

# **Descent Into Butchery, Part 2: An Update on the Gaza Massacre - “The cease-fire terms demanded by Hamas are entirely reasonable”**

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It's official now, as if it weren't obvious the whole time: Israel is hitting what it aims at, including housing blocks with dozens of trapped families inside, hospitals, schools, mosques, and even places where its air-drop leaflets had told Gaza residents to shelter. These places are hit, says prime minister Netanyahu, because that's where Hamas hides its rockets to fire into Israel.

Even if that's true—which, in part at least, it probably is—it simply puts Israel and Hamas on the same moral level in their indifference to civilian life. That conception roughly marks the outer margin of permissible discussion in the more liberal sectors of the corporate media, as when *New York Times* columnists Nicholas Kristof, Thomas Friedman, and Roger Cohen lecture how “extremist” elements and bad political leadership on both sides reinforce each other.

Nothing like this moral equivalence, of course, will be found in the discourse of the United States Congress, where gridlock has given way to joyful bipartisan complicity in mass murder. The Senate, echoing a previous House of Representatives resolution, voted 100-0—yes, including the “progressive” Democrats and Bernie Sanders along with all the rest—to endorse Israel's “self-defense” against “unprovoked” (!) rocket attacks and to demand the dismantling of the unity government that Palestinian factions had recently formed.

Subsequently, as her office proudly announces, “U.S. Senator Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.), Chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, today announced Committee passage of the fiscal year (FY) 2015 Department of Defense spending bill, which includes \$621 million for U.S.-Israel Cooperative Missile Development Programs, an increase of \$117 million over FY2014 levels. This includes \$351 million to support the Iron Dome Missile Defense System, which doubles the Administration's FY2015 budget request for the program.”

Can we please have our dreaded gridlock back?

The Israel-Hamas moral equivalence argument itself, however, is sustainable only in abstraction from the real-life catastrophe and historical context. To understand this, we have to step back for a moment from the immediate headlines, where each day's atrocities blur the memory of the previous one. It's not only that the Israeli state with full U.S. backing has overwhelming firepower and technological advantage to inflict carnage. We have to deconstruct the Biggest Lie about Gaza, which gains credence through endless repetition. It goes like this: “Israel withdrew from Gaza, pulled out all the settlers, left it to develop freely and peacefully, and what it got in return was rocket fire.”

The truth is that Gaza never had a single week of peace. From the day of Ariel Sharon's “withdrawal” in 2005, Israeli planes flew overhead deliberately creating sonic booms. Since 2006 Gaza has been essentially blockaded by Israel ; its port forbidden, most of its exports blocked, its boats unable to access fishing grounds, its population reduced to utter dependency on UN aid.

Farmers shot working their own land near the border. Kids shot down by Israeli snipers. Targeted assassinations became a feature of daily life, even in times of “quiet,” let alone Israel’s previous military invasions in 2008-9 and 2012.

Long before Netanyahu, it was the sainted Yitzhak Rabin who said his desire was “that Gaza would sink into the sea.” The unforgivable crime of Gaza’s population lies in failing to fulfill that wish (as if they really had a choice). Occupation had forced Israel to assume some minimal responsibility for social services, and the heavy burden of security for its settlers. Its unilateral “withdrawal” has allowed Israel to turn the Occupation into a kind of medieval siege conducted with modern warfare and surveillance technology. Penned in, without clean water, crowded and stressed beyond endurance, Gaza today lives in conditions as bad as those of any Jewish ghetto in Europe outside the Nazi period. And inside the Israeli Jewish population, overtly genocidal attitudes are gaining ground.

It is ultimately for Palestinian society to judge its own leadership, whether that’s Hamas, which constructed truly impressive underground tunnels for its militants but not civil defense for its people, or the corrupt Palestinian Authority that colluded with Israel and the U.S. CIA in a failed coup (2007), after Palestinian society had succeeded in organizing a genuine democratic election whose outcome Tel Aviv and Washington disliked.

That judgment might well be harsh, but the fact is that today, despite their unimaginable daily horrors, most people in Gaza don’t want the resistance to stop without the beginning of solutions to the slow death of the siege. The cease-fire terms demanded by Hamas—to open the borders, to allow fishing and commerce and the release of the hundreds of prisoners rearrested by Israel on the pretext of searching for the murdered Israeli teens—are entirely reasonable.

It’s the political and moral collapse of the Obama administration that blocks the road to a viable truce. It’s for us to judge “our own government’s” leadership, and to face straight-on the deadly consequences of this episode. There can be no fantasy that anything happening now opens the way to either a “two-state solution” or a “single democratic state.” No solution is possible until Israel’s own behavior makes it more of a strategic liability than an asset for Washington, and until global grassroots outrage and BDS (Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions) make Israel an international “pariah state.”

Until and unless that happens, Palestine will become the image that George Orwell portrayed in 1984: “If you want a vision of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face — forever.”

**David Finkel**, July 25, 2014

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**P.S.**

\* <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4221>

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