



## Will Israel implement an agreement with Hamas? History suggests NO

As I write this, indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas are in progress in Egypt about a long term agreement concerning Gaza.

It is appropriate to recall that Israel's last military offensive against Gaza in November 2012 also ended with an agreement concerning Gaza brokered by Egypt [\[1\]](#). Under it, both sides were required to cease hostilities and Israel undertook to take steps towards ending its blockade of Gaza. The agreement seemed to have the backing of the US, since Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stood beside the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Mohamad Amr, when he announced it on 21 November 2012.

### What happened to the November 2012 agreement?

So, what happened to this agreement? Basically, Israel failed to fulfil its obligations under it, whereas Hamas fulfilled its obligations to the letter for more than eighteen months – and the international community turned a blind eye to Israel's failure.

Specifically, in the agreement, Israel promised “to stop all hostilities on the Gaza Strip land, sea and air including incursions and targeting of individuals” and the “opening the crossings and facilitating the movement of people and transfer of goods, and refraining from restricting residents free movement”. Israel didn't fulfil either of these obligations – it continued to make regular incursions into Gaza (killing 20 Palestinians in Gaza in the following 15 months) and took no steps to lift its economic blockade.

The agreement required Hamas and other Palestinian groups to “stop all hostilities from the Gaza Strip against Israel, including rocket attacks, and attacks along the border”. Hamas did so for more than eighteen months from 21 November 2012. Speaking to a Knesset committee on 30 June 2014, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged this, accusing Hamas “of involvement, for the first time since a Gaza war in 2012, in rocket attacks on Israel”, according to a Reuters report [\[2\]](#).

Other Palestinian groups did fire rockets into Israel, despite being restrained by Hamas. But, according to Nathan Thrall of the International Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Programme, in an article dated 1 August 2014 in the *London Review of Books* [\[3\]](#):

“During the three months that followed the ceasefire [on 21 November 2012], Shin Bet recorded only a single attack: two mortar shells fired from Gaza in December 2012. ...

“[Hamas] set up a new police force tasked with arresting Palestinians who tried to launch rockets. In 2013, fewer were fired from Gaza than in any year since 2003, soon after the first primitive projectiles were shot across the border.”

### **Israel’s response to quiet along the border**

How did Israel respond to this comparative quiet along the border? In his *London Review of Books* article, Nathan Thrall writes:

“In the three months following the ceasefire, its forces made regular incursions into Gaza, strafed Palestinian farmers and those collecting scrap and rubble across the border, and fired at boats, preventing fishermen from accessing the majority of Gaza’s waters.

“The end of the closure never came. Crossings were repeatedly shut. So-called buffer zones – agricultural lands that Gazan farmers couldn’t enter without being fired on – were reinstated. Imports declined, exports were blocked, and fewer Gazans were given exit permits to Israel and the West Bank.

“Israel had committed [in the November 2012 agreement] to holding indirect negotiations with Hamas over the implementation of the ceasefire but repeatedly delayed them. ... The talks never took place. The lesson for Hamas was clear. Even if an agreement was brokered by the US and Egypt, Israel could still fail to honour it.”

### **If Israel had fulfilled its obligations**

Had Israel ceased military incursions into Gaza and taken steps to lift its economic blockade, as it was supposed to do under the agreement, it is virtually certain that Hamas would not have resumed rocket fire. Hamas did resume on 7 July 2014, after Israel made an armed incursion into Gaza and killed seven Hamas members. And if progress was being made towards lifting the blockade, Hamas would have been in a much stronger position to stop other Palestinian groups from firing rockets and mortars into Israel.

So, had Israel fulfilled its obligations under the agreement, it is very likely that rocket and mortar firing into Israel could have been halted altogether without Israeli military action against Gaza.

### **June 2008 agreement**

This is not the first time that Israel has failed to fulfil its obligations under an agreement with Hamas. In June 2008, Egypt brokered an agreement which, like the November 2012 agreement, provided for a cessation of hostilities on both sides and steps by Israel towards ending its blockade [\[4\]](#).

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Hamas fulfilled its obligations under this agreement to the letter and, as a result, southern Israel was almost entirely free from firing out of Gaza for four and a half months. But Israel did not ease its economic blockade, let alone lift it, and on the evening of 4 November 2008 (when the world was watching the election of Barack Obama) it made a military incursion into Gaza for the first time since the ceasefire began in June and killed seven members of Hamas. That was the end of that agreement.

A few weeks later Israel embarked on its first major offensive against Gaza, Operation Cast Lead, with the declared objective of suppressing rocket and mortar into Israel.

### **The lesson of history**

The lesson from the above is that the international community will have to ensure that Israel fulfils its obligations in any future agreement with Hamas. Come to think of it, does another agreement need to be negotiated? In reality, all that is necessary is that Israel be persuaded to implement the November 2012 agreement.

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### **References:**

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