

Israel Responds to War Against it

by Michael Curtis



Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel and show the heavens more just.

Albert Einstein once wrote that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Once again Hamas and Islamic Jihad have been acting in a reckless excessive fashion firing at least hundreds of rockets a day at Israel civilians, using metro tunnels, trying to kill Jews and overwhelm Israel, which has been dependent on effective technology to survive, by using the Israel Iron Dome anti-missile system, the network of connected batteries and radars that fire at rockets. Israel had to respond to overcome the threat, attacking the underground tunnels where the Hamas weapons are stored.

Many of the rockets are advanced long-range missiles, now able to target every city in Israel., and therefore the fighting has included the whole of Israel and the occupied territories. There are two immediate issues: where did profusion of heavy rockets come from; and how if the Palestinians are short of money with a supposedly impoverished population of two million, and a poor infrastructure, did they pay for them?

No doubt some of the rockets are made in Gaza, but most came from Iran, which transports them into the Gaza Strip by smuggling tunnels along the Egyptian border and by sea though an internationally approved naval blockade is in place. Iran has probably helped the Hamas plan to attack Israel by sea with a submergible naval weapon. In general, Iran has two objectives: it funded the terror coming from Gaza; it also wants to overcome the success of the Abraham Accords which are a stepping-stone to Jewish-Arab peace, and which unite a number of Arab countries against the threat of Iran.

The Hamas rockets are aimed at indiscriminate killing of Jews, hitting people, homes, businesses, places of worship. A number of factors, as well as myths, have been the excuse for the Hamas invasion. But in reality, the rockets of Hamas are the latest of the wars, the so-called "cycles of violence," that Palestinians have waged against Israel and Jews for nearly 75 years. The UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947 had adopted Resolution 181, the Partition Resolution, that divided the area of the Palestinian Mandate into a Jewish and an ARAB state, while Jerusalem would remain under international control administered by the UN. The Arabs refused to accept the compromise.

After some Arab assaults on Jewish settlements, the first Arab Israeli war occurred in 1948 when five Arab countries invaded territory of the State of Israel that was founded on May 14, 1948, intending to destroy it. The secretary of the Arab League, Azzam Pasha, declared "This will be a war of

extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades."

It is interesting to compare two fundamental statements. The Arab League Declaration on the Invasion of Palestine, May 15, 1948, stated, incorrectly, that Palestine has been an independent country since its separation from the Ottoman Empire, but the manifestations of this independence had been suppressed. Palestine, it states, is an Arab country situated in the heart of the Arab countries and attached to the Arab world by various ties, spiritual, historical, and strategic. The Arab countries have concerned themselves with the problem of Palestine and have raised it to the international level.

In contrast, the Israeli Proclamation of Independence issued in Tel Aviv on May 14, 1948, declared, "The state of Israel will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens without distinction of race, creed, or sex... In the midst of wanton aggression, we call upon the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to turn to the way of peace and play their part in the development of the state. We offer peace and amity to all neighboring states and their peoples.

The hostilities continue and responsibility for it is clear as already suggested, with clarification of who is the aggressor and who the victim in this ongoing conflict. However, a number of factors may be considered in assessing responsibility. One is the issue of possible eviction of six Palestinian families from the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. A supreme court ruling on the issue was due on Monday May 10 but was postponed because of Arab pressure. The issue is part of a broader one, that Israeli law allows Jews to reclaim land in East Jerusalem that was owned by Jews before 1948. Another similar issue is that a number of Arab families in the Silwan neighborhoods are facing home demolition to make way for a tourist site.

A difficult factor has been emotional reactions after perceived, or invented, threat to Al -Aqsa mosque, on a number of occasions, ostensibly by protests against Israeli police officers and authorities entered the mosque on April 13, when it refused the request to suspend broadcasting prayers while the Israeli President was delivering a speech. It was followed by a police raid on May 7. A third issue was the decision of the police to close the plaza opposite the Damascus Gate to prevent large crowds.

Most important is the intra-Palestinian rivalry between Hamas, governing in Gaza, and the Fatah movement headed by Mahmoud Abbas who governs the West Bank. Hamas has become more ambitious and more reckless. Hamas wants Palestinians to believe that it, not the Palestinian Authority, is defending Al Aqsa mosque and leading the struggle to liberate Palestinians. It has encouraged clashes between Arab and Jewish citizens in Israeli cities.

A fourth problem was caused by the cancellation by Abbas of elections, the first for 16 years, to be held on May 22, 2021, in the West Bank. The concern was that Hamas would beat Fatah and thus dominate the West Bank as well as Gaza.

These problems and longstanding historical grievances exist. But they are not a justification for Hamas missile and drone attacks against Israeli civilians. As usual, Israel is blamed by some for responding to attacks. This explains the new controversy over the Israeli bombing of Jala Tower, the building in Gaza housing the Associated Press and Al Jazeera, the Qatar based television network, but it is almost certain that Hamas maintained some kind of military presence there, and therefore the building was a legitimate target. In 2014 the journalist Matti Friedman had reported on the presence of Hamas in the building.

The reason for the Hamas hostilities is the controversy over the territorial area. Mandatory Palestine was a political

unit produced by the great powers after World War I, the product of international law and British colonial power. The crucial fact is that Palestine was not a geographical or political entity. The British mandate was silent on Palestinians. The myth still pervades that Palestinians were and are a population attached to the Middle East area for all eternity.

The exodus of Palestinians from Israel in 1948, about 600,000 is seen by pro-Palestinian activists as the Nakba, the catastrophe, when Palestinians became victims. Forgotten in the myth of false events is that 900,000 Jews were chased from their homes in Arab countries.

Also rarely mentioned among the various myths is that Israeli Arabs, Palestinians who stayed when Israel was formed in 1948 have full citizenship rights. The 1.8 million Arab Israelis are descended from the 160,000 who remained in the area in 1948.

They vote and receive the same social benefits as Jews, though some discrimination exists in housing and in public services. Arabs serve as Supreme Court justices, cabinet ministers and ambassadors, 12 are in the present Knesset. Most Palestinians speak fluent Hebrew, and all do not have to serve the obligatory two years of national military service, except for the Druze.

Israel, like all countries, is not blameless in its activities but has tried to de-escalate tensions. The reality is that it is confronted by Hamas that has built the extraordinary web of underground terror tunnels, many linked to playgrounds, hospitals, and mosques. Hamas is guilty of a double crime against humanity, using its own Palestinian civilians to kill Israeli civilians, and cause maximum civilian casualties. Its actions are malevolent not only for engaging in its enthusiasm for killing of Jews but also for believing that every death of a Palestinian will evoke international sympathy. The

international community should reject the false equivalence and recognize as has Secretary of State Antony Blinken that there is a clear and absolute distinction between a terrorist organization, Hamas indiscriminately stopping at nothing in efforts to kill Jews, and the State of Israel responding to those attacks.