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SNAPSHOT

Expendable Egypt

Why Cairo Can't Broker a Ceasefire Between Israel and Hamas

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The similarities between this month's hostilities between Hamas and Israel and those during their last major confrontation, in November 2012, are striking. Hamas and other Palestinian groups fire rockets deep into Israel, and the Iron Dome defense system knocks the projectiles out of the sky. Israel launches aerial strikes on densely populated areas of the Gaza Strip, and militants there shoot rockets back at Israeli civilians.

Yet one thing has changed: the relationship between Hamas and Egypt. In the fall of 2012, Hamas was able to count on the political support [1] of the Egyptian government of President Mohamed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood leader. The rise of the Brotherhood in Egypt earlier that year had simultaneously provided Hamas with a new regional ally and redefined relations between the group and Egypt, moving from the mutual deep-seated suspicion and antagonism of the Mubarak years to a relationship built on shared political ideals and respect.

After Morsi was ousted in July 2013, the new Egyptian government launched a crackdown on the Brotherhood at home and assumed an especially harsh posture [2] toward Hamas, calling the group, which was once a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza, a threat to national security [3]. Most significantly, Egypt's repeated restrictions on the flows of goods and people to and from Gaza and its campaign to crack down on underground tunnels between the strip and Sinai have deeply hurt Hamas's finances. In March 2014, moreover, Egypt's judiciary banned Hamas [4] from conducting any political activities in the country.

Unsurprisingly, Hamas felt the loss of Egypt's political friendship very deeply. Now that it was regionally