

# Israel's Right to Defend Itself: Implications on Regional Security and U.S. Interests

Prepared statement by

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Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to appear again before the Committee.

The recent conflict in Gaza should lead us to review developments in the region and their impact on U.S. interests. I am grateful that the Committee is undertaking this task.

I would suggest that we assess the Gaza war at two levels: the local or Israeli-Palestinian level, and the broader regional level that includes Iran.

At the local level, this conflict is a successor to the war of December 2008 and January 2009, known in Israel as "Operation Cast Lead." Then as now, Hamas and other Gaza terrorist organizations shot hundreds of mortars, missiles, and rockets into Israel. No government can accept such aggression and every government must protect its population, so it was only a matter of time before Israel acted. I recall that throughout 2008, when I was an official of the National Security Council, Israeli officials warned us that unless the fire from Gaza stopped it would be necessary for Israel to act. That war led Hamas to cut the number of firings

greatly in 2009, 2010, and 2011, but the number grew again this past year. The weekend of November 10-12 saw over 100 missiles, rockets, and mortars fired into Israel, so an Israeli response was inevitable.

Why did Hamas do this? Why did it in essence seek to force such an Israeli move? The answer is unclear but I would offer some theories. First, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank was at center stage with its UN membership initiative. Hamas seemed marginal while that diplomatic effort was playing out. With this war Hamas has once again grabbed center stage. Second, Hamas commits acts of terror fundamentally because it is a terrorist group. Hamas did not seize Gaza so as to improve school performance or medical care, or prove it could collect garbage efficiently. It seized Gaza to use it as a base for attacking Israel and the PA leadership in Ramallah. The *raison d'être* of Hamas is fighting Israel with acts of violence. Third, in the months where Hamas tried to stop attacks on Israel by other groups such as Islamic Jihad because it did not at that moment want to force an Israeli response, Hamas lost support from young fighters. They signed up to fight, not to be bureaucrats, and some turned to other groups. So Hamas was, by fighting, seeking to reclaim its terrorist leadership mantle.

Whether Hamas benefits from the war depends largely on two things. First, will Egypt police the border between Sinai and Gaza, and prevent arms resupply to Hamas? After Israel left Gaza in 2005 this question arose, and it arose again in January 2009 after “Operation Cast Lead.” In 2005 the United States negotiated an elaborate plan for border management, and it must be said that it failed totally—and fast. And in both 2005 and 2009 the government of Egypt under President Mubarak did nothing to prevent Hamas from smuggling in arms.

So we need to do better this time—or rather, Egypt does. I can see no Egyptian national security interest in having Iran arm Hamas, or having Hamas attack Israel, or having Hamas provoke another and perhaps wider conflict. So I think there is a chance here, and we should use this opportunity to press for it. In your consideration of the foreign aid we give Egypt, I urge you to have this front and center. Why give security assistance if it is not used in part to protect Egypt’s security in the Sinai, and thereby to prevent regional conflicts spurred by Iran?

Let me turn now to the regional picture, and Iran.

Those missiles that were aimed at Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were not built by Palestinians in Gaza. They are all Iranian and represent yet another front in Iran’s efforts to produce conflict, attack Israel, weaken U.S. interests, and support radical forces. The presence of Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Syria, fighting to preserve the Assad regime, is another example of Iran’s reach. There are very many other examples—in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and in Yemen, for example. In that sense one may say the fighting in Syria and Gaza are proxy wars with Iran. Iran’s decision to supply these missiles to Hamas demonstrates just how far it will go in attacking Israel—so far. Of course it may go further, and continues to develop a nuclear weapon.

Let me read to you from a Reuters report of last week:

Iran is enriching uranium at a constant pace and international sanctions aimed at making Tehran suspend the activity are having no visible impact, the U.N. nuclear watchdog chief said in unusually blunt remarks on Tuesday....[A]sked whether sanctions had produced any deterrent effect, [IAEA Director General Yukio] Amano told reporters in Paris:

"We are verifying the activities at the nuclear sites in Iran and we do not see any effect. They are, for example, producing enriched uranium up to 5 percent and 20 percent with a quite constant pace." Amano, whose inspectors regularly visit Iran's nuclear facilities, added: "It has not changed. We have observed that the progression of enrichment has been constant. There has been a steady, gradual increase in the amount."  
[<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/20/nuclear-iran-idUSL5E8MKA6720121120>]

The Gaza conflict is a reminder of two things with respect to Iran. First, that the Iranian threat is not only nuclear and prospective. Iran is today creating violence in the Middle East, and is the largest state supporter of terrorism in the world. Second, this is all being done by an Iran without nuclear weapons. One must assume that an Iran that has successfully defied the world and obtained nuclear weapons would be even more aggressive.

Let me make brief comments on Egypt and Jordan, and then conclude.

It has been widely said that Egypt's new Muslim Brotherhood government behaved sensibly during the Gaza conflict, and I agree. Egypt benefitted from this because it returned to center stage in the Middle East and the Arab world, and because it helped avoid a ground war it did not want.

But President Morsi instantly took advantage of the world-wide accolades to seize more power at home. Those who thought he was a dull bureaucrat, an apparatchik, a transitional figure, were proved wrong. Ironically, those were the exact things said of Hosni Mubarak when he rose to the presidency by accident—in that case the assassination of President Sadat. But like Mubarak, Morsi seems to have a will to power and is seizing more and more of it. Sadly it appears that those who argued Morsi was no democrat are being proved right.

U.S. policy should seek an Egyptian foreign policy that protects the Israel-Egypt peace treaty and prevents Hamas from being re-armed by Iran. These are in Egypt's interests as well. But we should not make the mistake we made for thirty years with Mubarak, basically paying no attention (except in 2004-2006) to his crushing of all moderate, liberal, democratic political forces. We have seen the counter demonstrations when he made his moves last weekend, by tens of thousands of Egyptians—and we know that he won the presidential election only by 51 to 48 percent. So millions of Egyptians want a moderate, secular state, and we should be supporting their right to freedom of speech, press, and assembly, to future free elections, and to an independent judiciary.

As to Jordan, we have in the past few months seen demonstrations of increasing size. Why now, in 2012, and not last year? I believe the central reason is economic. Due to increased energy prices and to the burden of caring for Syrian refugees, the government of Jordan is under very severe fiscal pressure. Those of us who seek stability in Jordan should help it address those issues. The United States is a generous donor and should continue to be so, but we need to work harder to press the Gulf oil producing nations to help. In past years they have, and recently the UAE's foreign minister said the GCC would help again. On November 20 he stated that Jordan's deficit was growing and that "we, in the UAE and the Gulf Cooperation Council, are studying ways to close or minimize this deficit." They should act fast—and will need a strong Saudi commitment to make the numbers work. I can think of few actions our own government could take now to

foster Middle East stability that would be more useful than persuading the GCC nations to help Jordan, now, and generously.

Madam Chairman,

I thank you again for inviting me to address the Committee, and am happy to answer any questions you and other members of the Committee may have.