Israeli Deterrence and the October 7 Attack

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For several decades, the strategy of deterrence has been an important pillar of Israel's security doctrine. The October 7 attack brings up a number of questions and challenges that relate not only to the effectiveness of this strategy but also to Israel's heavy reliance on it. The article seeks to analyze the failure of deterrence and even more so, the question of why Israel places its confidence in the strategy of deterrence against Hamas, although it is not at all clear that this strategy is effective against the threats that this organization poses. Despite several indications in recent years that Israel's deterrent threat has had a limited effect on Hamas's behavior—chiefly the recurring rounds of violence and even an increase in the scope of the violence from one round to the next—the strategy of deterrence has remained a central component of Israel's confrontation with Hamas.

Introduction

The brutal Hamas attack on October 7 brought up a variety of strategic issues, including questions about the strategy of deterrence and Israel's reliance on it. Among other things, much has been written in the past few decades on the question of whether it is possible to deter terrorist organizations. While the initial literature on this topic that developed in the 1990s cast doubt on the possibility of deterring these organizations (for example Bowen, 2004, p.55; Davis & Jenkins, 2002), over the years, researchers pointed to a variety of factors and ways of increasing the effectiveness of the deterrent threat toward them (for example Almog, 2004; Gearson, 2012; Trager & Zagorcheva, 2005). From this perspective, Hamas's large-scale attack on Israel raises several research challenges. Ostensibly, deterrence was supposed to have restrained the organization's activity, given that as a nationalist terrorist organization it aspires to attain international legitimacy. Unlike other terrorist organizations, Hamas is also a territorial organization that rules over a specific population, and is thus presumably more sensitive to deterrent threats, compared to organizations that do not have these characteristics and thus lack significant assets that can be threatened.

While it is still too early to state with certainty the reasons for the failure of deterrence, and some cast doubt on the ability to deter a terrorist organization like Hamas, we can presume that several factors had a decisive impact on the decision regarding the timing of the attack. Chiefly Hamas's expectation of a deterioration in the status quo for them, with the progress of Israel's normalization process

with countries in the region, especially Saudi Arabia, while neglecting the Palestinian issue. In this sense, and as I will expand on below, researchers have indicated that deterrence is influenced not only by the ability of the putative challenger—the actor that the defender (the deterring actor) is trying to dissuade from carrying out the unwanted act—to succeed in achieving its objectives (deterrence by denial; see, for example, Snyder, 1959), and by the cost that the challenger will pay in the retaliation that it will suffer (deterrence by punishment; see, for example, Morgan, 2003, pp. 15–20). Rather, deterrence success is also affected by the challenger's level of satisfaction with the existing status quo (Huth & Russett, 1990, pp. 469–470).

But despite the importance of these challenges, the focus of the article deals with another challenge: If there are such great limitations on the ability to deter Hamas, how did it happen that Israel relied so extensively on this strategy? My proposed answer to this question is based on the argument that over the years Israel adopted the identity of a deterrent actor that sees its role in the international arena in terms of deterrence that it must exercise. In this way, the deterrent actor can feel that it is taking active measures to attain security and simultaneously seek to avoid using violence (Lupovici, 2016). But when such an actor is subject to a significant violent attack, the challenge is not only to the physical security of that actor; it is also a threat to its identity (as a deterrent actor) and its ability to consistently tell the story of being a deterrent actor.

In addition, my argument is that the explanations for these two kinds of challenges complement one another. Israel's heavy reliance on the strategy of deterrence stems to a large extent from the Israeli deterrence identity, which influences the interpretation of events and limits the nature of the response to them. But this led to a situation where it was convenient to see how deterrence operates and accordingly to tell the story that Hamas is deterred. But this story,

which was only loosely connected to reality, served in effect as a justification for continued progress on the path of normalization with the Arab countries, without taking into account the consequences for the Palestinians, as Hamas was thought to be deterred and thus not really having the ability to act and cause significant damage to Israel or to the process.

The rest of the article is constructed as follows: The first section reviews the literature on the connection between deterrence and terrorist organizations and discusses various factors that can influence the success or failure of deterrence against these actors. The second section discusses the deterrence of Hamas: the use of the strategy of deterrence received a prominent place in dealing with the organization, but it failed. In this context, a discussion is presented on the challenges related to this failure and the reasons for the limited influence of Israeli deterrence against Hamas. The third section addresses the main research challenge, which is the reasons for Israel's reliance on the strategy of deterrence despite this strategy's limited influence on restraining Hamas's behavior over the years. I argue that the Israeli identity of deterrence has a central role in shaping the strategy of deterrence against Hamas and the way it was carried out. The conclusion proposes several future directions and consequences that stem from these arguments—about the need to rethink the place of deterrence in Israel's security perception and about better adapting this strategy to the international strategic and political reality.

Deterrence and Terrorism

There is broad agreement among researchers that for a strategy of deterrence (by the threat of punishment) to succeed in dissuading putative challengers from harming the defending actor, three main conditions are required. First, the defender must have capabilities that enable it to exact a price from the putative challenger; that is, it can carry out retaliation that causes

significant damage. This requires not only capabilities for causing damage but also means of delivering these capabilities. For example, having nuclear capability alone is not sufficient for achieving nuclear deterrence; effective means of delivering this capability into the enemy's territory, such as through aircraft or missiles, are also necessary. Second, it is argued that the defender's threat needs to be credible, meaning that the defender would be willing to use its capabilities when necessary to exact the price from the putative challenger. And third, the defender must effectively communicate its capabilities and its willingness to use them to the putative challenger, ensuring that the challenger understands that it will face consequences if it carries out an act that the defending actor is trying to prevent (see, for example, Morgan, 2003, pp. 15–20).

This research direction—the ability to exercise successful deterrence—guided the researchers who deal with the deterrence of terrorist organizations. The scholarly literature tended to downplay the ability to deter terrorist organizations and apply the conditions for successful deterrence against them. Researchers indicated several factors that limit the ability to deter these organizations. First, at the most basic level, the aim of terrorist organizations is to change the status quo, while a strategy of deterrence aims to preserve the status quo (Lupovici, 2010, pp. 708, 718). Therefore, it is clear that establishing deterrence over time with these actors, which are based on maximalist (religious or ideological) objectives (Bowen, 2004, p. 55; Davis & Jenkins, 2002, pp. 4–5, 62–63; Ganor, 2005, p. 65), would be difficult. Terrorist organizations tip the balance of interests in their favor, making it difficult to achieve credible deterrence. These problems are intensified by the difficulty of communicating with these organizations, which cannot always be identified (Paul, 2005, p. 55), and by the challenge of finding valuable targets that can be harmed in order to exact a heavy price from the terrorist organization and its leaders. Moreover,

due to various political needs, these actors may even want the defender to retaliate (Adler, 2010; Freedman, 2004, p. 122; Löwenheim, 2007, pp. 179–180; Paul, 2005, p. 55). Thus, the threat of retaliation, however harsh and credible it may be, could be insufficient to dissuade such actors from taking action.

However, several researchers have argued that deterring terrorist organizations is not impossible. Contrary to the claim that these organizations are irrational (Davis & Jenkins, 2002, p. 5; Ganor, 2005, p. 74; Payne, 2001, pp. 7–11), it is argued that there are opposing indications (Lebovic, 2007, pp. 105–115; Trager & Zagorcheva, 2005, pp. 93–94). This does not, of course, guarantee that deterrence will work, as there could be significant gaps in terms of the willingness of terrorist organizations to comply with international rules and norms. However, the indications that terrorist organizations are rational actors make it possible to reject categorical claims that these actors cannot be deterred, as rationality is considered a fundamental precondition for the success of deterrence (see, for example, Trager & Zagorcheva, 2005, pp. 96–105). Furthermore, several researchers have even suggested ways that could make the deterrence of terrorist organizations possible. First, it is necessary to distinguish between the various kinds of actors involved in carrying out terrorist attacks and to use appropriate threats for each kind. For example, threats can be directed toward the operatives themselves, leaders in terrorist organizations (Almog, 2004, pp. 513–514), the states hosting terrorist organizations, and against the states assisting them (Ganor, 2005, pp. 81–82; Press-Barnathan, 2004, p. 201). Researchers have also argued that a variety of measures can be relied upon, including law enforcement forces, military forces, and even tools from international law (Ganor, 2005, p. 67; Wheatley & Hayes, 1996, pp. 13, 19–20). Second, a few researchers have proposed a strategy of "tailored deterrence" toward terrorist organizations, which requires the defender

to have a close familiarity with the putative challenger and its culture in order to adapt the type of threats to the vulnerabilities of the challenger (Lantis, 2009, pp. 476–478).

It is also argued that deterrence of non-state actors such as terrorist organizations is not binary like nuclear deterrence. The deterrence literature developed based on nuclear deterrence, which creates a clear distinction between the success and failure of deterrence. When it comes to deterring terrorism, the goal could be limited, such as delaying the action, reducing it, or changing its purpose (Rid, 2012). In this sense, while the failure of nuclear deterrence is unacceptable due to its enormous cost, conventional deterrence, especially deterrence of terrorist organizations, can be partially successful. This approach, as I will expand on below, has even gained considerable traction in the Israeli security perception. Similarly, there has been support for the argument that deterrence—even of terrorist organizations—can be cumulative, and that these organizations can learn over time the cost they will have to pay if they challenge the status quo (Almog, 2004).

Furthermore, in recent years, as part of the development of research on deterrence by denial, several ways of deterring terrorism have been proposed based on this strategy. The distinction between deterrence by the threat of punishment and deterrence by denial was proposed by Glenn Snyder as early as the end of the 1950s. Deterrence by the threat of punishment focuses on the price that will be exacted from the challenger through retaliation, while a strategy of deterrence by denial is based on the threat that the challenger will not succeed in achieving its objectives (Snyder, 1959). In other words, while a strategy of deterrence by the threat of punishment is based on fear of the damage that will be caused after carrying out the act, deterrence by denial is based on the fear of failure (Wilner & Wenger, 2021, p. 7).[1] Compared to the extensive research literature on deterrence by punishment, the literature on

deterrence by denial is much less developed in establishing the fundamental conditions for its success (Stein & Levi, 2015, p. 411). However, in recent years, the research of this strategy has considerably expanded (Adamsky, 2021; Brantly, 2018; Lupovici, 2023; Wilner & Wenger, 2021), in part due to changes in the international threat environment, mainly threats of terrorism, alongside cyber threats (Wilner & Wenger, 2021, pp. 4–5).

Researchers who have discussed deterrence by denial have also proposed possible ways of deterring terrorism that are based on preventing the success of these organizations. Some studies have explored military prevention by denying the possibility of success, such as through defensive measures and physical barriers, either directly or with the assistance of external actors (Brantly, 2018, p. 35; Mezzell, 2019; Mitchell, 2015, pp. 124–125; Trager & Zagorcheva, 2005). For example, John Sawyer argued that communication by the defending actor about steps taken to strengthen the defense of targets that the challenger could attack enables conveying to the adversary the message that it must adopt new tactics, which could increase the challenger's costs or uncertainty about its ability to succeed (Sawyer, 2021, p. 111). Additionally, scholars have highlighted the cumulative effect of deterrence by denial that can be achieved over time (Kirchofer, 2017), based on defensive successes that cause the challenger to repeatedly fail (Sawyer, 2021, p. 111; Wilner, 2021, pp. 50–51).

Other researchers have identified social mechanisms to strengthen deterrence against terrorist threats—whether by strengthening the resilience of the society facing the threat of terrorism, making it clear to the challenger that its goals cannot be achieved (Gearson, 2012, p. 191), or through delegitimization of the terrorist organization and its activities (Adler, 2010, p. 219; Gearson, 2012, p. 183; Stein & Levi, 2015). As Alex Wilner argues, "[T]he objective is to reduce the challenger's probability of achieving his goals by attacking

the legitimacy of the beliefs that inform" its behavior". (Wilner, 2011, p. 26). This strategy aims to influence the challenger's perceived sense of success, particularly in translating an attack into a political achievement (Wilner, 2011, p. 27). In this sense, delegitimization can weaken the organization's ability to gain local and international support, which are important sources of material resources and manpower.[2]

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the deterrence literature distinguishes between various levels of deterrence—including general deterrence and immediate deterrence. General deterrence aims to dissuade an adversary from considering the possibility of challenging the defending actor. Immediate deterrence relates to the threats of deterrence that the defender employs—usually during a crisis in which the adversary seriously considers attacking the defender (Morgan, 2003, p. 9).[3] In other words, immediate deterrence is needed when general deterrence has failed. While a few researchers have rejected the relevance of this distinction, which was developed in the context of superpower relations during the Cold War, to terrorist threats (see, for example, Almog, 2004, p. 8), it could have value in understanding how to address the nature of the various threats of terrorist organizations.

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Although many issues regarding Israeli deterrence toward Hamas will be clarified in the future, we can already point out two basic components. First, Israel greatly emphasized the strategy of deterrence against Hamas—both by the threat of punishment and by denial. Second,

given the results of the attack—especially Hamas's building up its capabilities, training its forces, and other preparations over the years—it is clear that Israeli deterrence did not work. Not only did it not reduce the scope of the act or delay it, as several deterrence researchers propose in relation to how deterrence can work against terrorist organizations, it also did not prevent the most severe scenario that could have been imagined regarding the nature of Hamas's attack. In other words, we can point to both the implementation of the strategy by the defender (Israel) and its failure, which was expressed in the act carried out by the challenger (Hamas) that was unwanted from the defender's perspective.

The Implementation of the Strategy

Israel employed a strategy of deterrence against Hamas in two main forms. The first was by emphasizing the threat of punishment and making it clear that Hamas would face heavy consequences if it posed a serious challenge to Israel. This attempt included direct declarations of threats against Hamas and various actions in previous rounds of fighting, such as in operations Cast Lead, Pillar of Defense, Protective Edge, and Guardian of the Walls. These military operations aimed in part to create cumulative deterrence by demonstrating Israel's determination to take action and impose costs on Hamas while damaging the organization's various assets. In other words, Israel developed a "deterrence paradigm" that viewed each round as part of a cumulative deterrence process (Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014; Yadai & Ortal, 2013; Lupovici, 2016). Not only was it declared that the goal of each round was to achieve deterrence, but at the end of each round, it was claimed that deterrence had been achieved (or "restored"), and Hamas had been deterred. As explained below, although flawed, this logic demonstrates in practice how Israel's strategy relied on deterrence by the threat of punishment and, in fact, also by the use of punitive measures for future deterrence. For example, during

Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021, Netanyahu declared that "Hamas and the Islamic Jihad have paid and […] will pay a very heavy price for their aggression […] their blood is on their own heads" (Kan News, 2021). This declaration aimed to highlight the cost of challenging Israel in order to deter another round of fighting. Two years later, when Hamas did not join the Islamic Jihad's attacks, Netanyahu claimed that this was exactly the result of the price that the organization paid during Operation Guardian of the Walls, as he explained in a meeting of the Likud faction in May 2023:

> Operation Guardian of the Walls […] inflicted on Hamas the heaviest blow in its history—destroyed its aerial capabilities, its maritime capabilities, its underground capabilities. This caused a change in the balance of deterrence and at least it has worked like this for years, two years. Our intention in Operation Shield and Arrow was to change the balance of deterrence of the Islamic Jihad too, and this, of course, brought about the result that it brought. Not only in the PIJ [Palestinian Islamic Jihad], our intention was not only the PIJ. Anyone who comes to harm us will now better understand the meaning of the words: "your blood is on your own heads" (Kan News – the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, 2023).[4]

In this sense, each round of fighting ostensibly aimed to consolidate the conditions for the success of deterrence. Israel sought to make its capabilities for taking action and its willingness to use them clear to Hamas (and to other adversaries). Each use of force served as a way to convey the deterrent message, alongside the accompanying declarations. According to these declarations, the decision-makers believed that their threats influenced the decision-making processes of Hamas's leaders. For example, a few days before the October 7 attack, Tzachi Hanegbi, the head of the National Security Council, said that Israel had deterred Hamas for the next 15 years (Wasserman & Barsky, 2023),[5] following the previous rounds of fighting between Israel and the organization. Hanegbi expressed not only the Israeli strategy and goals but also the prevailing Israeli conception that this strategy was effective.

Along with emphasizing the strategy of deterrence by punishment, Israel also started to emphasize a strategy of deterrence by denial as part of a greater reliance on defense in its security doctrine (Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014, pp. 22–24). This was done through reliance on several preventive measures, primarily the land barrier on the border with Gaza and the accompanying technological measures, which aimed to physically prevent Hamas's ability to attack Israel, and in particular, to penetrate Israel via tunnels. These measures were intended to make it clear to Hamas that it would not succeed in harming Israel. For example, Benny Gantz, who served as defense minister when the land barrier was completed in December 2021, claimed, "The barrier, which is a first-rate technological and creative project, denies Hamas one of the capabilities that it tried to develop, and places an iron wall, sensors, and concrete between it and the residents of the south. This wall grants a sense of personal security that will allow this beautiful area to continue to grow. Daily life here is our victory" (Zitun & Tzuri, 2021).

In addition to the land barrier, Israel relied on other defensive and preventive measures, such as the Iron Dome. While these measures had clear defensive and preventive goals—preventing damage in the case of an attack and not necessarily dissuading the adversary from taking action—they were also presented as having the ability to influence Hamas's considerations for acting at all (see, for example, Wilner, 2021, p. 56).

The fact that Hamas attacked Israel—despite these attempts at deterrence and the declarations of Israeli officials that Israel is working to deter Hamas, and the threats that were made to Hamas—indicates the failure of deterrence.

Challenges in Explaining the Failure of the Strategy of Deterrence

As stated above, Israeli deterrence was based on two kinds of threats related to the harm that would be inflicted on the adversary in the event of an attack on Israel (deterrence by the threat of punishment) and that Hamas would not succeed in carrying out its activities (deterrence by prevention). Regarding the second kind, the explanation for the failure is quite clear and relates to Hamas's ability to overcome the various measures, such as the land barrier that was supposed to impede its operations. This was partly due to poor preparedness in Israel for such an attack, including the disruptions that Hamas utilized to hinder the effectiveness of the systems (see, for example, Gilead, 2023). When a challenger believes that the defender will not succeed in preventing an attack because the challenger has tactical solutions to counter the various defensive measures, it is not surprising that deterrence does not work. It is also evident that the Iron Dome is not an effective means of deterrence. While it plays an important role in intercepting rockets, it also provides incentives for Hamas to challenge Israel. This is because the cost of intercepting a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip toward Israel is significantly higher than the cost of launching such a rocket (Brantly, 2018, p. 36). Additionally, launching rockets toward Israel has allowed Hamas to create a comfortable status quo from its perspective, in which it disrupts daily life in Israel, but since a large portion of the rockets are intercepted, the damage caused is limited and therefore Hamas does not pay a high price for these actions (see also Golov, 2014, p. 79). Thus, the defensive solution gives Hamas an incentive to continue using these measures, even though it has an important role in reducing the potential damage caused by the rockets.

But the main deterrent failure relates to deterrence by the threat of punishment—a central strategy that Israel emphasized in its interactions with Hamas. As already mentioned, Israel invested great efforts in attempting to establish this deterrence, both in attaining means that would enable it to (credibly) threaten Hamas and other actors with painful retaliation, and in attempts over the years to convey such messages regarding Israel's capabilities and its willingness to use them, via the rounds of retaliation against the organization. The fact that Hamas attacked Israel—despite these attempts at deterrence and the declarations of Israeli officials that Israel is working to deter Hamas, and the threats that were made to Hamas—indicates the failure of deterrence.

However, my argument is that the failure of deterrence raises several research challenges. Apparently, the deterrence was supposed to work, as the balance of power between the sides is clear, and it was clear to Hamas that Israel has means that can exact a heavy price from it and that it is willing to use them. Not only does the war that broke out subsequently after the October 7 attack make this aspect clear, but it was also clear to Hamas that this would be the Israeli response, and it prepared for it, especially by creating an enormous network of tunnels, preparedness in terms of food and other means of staying there for many months, and preparing ambushes for Israeli forces (Zitun, 2023b; Mann, 2023). In this respect, the researcher Michael Milshtein believes that even though Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, was mistaken in the way he perceived Israeli society, he expected the Israeli response attack. According to Milshtein, "I am mostly trying to get inside Sinwar's head. I think that when you look in general at the way he devised the plan for the attack, and here you cannot separate the attack from Sinwar and also from the way it was implemented and its consequences, I think

that he says to himself that he expected Israel to respond in this way" (103fm, 2023). Similarly, evidence from documents captured during the war and published in *Yedioth Ahronoth* by Nadav Eyal reveal that "Hamas prepared for this moment. For years. It understood that the result of the October 7 attack would be a massive IDF invasion of the Gaza Strip. It prepared for the hostages to be held underground. It expected that the goal would be to eliminate Sinwar" (Eyal, 2023). Furthermore, while there are various assessments regarding the expectations of Hamas and its leaders with respect to the Israeli response, as discussed below, it seems that Israel's powerful response is actually in Hamas's interest, as it helps it in the struggle for legitimacy and for global public opinion.

In addition to the basic conditions for deterrence success that were supposed to influence Hamas's behavior, two other factors were expected to increase the impact of Israeli deterrence of Hamas. First, researchers on deterring terrorist organizations have pointed out that state characteristics might moderate the activity of these organizations. According to this logic, a terrorist organization with a territory that it rules and civilians it is responsible for could be more sensitive to deterrence threats than one that lacks these characteristics. The reason is that organizations with state characteristics (or semi-state organizations) need to attain domestic legitimacy (Naveh, 2015). Additionally, Uri Bar-Joseph argues that actors with state characteristics can prevent spontaneous outbursts of violence that might lead to escalation, and state characteristics also create assets that can be threatened (Bar-Joseph, 1999, p. 27; Honig & Yahel, 2019, p. 1211). While Hamas is not a state actor,[6] it does possess several semi-state characteristics that, according to the logic proposed, should have increased its sensitivity to deterrent threats.[7] For example, Kobi Michael and Omer Dostri concluded that not only was Hamas deterred since Operation Protective Edge, but one of the factors affecting deterrence was Hamas's

sensitivity to "the civilian population—expressing a pattern of more responsible and restrained conduct." They believed that while deterrence did not completely prevent the use of force against Israel, it did limit it, partly "out of its sense of responsibility for the population in the Gaza Strip and its desire to maintain its standing as legitimate sovereign" (Michael & Dostri, 2019, pp. 74, 76). In fact, even in the IDF, a discussion took place on these issues and on the connection between Hamas's control of the territory and the chances of violence. For example, Tamir Hayman, who served as the commander of the Military Intelligence Directorate, argued that Hamas was going through a process of change in which "they are committed to increasing sovereignty and this creates tensions within Hamas between the desire to fight, and sovereignty and concern for infrastructure" (Kubovich, 2024).

Second, researchers have argued that nationalist terrorist organizations, meaning those that seek to achieve self-determination, need international legitimacy. For example, Ayşe Zarakol argues that nationalist terrorist organizations seek to attain legitimacy from the Westphalian system, which is based on the idea of sovereign territorial entities, in contrast with terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, which seek to challenge the norm of sovereignty itself (Zarakol, 2011, pp. 2330–2331). Allegedly, nationalist terrorist organizations that seek international recognition need the support and legitimacy of the international community, so they are supposed to restrain their behavior and to be more sensitive to deterrent threats. Thus, such organizations are subject to tension between involvement in terrorism and the need to "normalize their relations with the world in order […] to gain some de facto international legitimacy" (Honig & Yahel, 2019, p. 1213).

In fact, these arguments regarding the need for international support are also tied to issues related to deterrence by denial through means of delegitimization. The basic claim in these studies is that another way to achieve

deterrence could be based on convincing the putative challenger that it will not achieve its aims. While most of these studies address the connection between domestic legitimacy and deterrence by denial through restricting financial and human resources for terrorist organizations, the idea is similar to restrictions that the international community can place on terrorist organizations to prevent them from achieving a central goal: international recognition of their sovereignty. In other words, it is possible to achieve deterrence by getting these actors to understand that they will not succeed in translating tactical achievements (for example an act of terrorism in which many are killed) into political achievements. As Boaz Ganor argues, some nationalist terrorist organizations operate as a political arm that aims to gain "legitimacy in the international arena—in an attempt to achieve political goals and to translate the impact of terror activities into concrete political achievements" (Ganor, 2008, p. 276). While Ganor notes that Hamas never gave up on the demand for a Palestinian state that would replace the State of Israel, which, according to its leaders, should cease to exist, and in this sense the organization expresses maximalist goals that are based on extreme religious motivations (Ganor, 2008, p. 275), even such an organization needs the support of global public opinion to achieve its nationalist goals.

The two arguments raised here present somewhat of a research challenge regarding Hamas's behavior. First, the organization was supposed to be sensitive to deterrent threats, as it has state characteristics that ostensibly were supposed to moderate its activity. In other words, penetrating into Israel's territory, entering communities, murdering and harming many civilians and soldiers, and the massive launching of rockets toward Israel—all express a situation in which there is no threat by Hamas that Israel succeeded in deterring. Second, it is difficult to explain the cruelty of the organization's actions, as expressed in the

October 7 attack, given its need for international legitimacy. The expressions of support and sympathy that Israel received from many countries immediately after they learned about the dimensions of the catastrophe indicate that Hamas, contrary to expectations, was not sensitive to the international public opinion that it supposedly needs in its national struggle and in its demand for a Palestinian state.

This article does not purport to provide absolute answers to these challenges, but we can already offer several explanations for the failure of Israeli deterrence. First, we can identify that for some time, even before October 7, 2023, Israel's general deterrence against Hamas was not effective. Hamas documents captured by the IDF during the war show that in January 2023, Sinwar himself referred to "the great plan" for the attack on Israel. According to this evidence, Sinwar assessed that it was possible to carry it out, which indicates that such a plan already existed even beforehand (Maariv Online, 2024). As Amos Harel reported in *Haaretz*, "The first signs of the operational plan reached the IDF a few years ago, and as time passed a clearer picture emerged. More than a year before the attack, the full plan became clear to Israel" (Harel, 2023). Operative planning before an attack—even if it has not yet been carried out—shows that Israel did not succeed in dissuading Hamas from even thinking about such a possibility, thus it is an expression of the failure of general deterrence.

Subsequently, we can provide explanations that concern the failure of Israel's immediate deterrence. One such explanation relates to the credibility of the Israeli threat. While we can assume that there was no doubt about the intensity of Israel's capabilities and the scope of the damage that it can cause to Hamas, and undoubtedly many attempts were made to communicate Israeli deterrence to Hamas through various statements and declarations over the years, we can point to the limited credibility of the Israeli threat. Various figures raised these doubts, highlighted by IDF

Spokesperson Brigadier General Daniel Hagari, who declared that Hamas's motivation will become clear in a future investigation, but "it is likely that the characteristic of a rift, the army's readiness, maybe in its (Hamas's) view, is one of the characteristics related to this" (N12, 2024). In other words, the political crisis in which Israel found itself under Netanyahu's leadership negatively affected Israel's deterrence, as some had warned prior to the war (for example Zitun, 2023a; Yadlin & Evental, 2023).[8] In this sense, not only did these processes affect the attention of the political leadership, which was busy advancing the judicial overhaul, they also made it difficult to consolidate Israel's deterrence and to convey an effective deterrent message.

Another explanation that takes into account both the aspect of immediate deterrence and long-term processes relates to the negative change in the status quo for the Palestinians. One aspect of this change stemmed from the fear that the status quo on the Temple Mount would change with the rise of the right-wing government. As Nadav Eyal wrote, "Sinwar and his associates […] convinced themselves that the status quo on the Temple Mount is in danger due to the extreme right in the government (Eyal, 2024). Hamas even conveyed a strong threat to Israel via Egyptian mediation and the UN representative that it would respond to a visit by Ben-Gvir to the Temple Mount. According to the report, Hamas made it clear to Israel that it would not stand idly by in the face of this act, which "would cause the situation to blow up" (Shabi, 2023).

Moreover, the balance of interests changed to the detriment of the Palestinians due to the regional peace initiative advanced by the Netanyahu government. Despite its advantages, not only did the initiative neglect the Palestinian issue, but it also symbolized the loss of hope for the Palestinians.[9] For example, the Palestinian foreign minister, Riyad al-Maliki, claimed in August 2023 that "there is concern that such an agreement will further weaken the Arab world's support for the Palestinians and undermine the

hopes for an independent Palestinian state" (Berdichevsky, 2023). In an opinion piece on the topic, Mohammad Abu Rumman, who served as a minister in the government of Jordan, wrote in 2023 that "the Palestinians are well aware that normalization with Saudi Arabia, which for them is a slight opportunity for improvement, is a big prize for Israel. If relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel gain momentum, in the future Israel's leaders will not feel any real pressure to make progress toward a genuine agreement, and the gates to the Arab and Muslim world are expected to be opened wide for Israel." Similarly, Khaled Elgindy from the Middle East Institute explained in an interview with *Foreign Affairs* that what intensified the despair in Gaza was the new status quo taking shape given the normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia and the removal of the Palestinian issue from the international agenda (Mackinnon, 2023).[10]

While these are not statements by Hamas spokespeople, they largely reflect the Palestinian sentiment. Furthermore, the intelligence assessment that emerged in Israel, based on documents and other Hamas sources that were captured following the conquest of the Gaza Strip, offers a similar explanation, which Nadav Eyal published in *Yedioth Ahronoth*. He wrote that "Sinwar and his associates came to the conclusion that the situation was becoming especially dangerous for the Palestinian issue […] in light of the approaching normalization with Saudi Arabia, a huge symbolic and regional event, they believed that the Palestinian issue would be left behind, perhaps for generations" (Eyal, 2024).[11]

These claims regarding concerns about a negative change in the status quo touch upon important insights brought up over the years by deterrence researchers. As mentioned above, while many deterrence scholars emphasize the cost involved in the punishment that the putative challenger will suffer, others also point out the price of dissatisfaction with the status quo and the expectation of a negative change in the status quo as factors that weaken the

deterrent threat.[12] It is argued, for example, that not only punishment but also positive incentives can increase the gap between maintaining the status quo and violating it, such that the putative challenger will have more to lose (Huth & Russett, 1990, pp. 469–470; Wilner, 2015, pp. 30–31). In other words, as the price of the status quo becomes higher and less tolerable for the putative challenger, the effectiveness of the strategy of deterrence decreases.[13] According to this explanation, the removal of the Palestinian issue from the agenda became another factor that harmed the effectiveness of Israeli deterrence and reduced the potential loss for Hamas.

These failures, the last of which was expressed in the October 7 attack, underscore the question of why Israel consistently relies on a strategy that has failed again and again.

The Big Challenge—Israel's Reliance on the Strategy of Deterrence Against Hamas

I argue that a greater research challenge relates to Israel's significant reliance on the strategy of deterrence. More surprising than the failure of deterrence is the fact that Israel continued to rely on this strategy despite its recurring failures in dissuading Hamas from acting. The failure of deterrence is actually less surprising, as there is accumulated evidence of the limitations of Israel's deterrent threat toward Hamas over the years.[14] These failures, the last of which was expressed in the October 7 attack, underscore the question of why Israel consistently relies on a strategy that has failed again and again.

We can learn about the limitations of deterrence, for example, from the dynamic that accompanied previous rounds of fighting between Israel and Hamas, such as operations Cast Lead, Pillar of Defense, and Protective Edge. Not only did each round take place despite the powerful response by the IDF in the previous round, but from one round to the next, Hamas

greatly increased the number of rockets that it launched and their range (Lupovici, 2016, p. 172). This is despite the fact that Israeli actions in the previous round were purported to send a deterrent message in order to dissuade or at least limit future action. Moreover, Operation Cast Lead should not have even occurred following the Second Lebanon War because Israel had supposedly demonstrated its capabilities and intentions, with the message of that war intended for the various actors in the region, not only for Hezbollah.

Furthermore, while there were supporters of the claim that deterrence against Hamas was working, as described above, there were other voices that challenged the claim that deterrence was effective. Among them, even publications in public IDF forums, such as *Eshtonot* of the Research Center of the National Security College, included experts who demonstrated great caution and even doubts about the ability to translate Israel's actions against Hamas into effective deterrence (for example Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014; Yadai & Ortal, 2013),[15] and warned against drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of deterrence based on the lack of violence (Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014, p. 27).[16]

But many tended to ignore these warnings, as mentioned above, and emphasized not only the importance of deterring Hamas but also the previous successes of this strategy, which brought "quiet." Even Tamir Yadai and Eran Ortal, who cast doubt on the deterrent impact of previous rounds, pointed to the supposed deterrent effect that these rounds provided, at least in the short term. According to them, in the long term, the deterrence operations have a limited impact, and in the short term, there is a deterrent effect that is expressed in "a certain period of quiet after them," like after the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead (Yadai & Ortal, 2013, p. 12).[17] This dynamic recurred in later rounds. For example, as described above, even in 2023, at the beginning of Operation Shield and Arrow, Netanyahu continued to emphasize the deterrent goal of the rounds

of fighting against Hamas and against the Islamic Jihad (Kan News – the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, 2023).

Of course, methodologically, we cannot necessarily attribute the "success of deterrence" to a lack of violence, as this can stem from factors such as the challenger not having a specific interest in acting, being engaged in other arenas, or, alternatively, preparing for a future round and waiting for more convenient conditions. Furthermore, the lack of violence can be explained by the use of force in the previous round by the defending actor, but the reason for not challenging, especially in the short term, does not have to be the success of deterrence achieved in the previous round of fighting, but rather the considerable harm to the capabilities of the putative challenger. Therefore, as long as it has not succeeded in restoring its capabilities, we will not see violence, but this "period of calm" does not stem from a lack of motivation on the part of the challenger—which the deterrent threat is supposedly attempting to influence—but from the lack of capabilities or appropriate means.

It is thus not surprising that the question of the success of deterrence has been discussed extensively in the research literature due to various methodological problems in establishing a causal relationship between issuing the deterrent threat and its influence on the behavior of the adversary.[18] Given these challenges, Yossi Baidatz and Dima Adamsky argue that the correlation "between the IDF's use of force and the desired behavior of the adversary is perceived as causal. Quiet is usually perceived as confirmation of the effectiveness of deterrence, while violence is perceived as the direct result of the failure of the use of force. However, this causal connection must be proven, and not assumed" (Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014, p. 27; see also Lupovici, 2008, pp. 79, 83, 87).

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The Identity of Deterrence: The Explanation for Adhering to the Strategy of Deterrence in Israel

I believe that for various reasons—cultural, political, and strategic—Israel has not only heavily relied on a strategy of deterrence over the years but also become attached to this strategy, resulting in what I refer to as holding an identity of deterrence: a perception in which the actor sees its role in the international arena in terms of deterrence, as a deterrer actor. I argue that an actor that has an identity of deterrer needs to define relations of deterrence toward significant others (so that they are deterred) and seeks to consistently hold to the narrative that deterrence is maintained and applied, and in this way it achieves its security. In other words, an actor with a deterrer identity tells itself a story regarding its role in the international arena and regarding its relations with its adversaries (Lupovici, 2016, pp. 69–76). This identity has several main characteristics: It provides an interpretation of events, reduces the range of strategic possibilities such that deterrence becomes an end in itself and shapes the public discourse. These elements were extremely prominent in shaping Israel's behavior in the period preceding the October 7 attack.

Interpretation of Events

The identity of actors provides them with a perspective through which they interpret reality.[19] An identity of deterrence similarly influences actors. In this situation, they interpret a lack of violence against them as the success of deterrence, while they interpret violence that

they experience as the failure of deterrence. For example, Netanyahu declared on several occasions after various operations that the quiet achieved—meaning the lack of harm to Israel—resulted directly from the deterrence achieved in operations. In May 2023, after Operation Shield and Arrow against Islamic Jihad targets, Netanyahu declared:

> I think that we have changed the deterrence equation. I have no doubt at all about this. I can't tell you, we'll never go back to attacks, and when exactly it will happen, but there is no doubt that we have strengthened Israeli deterrence, and this also has several precedents. The last precedent is what we did with Hamas. In Guardian of the Walls, we struck them with a blow that they had never suffered in their history, and since then I think they haven't fired even a single rocket into our territory. Two years have passed, and not without reason. And therefore, they didn't take part. Not in the previous operation, and not in the current operation. Now we have dealt a very powerful blow to the Islamic Jihad, and I think this has left a strong impression on them (Netanyahu, 2023) [my emphasis].[20]

> Prior to Operation Guardian of the Walls, Aharon Haliva, who was then head of the Operations Directorate, stated that "the deterrence is a lot stronger than what people think. Sinwar knows that he is in a position where the cost of defeat is greater than the cost of war and escalation."

This interpretation of the connection between the use of force in a previous round and deterrence has also gained wide traction among the military leadership over the years. For example, prior to Operation Guardian of the Walls, Aharon Haliva, who was then head of the Operations Directorate, stated that "the deterrence is a lot stronger than what people think. Sinwar knows that he is in a position where the cost of defeat is greater than the cost of war and escalation" (Kubovich, 2024). The

fact that this statement was made in a closed forum not only strengthens the claim that it was an authentic assessment of the situation and was not intended as a political message for the general public, but also supports the claims presented above that Israel consciously sought to achieve deterrence against Hamas.

However, it is also clear that a lack of violence is not necessarily the result of the success of deterrence. Indeed, this is what the defending actor hopes for and how it wants to see things, that the strategy used is supposedly the factor that shapes the adversary's behavior, as discussed above. However, there could be various reasons why an actor did not use force against an actor seeking to deter it. Therefore, an interpretation in which the failure of deterrence led to the violent act is a possible interpretation of the events, it is not necessarily an accurate one. First, often the failure of deterrence occurs long before the use of force, as the adversary needs time to prepare for the violent act and its possible consequences. Second, as mentioned, it is not at all clear whether there was successful deterrence at any previous stage, so it is not as if it stopped working and then the challenger attacked but rather that it did not work in the first place.

In the context of the October 7 attack, it is clear that this perspective, which was dominant in Israel, made it extremely difficult to see the reality and, in effect, helped create the conception that Hamas was deterred. Various acts that Hamas did or did not do were interpreted through this mistaken conception. One of the consequences of this conception was the assumption that, unlike the Cold War, deterrence should be understood as a continuum rather than a binary state of success or failure (Almog, 2004; Rid, 2012). Speakers such as Yossi Kuperwasser, who in the past served as head of the research division in the Military Intelligence Directorate and as Director-General of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, expressed this conception clearly. Thus, in the context of a short round of fighting in May

2018, during which rockets were launched at communities in southern Israel, Kuperwasser said that "deterrence is not zero or one […] in deterrence there are several degrees, and it is an entire theory. The Islamic Jihad and Hamas needed to release pressure and they did so to a certain degree and at a certain level and in certain ranges for a short period of time, and the Israeli response is what caused them to understand that it is time to stop" (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2018). These words reflect not only the idea that Hamas's use of force indicates the weakening of deterrence, but also the interpretation that the IDF's action succeeded in restoring deterrence and attaining quiet again.

Furthermore, Kuperwasser, like other senior officials, emphasizes that the success of deterrence is not a binary state. This conception provides both a supporting framework for interpreting deterrence and a justification for the concept itself. In this sense, the approach that complete deterrence should not be expected is not only a realistic approach that recognizes the complexity of reality, but also provides a justification for not needing to acknowledge the failure of deterrence, thus preserving the illusion that deterrence works. In other words, although various actions have been carried out that could challenge the claim that Israeli deterrence was working, they were interpreted as part of a doctrine that suggested that challenges did not necessarily indicate the failure of deterrence, as it cannot prevent all possibilities nor does it try to. Furthermore, as soon as IDF actions are carried out, they immediately restore deterrence.

Reducing the Possibilities for Action

The identity of deterrence shapes the nature of Israel's responses. Over the years, actors who have adopted the identity of a deterrent actor are constrained in how they are able to act. When they perceive a situation as undermining deterrence, they feel the need to restore it and take steps to do so. Thus, the lack of deterrence

is not only a problem of physical security but also a threat to their identity. Restoring deterrence becomes not only a means of achieving security but also an end in itself, as it validates their identity.

The assumption is therefore that if forceful actions are carried out, the deterrence can be restored. These assumptions, as part of this paradigm and conception of deterrence, also led to a lack of thorough consideration of how to act in order to achieve deterrence. The assumption was that the use of force is necessary for achieving deterrence, and that the more force is used, the more effective the deterrence will be attained. However, these assumptions made it difficult to formulate and deeply examine the relevant issues. Baidatz and Adamsky argue that goals such as strengthening or restoring deterrent capability were not shaped in a coherent, systemic manner (2014, p. 26). After the Second Lebanon War, in which the working assumption was also that deterrence would be achieved through the use of force, it was claimed that a significant effort was not made to understand under what conditions and how it would be possible to achieve deterrence in practice (Lupovici, 2008, p. 81). For example, in testimony to the Winograd Commission, which was appointed to investigate the war, Chief of Staff Dan Halutz was unable to answer the question of how the IDF should operate to achieve deterrence and what documents this conception was based on (Winograd Commission, 2007, pp. 69–70). The assumption was that great force needed to be used to restore deterrence (which had supposedly been lost) after the kidnapping of the soldiers from the Lebanese border in July 2006 (Lupovici, 2008; Lupovici, 2016, pp. 137–148).

Yadai and Ortal argue that

> **during the last 20 years, no formal theory or doctrine has been written that professionally recognizes this kind of operation,** conducts a

theoretical discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of 'crisis operations' (for deterrence) or 'levels of escalation' (deterrence and regularization), and defines the military and other tools that should be prepared as part of carrying out these operations. All the more so, we did not recognize the fact that for years we have been carrying out these operations as a military doctrine and as a state strategy" (Yadai & Ortal, 2013, p. 21) [emphasis in the original].

Another dimension of the tragedy in this respect is the need for a clearer definition of deterrence, its objectives, and the ways to achieve it, which were already discussed many years ago. As early as 2004, Shmuel Gordon stated that although Israel had already dealt with limited conflicts for decades, it had not developed a clear deterrence concept to address them (Gordon, 2004, p. 189). Moreover, the partial report of the Winograd Commission on the Second Lebanon War, published in 2007, stated that "specific operative decisions were made, and general objectives (weakening Hezbollah) or even comprehensive objectives (**strengthening Israel's general deterrence**) were also mentioned. But we did not find an orderly discussion of the compatibility between the achievement of the objectives and the military or political modes of operation that were decided on" (Winograd Commission, 2007, p. 118) [my emphasis].

The assumption was that the use of force would strengthen Israeli deterrence, and that it must be used occasionally to maintain "deterrent capability" (Lupovici, 2008, pp. 83–84). This conception expresses the idea that deterrence actually depends on what Israel does. Thus, for example, the rounds of violence could be interpreted as methods of achieving aeterrence, as Israel demonstrated its strength, and therefore the other side was supposed to be deterred. However, it is clear

from the deterrence scholarship that the success of deterrence does not only depend on the actions taken by the side trying to deter but also on the interpretation that the challenger attributes to them. For example, the fact that Israel responded forcefully to previous attacks could have taught Hamas that it needed to be deterred, but Hamas could also have learned a different lesson, such as that the Israeli deterrence had failed; otherwise, Israel would not have made the effort to respond and explain that it was acting to restore its deterrence. Moreover, the challenger has various considerations that do not only relate to the expected response of the actor seeking to deter it. A central factor influencing the challenger's considerations relates, as mentioned, to its level of satisfaction with the status quo. But framing the situation as part of a "capability"[21] that Israel cultivates or achieves by using force has allowed for the obscuring of the situation and strengthening the belief in deterrence.

Conclusion

It is too early to determine with certainty the factors that led to the failure of Israel's deterrence against Hamas as expressed in the October 7 attack. However, the ability to deter Hamas was probably limited given the various factors presented, including the high cost for Hamas of continuing the status quo, the lack of hope, and the undermining of the credibility of Israeli deterrence due to internal political processes in Israel. In light of past experience in the recurring rounds of violence between Israel and Hamas, it is not at all certain that general deterrence against Hamas has been effective since the end of the 2000s. Throughout this period, failures in immediate deterrence were evident. Every few years, Hamas not only struck various targets in Israel but also increased the strength of its attack, indicating that despite the prominent discourse in Israel suggesting that "Hamas is deterred," that was not necessarily the case. In other words, the Israeli discourse on deterrence and the impact

of Israel's threats on Hamas's behavior had become superficial. Hence, the main challenge is not why deterrence failed—an issue that in itself raises several important theoretical and empirical issues—but rather why Israel chose to emphasize the strategy of deterrence, despite indications that its contribution to restraining Hamas's behavior was limited.

The answer that I have proposed to this question is that Israel became attached to the strategy of deterrence that provides it not only with a means of achieving physical security but also with a way of validating its identity (as a deterrent actor). Although this strategy (and even this identity) has several advantages in achieving security, this identity could have negative consequences. First, it contributed to overreliance on the strategy of deterrence. The identity had decisive impacts on the way events were interpreted, and the mistaken interpretation that deterrence was working enabled decision-makers to advance political processes that pushed the Palestinians into a corner, worsened the status quo for them, and reduced the effectiveness of the strategy of deterrence, which needed to contend with a balance of interests that became tilted more and more in favor of Hamas. That is, Israel told itself the story that deterrence was working and shaping its enemies' behavior. The deterrence, and even more so, the Israeli attachment to it, created the illusion that deterrence was seemingly solving Israel's problems, and thanks to it, it was possible to attribute less importance to Hamas's threats (as it was deterred); there was no need for an arrangement with the Palestinians, as they were deterred (and therefore it was possible to move forward diplomatically in a way that did not take into account the Palestinians).

The lesson is that there needs to be a rethinking not only of Israel's interests—what is the price of the status quo and what are the price and advantages of comprehensive political processes that take into account the Palestinians—but also of which objectives of

the State of Israel should be protected and included in the umbrella of deterrence, and what constitutes overreliance on the strategy in a way that threatens its effectiveness. As Uri Bar-Joseph argued, deterrence is not an alternative for sensible foreign policy (Bar-Joseph, 1999, pp. 24–25). Similarly, Israel must develop a clear operative framework not only for achieving deterrence—how it is achieved, toward whom, against what threats—but also for how to check and ensure whether a certain adversary is deterred. Such a methodology of deterrence is challenging, but it is necessary and requires integration of specific intelligence gathering and analysis efforts. As Baidatz and Adamsky wrote in this context, there is a need "to invest a greater intellectual effort in improving the research methodology for assessing the achievement of the campaign," which would enable identifying deterrence success (2014, p. 27).

The strategy of deterrence could have a key role vis-à-vis various strategic threats, but decision-makers in Israel need to be more aware of what it can achieve and how. While the strategy of deterrence could be an important factor in deterring strategic threats from Iran, for example, it is limited with respect to other threats such as those posed by Hamas, especially in the case of low levels of violence. Furthermore, the assumption that the greater the amount of force used, the better deterrence will work is problematic. As discussed above, the previous rounds between Israel and Hamas showed no evident connection between the intensity of the Israeli response and the deterrent effect. Moreover, not only is it not clear that the increased use of military force contributes to deterrence, but it could even weaken it. This is because it raises the prices that Israel pays in the international arena, and this undermines its legitimacy to use force and increases the hostility of the civilian population, which tilts the balance of interests against Israel and adds another component that weakens its deterrence in the long term.

We can also identify a negative contribution of the identity of deterrence to security, as the need to maintain deterrence and the use of force should it fail strengthens the adversary's ability to plan attacks in a way that serves its interests. An example of this is the "damned if you do, damned if you don't" dilemma presented by Emanuel Adler. In this situation, Israeli decision-makers are forced to choose between a response that serves the interests of the terrorist organizations and a heavy price in internal public opinion for not responding. While not responding to such a provocation would be politically costly to an actor who has internalized the ideas of deterrence and when the public expects retaliation, a response to the provocation of the challenging actor could play into the hands of the challengers, who are often interested in retaliation and in carrying out a round of violence to advance various political aims (Adler, 2010). But the Israeli identity of deterrence adds another supplementary layer to this claim. The identity of deterrence provides not only the internal need for retaliation to achieve deterrence but also allows an adversary who is familiar with Israel to predict how it will behave in certain situations. Thus, although deterrence has many advantages, an identity of deterrence is a factor that makes it more difficult to manage the strategy, as it provides further motivation to challenge Israel.[22]

The consequences of this dynamic are also evident in Hamas's attack on Israel in October 2023. Knowing and being familiar with the Israeli strategy of deterrence and knowing that Israel would not be able to refrain from a massive response, Hamas hoped for a massive Israeli response that plays into its hands, using it for propaganda and as a means of limiting the duration and nature of the Israeli response. The hope is that over time Israel will not be able to continue such an attack, which invites international criticism of Israel and reduces its legitimacy to continue the war. For example, some interpretations hold not only that Hamas was aware that Israel would have to respond with great force, but that it also hoped for such a response. Hamas's brutal attack on Israel aimed, among other things, to set a trap for Israel that would hurt it politically (Kiley, 2023). Similarly, Page Fortna argues that "Hamas's leaders know that they cannot defeat the IDF militarily. Their only hope is to create a provocation that will push Israel to kill enough Palestinian civilians in order to defeat Israel politically" (Fortna, 2024).[23] In other words, the Israeli strategy of deterrence and the identity of deterrence were exploited by Hamas, which could have presumed Israel's need for a massive response, and intentionally launched a brutal attack partly in order to invite such an attack by Israel, which it prepared for, as mentioned.[24] All of these demonstrate the inherent advantages of such a strategy for Hamas, whose logic is actually to increase the intensity of Israel's attack in order to harm its legitimacy and to attain a political achievement through the organization's survival despite the Israeli attack.

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Notes

1 Despite the clear distinction between the strategies, some argue that there is not a sharp differentiation between these types of deterrence. Even in the case of deterrence by denial, there are prices that the putative challenger could pay, such as the costs involved in attaining the resources and preparations for the act, or the costs inherent in carrying out the act itself (Matania & Bachrach, 2023; Lupovici, 2023, pp. 6).

2 However, the connection between delegitimization and deterrence by denial success in practice is complicated (see Lupovici, 2023, p. 11).

3 For example, in nuclear deterrence, the goal is to achieve general deterrence—to cause the adversary to refrain from even considering the option of carrying out a nuclear attack on the defender. The goal is not to be forced into a situation of immediate deterrence, where there are indications of the challenger's intent to use nuclear weapons, and the defender responds with a series of specific threats to dissuade them from doing so.

4 Note that the threat "your blood be on your heads" appears in both quotations. In the first one, it is a direct threat toward Hamas and in the second quotation, it

is an explanation of the way the implementation of the threat supposedly worked.

5 Hanegbi said in an interview on Army Radio on October 1 2023: "Since Guardian of the Walls, in May two years ago, there has been a decision by the Hamas leadership to demonstrate unprecedented restraint. For over two years there has not been proactive fire of even a single Hamas rocket from Gaza. Hamas is very, very restrained and understands the implications of further defiance" (Kubovich & Lis, 2023). When he was confronted after the attack with his statement that "for over two years there has been no fire from Hamas, it is very deterred for 15 more years, it is not looking for escalation," he responded that this "is my mistake, [which] reflects the mistake of other bodies. As we had indeed believed that Hamas [had learned] the lesson of Guardian of the Walls" (Wasserman & Barsky, 2023).

6 In fact, this was Bar-Joseph's claim, which was formulated specifically with respect to advantages related to the establishment of a Palestinian state. According to him, such a course of action would, in part, allow for a more effective use of the strategy of deterrence.

7 On Hamas and its development as a semi-state actor, see, for example, Berti, 2013, pp. 79–129.

8 As Amos Yadlin and Udi Evental (2023) wrote a few weeks before Hamas's attack, "the complex security reality and the threats of escalation in the various arenas are also related to the severe tailspin that the judicial overhaul has put Israel in. Undermining internal cohesion, the reserves crisis and the harm to the IDF's competence, the government's attacks against the heads of the security establishment and the defense forces, the rift with Washington, its strategic mainstay—all of these elements weakness and severely harm deterrence. Consequently, the most immediate and effective step to restore deterrence is to roll back and shelve the judicial overhaul."

9 For a more extensive discussion of the connection between emotions and deterrence, see Crawford, 2000, pp. 146–149; Lupovici, 2016, pp. 73–76.

10 On the challenge of the Palestinian issue for the Saudis as part of the emerging agreement, see, for example, Guzansky, 2023, p. 7.

11 However, Eyal (2024) notes that concerns were also raised within Hamas about a renewed policy of targeted assassinations, as well as an assessment that Israel was internally weak due to the judicial coup.

12 Scholars have shown that an expectation of deterioration in the status quo reduces the putative challenger's sensitivity to deterrence, even when the balance of power between the sides is clear. For example, despite India's strategic advantage over Pakistan, it did not succeed in dissuading Pakistan from such an attack in the war between the countries over Kashmir in 1965 because the Pakistanis were concerned that the Kashmir issue was being removed

from the international agenda and a situation was solidifying in which the region is part of India. Furthermore, the Pakistanis were concerned that the power differences between the countries were growing quickly, which could have both reduced their future chances of success in the struggle over the region and exacted a higher price from them for such an action in the future (Ganguly, 1990, p. 84). Similarly, it is claimed that prior to the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein took into account the expectation of the emergence of a new and less convenient status quo for him after the end of the Cold War and the decline of the Soviet Union's strength and influence over the international system. According to this explanation, deterrence to prevent Iraq's invasion of Kuwait did not work, as Hussein's expectation was that such an act in the future, when the Soviet Union would no longer support Iraq, would be much more expensive. While Saddam Hussein was mistaken in his assessment of the Soviet Union's willingness to support the invasion, he understood the significance of the change in the international system and the high price that Iraq would pay for such an act in the future (Stein, 1992, p. 173).

13   The idea behind this claim is simple. There is a gap between the price of the status quo and the price that will be exacted from the putative challenger through possible retaliation. When this gap is large, deterrence under certain conditions can work better because it creates a clear distinction between maintaining the status quo and violating it. Hence it is possible to influence deterrence in two ways: One is raising the price of retaliation and thus increasing the gap between the status quo and the situation that will result from the unwanted act. The other is increasing the gap by making the status quo more comfortable for the putative challenger. In other words, the more comfortable the status quo is, the more the putative challenger will have to lose if it carries out the unwanted act.

14   An example of this is Kubovich's description of the IDF's surprise at the launch of rockets toward Jerusalem in May 2021, given the expectation that Israel's deterrence was effective. As a result, Hamas's threats that they would launch rockets at Jerusalem were rejected as empty threats (Kubovich, 2024).

15   For example, Yadai and Ortal wrote in the context of Operation Pillar of Defense that as in previous operations, it aimed "to maintain deterrence against non-state enemies." They wrote that "this phenomenon has become the de facto doctrine of the State of Israel and the IDF," due to Israel's unwillingness to defeat Hamas or its inability to achieve this objective. While wars with Arab countries led over the years to the gradual weakening of their desire to fight with the State of Israel, "the deterrence operations […] are not achieving a similar result. On the contrary, **from round to round, we are encountering stronger enemies, both politically and militarily. Paradoxically, the**

achievements of the active defense systems in Operation Pillar of Defense are providing the enemy with an incentive to persevere in its fight against us" (Yadai & Ortal, 2013, p. 6) [my emphasis added].

16   Although many believed in the concept of deterrence against organizations like Hamas, several prominent voices stated on various occasions that Israeli deterrence against Hamas was not working, such as former defense minister Moshe Arens (Arens, 2009; Arkin, 2021).

17   Regarding Operation Pillar of Defense, which ended around the time their article was completed, they claimed that it was too early to determine (Yadai & Ortal, 2013, p. 12).

18   For a methodological discussion, see, for example, Huth & Russett, 1990; Lebow & Stein, 1990; Lupovici, 2021.

19   On how identity provides a perspective through which reality is interpreted, see Hopf, 2002, pp. 1, 5; Weldes, 1999.

20   Netanyahu repeated similar statements on various occasions after the operation; see, for example, Cohen et al. 2023. However, it is worth noting that these conceptions regarding the way that military actions create future deterrence or constitute an explanation for the lack of violence have also been presented by others. For example, former prime minister Yair Lapid declared after Operation Breaking Dawn, which also targeted Islamic Jihad, that "the operation has restored Israeli initiative and deterrence. All of the objectives have been achieved" (Eichner, 2022).

21   It should be noted that the Hebrew term for deterrence capability often used, is kosher ha'arta'a, which "literally means that deterrence is subject to being fit or in good physical condition" (Lupovici, 2016: 57).

22   A similar claim can be made about the 1991 Gulf War. Iraq's launching of missiles toward Israel, from this perspective, stemmed not from a lack of Israeli deterrence but actually from Israeli deterrence. Saddam Hussein presumed that Israel would have no choice but to respond to the attack, given the importance of deterrence in Israel's security doctrine. Thus, he hoped to disrupt the plans to present an international coalition led by the United States, as the Arab countries that joined the coalition would have difficulty supporting such an alliance when Israel was using force against Iraq (Mendelsohn, 2003, pp. 97–100).

23   On the topic of a provocation against Israel that caused Israel to use massive force to achieve deterrence but also intended to harm Israel's legitimacy in world public opinion, see Adler, 2010, pp. 212, 214.

24   Thus, we can also wonder when Hamas restrained its behavior in the past, if this was indeed a result, as several researchers proposed, of Israeli deterrence whose influence stemmed in part from Hamas's sensitivity to the citizens located in the territory under its control (see, for example, Michael & Dostri, 2018, p. 76).