Indian Strategic Studies

The Islamic Jihad and the Israeli Dilemma in the Gaza Strip

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The barrage of rockets launched at Sderot and the Gaza periphery by the Islamic Jihad in northern Gaza on the night of November 1, 2019 underscored the Israeli dilemma regarding the Gaza Strip. This attack was yet another indication of the rise of the Islamic Jihad, which impacts on Hamas's status, security stability in Gaza, and prospects for Israel reaching an accommodation with Hamas. For Hamas, Islamic Jihad's growing strength is a provocation, and highlights that Hamas is a "resistance movement" devoid of active "resistance." A weakened Hamas serves Israel's interest regarding a return of the Palestinian Authority to effective control over the Strip, yet it is highly doubtful that the PA will try to regain control in the Strip, as long as there is no political breakthrough in relations with Israel. Therefore, Israel has three main alternatives: a continuation of the status quo vis-à-vis Hamas and the Gaza Strip; military escalation in the Gaza theater; and accommodation with Hamas. Because continuing with the current situation carries a high risk of escalation into a broad military campaign, which would be liable to wreak havoc in the Strip, and because Israel has no interest under the current circumstances to escalate the situation militarily, accommodation is the least problematic alternative. Understandings reached with Hamas that calm the security situation would facilitate a significant improvement in the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and their enforcement would attenuate Islamic Jihad's spoiler potential and, perforce, Iranian clout in the Strip.The barrage of rockets launched at Sderot and the Gaza periphery by the Islamic Jihad in northern Gaza on the night of November 1, 2019 underscored the Israeli dilemma regarding the Gaza Strip. This incident, which demonstrated both Islamic Jihad's autonomy and Hamas's difficulty in restraining the organization, is another episode in the rise of the Islamic Jihad, which impacts on Hamas's status, security stability in Gaza, and prospects for Israel reaching an accommodation with Hamas.

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