

THE TERRORIST THREAT RESULTING FROM THE GAZA CRISIS AND THE SECURITY RISK IN THE MEDIUM TERM

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It seems obvious to us that **Operation ‘Cast Lead,’** which risks causing more casualties in the days to come, may lead to a terrorist threat on both the local and international levels and that it may have consequences for security in the medium term.

The immediate risks are as follows:

- **Terrorist threat in Israel and in the Near East area (essentially in Egypt).**
- **Threat to American and European interests in North Africa and in the Middle East.**
- **General threat to Jewish communities throughout the world.**

1) The local and regional terrorist threat

The **local terrorist threat** is, essentially, posed by **Hamas**. It can manifest itself in two different manners.

A) The firing of rockets and missiles

First of all, rockets and missiles may continue to be fired against the South of Israel. Certain missiles (the GRAD) have a maximum range of 40 to 45 kilometres, which puts cities like **Beersheba** and **Ashdod** within their operational scope.

One might think that the pressure exerted by the troops on the ground, the disruption of communications due to the bombardment, the ‘clean-up’ of the areas near the borders of the Gaza Strip, the destruction of weapons storage depots and the elimination of terrorist leaders will gradually cause this threat to decline. However, nothing could be less certain. **There could be a repetition of a scenario like that in Lebanon whereby engagement of Israeli troops far inland could not prevent Hezbollah from launching missiles.**

Apart from the fact that it would be the worst one for Israel from the political and strategic point of view, **this scenario would leave intact the threat which initially justified Operation ‘Cast Lead.’** In the best case, nonetheless, **one can imagine that the**

effective radius of application of this threat will be reduced, perhaps to just 15 or so kilometres around the Gaza Strip, but in this event a city like **Ashkelon** would remain within the radius of attack by missiles. **Dozens of other less important localities are obviously also threatened.**

B) The threat of terrorist action inside Israel

Hamas is playing upon its position as supposed victim in a subtle way.

For the moment, it has every interest that Israeli military operations be concentrated in Gaza and it hopes they will create a maximum number of civilian victims (this is moreover why the terrorist organization has systematically had recourse to 'human shields' and hides its depots, bases and command posts in mosques, schools and other places where there are civilians present).

Up to now, this strategy has worked very well and it does not seem evident to us that Hamas wishes at present to make use of suicide attacks against the civilian population in Israel, since this would risk provoking a shift away from favorable opinion in the world at large.

Nevertheless, terrorist action by a clan or several individuals cannot be ruled out.

Another option for the organization would be to **try to carry out a stunning blow**: for example, **an attack against an Israeli civilian or military personality or against the Israeli Army inside the Jewish State**, an action which could be presented as a 'military' response and not as a terrorist act. The repeated broadcasts these past few days by the television channel *al-Aqsa* of a photographic montage showing Ehud Olmert and a coffin constitute an implicit threat and prove that the leadership of Hamas is thinking about such a possibility.

Finally, it is obvious that the situation has changed dramatically for Hamas and if Israel has a chance of attaining its war aims, then the logic of the organization might change. Hamas would be tempted, as in the past, to strike in Israel itself, with the objective of provoking a major political crisis in Jerusalem by demonstrating that despite Operation 'Cast Lead' it retained its ability to cause trouble.

It remains to be seen whether Hamas or another radical organization will still have this reputed operational capacity in the near future.

The possibilities of Hamas or of the Islamic Jihad of Palestine to move in their people from the Gaza Strip so as to carry out attacks on Israeli soil are presently extremely reduced and may even be said to be zero given the security cordon and military control of the region. But these two organizations, without doubt, still have the **possibility of infiltrating some commandos or other operatives from the West Bank.**

C) The risk of clashes with the Egyptian security forces

The spotlight of the daily news has focused exclusively on Israeli operations in Gaza, but **another clash, much quieter, is going on at the same time and escaping notice: that is the one which has been going on for several months between Hamas and the Egyptian security forces at the southern end of the Gaza Strip.** On 28 December, an Egyptian officer was killed near Rafah and on 31 December, another was wounded.

According to sources within Egyptian security with whom we have been in contact, ‘**at least a hundred Hamas activists have infiltrated Egypt since the beginning of the Israeli offensive, mostly seeking refuge**’ Many dozens of them were arrested and others are being actively pursued by the authorities.

Strategically, Hamas has no interest to open a ‘second front’ with Egypt (and its mother organization, the Muslim Brotherhoods of Egypt, would be opposed to that in any case), **but tactically**, it must guarantee freedom of movement of its men and its leaders at the Egyptian border, all of which may **give rise to sporadic clashes in the region of Rafah**.

D) The risk from *al-Qaeda*

Although for the moment Hamas has no interest in engaging in large-scale suicide attacks against the Israeli civilian population, the same is obviously not true for the ***al-Qaeda*** movement.

For several years, ***al-Qaeda*** has tried to establish itself in the Gaza Strip. The Salafist organization did not enjoy much success due to Hamas’ seizing control of the area. Moreover, the one attack committed in Israel that is probably attributable to the ***al-Qaeda*** movement – that against the bar ***Mike’s Place, in Tel Aviv*** on the night of 29/30 April 2003¹ - was a setback. To be sure, it would be a victory if ***al-Qaeda*** could move its operatives into Israel and commit an attack there. But **it is extremely doubtful that the movement of *Sheikh Osama* can attain this goal**.

In any case, it is likely that in order to do something it would have to sacrifice some Mujahedin converts of European origin who could be better used elsewhere...

One will note, however, that a new message from Doctor Ayman al-Zawahiri, the principal ideologist of *al-Qaeda*, a message dedicated to the Gaza crisis, was said to be ‘imminent’ by many Islamist websites on the evening of 5 January.

E) The risk of terrorist actions by networks of Israeli Arabs

These past two years some small terrorist cells formed by Israeli Arabs were dismantled by the security services.

One should emphasize that **this trend concerns just a tiny minority of the Arab population enjoying Israeli citizenship**. The risk of a terrorist act coming from Israeli Arabs **can thus be considered to be minor**, but sporadic riots are possible in the North of Israel.

F) The risk of attacks against Israeli or European tourists in the Sinai

In 2004, 2005 and 2006, suicide attacks targeted major and well protected tourist installations in the Sinai visited by Israelis and Europeans.² Other attacks were thwarted since then and the Egyptian security services dealt very heavy blows to the networks responsible for these attacks.

¹ The authors of this attack were two 27-year-old British citizens of Pakistani origin, Asif Muhammad Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif.

² In October 2004, 34 dead at Taba and Ras Shitan; on 22 July 2005, several dozen dead and hundreds of wounded in Sharm el-Sheikh; some twenty dead and 150 injured on 24 April 2006 in Dahab. Other attacks were foiled since then.

The risk of attacks in the Sinai cannot be eliminated but **can probably be considered as not being very serious.**

2) The terrorist threat on the international level

The situation at the international level is tense and can also give rise to attacks and assaults on Jewish communities.

A) The threat from Hamas

We believe that Hamas as such does not have the operational means nor the political will and interest to commit attacks abroad, unlike, for example, Hezbollah, which either for its own sake or for the sake of Iran perpetrated many terrorist attacks abroad during the 1980s and '90s.

To be sure, Hamas maintains illegally in Europe (since it is on the European list of terrorist organizations) its own networks for raising money and for carrying out propaganda via the *Al-Aqsa Foundation*. On 29 May 2003, the American Department of the Treasury categorized this foundation as a '*Financier of Terror.*'³ But the fund-raising network built by *al-Aqsa* is important for Hamas⁴ and **it is not very likely that this organization will put its existence in danger. Thus, there is infinitesimal likelihood that it would compromise itself by involvement in attacks in Europe or outside the area of conflict, all of which would be contrary both to its strategic interests and to the ideology of the 'mother community,' the *Muslim Brotherhoods* of Egypt, which have always rejected the use of violence outside the 'legitimate' terrain of Jihad.⁵**

Yet, there remains on the international level a double risk of terrorism linked to the situation in Gaza but totally independent of direct influence from Hamas.

B) The threat from *al-Qaeda* (outside Israel)

While the threat from the *al-Qaeda* movement in the area seems minimal to us, it should be taken all the more seriously in the rest of the world.

A message signed by the 'National Emir' of AQMI (*al-Qaeda* in the Islamic Maghreb), Abdelmalek Droukdel, calling upon 'Muslims' to 'target Jewish interests and Jews' was disseminated during the weekend of 3 January on many of the Arabic language Islamist websites which are permanently monitored by the ESISC.

The threat from AQMI is aimed at '***Jewish interests and Jews everywhere in the world, in particular in North Africa.***' The communiqué violently attacks the leaders of Arab countries, who are described as '***traitors***' and '***allies of the United States and of***

³ U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 29 2003: ***Treasury Designates Al-Aqsa International Foundation as Financier of Terror Charity Linked to Funding of the Hamas Terrorist Organization.***

⁴ The European 'Central Office' of the *al-Aqsa* faction is located in **Aachen** (Germany), just like the European centre of the Muslim Brotherhoods. Local offices exist in **Brussels, Copenhagen, Malmö and Rotterdam**

⁵ One notes nonetheless that the Swedish office of the *Al-Aqsa Foundation, Al-Aqsa Spannmat Stiftelse* was investigated by SAPO, the local security forces, and that its president, **Khalid al-Youssef**, was charged in April 2006 with preparing terrorist acts and was arrested. He was released several days later for lack of proof.

Israel. Many web surfers reacted to this call by posting messages offering **to attack 'Jewish interests in Morocco' to avenge 'the brethren in Gaza.'**

Since 2001, **'Jewish interests' (if we may take up the Islamist terminology) have been attacked repeatedly in North Africa.**

In 2002, the **synagogue of Ghriba**, in Djerba, **Tunisia**, was targeted for a bloody attack. In May 2003, **the Moroccan Jewish community was one of the targets of a wave of attacks which caused more than 40 deaths in Casablanca and the embassy of Israel in Mauritania was targeted by an attack on 1 February 2008.** On 8 August 2008, AQMI again called for strikes against this embassy.

In North Africa, the targets could be small but influential Jewish communities in Morocco or in Tunisia, as well as the embassy of Israel in Nouakchott. The embassies of Israel in Egypt and in Jordan could also be targeted.

At the same time, the ESISC believes that American and European interests could be targeted in North Africa or elsewhere: the United States is seen as the unconditional supporter of Israel and on Saturday, 3 January the Czech Presidency of the European Union described the Israeli military action as 'defensive.'

Finally, it is obvious that Israeli embassies, consulates and commercial or cultural installations are directly threatened worldwide.

Al-Qaeda could also try to go after European or South American Jewish communities.⁶

C) The threat of rampant terrorism

Given the ugly climate that reigns in some strata of the Muslim communities in Europe and the serious incidents which have marked some demonstrations in support of Gaza these past few days, including in Paris and London, **we believe that isolated terrorist actions against Jewish communities in Europe are possible in the days to come.**

One will note that these past several days **some especially violent actions were recorded in many countries:**

- On 31 December, two Israeli businessmen selling products from the Dead Sea were fired upon and were wounded in a shopping centre in Copenhagen.
- On the night of 3/4 January, private housing in Borgherout (suburb of Antwerp) where many Jewish families lived was set afire by arsonists.
- In the evening of Monday, 5 January, a vehicle on fire was directed at a synagogue in Toulouse.
- In the evening of Monday, 5 January, an arson attack was made on a liberal synagogue in Brussels.

Finally, we note that a video threatening a Parisian establishment ('Le Bataclan') where on 21 January there was supposed to be a gala evening in support of Israeli border police was 'posted' several days ago on youtube.com and was still seen there on 6 January at 13.00. On this video, a dozen young

⁶ It should be remembered that Hezbollah committed two especially murderous attacks in Buenos-Aires at the beginning of the 1990s.

people in masks openly threaten the management of ‘Bataclan’ calling upon them ‘to assume responsibility for their acts’ and concluding with the words that ‘*the next time we won’t come just for a chat.*’ The video ends with an insert saying ‘*Rendez-vous on 21 January*’.⁷

The broadcast of this video gave rise to a number of especially aggressive ‘postings,’ including the following one, which gives an idea of the overall tone of these acts (we reproduce without alteration the particularly “inventive” spelling of the author):

« pro palestine" a bruxelle et a liege on est avec vous les mecs, ns somme la 3 eme generation issue de l’imigration on est europeen, donc terminer de discuter il faut agir ns avons capté la ruze du sioniste on se sent trahi par l’europe car elle est pro-sioniste, rassemblement de berlin a malaga de 9.000.000 de jeunes pour chasser le sioniste d’europe et de palestine eh le jeter au fin fond du gronland..... »⁸

We consider the risk of assaults and of ‘micro-attacks’ against the Jewish communities in Europe to be greatest in the weeks to come.

3) Changes in the security situation in the medium term

In the prevailing context of the security scene since 2001, it is extremely difficult to foresee how the Gaza crisis might influence local, regional and international security in the medium term (6 months).

Nonetheless, there is reason to fear that whatever the outcome of this crisis may be, whether the Israeli war objectives are attained or not, whether Hamas sees its capacity to cause trouble reduced or not, the security situation might deteriorate in the months to come.

On the local level, some attacks will be possible and without doubt they will be attempted by Hamas or other radical organizations.

On the international level, Jewish communities and Israeli interests will remain seriously exposed.

In a more generalized manner, the crisis now under way can only radicalize further the extremist fringe of European Muslim youth and push some to draw closer to Jihadist structures which, unfortunately, already are finding resonance in this sector of the population.

There is also reason to fear some attacks against American and European interests in the coming months, with the United States being accused of directly supporting Israel and Europe, of playing a double game and allowing Israel ‘to massacre’ the Palestinian population.

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⁷The video can be seen at the following address: <http://fr.youtube.com/watch?v=-WBDanqAVLw>

⁸ «In Brussels and Liege, we support you guys ! We are the third generation of the immigration. We are European, so stop discussing! Me must act. We understood the trickery of the Zionism and we are betrayed by Europe because it is pro Zionist! From Berlin to Malaga, we are 9 000 000 palls and we’ll expel Zionism from Europe and Palestine et throw it deep in Greenland...”