

## Managing Non-State Threats with Cumulative Deterrence-by-Denial

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### **Abstract:**

*Israel has long used cumulative deterrence-by-denial to deter aggression from state and non-state actors alike. To achieve this, it has combined other measures, including deterrence-by-punishment and compellence, both at the tactical level. It has also compelled actors it can attack directly to clamp down on non-state actors more difficult to target in what is commonly known as “indirect deterrence.” Israel’s relative success in this suggests that cumulative deterrence may be used as a conflict management tool that can encourage conditions for finding more permanent political solutions to long-term confrontations. Israel’s case also demonstrates the usefulness of a consistent, long-term strategy for managing non-state threats. Finally, it suggests that conflicts may be managed for extended periods with mostly military means, though such means can only assist in laying the groundwork for conflict resolution. The US and its allies could benefit from the judicious application of Israel’s deterrence lessons as they seek ways to manage conflicts that appear intractable or too costly to attempt to resolve today.*

**Keywords:** *deterrence, compellence, terrorism, non-state actors, Israel, conflict management*

### **Introduction**

This article explores the possibility of managing conflicts using so-called “cumulative deterrence” instead of attempting to resolve such conflicts in the short term when this would be impossible, too risky or too costly. It does so by examining Israel’s long experience with the cumulative deterrence-by-denial of terror organizations in neighboring countries and territories and asking what lessons from this experience may be applicable to countering violent groups of non-state actors in general—even if defeating or finding political accommodation with such groups is currently implausible. This may provide an alternative to the options of costly and risky war-fighting vs. ignoring problems in the hope that they will eventually resolve themselves without outside assistance.

Audrey Kurth Cronin has argued that terror groups are sustained by what their sympathizers view as successes—and that these vary and go far beyond achieving an overall strategic aim. In addition to achieving a strategic aim, terrorist groups also have tactical or process goals, such as exacting revenge, lionizing a leader, or carrying out attacks to gain sympathizers’ attention.[1] Even when groups fail to achieve their strategic aims, as is usually the case,[2] they can thus survive if they can accomplish process goals that maintain their momentum. It is therefore not enough to deny groups overall success; they must also be prevented from achieving a significant proportion of their tactical and process goals—a difficult task that is nevertheless possible with properly calibrated punishments and inducements applied at the right time.

To counter the momentum al-Qaeda’s achievement of tactical and process goals provided, Cronin recommends clarifying what al-Qaeda is, exploiting the cleavages in the movement, hiving off disparate parts of the organization that are not really committed to al-Qaeda’s overall mission (including treating such entities differently from al-Qaeda’s “core”), highlighting al-Qaeda’s mistakes (such as killing Muslims) and making fewer of our own, and encouraging a popular backlash against it.[3] All these tactics are designed to deny al-Qaeda success in achieving process goals like maintaining unity and focus, expanding its influence, recruiting, and gaining sympathy from its audience. Denial of success in these areas would severely hinder the group’s ability to function and damage its momentum, leading to falling support for the group.

Some of Cronin's recommendations require a slight adjustment to fit groups that are dissimilar to al-Qaeda. For example, it may make more sense to exploit cleavages between terror groups and host or patron states than to attempt to do so with cleavages within a group more cohesive, centralized, or localized than al-Qaeda. In addition, some of Cronin's elements do not even apply to other cases or would be difficult to accomplish. Not all groups have cells and franchises that may be susceptible to attempts to hive them off from the core group in the way al-Qaeda affiliates can be. Another example is that it may not always be feasible for governments to highlight mistakes and encourage counter-mobilization if the audience in question has too little faith in the government attempting to message them—or if the group in question is mindful of public opinion and careful not to enflame it.

All of these potential differences apply to Israel's struggles against Yassir Arafat's Fatah group and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas. Israel has a long history of using a form of cumulative deterrence-by-denial to deter aggression from its adversaries, but it has not succeeded in convincing Palestinians to revolt against the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), an umbrella group in which Fatah is the largest faction, and Hamas; exploiting internal cleavages within the groups;<sup>[4]</sup> or hiving off franchises.

Despite this, Israel has achieved considerable, though certainly not complete, successes in deterring terror from both groups. Its experience of deterring first Fatah and then Hamas by denial can shed further light on the sorts of approaches the US and its allies can take to assist in reducing attacks from some modern religious terror groups. Its case also contains a warning: Despite its successes, one cannot say that Israel has accomplished its strategic aims and no longer faces a terrorist threat. If the "push factors" that encourage terrorism remain, the threat of terror is likely to re-emerge. The obverse is also true, however: If cumulative deterrence-by-denial is done well and push factors are removed or ameliorated, it has the potential to lay the groundwork to resolve conflicts by easing violence and helping create incentives to maintain the peace.

### ***Deterring Non-State Actors***

Denying a terror group success in strategic or process goals can lead to deterrence—even when animosity is extraordinarily high, as in the case between Israel and Hamas. Hamas continues to be well-armed with rockets and has not moderated its stance on desiring the destruction of the State of Israel and yet, Israel's border with Gaza is mostly quiet.<sup>[5]</sup> Israel has been managing violence with Hamas, with considerable success, for nearly three decades now. Deterrence-by-denial is a significant part of this.

Deterrence-by-denial is one of two broad forms of deterrence recognized in both strategic theory and criminology. The criminological idea is that would-be criminals will often decide against taking on a given target if they deem their chances of success with that target to be lower, and the costs and risks higher, than other options they have. Similarly, deterrence theorists have long recognized that retaliation (punishment) was not the only way to deter an adversary from taking an undesirable action.<sup>[6]</sup>

The basic workings of deterrence-by-denial in strategic contexts are similar to those in criminology: An adversary comes to perceive a target to be so well protected that attacking it would be futile. That adversary then decides to do something else. What that something else is, is one of the central problems inherent in practicing deterrence-by-denial: There are often plentiful other "softer" targets for attack, so that deterrence-by-denial ends up simply shifting attacks from one place to another. This can still be useful in protecting particularly high-value targets, but the impossibility of guarding every target from attack should be immediately apparent.

This problem is only relevant at the tactical level, however, and other approaches can be used instead at that level. At the strategic level, there is only one overall target: the deterring state or a group of states (such as the West as a whole). Moreover, deterrence-by-denial does not mean preventing all attacks, but rather preventing them from having the effect the attacker wishes to achieve. Over time, this denial can lead attackers and,

perhaps more importantly their supporters, to seek alternative means of achieving their goals. If non-violent means are available, they may switch to these for achieving at least some of their aims.

The Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky recognized this back in 1923 and argued that Jews in Palestine needed to protect themselves with an "iron wall, which the native population cannot breach." [7] He argued that, once the Arabs had lost all hope of breaching the "iron wall," "the leadership will pass to the moderate groups [and] both peoples can live together in peace, like good neighbors. But the only way to obtain such an agreement, is the iron wall, which is to say a strong power in Palestine that is not amenable to any Arab pressure." [8]

The historian of Israel, Avi Shlaim, argues that this has been Israel's strategy, conscious or not, ever since. [9] Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, indeed echoed Jabotinsky's assessment: "A comprehensive agreement is undoubtedly out of the question now. For only after total despair on the part of the Arabs, despair that will come not only from the failure of the disturbances and the attempt at rebellion, but also as a consequence of our growth in the country, may the Arabs possibly acquiesce in a Jewish Eretz Israel." [10] Likewise, Israel's current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, wrote in 2000, "the only kind of peace that can endure in the Middle East is a peace that can be defended (the peace of deterrence)." [11] As Netanyahu and his former defense minister Moshe Ya'alon see it, the reason Israel has not achieved peace with the Palestinians is because they have not yet accepted Israel's permanent existence. Until they do, Israel must defend itself and deter aggression. [12]

### ***Cumulative Deterrence-by-Denial through Deterrence-by-Punishment***

The image of an "iron wall" is about defensive, i.e. passive, measures. In reality, however, it is impossible to physically defend all of Israel (or any state) and prevent all or even most attacks. This would appear to make strategic deterrence-by-denial impossible. Luckily, it is possible for tactical deterrence-by-punishment and even pre-emption to achieve a cumulative deterrent effect over time (hence the term "cumulative deterrence"). Israeli policymakers have long accepted that they "cannot prevent every murder of a worker in an orchard, or a family in their beds. But it is in our power to set a high price on our blood, a price too high for the Arab community, the Arab army or the Arab government to think it worth paying." [13] In other words: Israel seeks to deter attacks via retaliation because relying on defense and denial alone is impossible.

Doron Almog and Uri Bar-Joseph explain that deterrence-by-punishment can create "cumulative deterrence," which is nothing more than deterrence-by-denial on a grander scale and achieved through means including, but not limited to, both deterrence-by-punishment and -by-denial at the tactical level. Over time, Israel's foes come to expect retaliation and, losing hope in the idea of eliminating Israel anytime soon, significantly moderate their attacks. This phenomenon is also described by Lawrence Freedman (in the concept of "internalized deterrence"), Patrick Morgan, Thomas Rid, and Amir Lupovici, who have all noted the potential for deterrence to establish norms of behavior that become internalized. [14] As Shmuel Bar, an Israeli academic with a background in national security, explained: After each round of violence with Hamas, Israel sets the bar for acceptable violence lower. Over time, then, cycles of confrontations with Hamas will lead to lower levels of violence. [15]

The idea that actors can learn to be deterred after being punished for attacks, i.e. that periodic escalations can produce greater deterrence later, is absent from traditional deterrence conceptions in international relations and strategic studies. This is odd, since it has long been a central part of the conception of deterrence in criminology. Criminologists call the idea that criminals learn from experiencing punishment (either themselves or vicariously through someone close to them) specific deterrence and, though debate certainly continues, there is empirical support for its operation—especially when accounting for factors like attribution bias. [16]

### ***Indirect Deterrence and the “Return Address” Problem***

Non-state actors often do not have a “return address,” i.e. territory that can be targeted in retaliation for attacks. Israel has tried a few means of getting around this problem. In the early years of the modern state, it faced infiltration across its borders from Jordan and Egypt, mostly by unorganized individuals and small groups. Most of the time, Israel simply did not have the resources to police its long, winding, and irregular borders effectively. Moreover, as Israeli Chief of the General Staff Moshe Dayan and Director General of the Ministry of Defense Shimon Peres argued at the time, attempting to do so would have been a strategic error by focusing too many of the resources Israel had on border policing, leaving it open to the greater strategic threats represented by the armies of Israel’s Arab neighbors.[17]

Instead, Israel began retaliating against Jordanian and Egyptian-controlled villages.[18] The results of this policy were mixed, with some, like the policy’s progenitor Moshe Dayan, claiming it “proved effective and deterred many,” while others, like then-Prime Minister Moshe Sharrett, admitting after two Israelis were killed in Ajjur: “The [Israeli public’s and army’s] rage must be defused.... I do not believe that the reprisal will help in any way in terms of security. On the contrary....”[19] Eventually, Moshe Dayan stated, Israel decided that “even when Arabs harm peaceful civilians, we must direct our retaliation against military objectives.”[20] There was a danger that the reprisals against Jordan and Egypt could lead to another war with Israel’s Arab neighbors.[21] This was not necessarily a bad thing as far as the country’s then-Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion saw it because such a war was coming, anyway: “Our neighbours are preparing for a second round and we may assume that they will be more prepared and united.”[22] He believed they would be ready by 1956.[23] His prophecy came true (he also did little to prevent its realization) in the form of the 1956 Suez Crisis and Israel’s successful Sinai campaign. After that war, infiltration declined as a main concern for Israel. The experience also led Israel to a recipe for success that it uses to this day: if it does not control the territory from which attacks emanate, it applies pressure or retaliates against the authority that does control that territory.

The authority that controls such pieces of territory can be a state, like Jordan, Egypt, or Lebanon, or a non-state actor with sufficient “state-like manifestations” that make it susceptible to deterrence targeting, like the Palestinian Authority (PA), Hezbollah, or Hamas since it gained control of the Gaza Strip.[24] When a party puts pressure (e.g. through reprisals) on an authority even though that authority is not itself responsible for the attacks that party wishes to deter, this is known as “indirect deterrence.” This term is somewhat of a misnomer because it actually entails the use of compellence. The overall effect for the initiator looks like deterrence, however, hence the use of the term.

### ***Indirectly Deterring Fatah***

Deterrent threats are used to maintain the status quo and *prevent* an opponent from taking an undesirable course of action. They are not meant to *encourage* an action. In the example of Fatah operating from Jordan, the attacks were already happening and the status quo was therefore one that included violence. Israel wished to change this and establish a new status quo wherein Jordan would clamp down on Fatah and the PLO. Attempting to change the status quo by coercing an opponent to *do* something is known as compellence. Israel was thus attempting to coerce Jordan into action, not prevent it from doing something; it was trying to compel Jordan, not deter it. Furthermore, Jordan was free to rein in the PLO in any way it wished (whether by deterrence or other means). So-called “indirect deterrence” therefore need not entail any actual deterrence.

The reason this matters is because compellence is much harder to achieve than deterrence, mainly because complying with a compellent demand is more blatant than complying with a deterrent demand since the latter only requires maintaining the status quo, something the opponent can claim was always the intention. Complying with a compellent demand also carries with it the humiliation of bowing to pressure from another

party. Deterrence, moreover, has clear limits, whereas complying with a compelling demand may attract further demands for concessions that would undermine the party's credibility and therefore its own ability to deter.[25] Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal himself has noted this phenomenon: He states that negotiations conducted during a period of weakness "lead only to surrender in the face of a dominant enemy... lowering the ceiling of demands and political discussions." [26] Finally, as Schelling noted, compellence requires the compelling party to risk the deterioration of the status quo to implement its threat. In practice, this often requires administering punishment *until* the intended party complies (a form of negative reinforcement). [27] It therefore carries greater risks and requires more immediate, potentially destabilizing, action.

In the case of Israel and Fatah, indirect deterrence via compellence was fairly effective nonetheless. After the 1967 war showed the extent of Israel's military muscle, lending additional credibility to its threats against its neighbors, Syria's president, Nureddin al-Atassi, warned Fatah against raids across the border into Israel: "You will lose and drag us all along with you in the catastrophe." [28] Israel's pressure on Jordan, which had also lost territory to Israel in 1967, coupled with PLO's own missteps, which led Jordan's King Hussein to view the it as a threat to stability and his rule of the Kingdom, eventually led Jordan to oust the PLO altogether. The King approved draconian actions against the group to drive its members from Jordan in a September 1970 operation so devastating the PLO has since referred to it as "Black September." [29]

### ***Indirectly Deterring Hamas***

Israel has also used indirect deterrence against Hamas via the PA and against other militant groups in the Gaza Strip via Hamas itself. "By establishing deterrence, Israel [had] led [the PLO] towards peace" by the 1990s. [30] The result was the Oslo Accords, which led to an alignment of interests between Israel and the PLO: "If Arafat wanted to be president of a new Palestinian state, Israel would need better security. If Israel wanted his cooperation in improving its security, the Palestinians would need to see progress toward the establishment of a state." [31] This gave Israel leverage: It had surrendered control of parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the newly founded PA, but that territory was now a "return address" for Israeli reprisals if it was attacked, including by Hamas, which began its suicide bombing campaign against Israel in the 1990s. The leverage ran in both directions, of course, and the PA was also able to initiate violence against Israel if it was not satisfied with progress on the Oslo negotiations. Both sides using this leverage eventually undermined trust and led to the collapse of the indirect deterrence relationship.

Before that collapse, however, violence had fallen by 1999 to its lowest level at any time since the signing of the Oslo Accords. Shlomi Eldar, an Israeli journalist who was frequently in Hamas's home base of Gaza at the time, explained, "Hamas was nowhere to be seen. They had gone underground." [32] Mosab Hassan Yousef, who worked with Israeli intelligence and was the son of a Hamas founder, said of the period: "[The PA] had destroyed the military wing of Hamas and thrown its leadership and fighters into prison. Even after they were released, the Hamas members went home and did nothing more against the PA or the occupation." [33] It was not until the PA released Hamas members from prison at the start of the Second Intifada that the group once again became deadly. "Indirect deterrence" had worked, but the momentum required in this case to sustain it had vanished.

Israel recognizes the difficulty of relying on compellence of a third party to control its opponents and has therefore often opted to take a more direct approach, at times abandoning deterrence altogether in favor of an offensive push to eradicate the threat. After leaving Jordan, PLO leader Yassir Arafat moved his operation to Lebanon. Rather than try to deter the PLO indirectly through Lebanon's weak and war-riven government, Israel went on the offensive with an operation to push the PLO out of Lebanon for good. [34] This succeeded, and the PLO moved its headquarters to faraway Tunisia, where it was "less cohesive and more vulnerable to pressures from the Arab states." [35] This, combined with diplomatic pressure from the United States, a fear that his movement could be superseded, and the potential held out by international conferences for a political

opening, led Arafat to renounce terrorism for the first time in a statement (though to a much lesser extent in practice) in 1988.[36] Deterrence and compellence had not permanently ended PLO violence, but they had moderated its position and brought it to the negotiating table on terms Israel could consider acceptable for the first time.

### ***Directly Deterring the PA and Hamas***

A lack of trust and the slow accumulation of tit-for-tat attempts at leverage on both sides eventually killed the Oslo process. As PA leaders told former Shin Bet (internal security) head Ami Ayalon: “We don’t put Hamas members in prison for your sake. We only do it because our people believe that at the end of the day we’ll have a state beside Israel. When we no longer believe that, forget about us.”[37] When an opposition member of Israel’s parliament, Ariel Sharon, visited the Temple Mount, known to Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif or Noble Sanctuary, Arafat sought once again to use his leverage to coerce Israel into progress on the implementation of Oslo. The PA encouraged protests and eventually released members of Hamas from prison, igniting the deadliest wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence since at least the 1940s.[38] Arafat also founded a militant group of his own to carry out suicide attacks, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades.[39]

Major General Giora Eiland, head of the Israel Defense Forces’ (IDF) Planning Directorate, explains that Israel now saw that the problem was “the Palestinian Authority which was allowing this reality to exist.” Israel could no longer “rely in any way on the Palestinian Authority with regard to security.” He notes that this “was a very deep strategic change. ...[S]trategically speaking we had crossed a certain line in which we... were entering a direct and frontal fight with the Palestinian Authority” instead of just against Hamas.[40] In short, the “indirect deterrence” of Hamas had collapsed because the Oslo Accords had. Israel was now seeking to disrupt the PA and Hamas and to compel them to halt the violence.

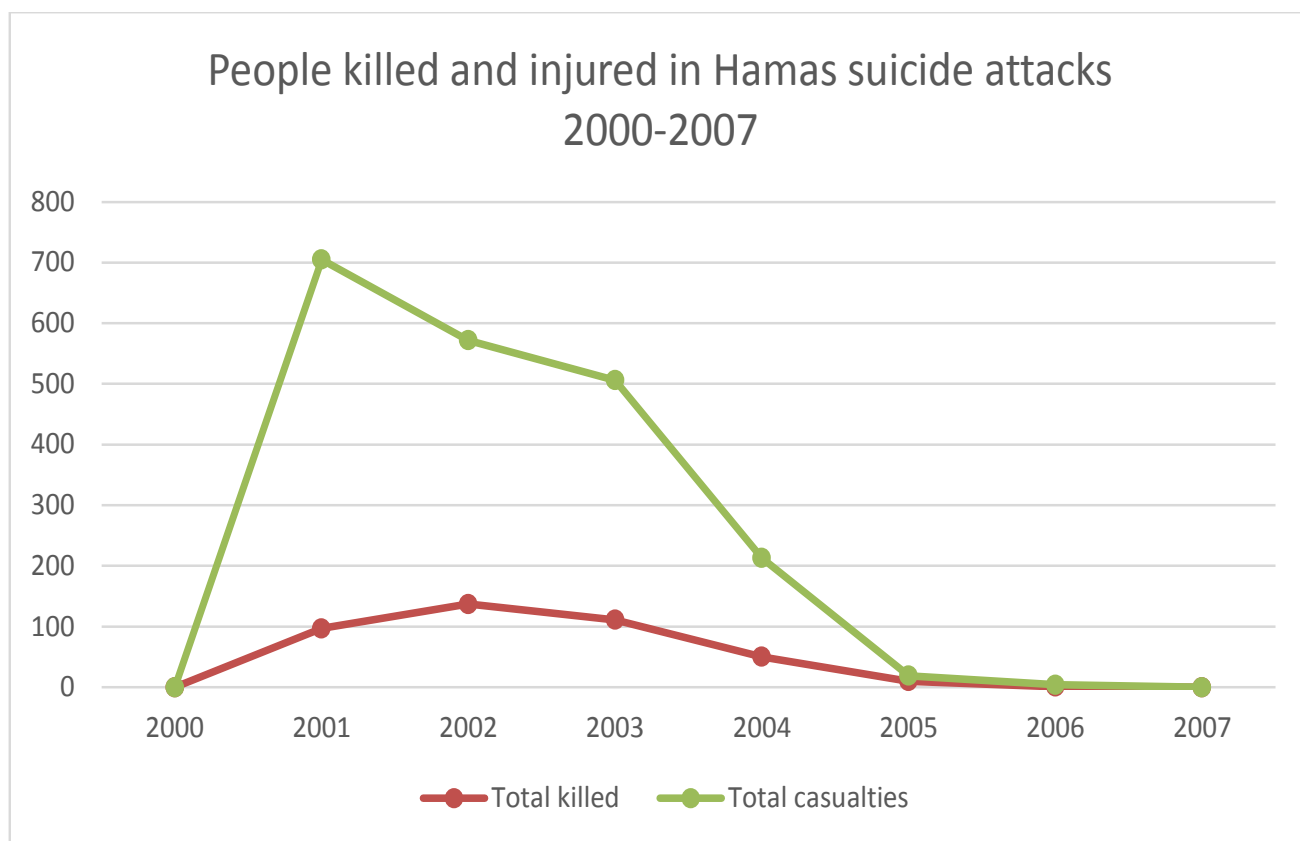
Israel moved to deter violence from suicide attackers by accelerating construction of the security barrier in the West Bank. Though the barrier comes nowhere close to stopping all border crossings, empirical evidence analyzed by Hillel Frisch shows that it works and statements by militants also evince the barrier’s success.[41] This is in part because the barrier means “different terrorist cells... have to work together, exposing themselves to Israeli counterterrorism in the process... ‘One plus one is eleven’ when it comes to counterterrorism, [former Shin Bet head Avi] Dichter contends, arguing that this expansion of the operation’s circle from one cell to another offers exponentially more opportunities for disruption.”[42] By 2004, combined with increased checkpoints in the West Bank and improved intelligence, the barrier helped Shin Bet “to stop 95 percent of the attempted attacks on Israel, capturing almost every suicide bomber who dared attempt crossing into Israel.”[43]

Israel also sought to compel Hamas to halt violence through a campaign of targeted killings aimed at Hamas’s senior political leadership. As the Palestinian negotiator and politician Ziad Abu Amr recalls, “the attempt on [Hamas leader Abdel Aziz al-]Rantissi’s life [on 10 June 2003] was a catalyst of some sort. Especially when certain intelligence came to the Palestinian side to the effect that Israel was determined to liquidate all the Hamas leaders. And I think the Hamas leaders and we, too, took that very seriously. And I remember I asked... is Hamas better off with its founders and top leaders around, or do you think this is irrelevant? If you think it is important... I think we have to do something political about it right now.”[44] Giora Eiland reports “The unsuccessful attempt to hit Rantissi caused Rantissi, who was one of the worst extremists among the Hamas leaders, ...to change his mind overnight and to suddenly accept requests by the Palestinian Authority and the Egyptians to give a chance to the *hudna* [ceasefire]. ...the effect of the attempt on his life was immediate.”[45] Hamas agreed to a ceasefire shortly thereafter and more than a month passed without Hamas violence. Targeted killing had succeeded in compelling Hamas to reduce its violence in exchange for the tacit prospect of allowing its senior leaders to survive.

Despite the truce, tit-for-tat violence soon resumed and a pattern of escalations, temporary lulls, and tit-for-tat attacks sparking renewed escalation continued until April 2004, when Israel successfully killed Hamas founder and spiritual leader Sheikh Yassin and, a few days later, Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi.[46] In 2004, Hamas carried out only one further suicide attack in August. Hamas external leader Khaled Meshaal essentially admitted that Israel was limiting Hamas’s ability to hit back, claiming the fall in suicide attacks was due to “difficulties on the ground’ dictated by ‘a temporary extraordinary situation,’ such as the Israeli army’s stringent measures.”[47] The number of suicide attacks plunged from 2003 to 2005, ceasing altogether by 2007 (see Figure 1). Israel wished for the attacks on its citizens to stop, the PA wished to regain control of its cities, and Hamas wished to avoid the death or imprisonment of all its senior leadership. The collapse of indirect deterrence had been bloody, but Israel now deterred Hamas and the PA directly. As so often, however, the situation was soon to change and Hamas would shift tactics to get around Israeli deterrence, requiring a new series of counteractions.

Israel had raised the cost to Hamas of carrying out suicide bombings so much that Hamas announced it was abandoning the practice in 2006.[48] As attacks became harder through 2004, however, Hamas made increased use of a new tactic: rocket and mortar launches (see Figure 2). Israel’s focus was on the much deadlier suicide attacks, so projectile launches were not clearly covered by the “red lines” (figurative lines Hamas may not cross without sparking retaliation) Israel had established against violence towards the end of the Second Intifada.

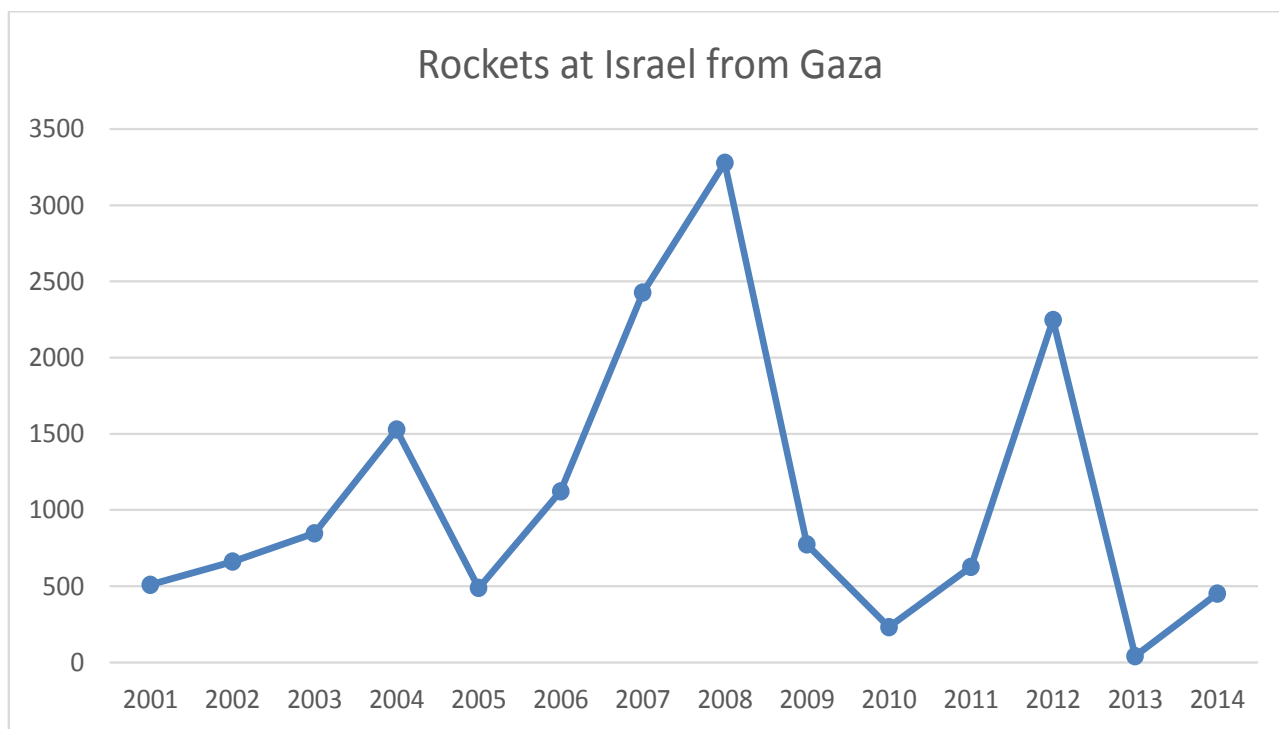
Figure 1: Deaths and Casualties in Hamas Suicide Attacks.[49]



**Directly Deterring Hamas, indirectly Deterring other Gazan Groups**

When Hamas took over control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, some in Israel believed this would be helpful because it would make targeting, and therefore deterring, Hamas easier. Israel’s military intelligence director Amos Yadlin told US Ambassador Richard Jones that a Hamas takeover

Figure 2: Rockets Fired at Israel from Gaza (all groups), annually, 2001-2014[50]



“would please Israel since it would enable the IDF to treat Gaza as a hostile country rather than having to deal with Hamas as a non-state actor.”[51] Though this was probably not the consensus view, as evidenced by Israel’s later actions attempting to compel Hamas’s ouster, the group’s takeover did give it a clear return address and ensured that the people of Gaza would now hold it accountable not just for resisting Israel, but for their overall safety and quality of life. As another official put it: “Hamas is a clear and defined enemy.... All their buildings are now targets, as is anyone walking around with a weapon.”[52]

Despite the fact that Hamas now had a clearer “return address,” Israel did not simply try to deter it. Instead, it sought to weaken its government and compel Gazans into ousting it from power by sealing off the Strip. UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Territories, Richard Falk, described the situation in Gaza in 2008 as a “humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding day by day.”[53] A Gazan municipal employee recalls: “There was a slow suffering in August, September, October and you thought ‘let it come!’”[54] Israel had pushed Hamas into a corner: It wanted to bring Hamas down, not just stop rocket launches. Simply stopping the attacks would thus not have ended the blockade or Gazans’ suffering. Israel’s compellence therefore overrode deterrence. Since Gazans might eventually try to eject Hamas if they continued to suffer and Hamas did nothing, Hamas saw escalation as its only option. Schelling explained this thus: If the enemy “is not to react like a trapped lion, [he] must be left some tolerable recourse.”[55] Making an opponent feel like a “trapped lion” is an example of a “push factor” encouraging violence even when an actor expects retaliation for such actions.

There were also “pull factors”: perceived vulnerabilities Hamas sought to exploit. Israel had only left the Gaza Strip three years prior and was not keen to reconquer it. Moreover, even an invasion into the Gaza Strip seemed unlikely. Israel had retreated only in 2006 from southern Lebanon without achieving its objectives against Hezbollah, which continued to rain rockets on northern Israel until Israeli troops withdrew—an apparent victory for a non-state actor controlling a strip of land adjacent to Israel. As Abu Obeida, the spokesman for Hamas’s military wing, summarized: The “Zionists military commander or political [sic] cannot afford results [sic] of a decision as big as the invasion of the Gaza Strip, especially the feel of defeat



[sic], failure and disappointment are still fresh to them after the war in Lebanon.”[56] This combination of push and pull factors essentially ensured escalation.

The result was “Operation Cast Lead,” the 2008-2009 Gaza war. As Figure 2 shows, rocket fire from Gaza fell dramatically after the war (in fact, the fall was sharper than pictured, because most of the rockets launched in 2009 fell before the end of Cast Lead). Deterrence had taken hold, but it was not stable: Tit-for-tat violence returned in 2011 and intensified in 2012, making the status quo less palatable. As in 2008 and as in the run-up to the Second Intifada, both sides began to surmise that they have more to gain from escalation than from the worsening status quo. This is where the goal of cumulative deterrence tomorrow can clash with the goal of tactical deterrence today: If a future status is preferable to today’s status quo, there is less incentive to avoid escalation. The same held true for Hamas: Gazan opinion polls showed that Hamas’s approval ratings fell in 2012 when PA President Mahmoud Abbas was involved in talks with Israel, just as they had two years earlier when armed groups in Gaza fired rockets at Israel but Hamas abstained.[57] Hamas also knew that its approval had risen after the last confrontation with Israel. Both sides thus had “push factors” encouraging conflict.

The result this time was “Operation Pillar of Defense/Cloud” in 2012. That war ended with an internationally-backed truce in which Israel agreed to ease its blockade of Gaza—in some ways a victory for Hamas. The calm was even shorter-lived this time around. Changes in the Middle Eastern political arena, especially the rise to power of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt, saw Hamas increasingly isolated in 2014. It even accepted a unity deal with Abbas’s Fatah that year. Even as Hamas appeared to be conciliating with Fatah, its leaders were encouraging Hamas’s militant cells in the West Bank to abduct Israelis to hold in exchange for Hamas members in Israeli prisons.[58] In June 2014, a cell from Hamas’s military wing in Hebron obliged, kidnapping and murdering three Israeli teenagers. Israel initially focused its attention on the West Bank, as the Gaza border remained quiet. Over time, as it emerged that Hamas had indeed orchestrated the abduction and as projectile fire from Gaza intensified, tensions continued to mount.[59] This eventually erupted into “Operation Protective Edge,” the third war in Gaza in seven years.

Since 2014, the Gaza border has been quieter than at any time since before Hamas’s takeover.[60] Occasional rockets have been fired from the Strip, but none of these have been from Hamas. This calm is most easily explained by deterrence: Hamas’s political situation, vis-à-vis both Fatah and Egypt, for example, has not changed significantly, nor has Hamas’s capacity for violence been severely reduced. In fact, it apparently replenished its rocket arsenal quite quickly.[61] On top of this, Hamas actively curbs attacks on Israel by arresting rocket launchers, most of whom belong to groups competing with Hamas that are aligned with the Islamic State group.[62] Deterrence is essentially invisible as it is a non-event, so its action can only ever be posited in probabilistic rather than certain terms, but the probabilities point toward deterrence, at least for the time being.

Hamas’s maintenance of calm on the border with Israel is due to a clear choice on its part to maintain that calm. In August of 2016, Israel even attempted to move to the next level in cumulative deterrence by re-drawing its red lines once again at an even lower threshold: it no longer accepts even a single rocket being launched from Gaza—even if it causes no damage or injuries, as is often the case.[63] Every other time Israel has attempted this has come only after a major escalation. This time, Hamas appears to have accepted that the Gaza border should remain quiet.

### ***Cumulative Deterrence and Countering Terrorism More Broadly***

The repeated rounds of calm, followed by increasing tit-for-tat attacks ending up in escalation may not sound like a promising general recipe for countering terrorist violence. The fact that Israelis can mostly continue to live their lives as normal when an entity on their border wishes to see their state destroyed is,

however, an astonishing accomplishment. As former Deputy Director and head of the Palestinian desk at Israel's Ministry for Strategic Affairs, Kobi Michael, observed in 2014: "The Palestinian mainstream actually abandoned terrorism in the sense of at least the most serious type of terrorism... the suicide bombers. ... This is a huge achievement for the IDF and for the State of Israel. [It is due in part] to the understanding with the Palestinians that terrorism is not good for them, that terrorism actually enhances the capabilities of Israel to use its advantages towards the Palestinians because it creates... legitimacy for using military force." [64]

Essentially, Israel has ensured that its iron wall remains in place, eliminating "pull factors" (e.g. relative defender weakness) that would encourage an attack. Israel is also careful not to exacerbate "push factors" that would encourage Hamas attacks. For example, Israeli officials were careful to note explicitly during the last two big operations that they had no intention of toppling the Hamas government in Gaza. As Schelling observed, "the threat of massive destruction may deter an enemy only if there is a corresponding implicit promise of non-destruction in the event he complies." [65] If the intention is to reestablish deterrence, the deterrer must be careful to provide inducements, such as a promise to be left alone, as well as threats.

Even some of the earliest scholars of deterrence theory in criminology, like Beccaria and Voltaire, have recognized that excessively harsh punishments can actually *increase* unwanted actions rather than decrease them. "If the same punishment is prescribed for two crimes that injure society in different degrees, then men will face no stronger deterrent from committing the greater crime if they find it in their advantage to do so." [66] For example, if "the death penalty is applied equally to petty theft and grand larceny, it is clear that they will try to steal a lot. They could even become murderers if they think that this is a way not to be caught." [67]

The status quo Israel promises in exchange for quiet must be a better option than the punishment it promises in exchange for violence. Properly calibrated threats are thus not the only important factor in effecting deterrence; properly calibrated promises and rewards are equally vital. Furthermore, if current conditions for Hamas are improved during a time of relative quiet, it has a greater incentive to maintain that quiet and more to lose in another round of escalation. [68] Israel has also striven to avoid civilian casualties during its operations, helping to reduce, though not eliminate, local grievances and international condemnation that would threaten to reduce its freedom of maneuver. Israel is thus careful to retain the moral high ground that underpins its legitimacy.

Israel has declined to topple Hamas because it does not want to fill the vacuum that would create indefinitely or end up with an even worse adversary on its hands, as was the case when Israel ousted the PLO from southern Lebanon only to have Hezbollah take its place. At the same time, Israel is fully aware that it cannot simply disengage from the wider region. This is in stark contrast to the post-9/11 counterterrorism policy of America, which has the luxury of swinging between activism and disengagement. Such swings are unwise, however, as much of Israel's success in countering terrorism is rooted in the sheer consistency of both its approach and its will to carry it out.

To return to Cronin's points, Israel has certainly demystified Hamas, at least for audiences within Israel. Israeli policymakers understand Hamas very well and carefully differentiate between its actions and those of other groups, avoiding giving the sense that Hamas is omnipotent and omnipresent. While remaining alert to the threat Hamas does, and could later, pose, it has also avoided exaggeration, making clear that other threats, namely Iran, are more severe. Israel has also exploited cleavages wherever possible, for example between Hamas and its foreign supporters as well as between Hamas and Arafat's/Abbas's Fatah. Other than that, however, Israel has largely diverged from Cronin's recommendations: It has not hived off groups claiming allegiance to Hamas because there are none. [69] As noted above, it did attempt to highlight Hamas's mistakes and encourage a popular backlash against Hamas among Gazans by implementing the blockade—but this has so far failed. Despite this, Israel has been able to manage its conflict with Hamas in lieu of resolving it.

The US, in fact, has more options and tools at its disposal than Israel, which has allowed it to survive mostly unscathed despite an inconsistent foreign and security policy and a lack of consensus within the US about the best path forward. From its inception, most of Israel's Arab and Muslim neighbors have rejected it. This is not the case with the United States, which the Arab and Muslim world once saw as a positive example in comparison with the colonialist powers of Europe. Furthermore, unlike Israel, the US has no territorial disputes with Middle Eastern countries and terrorists and Middle Eastern states do not currently threaten the US very existence. In fact, the US remains a key ally to many countries in the wider Middle East (though this does not necessarily translate into a positive view of America) and beyond: When Pew polled citizens of majority-Muslim Indonesia, they responded that America was their greatest ally.[70] Finally, while many Palestinians would prefer Hamas to Israel, most Muslims throughout the world view America more positively than the Islamic State group America is fighting. It is well within America's power to ensure this remains the case as long as it avoids making mistakes that would cast it in a worse light, such as killing large numbers of innocent civilians.

It may seem that the case of Israel, which faces existential threats and cannot physically disengage from the region, and the case of the US, which faces no existential threat and engages by choice, are too different, but there are lessons that can be learned beyond Israel's borders. The first is perhaps that, with all its advantages, the United States ought to have the capability to hold violence and chaos in check without having to topple every regime carrying out that violence and spread democracy by force. The record for the security of both countries is mixed at best when it comes to ousting opposing governments and authorities from territories they control. Many regimes supporting violence and terrorism can be left in power and brought closer to compliance with international norms at least as regards their external behavior. This requires that America and its allies do not shy away from fierce retaliation when necessary, but also that they do what they can to improve the status quo for the people living under such regimes and or unrecognized authorities whenever those regimes and authorities keep the peace. In the end, America's greatest asset may, however, be the most significant force holding it back from taking such an approach: the real and severe threats Israel faces have led to a greater consensus about the responses required than have emerged in the post-Cold War United States. Absent that sense of threat and a consensus on how to counter it, the US may lack the will to apply consistent policies, including occasional harsh reprisals as well as ostensible rewards to "enemy" regimes and authorities, that could lead to cumulative deterrence-by-denial.

The most core interest of any governing authority is usually its survival and control of its territory, but Israel did not need to topple Hamas in Gaza or even threaten to do so to achieve deterrence. This is all the more remarkable considering Hamas's level of animosity towards Israel. With the proper intelligence, the US and its allies could find assets to target against enemy regimes and authorities significant enough to effect coercion. Threats of regime change could still be used, but only if there is a credible opposition. As Israel's fight against Hamas (and indeed the West's perceived existential struggle against the former Soviet Union) shows, however, this is often unnecessary and could make things worse.

This could even have worked for Islamic State, though this would not have been the best course of action. Failing to counter such a group forcefully and allowing it to appear to overturn the regional order did not bolster deterrence—it undermined it. The Islamic State has also served as a symbol of what can be accomplished with sufficient brutality and an alleged adherence to the harshest interpretations of Islam. Even its relatively brief success may already have reinvigorated the so-called "fourth wave" and extended its life beyond the initial generation predicted by David Rappoport's "wave" model of modern rebel terrorism. If religious terrorism is ever to end, the West cannot afford more such mistakes.

Nevertheless, there is good reason for caution when contemplating the toppling of an already-established regime or authority. Israel fears that, if Hamas ever lost control in Gaza, whatever replaced it would have to be deterred afresh.[71] Zones of contested sovereignty can often become hotbeds of terrorism and many

such hotbeds come into being without US (re-)action. The corollary is that US action is no guarantee of conflict resolution in such zones, either. Many are highly resistant to the imposition of control by one group or government, even with the investment of considerable US resources. Extensive occupations also have costs beyond those to the treasury and that in American lives: They make the occupier responsible, directly or indirectly, for the population under occupation. Any human rights abuses, as well as the often necessary curtailment of civil liberties in times of conflict, have a corrosive effect not only on the occupier's image, but also on its own society, as Israelis themselves have learned.[72]

Instead, it may be possible to work with a recognized government or governments and/or friendly authorities to reduce violence in such situations so as to give space for resolving the conflict over governance later, rather than trying to force a solution in the short term with extensive US involvement and funding. Groups that control pieces of territory within a failed state may be convinced to halt attacks against the recognized government and other competing groups and renounce international terrorism in exchange for allowing them, for a set, mutually-agreed period, to retain control of the territory they currently hold. The fact that there is a precedent for this from the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, known as a *hudna* [truce], can also help in securing and legitimizing such an arrangement when it involves Islamist groups.[73] Some conflicts may not be resolvable at an acceptable cost at the present, but this does not mean the US and its allies should simply disengage altogether. Conflicts can escalate and draw the US back in if it fails to manage them just as easily as they can escalate when one attempts to resolve them quickly at all costs.

Cumulative deterrence can be a sort of "second-choice" tool for conflict management when conflict resolution is infeasible, but it could also aid in finding long-term solutions. The "peace dividend" provided by the establishment of a long-term ceasefire would boost support for that cease-fire, even as international aid disproportionately improved prospects for people in government-controlled areas, undermining support for the authorities controlling other areas. Coupled with the increased trust that extended periods of ceasefire can bring, this could ease the way for negotiations between the various factions on how to share power as local support for a return to violence dwindles. It is not that militant groups in such a situation would simply give up, but that they would come to see a greater risk (through loss of public support) from returning to violence than from pursuing a political path. Such an outcome is by no means guaranteed and can only result from conflict resolution, not mere conflict management that deterrence provides. Nevertheless, reducing violence can save lives and managing conflicts can make it easier for conflict resolution to proceed over the longer term.

Conflict management can support conflict resolution, but it provides no permanent solutions itself. It is not enough to attempt to close off avenues to violence if others for achieving political change are not opened up. The most recent Pew poll on Muslims' attitudes towards democracy showed continuing broad support for it.[74] Without the ability to effect change in their lives through some sort of broad political participation, large-enough numbers of Muslims remain likely to continue to support violent attempts at doing so. This is why, though the West is now rightly skeptical of democracy promotion at gun-point, it is wrong to swing too far in the opposite direction. The only long-term solution to political violence remains ensuring that a countries' citizens have non-violent means of effecting change. The US and its allies are, in many parts of the world, the only actors on the world stage capable of cautiously supporting the sorts of changes needed for people to improve their lives without resorting to violence. Shying away from this responsibility could be the greatest peril of all.

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## Notes

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[69] Israel has exploited cleavages between groups close to Hamas, such as Islamic Jihad (in part through indirect deterrence), but Hamas does not have "franchises" in other locations in the mold of al-Qaeda and Islamic State because its aims are local.

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