

Hamas Thinks They Are Winning



by James S. Robbins

A month after Hamas massacred over 1,400 people in Israel, the war they unleashed is not going well for them. Israeli airstrikes have taken out [key leaders](#), command posts, and arms depots. The Israel Defense Forces has isolated Gaza City and is moving to reduce it. Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar is reportedly surrounded in his bunker. Calls for a ceasefire are falling on deaf ears.

It would be best for everybody if Hamas simply surrendered and ended the fighting. But the terrorists don't see it that way. From their perspective, this is just the latest battle in a long war that they have been winning.

Israeli leaders had long avoided removing Hamas from power. They believed that they had Hamas contained in Gaza, and that

despite periodic terrorist attacks – with rockets, mortars, bombs, and incendiary kites, among other things – the situation was all a matter of conflict management. When the provocations got too great, Israel would “[mow the grass](#)” with airstrikes or the occasional ground incursion. It thought it could educate Hamas that the terrorists could not win. The [moderates](#) would one day come to the fore and grudgingly accept reality.

Hamas learned a different lesson from these half-measures. From their point of view, no matter what Israel did, they were still standing. This was the same conclusion the North Vietnamese reached when the U.S. pursued limited warfare against Hanoi and what [Saddam Hussein told his people](#) in 1991 after Coalition forces withdrew from Iraq. When the punitive Operation Protective Edge concluded in 2014 and Israel pulled back, Hamas declared victory for having “repulsed the IDF.” Spokes-terrorist Abu Obeida [said](#): “Gaza achieved victory because it has done what major armies failed to do. It forced the enemy to retreat.”

Sadly, [Abu Obeida](#) had a point, in a way. Perceptions are critical in limited war. Hamas could declare victory because they survived, and if they behaved like winners, some people would believe it.

Hamas continued to rule in Gaza and receive international support, both authorized and illicit. They skimmed aid money and diverted humanitarian funds. They stockpiled weapons, built tunnels, and occasionally made small-scale attacks. When Israel leaned on defensive measures like Iron Dome and limited reprisals to contain the threat, Hamas concluded that the Jewish state was weak. But Israel missed the threat because it thought its plan was working. “Hamas is very, very restrained,” Israeli national security adviser Tzachi Hanegbi [said](#) on Oct. 1, “and understands the implications of further defiance.” Around the same time, Biden national security adviser Jake Sullivan confidently [said](#), “The Middle

East region is quieter today than it has been in two decades.”

Then came Oct. 7, Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, which to Hamas was a great victory. After all, as many Western academics [reminded us](#) after the attack, “decolonization is not a metaphor.” To the terrorists it means killing Jews. “[From the river to the sea](#)” means ethnic cleansing. A [Jewish baby baked alive in an oven](#) is the purest expression of the Hamas ideology, program, and practice.

Yet according to the [Arabic Wikipedia version of the events](#), this never happened. It claims Hamas killed no Israeli civilians. [Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah](#) said the Israeli army did it. Hamas was only hitting military targets and reports to the contrary are dismissed as “fake news.” In the [discussion section](#) for the Wikipedia entry, you learn more details about the Hamas apologist view of events, such as that the women seen stripped and killed by the terrorists were in fact already mostly naked at the peace festival beforehand, which they say “refutes the lie that Hamas stripped the bodies.” And those terrorist videos shockingly documenting every form of Hamas atrocity? [Israeli propaganda](#), they say.

Hamas fighters are now hunkered down in their fortress in Gaza City (except for the [cowards who tried to escape](#) through Egypt with the wounded). And their outer defenses are the international media, academics, and fellow travelers rallying to support them. This propaganda complex is the result of a [political warfare campaign](#) going back 30 years. Their penetration of Western academic and thought circles has been remarkably successful. See, for example, Al Jazeera host and CUNY professor Marc Lamont Hill arguing that Hamas is not a terrorist organization but a “[democratically-elected government](#),” or the [Voice of America](#), [BBC](#), and [CBC](#), plus [Harvard](#) and [other universities](#), refusing (at least at first) to call Hamas “terrorists.”

Hamas supporters are busy trying to change the debate, pushing narratives of Israeli genocide and war crimes, of unconfirmable body counts and AI-generated propaganda images of innocent victims like the [six-fingered child](#). And always they call for a ceasefire so that Hamas can recover and reload. These talking points are parroted by fellow travelers [demonstrating worldwide](#). President Joe Biden's off-the-cuff call for a "[humanitarian pause](#)" in the fighting shows the pressure may be getting to him.

So, on the military, diplomatic, and propaganda fronts, Hamas thinks they have the upper hand. They expect victory because they think they have always been victorious. The terrorists are defiant; Hamas politburo member Ghazi Hamad [told Lebanese TV](#) that attacks like that on Oct. 7 will continue. "We are the victims of the occupation. Period," he said. "Therefore, nobody should blame us for the things we do. On October 7, October 10, October one-millionth, everything we do is justified." They sought to create a permanent state of war, to foment a general uprising, to "[change the entire equation](#)."

But Hamas has miscalculated. They changed the equation, but not to their benefit. In the past, Hamas won by not losing, and Israel lost by not winning. This time, Israel is pursuing total victory. Hamas will be ejected from Gaza, its assets seized, its leadership (and a good number of followership) hunted down and eliminated. A new security arrangement will be erected that will not tolerate the rockets, bombs, mortars, and kites. Israel will force Gaza to be peaceful. Then they can have their ceasefire.

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James S. Robbins is Dean of Academics at the [Institute of World Politics](#) and author of [This Time We Win: Revisiting the Tet Offensive](#).