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OPERATION "SUMMER RAINS" – AIMS, METHODS AND POSSIBLE OUTCOMES**Shlomo Brom****Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies**

Operation "Summer Rains" was launched by Israel on June 28 in response to an attack by Hamas near Kerem Shalom. In that incident, a Hamas squad tunneled under the fence separating Israel from Gaza and attacked an armored unit from the rear, killing two soldiers and capturing another -- Gilad Shalit -- whom they took back to Gaza.

Although the immediate objective is to free the captured soldier, the operation apparently also has the broader goal of ending the continuous Qassam rocket attacks on Sderot and other Israeli towns, thereby terminating an intolerable situation in which the Gaza Strip, from which Israel totally withdrew in August 2005, serves as a base for attacks that disrupt daily life in adjacent areas of Israel. Israel hopes to do that by changing the rules of the game and excluding from that "game" rocket fire on civilian settlements. In effect, Israel wants to replicate the model that prevails on the Israeli-Lebanese border, where the ongoing confrontation with Hizbullah proceeds according to clear rules that preclude attacks on civilians and confine operations to specified sectors. Finally, Israel has declared that it will not surrender to extortion and release prisoners in return for the captured soldier.

The method chosen to advance these aims is

application of increasing pressure on Hamas and other organizations in order to convey the message that the situation of those organizations will continue to deteriorate and the price they pay will grow as long as they refuse to adopt new rules. Pressure includes cautious and measured ground-force incursions into the Gaza Strip (first in the south and later in the north), precision air strikes on terrorist squads, headquarters and logistical infrastructure, renewal of artillery strikes on rocket launch zones, direct action against the political leadership of Hamas (i.e., arrest of ministers and parliament members in the West Bank and attacks on offices in Gaza), threats of also resorting to physical attacks on the leadership, and harassment of the population in Gaza through destruction of the electrical grid and creation of sonic booms at night.

This method has several advantages. First of all, it communicates persistence along with patience by effectively saying, "We have time. Our situation will not get worse if we wait, but yours will." Secondly, it complicates efforts in the international community to depict Israeli action as a disproportionate response to a provocation that, to some, seems minor (and notwithstanding some international criticism of some measures – the arrest of political leaders, the harassment of the civilian population –

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substantial negative reaction has thus far been avoided). Thirdly, it minimizes the risk of further casualties.

The main problem with this approach is its effectiveness. For it to succeed there must be some force on the other side both sensitive to the costs imposed on it and capable of controlling events. It is doubtful that this condition is met. Although the Hamas government is ostensibly the primary address, it does not control all the factions on the Palestinian side, especially the Islamic Jihad and many groups associated with Fatah. The latter are interested in chaos and civilian suffering because their political interest is to undermine the Hamas government. The only incentive for Hamas to undertake a violent confrontation with those factions and impose its authority on them, i.e., to go to the brink of civil war, is the understanding that it will emerge with a substantial political gain. But it is difficult to see how such an incentive can be created if Hamas believes that the Israeli and American governments, in cooperation with various Palestinian elements, have already decided to overthrow it. In those circumstances, any further threat of pressure that might precipitate the collapse of the Hamas government is hollow, and the only option left for Hamas is to preserve the Palestinian public perception that the problems of a democratically-elected Hamas government are due to Israeli and American actions supported by their Fatah "collaborators." Recent public opinion surveys in the Palestinian territories confirm that this is the prevailing perception.

Even within Hamas, different factions hold contrary views. The local political leadership, including Prime Minister Ismail Haniyya, still wants and hopes to weather the crisis and strengthen its hold on the Palestinian Authority. By contrast, the leadership based in Damascus as well as the military wing are closer to the view that the fate of the Hamas government has

already been sealed and that it is time to think about the next stage.

Moreover, the endurance of the Palestinian public is high. It demonstrated its ability to adapt to harsh conditions both before and during the *intifada*, and its sensitivity to a further deterioration is therefore probably low. Besides, there is a limit to the hardship Israel can inflict on the civilian population, both for ethical reasons and for fear of the international repercussions.

All this suggests several conclusions. One is that the military pressure must exact a higher price on the Palestinian side, especially on the leadership of Hamas and other organizations, before it has a chance of producing the desired outcomes. Secondly, Israeli goals -- or at least some of them -- can only be achieved within the framework of a comprehensive package with the Palestinian side. For Hamas, the most important component of the package will be an understanding that Israel will allow it to continue governing; for Israel, it will be acceptance by Hamas of new rules of the game. Within this framework, both sides will need to step back from the linkage between the release of the Israeli soldier and the fate of Palestinian prisoners. That might be accomplished by creating a "decent interval" between Gilad Shalit's release and a subsequent release of a small number of prisoners. For Israel, such a deal might be possible, but only if Israel first resolves a basic ambivalence in its policy and decides what it wants more: overthrowing the Hamas government, which means giving up hope of finding an authoritative interlocutor on the Palestinian side, or preserving a Palestinian interlocutor for effective dialogue, even if its address is the Hamas government.

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