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Drexel GPS: Geopolitical Update Israeli Airstrikes Intensify on Hamas; Digital Misinformation Spikes 10/13/23

Today's geopolitical landscape unfolds as Israel's war with Hamas enters its first full week after the surprise attack. Israel has retaliated and is engaging in an active bombing campaign of artillery and airstrikes on targets in and around Gaza. Israel has mobilized over 300,000 military reservists. There is a growing number of ground troops and equipment massing at various points along the Israeli side of the border. These actions leave little doubt that massive and unprecedented ground assault operations into Gaza by the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) is an inevitable reality that will commence in the very near-term.

- As the world focuses on the crisis in Israel, the U.S. Navy's USS Gerald Ford Carrier Strike Group has arrived on station in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. This is a strong signal by the United States intended to deter either state or non-state actors in the region from taking advantage of the situation and widening the scope of the war between Hamas and Israel.
- The Israeli military overnight has issued a 24-hour deadline for all civilians in Gaza City to move to the south for their safety immediately. This will prove to be extremely difficult if not impossible for the estimated 1.1 million residents to comply with.
- Further complicating the issue is the question of Egypt to the south, and if it will open its currently closed border with Gaza to accept the flow of civilians.
- International humanitarian law applies in situations of armed conflict and places obligations on all parties to the conflict to protect civilians and reduce human suffering. The fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas would technically be governed by these rules.
- However, Israel's desire for revenge after the terror attacks along with Hamas's established strategy of hiding among civilians in the ultra-densely populated city of Gaza will test the limits of the legal framework for warfare.
- Of the over 1200 Israelis confirmed killed by Hamas in Saturday's attack, the overwhelming majority (>900) of them were civilians. Twenty-seven Americans have also been confirmed among those killed. The whereabouts of the estimated 100-150 hostages taken back into Gaza by Hamas has yet to be determined. There has been some

reporting of Qatari mediators being in contact with Hamas to discuss the possibility of some form of prisoner exchange involving women and children for the 36 Palestinian women and children being held under Israeli control.

- This current situation in the Middle East illustrates how events which seem uncorrelated on the surface regarding policy, technology, and law, actually do intersect and influence each other at critical junctures under the umbrella of geopolitics.
- Modern warfare increasingly highlights the asymmetric impact relatively low-cost operations, such as misinformation and other activities carried out in cyberspace, can influence both the battlefield and the political climate that drives the onset of conflict.

Drexel GPS Assessment: Online Misinformation

In the aftermath of last Saturday's attack, there has been a surge in online misinformation and content supportive of Hamas's actions. This includes false reports of rockets being fired along the tense northern border Israel shares with Lebanon. The combination of recent events, a still-developing Israeli response, and the historical tensions of the region, provides a real-time example of how digital misinformation can light the powder keg of the Middle East and must be taken seriously.

After Saturday's attack there has already been cross-border exchanges of artillery and gunfire in Northern Israel/Southern Lebanon between Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants and Israeli forces resulting in at least three militants and one Israeli soldier being killed.

Some of the exchanges have been claimed by groups operating out of Hezbollah-controlled southern Lebanon, and others by Hezbollah themselves. Hezbollah is based in Lebanon and the area is considered one of the most likely flashpoints for an expansion of the war.

As tensions mount ahead of an anticipated ground assault into Gaza by the IDF, a successful online misinformation campaign by a bad actor could be the catalyst which sparks full-scale hostilities along the northern front for Israel throughout the course of the campaign.

- Highlighting this point, the European Union's (EU) Commissioner for Internal Market, Thierry Breton issued a letter to CEOs Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook and Elon Musk of X (formerly Twitter) advising them to curb disinformation on their platforms.
- The letter warned that their platforms were being used to disseminate illegal content and false information in the wake of recent violence in the Middle East that violated the EU's terrorist content moderation clauses of the Digital Services Act (DSA) which was passed last year.

- The seriousness with which the EU views violations of this policy is reflected by the stiff penalties associated with it. Currently the EU's Digital Services Act covers 19 major online platforms including Amazon and Apple.
- Regulations cover transparency, removal of illegal content, and user control and failure to comply could result in fines of up to 6 percent of a company's global revenue.

EU Urges Facebook to comply with DSA Online policy :



Thierry Breton 
@ThierryBreton · Follow



The #DSA is here to protect free speech against arbitrary decisions, and at the same time protect our citizens & democracies.

My requests to #Meta's Mark Zuckerberg following the terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel — and on tackling disinformation in elections in the EU 



11:22 AM · Oct 11, 2023



Drexel GPS Assessment: Defense speak

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is preparing the public for a long war. As the full scale of the massacre of civilians by Hamas on Saturday comes to light, no longer will a “*mowing the grass*” strategy as it pertains to Hamas be considered an acceptable option. While it is impossible to physically destroy an ideology, Israel will expand its military focus beyond the

traditional C2 (Command & Control) targeting framework. Instead, it will conduct operations with the aim of kinetically **“uprooting”** and destroying Hamas’s entire C5ISR infrastructure.

- **C5ISR** is an acronym used in defense circles to describe new technologies, activities, and practices added to the C2 framework. These include Command, Control, Computers, Communications, Cyber-defense (C5), Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR)
- Hamas infrastructure targeted under a C5ISR targeting model will include but not be limited to:
 - Command and Control posts, internet connections, servers, workstations, and cybersecurity defenses.
 - Identified networks, locations, and/or individuals that support intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities (ISR).
 - Ground vehicles, aircraft, sea assets, and foot soldiers.

While recognizing its right to retaliate, the United States has urged restraint on the part of Israel only as it pertains to military operations under the rules of the Geneva Convention.

- As the full scale and details of the massacre on civilians by Hamas last Saturday comes to light, public opinion in Israel is increasingly and overwhelmingly aligning in support of Netanyahu’s statement, “Every member of Hamas is a dead-man.”
- Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant voiced a message to IDF soldiers that all "restraints have been removed for the upcoming offensive.”
- Both statements correlate with a consensus among military and intelligence analysts that the scope and scale of Israel’s operations into Gaza will be conducted with an intensity not previously seen.
- This does not bode well for the inhabitants of Gaza living in close proximity to Hamas fighters and operations centers where Israel has already enacted a full blockade cutting off all supplies of food, water, and fuel.

What is Hamas?

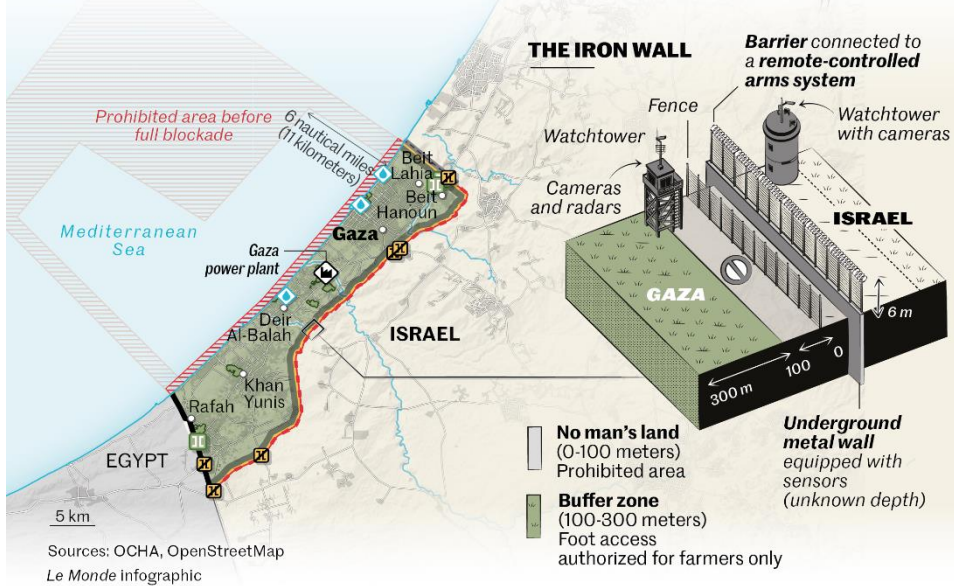
- Hamas is an Islamist militant movement and one of the Palestinian territories’ two major political parties. The group is best known for its armed resistance to Israel.

- Its rival party, Fatah, dominates the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and rules in the West Bank. The PLO has renounced violence.
- Hamas is an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (“Islamic Resistance Movement”). It was founded by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a Palestinian cleric who became an activist in local branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1960s.
- Yassin established Hamas as the Brotherhood’s political arm in Gaza in December 1987 following the outbreak of a Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.
- Hamas first employed suicide bombing in April 1993, five months before PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo Accords.
- The United States designated Hamas a foreign terrorist organization in 1997.
- Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005 and effected a blockade. Egypt and Israel closed their borders to Gaza in 2006. Israel made the blockade permanent in 2007 citing security concerns. The flow of goods and services from most of the world to Gaza are highly restricted.
- Hamas has been the de facto authority in Gaza since shortly after Israel withdrew from the territory in 2005. Designated a terrorist entity, Hamas is cut off from official assistance provided by Western countries to the PLO in the West Bank. Palestinian expatriates and private donors in the Persian Gulf provide much of the movement’s funding.
- Iran is one of Hamas’s biggest benefactors, contributing funds, weapons, and training. Iran and Hamas briefly fell out after backing opposing sides in Syria’s civil war, but Iran currently provides millions in support annually to Hamas.

Israel Enacts Complete Blockade of Gaza

THE GAZA STRIP BLOCKADE

-  Double fences around no man's land
-  Concrete wall
-  Steel wall built by Egypt
-  Buffer zone
-  Danger zone
-  Closed checkpoint
-  Palestinian checkpoint
-  Current naval blockade
-  Refugee camp
-  Desalination plant



Drexel Hamilton will continue to monitor this situation as it develops.

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