



# ISRAEL MATTERS!

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Shalom

*Special Supplement - Fighting in Gaza*

January 16, 2009

## Israel Kills Senior Hamas Leader

GAZA CITY – January 15, 2009 (AFP) – Israel killed a top Hamas leader as tanks pressed into the heart of Gaza City.

Said Siam, interior minister in Gaza's Hamas government, was slain along with his brother and son in an air strike on the brother's house north of Gaza City, Hamas said, as its armed wing vowed to avenge his death.

His sister-in-law, bodyguard, and four neighbors also died in the strike, according to Gaza medics, who said more than 40 Palestinians were killed in fighting across the territory on Thursday.

A Hamas hardliner, Siam had created the Executive Force, a militia that played a key role in the Islamist takeover of Gaza in June 2007. He is the highest-ranking Hamas official killed since the war began on December 27.



The assassination came after a day of fierce fighting in which Israeli tanks rolled into the centre of Gaza City and forces struck a hospital, a media building and a UN compound, setting ablaze a warehouse filled with food aid.

Civilians fled the advancing Israeli troops inside Gaza's main city as warplanes pounded the Hamas-ruled enclave in a bid to stem Palestinian rocket fire.

Despite the Israeli onslaught, Hamas militants continued to launch projectiles

Thursday, sending two long-range Grad rockets crashing into the southern Israeli city of Beersheva and wounding five people, medics said.

At least 25 rockets and mortar rounds were fired from Gaza into Israel on Thursday, with Palestinian militants having launched at least 1,090 projectiles since the war be-

gan, according to the army.

As the battles raged on the ground, Egypt pressed ahead with Western-backed efforts to end the war in which an estimated 600 Palestinian civilians have been killed.

In what could be a major breakthrough, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni would travel to Washington to sign a memorandum on joint efforts to halt smuggling beneath the Gaza-Egypt border. Shutting down the hundreds of tunnels beneath the frontier that form Hamas's main resupply route was one of Israel's chief war aims.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon arrived in Israel shortly before an Israeli tank shell hit the UN refugee agency's main Gaza compound, wounding three employees and torching a warehouse filled with tens of millions of dollars worth of aid.

Ban said he had conveyed his "strong protest and outrage" and demanded an explanation in talks with Israeli officials as part of a regional tour aimed at cajoling the two warring parties into a ceasefire agreement.

Olmert said that Israeli troops had shelled the compound in Gaza in response to fire coming from the building, charges denied by the UN refugee agency.

The European Union's Czech presidency joined a chorus of international protests at the strike, calling it "simply unacceptable," while Amnesty International said the strike could constitute a war crime.

Another Israeli raid hit a building housing several media outlets in central Gaza City, wounding two cameramen.

Israel says 10 of its soldiers and three civilians have died as a result of combat or rocket fire during the offensive.

Egyptian officials said Israeli envoy Amos Gilad responded "favorably" to Cairo's plan for a ceasefire, which would halt the fighting and the weapons smuggling and lift a crippling 18-month blockade of the territory. An Israeli government spokesman said however no decision had yet been reached on the plan.

Hamas also has yet to reach a final decision, having said only that it does not reject the "broad outlines" of the proposal. Former British prime minister Tony Blair, now the international community's Middle East peace envoy, said he was still hopeful for a ceasefire, saying the Egyptian plan contained all the necessary elements.

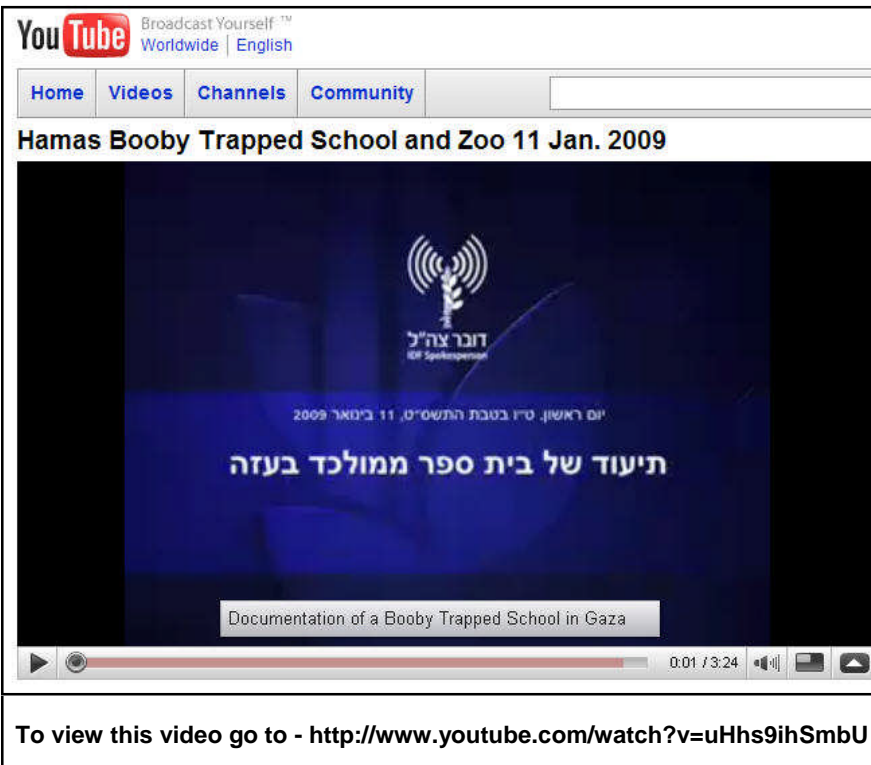
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# Gaza War Full of Traps and Trickery

**New York Times - January 11, 2009:** The grinding urban battle unfolding in the densely populated Gaza Strip is a war of new tactics, quick adaptation and lethal tricks.

Hamas, with training from Iran and Hezbollah, has used the last two years to turn Gaza into a deadly maze of tunnels, booby traps and sophisticated roadside bombs. Weapons are hidden in mosques, schoolyards and civilian houses, and the leadership's war room is a bunker beneath Gaza's largest hospital, Israeli intelligence officials say.

Unwilling to take Israel's bait and come into the open, Hamas militants are fighting in civilian clothes; even the police have been ordered to take off their uniforms. The militants



emerge from tunnels to shoot automatic weapons or antitank missiles, then disappear back inside, hoping to lure the Israeli soldiers with their fire.

In one apartment building in Zeitoun, in northern Gaza, Hamas set an inventive, deadly trap. According to an Israeli journalist embedded with Israeli troops, the militants placed a mannequin in a hallway off the building's main entrance. They hoped to draw fire from Israeli soldiers who might, through the blur of night vision goggles and split-second decisions, mistake the figure for a fighter. The mannequin was rigged to explode and bring down the building.

In an interview, the reporter, Ron Ben-Yishai, a senior military correspondent for the newspaper Yediot Aharonot, said soldiers also found a pile of weapons with a grenade launcher on top. When they moved the launcher, "they saw a detonator light up, but somehow it didn't go off."

The Israeli Army has also come prepared for a battle both sides knew was inevitable. Every soldier, Israeli officials say, is outfitted with a ceramic vest and a helmet. Every unit has dogs trained to sniff out explosives and people hidden in tunnels, as well as combat engineers trained to defuse hidden bombs.

To avoid booby traps, the Israelis say, they enter buildings by breaking through side walls, rather than going in the front. Once inside, they move from room to room, battering holes in interior walls to avoid exposure to snipers and suicide bombers dressed as civilians, with explosive belts hidden beneath winter coats.

The Israelis say they are also using new weapons, like a small-diameter smart bomb, the GBU-39, which Israel bought last fall from Washington. The bomb, which is very accurate, has a small explosive, as little as 60 to 80 pounds, to minimize collateral damage in an urban

area. But it can also penetrate the earth to hit bunkers or tunnels.

And the Israelis, too, are resorting to tricks.

Israeli intelligence officers are telephoning Gazans and, in good Arabic, pretending to be sympathetic Egyptians, Saudis, Jordanians or Libyans, Gazans say and Israel has confirmed. After expressing horror at the Israeli war and asking about the family, the callers ask about local conditions, whether the family supports Hamas and if there are fighters in the building or the neighborhood.

Karim Abu Shaban, 21, of Gaza City said he and his neighbors all had gotten such calls. His first caller had an Egyptian accent. "Oh, God help you, God be with you," the caller began.

"It started very supportive," Mr. Shaban said, then the questions started. The next call came in five minutes later. That caller had an Algerian accent and asked if he had reached Gaza. Mr. Shaban said he answered, "No, Tel Aviv," and hung up.

Interviews last week with senior Israeli intelligence and military officers, both active and retired, as well as with military experts and residents of Gaza itself, made it clear that the battle, waged among civilians and between enemies who had long prepared for this fight, is now a slow, nasty business of asymmetrical urban warfare. Gaza's civilians, who cannot flee because the borders are closed, are "the meat in the sandwich," as one United Nations worker said, requesting anonymity.

It is also clear that both sides are evolving tactics to the new battlefield, then adjusting them quickly.

To that end, Israeli intelligence is detaining large numbers of young Gazan men to interrogate them for local knowledge and Hamas tactics. Last week, Israel captured a hand-drawn Hamas map in a house in Al Atatra, near Beit Lahiya, which showed planned defensive positions for the neighborhood, mine and booby trap placements, including a rigged gasoline station, and directions for snipers to shoot next to a mosque. Numerous tunnels were marked.

A new Israeli weapon, meanwhile, is tailored to the Hamas tactic of asking civilians to stand on the roofs of buildings so Israeli pilots will not bomb. The Israelis are countering with a missile designed, paradoxically, not to explode. They aim the missiles at empty areas of the roofs to frighten residents into leaving the buildings, a tactic called "a knock on the roof."

But the most important strategic decision the Israelis have made so far, according to senior military officers and analysts, is to approach their incursion as a war, not a police operation.

Civilians are warned by leaflets, loudspeakers and telephone calls to evacuate battle areas. But troops are instructed to protect themselves first and civilians second.

Officers say that means Israeli infantry units are going in "heavy." If they draw fire, they return it with heavy firepower. If they are told to reach an objective, they first call in artillery or airpower and use tank fire. Then they move, but only behind tanks and armored bulldozers, riding in armored personnel carriers, spending as little time in the open as possible.

As the commander of the army's elite combat engineering unit, Yahalom, told the Israeli press on Wednesday: "We are very violent. We do not balk at any means to protect the lives of our soldiers." His name cannot be published under censorship rules.

"Urban warfare is the most difficult battlefield, where Hamas and Islamic Jihad have a relative advantage, with local knowledge and prepared positions," said Jonathan Figchel of Is-

rael's International Institute for Counterterrorism. " Hamas has a doctrine; this is not a gang of Rambos," he said. "The Israeli military has to find the stitches to unpick, how to counter-balance and surprise."

Israeli troops are moving slowly and, they hope, unpredictably, trying not to stay in one place for long to entice Hamas fighters "to come out and confront them," Mr. Fighel said.

Today, he said, "the mind-set from top to bottom is fight and fight cruel; this is a war, not another pinpoint operation."

Israeli officials say that they are obeying the rules of war and trying hard not to hurt noncombatants but that Hamas is using civilians as human shields in the expectation that Israel will try to avoid killing them.

Israeli press officers call the tactics of Hamas cynical, illegal and inhumane; even Israel's critics agree that Hamas's regular use of rockets to fire at civilians in Israel, and its use of civilians as shields in Gaza, are also violations of the rules of war. Israeli military men and analysts say that its urban guerrilla tactics, including the widespread use of civilian structures and tunnels, are deliberate and come from the Iranian Army's tactical training and the lessons of the 2006 war between Israel and Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Hamas rocket and weapons caches, including rocket launchers, have been discovered in and under mosques, schools and civilian homes, the army says. The Israeli intelligence chief, Yuval Diskin, in a report to the Israeli cabinet, said that the Gaza-based leadership of Hamas was in underground housing beneath the No. 2 building of Shifa Hospital, the largest in Gaza. That allegation cannot be confirmed.

While The New York Times and some other news organizations have local or Gaza-based Palestinian correspondents, any Israeli citizen or Israeli with dual citizenship has been banned for more than two years from entering Gaza, and any foreign correspondent who did not enter the territory before a six-month cease-fire with Hamas ended last month has not been allowed in.

Israel has also managed to block cellphone bandwidth, so very few amateur cellphone photographs are getting out of Gaza.

But Israeli tactics have caused civilian casualties that have created an international uproar, both in the Arab world and the West. In one widely reported episode, 43 people died when the Israelis shelled a street next to a United Nations school in northern Jabaliya where refugees were taking shelter. The United Nations says no militants were in the school.

The Israelis said they returned fire in response to mortar shells fired at Israeli troops. Such an action is legal, but there are questions about whether the force used was proportional under the laws of war, given the danger to noncombatants.

The backlash from the school attack is another potent example of the risks in an urban-war strategy: Israel may in fact be able to dismantle Hamas's military structure even while losing the battle for world opinion and leaving Hamas politically still in charge of Gaza.

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# Iran Warns Hamas Not To Accept Truce

THE JERUSALEM POST—Jan. 12, 2009

Iran is exerting heavy pressure on Hamas not to accept the Egyptian proposal for a cease-fire with Israel, an Egyptian government official said on Sunday.

The official told *The Jerusalem Post* by phone that two senior Iranian officials who visited Damascus recently warned Hamas leaders against accepting the proposal.

His remarks came as Hamas representatives met in Cairo with Egyptian Intelligence Chief Gen. Omar Suleiman and his aides to discuss ways of ending the fighting in the Gaza Strip.

The Hamas representatives reiterated their opposition to a cease-fire that did not include the reopening of all the border crossings into the Gaza Strip, Hamas spokesmen said on Sunday.

The spokesmen said Hamas voiced its strong opposition to the idea of deploying an international force inside the Gaza Strip.



The Egyptian official said that the two Iranian emissaries, Ali Larijani, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, and Said Jalili of the Iranian Intelligence Service, met in the Syrian capital with Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal and Islamic Jihad Secretary-General Ramadan Shallah.

"As soon as the Iranians heard about the Egyptian cease-fire initiative, they dispatched the two officials to Damascus on an urgent mission to warn the Palestinians against accepting it," the Egyptian government official told the *Post*.

"The Iranians threatened to stop weapons supplies and funding to the Palestinian factions if they agreed to a cease-fire with Israel. The Iranians want to fight Israel and the US indirectly. They are doing this through Hamas in Palestine and Hizbullah in Lebanon".

The official pointed out that the Iranians were applying "double standards" regarding the current conflict - on the one hand, they encouraged Iranian men to volunteer to fight alongside Hamas; on the other hand, Iran's spiritual leader, Ali Khamenei, told the volunteers that they would not be permitted to join the fight against Israel.

"The Iranians never fired one bullet at Israel," he said. "But now they are trying to appear as if they are participating in the war against Israel. The leaders of Teheran don't care about the innocent civilians who are being killed in the Gaza Strip".

The Egyptian official accused Iran of "encouraging" Hamas to continue firing rockets at Israel with the hope that this would trigger a war that would divert attention from Iran's nuclear plans.

"This conflict serves the interests of the Iranians," he said. "They are satisfied because the violence in the Gaza Strip has diverted attention from their nuclear ambitions. The Iranians are also hoping to use the Palestinian issue as a 'powerful card' in future talks with the Americans.

"They want to show that they have control over Hamas and many Palestinians".

Karam Jaber, editor of the semi-official Egyptian weekly *Roz Al-Youssef* magazine, said that Hamas was caught between the Syrian anvil and the Iranian hammer. The Iranians, he said, prevented Hamas from negotiating a cease-fire with Israel, while the Syrians were blackmailing and intimidating the Hamas leaders in Damascus.

"History won't forget to mention that Hamas had inflicted death and destruction on the Palestinians," he said. "We hope that Hamas has learned the lesson and realizes that it has been fighting a war on behalf of others. We hope the Hamas leaders will realize that they are fighting a destructive war on behalf of the Iranians and Syrians".

Egyptian political analyst Magdi Khalil said he shared the view of the Palestinian Authority and Egypt that Hamas was responsible for the war in the Gaza Strip. "Ever since Hamas seized control over the Gaza Strip in 2007, they turned the area into hell," he said. "They imposed restrictions on the people there and even prevented them from performing the pilgrimage to Mecca".

The analyst said that the head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service was right when he recently described Hamas as a group of gangsters. "Hamas and its masters in Damascus and Teheran want to spread chaos in Egypt," he said. "They want to solve the problem of the Gaza Strip by handing the area over to Egypt. They want to create a homeland for the Palestinians in Sinai".

He said that Hamas was not only jeopardizing Egypt's national security, but had also destroyed the Palestinians' dream of statehood. "By endorsing the Iranian agenda, Hamas has brought the Iranians to Egypt's eastern border," he said. "Hamas has also copied Hizbullah's policy of entering into pointless adventures".

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# U.N. Agency That Runs School Hit in Gaza Employed Hamas and Islamic Jihad Members

**FOX NEWS—By Joel Mowbray, Wednesday, January 14, 2009:** The United Nations agency that administers a school in Gaza where dozens of civilians were killed by Israeli mortar fire last week has admitted to employing terrorists to work at its Palestinian schools in the past, has no system in place to keep members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad off its payroll, and provides textbooks to children that contain hate speech and other incendiary information.

A growing chorus of critics has taken aim at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in recent years, although momentum on Capitol Hill has been slow. But last week's incident, which Israel maintains was prompted by Hamas operatives firing mortars at Israelis from a location near the school, has prompted some lawmakers to scrutinize the U.N. agency.

Rep. Steve Rothman, D-N.J., introduced a resolution in the fall calling for greater transparency and accountability at UNRWA. The bill called on the agency to make its textbooks available on the Internet for public inspection and to implement "terrorist name recognition software and other screening procedures that would help to ensure that UNRWA staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries are neither terrorists themselves, nor affiliated with known terrorist organizations."

Rothman said he plans to re-introduce his UNRWA resolution in the coming weeks because, "as timely as this bill was before, it is even more timely now. It is urgent that Congress can be assured that U.S. taxpayer money is not being spent to support Hamas and its murderous activities."

A spokesman for UNRWA adamantly said that the agency is now free of terrorist connections. "We're composed of social workers and teachers," the official explained. "We take every step possible to have only civilians inside UNRWA facilities." But the U.N. Personal History form for UNRWA employees does not ask whether someone is a member of, or affiliated with, a terrorist organization such as Hamas or Islamic Jihad. And there is no formal screening to ensure that employees are not affiliated with terrorist entities. Asked about this, the UNRWA spokesman replied, "Palestinian staff sign an undertaking confirming that they have no political affiliations whatsoever, and have not and will not participate in any activities that would violate the neutrality of the U.N." There is no formal enforcement, however, to monitor possible terrorist activities by employees after they sign the pledge at the time of hiring.

UNRWA official Chris Guinness told the Jerusalem Post this week that the agency screens names of new employees against the relatively small U.N. database of Taliban and Al Qaeda figures. Extremist Palestinians, however, are far more likely to belong to organizations, such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, that are not on that watch list.

In 2004, former UNRWA Commissioner-General Peter Hansen told the Canadian Broadcasting Company, "I am sure that there are Hamas members on the UNRWA payroll and I don't see that as a crime." He added, "We do not do political vetting and exclude people



from one persuasion as against another."

There have been several high-profile examples of terrorists being employed by UNRWA. Former top Islamic Jihad rocket maker Awad Al-Qiq, who was killed in an Israeli air strike last May, was the headmaster and science instructor at an UNRWA school in Rafah, Gaza. Said Siyam, Hamas' interior minister and head of the Executive Force, was a teacher for over two decades in UNRWA schools.

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill say they are also concerned that terrorist propaganda is being taught in UNRWA schools. A notebook captured by Israeli officials at the UNRWA school in the Kalandia refugee camp several years ago glorified homicide bombers and other terrorists. Called "The Star Team," it profiled so-called "martyrs," Palestinians who had died either in homicide bombings or during armed struggle with Israel. On the book's back cover was printed the UNRWA emblem, as well as a photo of a masked gunman taking aim while on one knee.

There is evidence that students educated in UNRWA schools are much more likely to become homicide bombers, said Jonathan Halevi, a former Israeli Defense Forces intelligence officer who specializes in Palestinian terrorist organizations. Halevi has spent several years building an extensive database for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs of terrorist attacks by Hamas and other Islamic extremist groups.

Though he cautioned that estimates are tricky because the identity of an attacker is not always made public, Halevi estimated that over 60 percent of homicide bombers were educated in UNRWA schools. By comparison, roughly 25-30 percent of Palestinian students in the West Bank, the origin of almost all homicide bombers since the start of the intifada in 2000, attend UNRWA schools, according to the agency's figures.

A UNRWA spokesman strongly disputed any connection between the agency's schools and a greater likelihood of terrorist activity later in life. As proof, he pointed to UNRWA's "special efforts in our schools to teach tolerance, human rights and peaceful conflict resolution."

UNRWA sent an eight-page brochure to FOXNews.com that speaks about the group's tolerance, human rights and peaceful conflict resolution curriculum. But it makes no mention of tolerance toward Jews or Christians or of peaceful coexistence with Israel. Rather, it is geared toward student interaction, the rights students should expect in society, and learning to express emotions through acting, painting, and storytelling.

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## **UN Compound Shelled In Response To Fire**

JERUSALEM (AFP) — January 15, 2009 - Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told visiting UN chief Ban Ki-moon on Thursday that Israeli troops had shelled a UN compound in Gaza in response to fire coming from the building.

"The Israeli forces were attacked from there and their response was severe," Olmert's office quoted him as telling Ban. "We do not want such incidents to take place and I am sorry for it but I don't know if you know, but Hamas fired from the UNRWA site.

"This is a sad incident and I apologize for it."

## Domestic Commentary:

# A Defensive War - Israel's Determined Enemies Leave It No Option

**Eric Cantor and Steny Hoyer**

*House Republican Whip Eric Cantor represents Virginia's 7th Congressional District.*

*House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer represents Maryland's 5th Congressional District.*

During this difficult war in the Gaza Strip, we stand with Israel. Why? Because we have been to Israel. We have seen Sderot. In August 2005 and again in 2007, we visited the region of southern Israel that includes this embattled Israeli border town. Taken together, the trips helped us define the historical and military context for Israel's current action in Gaza.

Our 2005 visit to Israel took place during the "disengagement" period, when Israel painfully uprooted its military and all Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip. Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon made the decision to leave in spite of significant domestic opposition. We remember how divided Israeli society was, with critics defiantly brandishing orange protest ribbons from their cars. Mr. Sharon's goal, however, was an international show of good faith

to kick-start a moribund peace process by giving the Palestinians what they asked for: full control of Gaza.



The plan collapsed. Israel's good intentions were never reciprocated. Instead of building roads, bridges, schools and industry, Hamas and other terrorists wasted millions turning Gaza into an armory. The already flimsy notion that Palestinian terrorism was a consequence of Israeli occupation -- an article of faith among those currently decrying Israel's "aggression" -- blew up along with the 7,000 indiscriminate rockets Palestinian terrorists began to launch into Israel.

By the time we returned to the border area in 2007, formerly sleepy southern Israeli towns like Sderot were gripped by fear. Each day, scores of rockets pounded the region. It reminded us of how life was paralyzed in the Washington metropolitan area when just a single sniper fired random shots at civilians. But southern Israel was far worse. We remember Israeli families from Sderot describing how every facet of their lives was consumed by the "15-second rule": Each time a rocket was fired from Gaza, the Israeli government sounded a siren indicating 15 seconds to take cover. We were told by Israelis those tasks as simple as taking a

shower or stepping outside to grab a newspaper felt like a game of Russian roulette. We met families whose children had lost the ability to speak, and who no longer had control of their basic bodily functions -- due to the profound and ever-present fear.

Prior to military action, Israel tried a number of other options to stop the rockets, all to no avail. Israel pleaded with Palestinian terror groups to stop their attacks. Israel raised numerous complaints at the United Nations that fell on deaf ears. Israel imposed a blockade of Gaza to deprive Hamas terrorists of the rockets and weapons being used to attack Israel. Israel pressed Egypt to cut down on smuggling tunnels used to deliver rockets and weapons to terrorists. And most recently, Israel worked with Egypt to broker a six-month cease-fire with Hamas.

As Israel negotiated for peace, Hamas built up its weapons supply, acquiring longer-range, more powerful rockets, which are now paralyzing almost 1 million Israelis. Israel's decision to go to war came late last month when Hamas declared that it would not renew the Egyptian-brokered, six-month cease-fire (a cease-fire, it should be noted, that Hamas frequently violated and was urged by Egypt to restore).

In any armed conflict, both sides are obligated by international law to seek to minimize civilian casualties. At a time when far too many civilians are falling victim in this conflict, we urge adherence to this essential principle just as we encourage all sides to ensure that humanitarian relief reaches civilians in Gaza. What distinguishes the two sides, however, is their very aim. While Israel targets military combatants, Hamas aims to kill as many Israeli civilians as possible. Hamas, after all, is one of the Middle East's most notorious terrorist outfits. Since its inception in 1987, it has worked systematically to fulfill the goal laid out in its charter: the destruction of Israel. During the last Intifada, Hamas claimed credit for 52 suicide bombings that killed 288 Israelis, according to Israeli government figures.

A culture that celebrates death is only too happy to sacrifice its own people for the sake of rallying world support. In the heat of war, Hamas is holding true to its indisputable record as it launches rockets from neighborhoods, schools, markets and mosques. This is in stark contrast with Israelis, who drop leaflets and make phone calls to Palestinian civilians in targeted areas, alerting the civilians, but forfeiting the element of surprise.

Like most Americans, we identify strongly with Israel's ongoing, elusive quest to achieve peace and security in a dangerous part of the world. We recognize that by arming and training Hamas, Iran has made this latest Israel-Hamas war a key front in its effort to remake the region in its own radical image.

America would never sit still if terrorists were lobbing missiles across our border into Texas or Montana; and just as we assert our right to defend ourselves, Israel has every right to protect its own citizens from the implacable foes on its borders. Support for Israel in her time of need, from both Democrats and Republicans, is not just the logical choice. It is both a strategic and moral imperative.

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## International Commentary:

# Gaza's True 'Disproportion'

**Carlos Alberto Montaner, Madrid, Spain**—Israelis are being accused of suffering too few casualties in their confrontation with the Hamas terrorists. Those who reason thus usually speak the words "disproportion" or "asymmetry" in an indignant tone. While at this writing close to a thousand Arab Palestinians have died or been wounded as a result of the bombings, the Israeli losses amount to just over a dozen.

Tel Aviv's critics -- from whom an anti-Semitic stench often rises -- do not say whether Israel should increase its quota of cadavers or if it must reduce the Arabs' quota to achieve the reasonable proportion of blood that will soothe the peculiar itch for parity that afflicts them. Nor do they specify the morally permissible number of casualties to end the rain of rockets that for years has been constantly falling on the heads of Israeli civilians.

This demand for "proportionality" can only be called surprising. Until this conflict began, history books everywhere always expressed great satisfaction and a certain chauvinistic pride when a nation's army inflicted on the enemy a large number of casualties, vis-à-vis a trifling price paid by "our boys." Israel is the only country expected to behave differently and, in fact, it does; I know of no other nation that announces where and when it will drop its bombs, thus enabling civilians to evacuate the territory. Of course, in this it behaves asymmetrically, because the Hamas terrorists, forever eager to cause the greatest damage possible, never announce when or where they will launch their rockets against Israel's civilian population.

In turn, Israel has not the slightest interest in causing casualties. All it wants is to stop Hamas' attacks the only way it can: by eliminating the terrorists and destroying their arsenals. There's no other way to deal with them. Hamas is not a political organization with which agreements can be reached, but a fanatical gang intent on wiping Israel off the map. To achieve this objective, its members are even willing to turn their own children into human bombs, just to kill the hated Jews.

Here's another very important asymmetry. The Jews build underground shelters in all houses near the border; they close the schools and hide the children at the least sign of danger; they treat the death of a single soldier as a national tragedy; they do everything possible to rescue their prisoners, and protect the civilian population from the consequences of war. In contrast, the authorities in Gaza, drunk with violence, fire their machine guns irresponsibly into the air to express joy or grief (causing numerous injuries), do not hesitate to install their headquarters or hide their guns in schools, mosques or hospitals, use human shields to protect themselves, turn to suicidal terrorists and reward the families of such "martyrs" with money.

One week before Hamas broke the truce and stepped up its rocket attacks against the Jewish state (the spark that set off this conflict), I was in Israel, where I had been invited to deliver a lecture at the University of Tel Aviv. As part of the contacts organized by my hosts, I visited the Wolfson Medical Center to learn about the program "Save a Child's Heart." I was very

moved. It is a foundation devoted to providing heart surgery for very poor children, most of them from the Arab world. As it happened, I witnessed the hurried arrival of a tiny 5-day-old girl, who had to be operated on at once to keep her from dying. She was brought in by her mother, a woman in a black head covering that allowed me to see only her tear-filled eyes, and her husband, a small, bearded man who watched with amazement the indescribable kindness with which a group of doctors and nurses treated the baby. The family came from Gaza.

Since the war erupted, I have asked myself constantly what became of them all.

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**Carlos Alberto Montaner, Madrid, Spain**

Carlos Alberto Montaner is a Cuban-born writer, journalist, and former professor. He is one of the most influential and widely-read columnists in the Spanish-language media, syndicated in dozens of publications in Latin America, Spain and the United States. He is also vice president of the Liberal International, a London-based federation devoted to the defense of democratic values and the promotion of the market economy. He has written more than twenty books, including *Journey to the Heart of Cuba*; *How and Why Communism Disappeared*; *Liberty, the Key to Prosperity*; and the novels *A Dog's World* and *1898: The Plot*. He is now based in Madrid, Spain.

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