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Hamas and the Enduring Tunnel Threat: A Review of Israeli Security Policy

Early in May 2016, tensions escalated between Palestinian militants in Gaza and the Israeli Defense Forces conducting operations along the Strip's border. The IDF confirmed airstrikes on Hamas and Islamic Jihad outposts as a response to several rounds of mortars from both Islamist paramilitary organizations. While sporadic exchanges of fire had dotted headlines since the conclusion of Operation Protective Edge in 2014, this particular flare-up was precipitated by an enduring security topic in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—Gaza's extensive tunnel system. The IDF had successfully destroyed an underground passage connecting Gaza to Israel, but Hamas was clear that such strategic access would not be lost without retaliation.ⁱ

Palestinians in Gaza originally began constructing tunnels to smuggle goods from Egypt soon after the 1979 Camp David Accords. These passages formed a lifeline to the outside world, particularly after Israel imposed a tight blockade on consumer goods into the Strip to challenge Hamas' rise to power in the 2006 Palestinian elections. Eager to acquire weapons and illegal building supplies through the Sinai, Hamas also recognized the strategic importance of tunnels that exposed Israeli territory. Unlike the wider smuggling tunnels constructed to transport bulky items through the South, the new tunnels into Israel were wide enough for only a person to pass through. Still, they represented an engineering accomplishment: buried 100-130 feet below the ground, supplied with electricity and communication systems, reinforced with thick layers of cement.ⁱⁱ These tunnels were intended solely for acts of terror including the kidnapping of IDF soldiers to hold for excessive ransom and the launching of attacks on exposed Israeli kibbutzim.

Despite extensive efforts in Operation Protective Edge to “neutralize” the threat of these tunnels, the risk of terrorist attacks remains for Israel. Hamas boasted of building 50 tunnels in the year following the ceasefire. Highlighting the risk of such resurgence, Lt. Col. Peter Lerner of the IDF issued a public statement: “Hamas is continuing to try to carry out and build this infrastructure into Israel and it's something we are not prepared to tolerate.”ⁱⁱⁱ Over the past year IDF engineers have set to work excavating more points of suspicion along the border, but their efforts have ignited exchanges of fire, as described earlier. It is unclear if further gains by the IDF to prevent infiltration will initiate even more severe responses in the future.

For many observers who view the conflict through a lens of pessimism, full-out war looms as an inevitability. The cycle of IDF military operations in 2008, 2012, and 2014 have managed to contain the threat of Hamas rocket attacks, but not remove it. As long as Hamas calls for armed resistance and total liberation of Palestine, the existential threat to Israel remains. Even if Hamas were to lose its large favor with Palestinians, there are even more radical paramilitary organizations ready to assume its place.

The other side of the discourse is dominated by those concerned with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. In 2015 the Strip’s unemployment rate rose to a record 44%, and almost 60% among young people. GDP has dropped by 15% in the last year, and 72% of households are food insecure. With few resources inside the Strip and movement outside only possible “in exceptional humanitarian cases, with an emphasis on urgent medical cases,” the blockade has exerted almost full control over the living conditions of 1.8 million Palestinians.^{iv} Conditions, which the UN Conference on Trade and Development reported, would be “uninhabitable” if no progress was made by 2020.^v

When citing such statistics, leaders of pro-Palestinian states and humanitarian international organizations seem to argue that terrorist sentiments and activities are a secondary effect. The need for the tunnels derived from a desperation to access consumer goods, and subsequent terrorism-designated tunnels were constructed only after demands for a lift of the blockade and access to markets were denied by Israel. In this way, there is room for cautious optimism that both sides have opportunity for gain: the economic revitalization of the Gaza Strip can raise development levels for Palestinians and promote long-term security for Israel.

A more reasoned approach, as in almost every international security situation, requires a careful blending of various viewpoints. Such a degree of nuance tends to be unpopular in the politicized rhetoric of the Israel-Palestine conflict. One side often prefers to be right, and present only evidence that support such a position. Nevertheless, this paper will suggest that the threat of tunnels from Gaza has perpetuated because of both reactive Israeli decision-making processes and underlying technical difficulties in operational counterterrorism. Neither of these root causes, however, discount the effects of chronic volatility in both Israeli domestic and greater regional politics.

For the past four years, I have immersed myself in understanding the many interconnected factors and individual narratives that render this conflict complex. From combined work and study experiences, I have taken a simple truth away: there is never a single answer to the conflict. In the case of this research, multiple security perspectives provide a balanced and holistic assessment of the threat tunnels pose. The points emphasized in the research of this topic have many corollaries to other security topics in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Perhaps most important to note, the complex interweaving of factors illustrates why the

disproportionate amounts of effort made by the international community have failed to produce a lasting peace or sense of security for either side of the conflict.

In a speech before the Knesset soon after the 2006 Lebanon War, then opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu delivered a line that soon became a pro-Israel pundit favorite: “The truth is that if Israel were to put down its arms there would be no more Israel. If the Arabs were to put down their arms there would be no more war.” Regardless of the accuracy of such a statement, it nevertheless revealed two fundamental Israeli perceptions of the regional and international security environment. First, Israel is surrounded by solely hostile nations that pose an existential threat. Second, the international community cannot be considered a reliable ally. In essence, Israel alone is responsible for ensuring its own security.^{vi}

In Charles D. Freilich’s evaluation of the Israeli decision-making process, he argued that the result of such a hostile external environment with extreme uncertainty is a “pathology” of “an unplanned process.” The security establishment relies on primarily reactive position—acting only upon external threats until they demand response as opposed to developing an official position as articulated by senior political officials and operationalized by the IDF. As one former national security advisor described to Freilich, “[It]does not mean that thought was not devoted, nor that detailed decisions did not take place. It means that things were not done with the appropriate methodology.”^{vii} The logic of such a stance suggests only small benefits from a long-term counter-terrorism strategy. If the nature of terrorist threats is rapidly evolving, better for

Israel to leave room for flexibility rather than over-invest in systematic policy planning that cannot adapt to changing regional circumstances.

Yet in the case of the tunnels, it seems that Israel's constantly changing approach has incurred more costs than gains. As early as 2001, the IDF had assumed a proactive stance in decreasing the number of tunnels they referred to as a "gateway to terror." A 2004 IDF operation centered in the crowded southern city of Rafah ordered the destruction of any homes that either covered an entry point of a tunnel or provided shelter to Palestinian militants staging attacks against soldiers. The IDF reported discovering and neutralizing over 90 tunnels throughout the campaign, but not without significant destruction of civilian structures. Approximately 2,500 homes in Gaza were destroyed and in Rafah alone 16,000 residents were displaced. In a critical review of the operation, international advocacy NGO Human Rights Watch concluded that the IDF had exceeded the necessities of counterterrorism efforts by creating a mandatory 300-meter buffer between Palestinian structures and the border. The organization's report concluded that such an action could only "entail the wholesale destruction of neighborhoods, regardless of whether the homes in them pose a specific threat to the IDF, and would greatly exceed the IDF's security needs."^{viii}

The international condemnation for the scale and intensity of Israeli military operations proved to have little tangible effect in the years following. A reporter for *National Geographic* remarked upon his visit to the Strip that "tunnels are so common... Rafah features them in official brochures."^{ix} In 2006, Corporal Gilad Shalit was captured by Hamas operatives during an attack that killed two others in his defense post in Israel. Shalit was transported via tunnel to a holding site in Gaza and was not released until more than five years in captivity. For his safe return, Hamas negotiated the release of 1,027 Palestinians prisoners, many of whom had been

convicted for brutal crimes against the state.^x In addition to setting a remarkable precedent for prisoner swaps, the Shalit affair also demonstrated how susceptible Israel's southern communities remained to tunnel attacks.

The IDF emphasized the preventative measures it took following the Shalit crisis including the destruction of newly discovered tunnels, arrests of high profile terrorists within the Strip, and the creation of a land and naval buffer zone to limit the flow of persons and goods out of Gaza. Yet in many ways this response seemed to illustrate the limitations of an unplanned approach to counterterrorism—confronting Hamas' threats as they presented themselves was costly and inconclusive. Decision makers in the security establishment argued the removal of Hamas through more proactive means would create more unrest in Gaza and thus a greater long-term security risk to Israel. Instead, they opted for a reactive “sit and wait” approach, in which Israel would deter Hamas by strong responses to Palestinian terrorist attacks. They reasoned as Hamas' military capabilities were gradually weakened, the political legitimacy of the organization in Gaza would erode.

During this period, many left-leaning critics began to see the blockade as a form of collective punishment meant to motivate political upheaval. I spoke with Ori Nir, spokesman for Americans for Peace Now and long-time reporter on Palestinian affairs and Israel's Arab minority, about the strategic interest of the blockade during this period. Nir emphasized that the intention was less to restrict access to weapons or the outside world, and more to “make life so difficult that [Palestinians] would rise up and overthrow Hamas, and the Gaza Strip would go back to Fatah.” Fatah, the majority secular political party led by Mahmoud Abbas, is also avowedly non-violent—the most preferable negotiation partner for Israel within the Palestinian Authority.

What Israel failed to recognize in their strategic waiting was that the threat of Hamas was evolving. Smuggling and resourceful weapons manufacturing in the Strip had allowed Hamas to accrue a large supply of long-range missiles. The IDF admitted that during the same period tunnels “became longer, deeper, more stable, more secure and more daring in purpose.” When Hamas began firing rockets regularly towards Israeli civilian populations in June of 2014, Israel responded with a full aerial campaign in early July. The stated objective of IDF operations was to degrade all terrorist infrastructure, particularly all rockets and mortar launching devices.^{xi} Yet the entire strategic outlook shifted when Hamas mounted four surprise subterranean attacks between July 17-21. Heavily armed Hamas operatives emerged from tunnels that endangered several agricultural communities and killed 11 IDF soldiers.^{xii} Much like the Shalit kidnapping, Hamas executed a tunnel attack that not only left the IDF in surprise, but that drew out a reaction more out of necessity than strategy. The IDF launched a limited ground operation that aimed to locate and neutralize cross-border assault tunnels. From the early hours, losses accumulated much faster than the aerial phase—14 soldiers were killed only shortly after entering the Strip. While then Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon and the majority of the defense establishment believed the operation would be an effective measure lasting “two to three days,” the IDF lingered inside Gaza until August 5. Both the significant losses and drawn out nature of the campaign suggested that Israel was unable to accurately forecast the sophistication of the threats they faced within the Strip.

With extended Egyptian brokering, Israel and Hamas finally reached a lasting ceasefire after 50 days of fighting. Though casualty numbers were reported and contested on both sides, final reports of the conflict estimated 2,104 Palestinians died, 1,462 of whom were civilians; 72 Israelis died, 66 of whom were soldiers.^{xiii} The IDF declared the operation a conclusive victory.

Hamas had been militarily degraded, and Israel had once more established a deterrence for future attacks. Despite their “non-negotiable” stance on the lifting of the air and naval blockade as well as increased allowance of people out of the Strip, Hamas leadership received neither of these from mediated talks. The IDF reported locating and destroying 32 tunnels originating in Gaza, including 10 of which crossed into Israeli territory.

Still, Hamas managed to spin key outcomes of the fighting into their own victory narrative. The temporary evacuation of Israelis from southern settlements near the Strip’s border was portrayed as territorial advancement. Hamas highlighted the expanded capabilities of their rockets to reach northern population centers.^{xiv} The drawn-out war of attrition drove the Israeli public into bomb shelters with little warning while the Iron Dome, a highly effective and advanced anti-missile system, dramatically intercepted 735 mortars aimed towards civilian populations. Nevertheless, Hamas directed enough rockets towards Ben Gurion Airport that air traffic was diverted for more than 24 hours, completely isolating Israel from international entry or exit.^{xv}

The heavy civilian losses and damaged infrastructure—more than 16,000 Palestinian homes either leveled or left uninhabitable by Israeli aerial attacks—garnered Israel international condemnation for lack of restraint. Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International launched high-profile investigations into Israel’s unlawfully indiscriminate attacks on civilians. The United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry ultimately concluded that possible war crimes were committed by both Palestinian and Israeli armed groups, but emphasized that Israel had shown little restraint by weapons with a sweeping destructive radius in densely populated areas.^{xvi}

Overtime, the critical focus of international organizations has shifted from the operation to its aftermath. By June of this past year, Israel had permitted the entrance of only 6.5% of the cement needed for reconstruction, and reconstruction efforts were delayed until 10 months after hostilities had ended.^{xvii} Many Palestinians have argued that due to the shortage of construction supplies, selling their allocated cement to Hamas at black-market rates is the only means of income.^{xviii} In response, the global humanitarian community has once more levied criticism towards Israel. While Israel may not be the force responsible for escalating hostilities in Gaza, it is responsible for maintaining an efficient and humane blockade. The message is clear: Israel must work harder to establish a balance between efficient security measures and the increased flow of goods and people in and out of Gaza.

Recognition of continued operational failure in Gaza comes from within Israel as well. One year after Protective Edge, *Haaretz*, Israel's oldest and most liberal daily newspaper, published a multi-chaptered investigation that emphasized the power Hamas still exerts in the Strip, failed revitalization efforts to improve living conditions, and an unwillingness of Israelis decision makers to reconsider the many facets of the blockade. The editors asked, "If we don't learn from our wars, are we doomed to repeat them?"^{xix} In the case of the tunnels, it seems the answer is yes. While a high-profile kidnapping and surprise attacks have repeatedly illustrated the risk tunnels continue to pose to Israeli security, it remains less clear what strategic takeaways the security establishment has adapted in their policy vis-à-vis Hamas.

In studying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the asymmetric nature of the two sides is stark. Though a young, small nation, Israel holds some of the largest qualitative military advantages in the region and is a nuclear power. More than 6 percent of Israel's whole GDP is dedicated to defense.^{xx} In 2016, the IDF received \$14.9 billion from the national budget, though most likely a much larger amount through undisclosed discretionary operational funds. Israel is also the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, all \$3.1 billion going directly to military financing, instead of economic and humanitarian assistance like other developing nations.^{xxi}

In contrast, Hamas receives military funding and weaponry only through undisclosed, black-market means. As a militant offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood with a long history of civilian attacks, many neighboring Arab countries have followed international consensus and designated Hamas as a terrorist organization. The el-Sisi's military government in Egypt, eager to distance itself from its Brotherhood predecessors, took a proactive stance, flooding smuggling tunnels that led into the Sinai and severely limiting the flow of Palestinians into Egypt from Gaza's Rafah border crossing. Still, Turkey and Qatar have found support of Hamas to be strategic domestically. By voicing public support of Hamas, Turkey's Erdoğan has garnered the support the conservative Muslim electorate.^{xxii} Though Qatar has received condemnation for permitting the private financing of terrorist groups and granting asylum to Khaled Mashaal, Chairman of Hamas' Political Bureau, the small Gulf nation would rather let its citizens cultivate Islamist causes abroad than include them in state politics.^{xxiii}

Hamas' most significant supporters prior to the 2014 conflict were those that similarly call for the destruction of the state of Israel. Iran had provided the organization with a majority of its smuggled weapons, and Syria harbored Meshal before civil war broke out. Hamas was never a close ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and as Iran's commitment to securing influence

in the Syria conflict grew, the nation's support for Hamas waned. With a patched collection of allies, Hamas has relied on ingenuity to amass an arsenal of "basic" rockets. Short-range Qassam rockets intended to batter southern Israeli cities were supplemented with new long-range missiles from Syria. While these rockets lacked the accuracy necessary to inflict significant Israeli casualties, they nevertheless caused significant disruption and fear in communities thought before to be out of Hamas' reach before Protective Edge.

Long histories of asymmetric warfare prove that even with disparities of power between sides of a conflict, the weaker can still inflict heavy costs upon and secure strategic victories from their stronger opponent. Palestinian armed resistance has especially demonstrated the effectiveness of unconventional warfare. Commercial airline hijackings, high-profile hostage situations, and metropolitan suicide bombings are all "lower-cost, higher-yield methods": coordinated acts carried as little as one person can impact an entire nation and attract global media attention. Specialists in operational counterterrorism have argued that such Palestinian attacks also require a disproportionate Israeli response.^{xxiv}

While the IDF has the tactical skills to execute high-risk operations with a large amount of flexibility—the Entebbe raid of 1976 and airstrike on Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 among the best examples—they come with a cost. In the case of the tunnels, \$10 million spent by Palestinians for digging efforts can force Israel into an undesirable ground operation into the Strip. Beyond the obvious expense of mobilization, there is a significant Israeli reluctance for any form of reengagement in Gaza since the difficult IDF withdrawal in 2005. In essence, Hamas has forced Israel into a tenuous position.^{xxv}

Given the analysis of each side's capabilities, one question lingers: how can a globally-recognized military strength that has developed a state-of-the-art multi-tiered missile defense

system be challenged by holes in the ground? More than just a case of asymmetric struggle, the tunnels present a technical challenge beyond their hand-dug origins.

In the wake of the 2004 IDF operation to neutralize tunnels, the difficulty of demolishing submerged structures came to light. Human Rights Watch reported that when probed by investigators “the IDF refused to specify how many tunnels versus entrances had been discovered and destroyed.” It was suggested in the same report that collapsing the deeper lateral portions of the tunnels was beyond the technical capacity of IDF engineers. Moreover, there was no conclusive statement on whether or not the tunnel entrances that were destroyed led to tunnels into Israel or if they were some of the many interconnected decoy tunnels.^{xxvi} In general, the network of the tunnels remained unmapped.^{xxvii} When the Shalit affair soon proved just how devastating these tunnels could be, the IDF continued to be limited by technical shortcomings.

The IDF unsuccessfully tried to free Shalit during Operation “Summer Rains,” a full-scale air and ground assault of militant group targets in Gaza. The failure to locate Shalit in this operation and throughout his five years in captivity was an embarrassment to Israeli intelligence within the Strip. Surveillance of a densely populated area was not only difficult, but the IDF accepted that even if they were able to locate possible holding sites, verification was nearly impossible. Attempting a hostage retrieval, the IDF would face an exceptionally high risk of ambush or booby traps. In this way, an effort to rescue Shalit could end with even more soldiers held hostage for high ransom.^{xxviii}

Historical parallels began to be drawn between the tunnels from Gaza and past examples of tunnel warfare. The Viet Cong’s infamous Cu Chi tunnel network similarly concealed vital supply routes and weapon caches.^{xxix} These narrow passages served as base of operations for devastating attacks against South Vietnam and American allies. Their destruction depended on

volunteering “tunnel rats” who would explore and engage the Viet Cong in close quarters combat. In late 1974 and early 1975, the Republic of Korea discovered three North Korean tunnels as long as five kilometers infiltrating south across the demilitarized zone.^{xxx} The United Nations Command immediately deployed experts to apply tunnel detection techniques, and their efforts were supplemented by the efforts of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, a division of the United States Department of Defense. Despite the alarm of discovering such substantial structures and DARPA’s immense human capital investment in crafting a solution, no reliable use of either electromagnetic or seismic technology was found to aid in geological surveying.^{xxxi}

Most recently, tunnels under the United States-Mexico border have been used as drug trafficking channels. American federal investigating agents from Border Patrol, Homeland Security and several drug enforcement agencies teamed up as early as 2005 to combat digging efforts of international cartels. A decade later, a geophysicist on the project admitted to a reporter from the *The New Yorker* that excavation-detection systems had yielded only “massive amounts of data and unacceptably high false alarm rates.”^{xxxii} Authorities instead relied on local tips of suspicious activities and phone taps. As accumulating case-studies since the Shalit affair seem to demonstrate, operational counterterrorism in Gaza—as nearly all instances of tunnel defense—remains dependent on human intelligence. Where reliable sources end, the threat still remains.

I met Amos Harel in a crowded Tel Aviv café in March to gather his impression of such a human-dependent hypothesis. Harel is the Senior Military Correspondent for *Haaretz* and has written extensively on Israeli defense and international security strategy. Harel pulled out his phone to show me photos of the tunnels—dark and extraordinarily narrow shafts. In addition to emphasizing their small size, Harel said the tunnels were a reminder of the “limits to what you

know.” In the case of Operation Protective Edge, Harel felt that “members of security cabinet weren’t aware of possible implications” of the tunnels, and particularly the threat they posed before Operation Protective Edge.

Only a few months after Harel and I met, headlines began to fill with more stories of the tunnels, and particularly, their destruction. Hamas reported structural collapses killing seven fighters. Ismail Haniyeh, a senior leader of Hamas who remains in the Strip, praised the bravery of these martyrs and lauded their efforts as part of a continued battle against the occupation: “The resistance continues on its path of liberation of the land... Fighters are digging twice as much as the number of tunnels dug in Vietnam.”^{xxxiii} Many observers viewed Haniyeh’s statement as an effort to build organizational support while at the same time obscuring the reality of defeat. There was little coincidence in their mind that this incident came on the cusp of a technological partnership between Israel and the United States. Israeli and American engineers were rapidly developing an “underground Iron Dome,” backed by at least \$40 billion of U.S. pledged support. As Christopher Sherwood, spokesperson for the D.O.D., explained, the system “will be to establish anti-tunnel capabilities to detect, map and neutralize underground tunnels that threaten the U.S. or Israel” and could be advantageous to both states confronting subterranean enemies.^{xxxiv}

Should the tunnel detection system prove effective, Israel will likely promote its success through various media channels in the same way it celebrated the advent of the Iron Dome. In the meantime, however, there remains a primary dependency on human intelligence for tunnel defense. The successful tunnel neutralizations described at the beginning of this paper, for instance, were widely thought to come from a detainee confession. Observers reasoned it was not coincidence the tunnel discoveries overlapped with the capture of a Hamas fighter who crossed

the security fence from Gaza into Israel with knives.^{xxxv} Those aware of the continuing technological challenges, including Harel, are skeptical this dependency will change in the near future.

There are few debates over Israeli security policy that do not at some point refrain to Kissinger's quip about the decision-making process in Israel: "Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic policy." In most interpretations, the former Secretary of State's words refer to highly politicized process of governing: carefully constructed coalition governments squabble in cabinet meetings along party lines.^{xxxvi} Yet, from a social psychology perspective, I would argue this quote also captures the extent to which the minds and hopes of the Israeli people continue to shape the Jewish state's foreign policy. Voting citizens are also parents of children who serve in the IDF, with families who live under rocket fire, and who experience fear and uncertainty from hostile neighbors and frequent terrorist attacks.

Kissinger's observation thus begs many questions of domestic accountability for future research. To what extent is the Israeli public aware of the security threat from Gaza and how the defense establishment has confronted it? Is there a call to alter the status quo of the blockade or to improve the humanitarian outlook for Palestinians in Gaza? Is there a willingness to let the tunnels endure, viewing Hamas as undesirable but not the most immediate threat? There are many more accompanying questions in these directions, but I will conclude with a few observations that are particularly relevant to future research in this topic.

First, there has been mixed success confronting security leaders and their strategy for the tunnels during and after Operation Protective Edge. In February of this year, a much anticipated report from the State Comptroller and Ombudsman Joseph H. Shapira was released to security leaders for comment. Amos Harel reported the confidential draft was released early given “the apparent urgency of the tunnel issue on all fronts.”^{xxxvii} Harel found the draft’s major points as “painting a depressing picture”: that Israel was unprepared to confront the threat of tunnels, that serious strategic deficiencies continued throughout the operation, and that a new round of fighting is inevitable.^{xxxviii} Rather than respond substantively to the report’s content, however, a close associate to former Defense Minister Ya’alon decried it as incitement to a *Haaretz* reporter: “This is a scandalous draft, from the fact it was leaked before those involved could respond, to the information it contains, which shares little relation to reality.”^{xxxix} While the work of the State Comptroller continues to be classified, there must be an effort to gather further details as the information becomes available and more critiques of the operations are made public.

Second, the Israeli public’s response to terrorism—a calmer, more patient one in many ways—requires nuanced analysis. For instance, rather than directly criticizing the security establishment about the continuing threat of the tunnels, the popular television sketch show *Eretz Nehederet* turned to comedy to render the absurdity of the situation. In the program’s skit a Yaalon impersonator listens to the digging sounds under a home, only to suggest a long list of origins for the noise other than Hamas operatives. The skit creatively links the tunnels to other policy failures, while at the same time clearly showing how politicians refuse to acknowledge the perpetuating security threat. When I spoke with Amos Guiora, former IDF Legal Advisor to the Gaza Strip, he raised the point that Israelis are well-weathered enough in terrorist attacks to not overreact. In a recent op-ed for the *New York Times*, for instance, Guiora wrote, “A mature—

perhaps ‘experienced’ is a better word—society understands that there will be days when terrorists have the upper hand in spite of government efforts.”^{x1} Nevertheless, it remains to be determined whether or not Israelis have cautiously accepted the complexity of the tunnel threat or instead chosen to ignore strategic failures.

Last, but perhaps most importantly, there has not been a collective recognition that revamped Israeli counterterrorism strategies and increased investment in detection technology must be coupled with diplomacy. In other words, there are marked political gains for leaders in Israel who take a “tough” stance on terrorism, but very little for those who want to secure a lasting peace with Palestinians. In the last election, Prime Minister Netanyahu secured vital votes after publicly denouncing the future of the two-state solution. Other members of his conservative Likud party have gone to extreme efforts to limit funding for pro-Palestinian NGO’s. Moreover, the wave of domestic terrorism has convinced many Israelis that there is no longer a need for restraint when detaining suspected terrorists. Such developments are not only counterproductive in many ways, but also have allowed political leadership to not acknowledge the fact that isolating Gaza has not weakened Hamas. To prescribe renewed diplomatic efforts is not to ignore the immense distrust that has grown between the two sides, the tunnels indeed a part of that. It is merely a recognition that mutual unwillingness to reach a lasting peace agreement has been equally detrimental to Israeli and Palestinians alike.

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