



Give Israel a Chance

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No nation on Earth would accept being permanently bombed by a neighboring territory and remain impassive. Israel's punishing assault against Hamas in Gaza should not, therefore, be a surprise. What is truly surprising is that it did not happen much earlier. Israel has endured the unendurable: more than four thousand Palestinian missiles, which have not caused more deaths because of the enormous passive protection efforts –in the form of bunkers- for the towns in southern Israel. Demanding that Israel cease its military operations is immoral and a serious strategic error. The political goal of the EU and the international community should not be a simple cease-fire, but putting a stop to terrorism from Gaza.

The usual media manipulation by the Palestinians is again underway, offering everywhere images of their people's suffering, which unfortunately is inevitable in any military confrontation. It is so adept that it makes us forget the suffering the Palestine terrorists have been inflicting on a large part of the Israeli population. Until Israel completely withdrew from Gaza in 2005, Hamas justified the suicide bombings and other kinds of attacks as a necessary instrument in the fight "against the Israeli occupation". Well, since Sharon decided to leave Gaza to the Palestinians, the only Israeli in the Strip has been the unfortunate soldier Gilad Shalit, kidnapped two years ago by militiamen from Gaza. Nevertheless, the fact that Israel is no longer an "occupying force" has not diminished the

yearning for violence by Hamas and other Palestinian groups in Gaza. This is for a simple reason: what Hamas wants is not a solution with two states living peacefully one next to the other. What Palestinian Islamism aspires to is one state in the area, Palestinian and Islamic. And therefore, they do not want to, and cannot give up their goal of eliminating Israel. That is why Israel is forced to defend itself. If they did not, they would simply cease to exist.

As in any war there has been no lack of devotees crying to the moon about how disproportionate the Israeli military response was. We do not know what they would propose as an alternative, but what we do know is that not only are the actions of the Israeli armed forces, the IDF, scrupulously following the laws of war, but they are even being highly effective in choosing their targets. Clearly, any military action runs the risk of causing innocent civilian casualties, but according to what both observers on the ground and the sacrosanct institution of the United Nations report, perhaps less than 10% of the victims can be considered innocent victims. The rest, 90%, would be leaders and militia-men of Hamas. This means, among other things, that the execution of the Israeli attacks is better prepared than what NATO is doing in Afghanistan, for example, where the proportion of casualties due to error is significantly higher.

In short, Israel has the right to defend itself and it is doing so in the best way possible, fairly, legiti-

mately and proportionately. While they fight against the terrorists in Gaza they allow humanitarian aid to flow to the Palestinians in the area. And we must remember that if Gaza is today a wasteland, it is due to the terrible administration of Hamas' leaders, much more interested in terrorizing the Israelis than in creating opportunities for their voters.

Why would it be a strategic error to force Israel to stop the offensive now? For a very simple reason: because eliminating Hamas' arsenals and missiles is not enough and that is what the IDF bombings have been doing until now. Douglas MacArthur said: "In war there is no substitute for victory". With the exception of defeat, of course. And if there a lesson to be learned from unfinished or poorly finished conflicts, like the war by Israel against Hezbollah in the summer of 2006, it is that the absence of a clear, resounding and visible victory, that is, the absence of a decisive victory, quickly becomes a defeat. The survival of Hezbollah was felt by its followers and a good part of the Arab world to be an Israeli defeat. Whether it is true or not is not important. Appearances are what count.

That is why eliminating Hamas' missiles is not enough. They must be completely deprived of the feeling of victory and in order to achieve that their will must be bent. If the international community gives Hamas' leaders hope that if they hang on a little Israel will be forced to stop its actions, they will reinforce their feeling of victory. Even worse, we will be directly sponsor-

ing the radical Palestinians at the expense of the moderates, those we can talk to about a peaceful solution for everyone. If Hamas is not defeated politically, those who will be the Palestinian Authority, president Abbas and the government of Salam Fayyad. A non-defeat of Hamas would encourage them to try a takeover in the West Bank similar to the one they did in 2007 and which brought them to power in Gaza. And that would certainly be the end to the peace process. On the other hand, if Hamas is clearly defeated, the Palestinian Authority will have a new opportunity to regain its role in the Gaza Strip, which at present is in fact a separate Palestinian state.

Finally, we should not forget that while Israel is fighting to defend the peace and calm of the neighboring towns around Gaza, the defeat of Hamas not only will bring new opportunities for stable peace to the area, but will be a serious setback for Iran in the region. In this sense we must not forget that Israel is not only fighting for its security but also it is fighting for the security of Europe and the West. Stopping Iran, which day by day grows stronger,

more irresponsible, more provocative and is at the brink of becoming an atomic power, can only benefit international peace. That is, our peace and security.

Therefore, the best contribution that the EU and the UN can make to peace and stability in the region is let Israel reach its goals. And this is as easy and simple as not pressing for a premature cease-fire as they did in 2006. International pressure should be focused on our enemies, and in this case on Hamas, not on our friends or saviors. Israel should feel our support so that Hamas senses its isolation and feels that it is within the Israeli soldiers' reach. Hamas has been a disaster for the Palestinians; it is the true barrier to reaching a reasonable solution to the peace process. It is just another playing piece for radical Islamism as well as for Iran, who plays with its pawns north and south of Israel as part of its strategy of power in the Levant. We must not ask Israel for restraint; we must support and pursue the military and political elimination of Hamas. Less than that means postponing a larger conflict.