

Why Israel's Attack on Gaza is Unjustified (5 Jan. '09)

The Gaza Strip is a tiny, densely populated territory of 1.4 million, the majority of whom are children under age 14. Precision strikes are impossible here. Given the population density, it is absurd to claim that Hamas is deliberately hiding in civilian areas. There are few if any open areas. The people are trapped by a wall. Gaza has been called an open-air prison.

The evidence is overwhelming that Israel is deliberately striking out at civilian targets. Human Rights Watch says so. The UN says that at least 1 in 4 of the more than 500 killed so far have been non-combatants: unarmed people, innocent women and children. Hospitals, already in crisis because of Israel's long-standing blockade of the territory, cannot begin to cope with over two thousand people who have been severely injured. Israel has been keeping out the news media and, at times, even the Red Cross. Apparently it prefers that we not see all the damage being done.

Israel's attack is vastly disproportionate to any threat posed by Palestinians to Israeli civilians. In recent years, only a handful of Israeli casualties have been reported from all causes. Ceasefires, though imperfect, have been more effective than the alternative in protecting Israelis. Qassams are crude, primitive rockets which almost never cause deaths or injuries. Russia's attack on Georgia was condemned as disproportionate. This is far worse.

Israel claims that its offensive is justified because it is intended to protect its civilians from attack. Though such a goal is certainly laudable, arguments for military action have to be carefully evaluated, especially when it inevitably brings harm to the innocent on the other side. In particular, we have to ask: What exactly is the goal? How likely is it that this action will make things better than they were? Were alternative, less lethal methods given a fair trial? Bombing people simply because it makes us feel good isn't really a morally defensible option. But this is what we suspect Israel is up to.

Israel's position is reasonable only if we believe the following:

- that the massive Israeli raid on 4 November, supposedly against a tunnel being built to abduct an Israeli soldier, was not a ceasefire violation, though it killed a number of Palestinians. Previously the ceasefire, agreed on 19 June, though imperfect, was more or less holding. A soldier was abducted in June 2006 only because Israel did not know where the tunnel was. If they know where a tunnel is, countermeasures should be easy. In truth, Israel wanted the ceasefire to end and used this as a hollow pretext. The stated explanation makes no sense and the outcome, more fighting, was completely foreseeable.
- that starving out and bombing from the air an entire population, the majority of whom are children, is a sensible way to significantly reduce the already small

number of Israeli casualties. The Israeli military itself admits its attack cannot be realistically expected to end the Qassams (BBC 1/4/08). A ceasefire is the morally compelling option if the goal, as admitted, is just to reduce them.

- that Israel can realistically expect total peace and quiet and not even sporadic and token acts of resistance while it continues to besiege and starve out Gaza, occupy the West Bank, destroy the Palestinian economy and expand settlement activity (which has doubled in the last year). The fact that even inaccurate rockets sometimes send Israelis to air-raid shelters is certainly unfortunate. But it is just not correct to say that Israel has sought a peaceful solution. It has never stopped trying to overthrow the elected Palestine government in Gaza. The Palestinians are also divided into factions, and, even if some agree to a truce, they are unlikely to all agree to disarm unilaterally while under so much pressure. That's just human nature.
- that Israeli life is infinitely more precious and valuable than Palestinian life. Though they would all vigorously deny it, this is what top Israeli and US politicians apparently believe. But it is very dangerous to tell the world that we don't care about Palestinian life. That kind of message breeds terrorism.

The Palestinians are afflicted in a way that makes the troubles of Israelis pale by comparison. And afflicted people are unlikely to just sit on their hands and hope for a solution, while those who afflict them take their sweet time, annex more territory and enjoy absolute peace and quiet. The ceasefire which Israel chose to end, though imperfect and subject to technical violations by each side, offered both sides the best security possible in the existing circumstances of political stalemate and ongoing occupation. The fact that it was not a substitute for the "peace process" that Israel never seriously pursued does not mean that it was the wrong approach.

Israel has reduced the Palestinians to a condition of abject misery and squalor and has given absolutely nothing to the "moderate" President, Mahmud Abbas, whom they call a legitimate negotiating partner. At Annapolis last year, they said they would work out with him a two-state solution by January 2009. Instead they expanded settlements and made Abbas's position politically untenable. Israel has never sought to reward Palestinian moderation even as it punishes so-called "extremism". And when the situation blows up, it is always somebody else's fault.

Make no mistake: the images from Gaza make an excellent recruiting poster for Al Qaeda. The world knows who gives Israel its weapons. Call your Senators and Representative and tell them that this war must stop.

People for Justice in Palestine—www.iowajpp.org