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The Shame of Gaza

Hundreds of innocents have died in Gaza. Who is really to blame for this tragedy?

Israel left Gaza completely in 2005, freeing the Palestinians to build an autonomous state there. Yet since then, the Hamas terror regime has instead chosen to use its resources to wage an unrelenting war against the Jewish state from military installations located in the midst of densely populated Arab residential areas.

What are the facts?

When Israel evacuated its citizens and military from Gaza in 2005, Israelis hoped this would be the beginning of a win-win, land-for-peace exchange with the Palestinians. American Jewish donors even paid $14 million to purchase 3,000 greenhouses left by Israeli settlers and transferred them to the Palestinian Authority.

But instead of creating a thriving agricultural enterprise, the greenhouses were vandalized and destroyed. Gaza's golden Mediterranean beaches could have made it a Middle East tourist mecca. But instead of the vibrant state that both Israel and many Palestinians envisioned, today under Hamas Gaza's poverty is worse than ever, its cities are ravaged by self-inflicted warfare and its people suffer under an Islamist dictatorship. What a shame that is.

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What's worse, since Hamas strong-armed the Palestinian Authority out of power in Gaza in 2007, the terror group began attacking Israel with a nearly continuous barrage of unsophisticated, but still deadly short-range rockets. Avowedly committed to destroying Israel, Hamas and other Gaza-based jihadis have since 2001 fired more than 15,000 rockets at Israeli cities and kibbutzim.

Israel responded in 2009 with a ground offensive in Gaza and in 2012 with intense shelling of Hamas military positions, most of them purposely located in Gaza's heavily populated urban areas. Israeli military responses did untold damage to Gaza's infrastructure, and led to short-term ceasefires by Hamas. Unfortunately, Israel's defensive responses also resulted in approximately fifteen hundred deaths, many of them Arab civilians living near Hamas military positions. What a shame that is.

Recently Hamas has acquired longer-range, Syrian-produced missiles via Iran that are capable of reaching Tel Aviv, Ben Gurion International Airport and Jerusalem. In the first seven months of 2014, Hamas militants launched more than 3,500 such high-powered rockets, threatening 80% of Israel's population—and sending many of those six million people fleeing in terror to bomb shelters.

Thanks to Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system and the Palestinians' poor targeting capabilities, these attacks have yet to kill large numbers of Israelis. But it's not for lack of trying: Hamas aims to kill as many Jews as possible.

What Is to Be Done? In 1945, during World War II, the United States bombed Dresden, Germany, and, a few months later, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, killing 220,000 people, most of them civilians. Who was to blame for these tragic deaths? Was it the United States, which was responding defensively to two deadly enemies, or was it the leaders of Germany and Japan, who had sworn themselves to the enslavement and destruction of many nations, including our own? The U.S. believed it needed to demonstrate to Germany and Japan that unless they surrendered, their military, their infrastructure and, if necessary, their people would be decimated.

Israel's situation today is even more dire than that of the U.S. in 1945. Israelis are being attacked daily by a Palestinian terrorist group sworn to the Jewish state's destruction and launching military offensives on Israeli civilians. This is an existential threat that no nation would or should tolerate. An implacable enemy like this must not merely be temporarily deterred, it must be defeated.

We pray that few Arab civilians are harmed in Hamas' deadly adventure, but demands by the international community that the group move its military operations out of populated areas have been ignored for more than a decade. Indeed, by basing its military operations in urban centers, Hamas' intention seems precisely to allow its citizens to be killed and injured for propaganda purposes. Such use of human shields is, of course, a war crime.

Above all, we pray that Hamas and other radical Arab groups give up their blood vendetta against Israel. One thing is clear: If tomorrow Hamas were to lay down its arms and declare peace with Israel, we would have peace immediately. But another thing is also clear: If tomorrow Israel were to lay down its arms and declare peace with Hamas, there would soon be no Israel. This is the ultimate shame.

Contrary to some media reports, the conflict between Hamas and Israel is not a "cycle of violence," nor does it require "mutual restraint." Rather, Israel, a nation smaller than tiny El Salvador, surrounded by a sea of hostile Arab and Muslim nations, is responding logically to protect its citizens from an enemy directly on its border. What nation would not respond to such existential threats with definitive force meant to defeat this enemy?

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