

From Israel Interactive

January 12, 2009

How did the Hamas so grossly miscalculate Israel's response to the deadly barrage of rockets fired on our towns and cities? This question has occupied my mind for a week now. Having studied and taught the Mid East conflict I would like to offer the following view:

The Hamas did not expect Israel to react so severely. They honestly thought Israel would exchange some fire and then ask for a ceasefire. They believed we would continue a low intensity conflict from which they have everything to gain. Their belief stemmed from several wrong conclusions:

1. Israeli communities have been absorbing Hamas rockets for the past 8 years. The Israeli response was always measured in an attempt to achieve a cease fire. One that was agreed on and brought some quiet (Hamas still fired rockets but "only a few") until mid December. The Hamas gathered that even if they stepped up the rocket fire Israel would not react with full force.
2. Israeli elections are around the corner (February 10) and no politician would be willing to risk his/her seat in a military confrontation prior to these elections. Hamas was convinced that Israeli leaders are so corrupt and ideologically twisted that only their own good stands before their eyes.
3. Israel's perceived defeat to the Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 together with Iranian and Hezbollah encouragement to take Israel on clouded the judgment of Hamas's leadership. The war against Hezbollah 2.5 years ago did not go well for Israel. Many in Israel criticized our handling of the war (only natural for a democracy). Yet, militarily speaking Israel achieved its goal of deterring the Hezbollah from another military confrontation. The simple proof to this is that Hezbollah promised to "burn northern Israel" in the case of an Israeli invasion into Gaza. They have not dared to fire even one rocket thus far.
4. The Israeli army is a "paper tiger." Once again the perceived defeat of Israel by Hezbollah in 2006 stemming mostly from the anti Israel propaganda in the Arab world (downright lies) as well as their belief that Israeli society cannot handle its sons dying in battle led the Hamas to misread Israel's military force and determination.
5. Most important --- The Hamas being an integral part of radical Islam and world jihad truly believes that Israel will soon disappear as the first step towards a total collapse of Western culture. This belief, which is expressed by Iran (almost on a daily basis), Hezbollah, Al Qaeda and other radical Muslim organizations, is a fundamental part of their ideology. The Hamas is not completely unrealistic to think that Allah will bring down fire from the heavens consuming all the Jews. But, they do believe that Israeli society is falling apart ultimately destroying Israel from within. In their eyes Israeli society is in a state of decomposition and decay. They view us as materialistic hungry, caring not for the poor and needy. They think we are a collective of individuals that can only exist if we trample one another. They think the core of our society is involved in murder and rape. They scorn our love of life; they do not comprehend our willingness to compromise with our enemy translating it is a deep weakness.

For all these reasons and more Hamas decided to break a weary cease fire and confront Israel in deadly attacks. They believed they would have the upper hand and deal Israel another severe blow that will aid in on our disintegration.

They just don't get it. They don't understand that our strength stems from our love of life, ability to compromise, and criticize ourselves when needed. When they read our newspapers, which do report on murders, rape and theft as well as extensive coverage of some of our leaders suspected of ugly corruption they think it is the general rule of our society.

Israel will never be able to convince the Hamas otherwise. For this reason we understand that the concept of peace is still very far off.

Israeli society is deep-rooted in our Jewish culture. A culture rich with values, ethics, morals, achievements and survival even under the harshest of circumstances. We are also a society that will defend ourselves with full force when we have been pushed beyond the limit.

The Hamas is about to learn this the hard way.

A second message from Itai:

The photos coming out of Gaza of dead men, women and children after Israeli shells exploded in a UN school are mortifying. Not one of us can see this and not feel distressed and heartbroken. Innocent loss of life is tragic even when it is your worst of enemies. Having said that, let's look at the facts;

The Hamas was convinced, as they voiced over and over again, that once the ground "face to face" combat begins Israel will be at a disadvantage. Hamas knows every Gaza ally. They booby trapped buildings, tunnels, cars and even dead animals lying on the side of the road. They have an extensive system of underground tunnels. Their strategy is to ambush Israeli fighters by luring them into those allies and booby trapped buildings. All they need is one picture of a dead or captured Israeli, a burning tank or a downed drone in order to claim victory.

The Israeli military is well aware of the Hamas techniques and is conducting its operation with smart tactics that will be exposed only once this operation ends. As a result a badly beaten Hamas has turned to a traditional terroristic strategy using their civilians. The hope is that the Israel, known for its concern with civilian causality, will kill a score of deemed innocent people. World reaction would then stop the Israeli operation and again Hamas claims victory.

In the first days of the war Israel using air power called hundreds of Palestinians in Gaza (on their cells) warning them that their homes, which stocked large piles of rockets and all sorts of weapons and ammunition was about to be bombed. They were given enough time to leave. The residents immediately called the Hamas commanders asking what to do. The Hamas instructions were clear – bring the entire family on the roof the Israelis won't dare fire. Israel seeing this fired a warning shot at the corner of the building. The residence got the message and vacated. Hamas was enraged (with the Palestinian residents).

Another Hamas tactic was to store rockets and general weaponry in Mosques. They ensured constant presence of worshippers so that again Israel would be deterred from firing and if it does they can present dead worshippers. Surely this would enrage the Muslim world and perhaps open up many other fronts with Israel such as Hezbollah, Syria and maybe even Iran. Once again Israel was smart and took out the Mosques mentioned with minimal casualties.

Israeli military intelligence reports that Hamas wanted terrorists are conducting their

movements with a gun in one hand and a child in the other. They know us all too well. Even though some of the most wanted were spotted Israel held its fire.

Finally the Hamas used the UN school, with the full knowledge of the UN workers (almost all of which are Gaza Palestinians) to fire mortar shells at the Israeli troops. Israel took the bait and fired back. The Israeli military has video footage clearly showing the Hamas fire from the school. Several Hamas terrorists were killed two of which are Imad and Hassan Abu-Askar. Many innocent civilians were also killed. This is not the first time Terrorists use the UN to strike at Israel. In the past Hezbollah used UN vehicles and uniforms to kidnap Israeli soldiers. The UN even had a film of this event but denied it for over a year (they claimed they don't take sides) finally admitting it after Israeli intelligence pressured them. The Hezbollah also fired at Israel from UN camps. The Hamas is a meticulous student of the Hezbollah.

Have no doubt that Hamas is desperate enough to start firing from the Gaza hospital. Israel has declared it will not return fire.

A word about the Hamas leaders hiding places; it is now known that 2.5 years ago Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the Hezbollah, found the safest hiding place in Lebanon. He hid in the cellars of the Iranian embassy knowing fully well Israel would not open a front with Iran. Since there is no Iranian embassy in Gaza Hamas leaders are hiding in the Gaza hospital (Shiffa hospital). Some of them are dressed in doctors and nurses uniforms. Other Hamas leaders are hiding in underground tunnels.

In the past these same leaders declared their ultimate desire to confront the Israeli army and die as martyrs while killing as many Israelis as they can. They sounded like real heroes to their public.

As their public is now learning they are far from heroes they are cowards!

Itai Tennenbaum

itai@israelinteractive.com

www.israelinteractive.com <<http://www.israelinteractive.com/>>