

WAR IN GAZA

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The recent war in Gaza was the latest violent episode in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Israeli forces unleashed their military might on the break-away Hamas, who in defiance of the mainstream Fatah movement and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had through a coup taken control of Gaza and its one and a half million inhabitants well over a year ago. Hamas was against the negotiations sponsored by the international community to resolve this oldest global conflict and steadfastly refused to recognize Israel. Moreover its periodic barrage of rockets on Israelis marked the organization's uncompromising attitude towards all peacemaking efforts. Hamas believed, or appeared to believe, that violent defiance of diplomacy would bring it glory in the eyes of Palestinians thereby replacing Mahmoud Abbas and taking control of the West Bank too. Reality, however, turned out to be different.

Internally, Hamas miscalculated. Though there are no reliable polls (and one wonders why they are not conducted. Could it be Hamas preventing such polls?) on the sentiments of the people of Gaza towards Hamas. But it is crystal clear that Hamas's militancy has now resulted in around 1.500 Palestinian deaths and thousands more injuries (many of the dead and the injured infants and children). The war has also weakened Hamas's power infrastructure and greatly diminished its military potency. There is now every possibility that any long-term solution would include a far more serious effort to stop the flow of arms from Egypt to Gaza, which could include the stationing of UN troops along the border with Egypt. Economically, the damage incurred in Gaza must be in hundreds of millions of dollars if not more. On all domestic fronts, therefore, Hamas's political and military leadership has been undermined as the result of the war.

Externally, this last war, just like the war in Lebanon a couple of years ago, has demonstrated the orientation of global powers and has reaffirmed the coordinates of regional politics. All the Arab countries almost unanimously, like most of the world, have supported Mahmoud Abbas and have considered Hamas as a rebel organization. Hamas's ties with Shi'a Iran has angered Sunni Arab countries and the organisation's headquarter in Syria, led by Khalid Mash'al, has failed to gain much support, if any, from the Arab League. The UN Security Council resolution to stop the war was adopted only after much destruction had already taken place in Gaza and Israel was close to its war aims. It was as if everyone seemed content with the diminishing military capacity of Hamas.

Those who keep thinking that sheer violence and utter defiance of diplomacy can steer the politics of the region in a radically different direction have once again been proven wrong. Ideologised politics cannot break the logjam that has been persisting for well over half a century. Others have tried that and failed. The only feasible solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute seems to be a two-state solution with secure borders. Both Palestinians and Israelis must accept that.