



# NEWS REVIEW

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## NSW Jewish community solidarity with Israel

About 2000 members of the Sydney Jewish community demonstrated their solidarity with Israel at a Gathering for Peace on Sunday night.



Held at Central Synagogue, the function was organized by the State Zionist Council of NSW, the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, Executive Council of Australian Jewry and Zionist Federation of Australia.

The ceremony included Hebrew prayers and psalms, and a moving address by Noga Gulst, an Israeli who is studying in Sydney but formerly lived in Sderot, 1.5kms from Gaza. She described the stress of her children growing up under the shadow of mortars and rockets being fired from Gaza.

Executive Council of Australian Jewry President Robert Goot told the gathering that Hamas' use of women and children as human shields was "a war crime -- nothing more, nothing less. If Israel laid down its arms there would be no Israel. If Hamas and Hezbollah lay down their arms there would be peace," he said.

Eli Yerushalmi, Deputy Chef de Mission at the Israeli Embassy in Canberra, said Israel's conflict is not against the Palestinian people. "Hamas has turned the Gaza Strip into a large ammunition depot," he said.

State Zionist Council of NSW Vice-President Ron Wiseman pointed out that Egypt also shared a border with Gaza and had a responsibility to ensure that Hamas did not violate

that border by smuggling weapons into Gaza.

And NSW Jewish Board of Deputies President Robin Margo said the purpose of the gathering was "not to fan the flames of conflict," but to support Israel's "just, defensive war." Israel's war was against Hamas' terror infrastructure and not the Palestinian people, "and we mourn for each and every civilian casualty, whether they be Israeli or Palestinian", he said.

The gathering also called for the Hamas rockets to cease and for Hamas' smuggling of weapons into Gaza to halt.

## Empathy for sale

**David Burchell | The Australian | 12 January**

Medieval Europeans were titillated by reports of dog-headed men and other far-off monstrosities, but chiefly because they provoked interesting thought experiments (what's human and what's not?). Medieval Muslims were so incurious about the Europeans, they called them all Franks, or Frenchmen, and distinguished them by body smell.

The Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire made much out of the human toll of a catastrophic earthquake in Lisbon, because he believed it proved his arguments for the non-existence of God. There's no evidence he shed any tears.

It's we, the emotional sophisticates of the modern West, who invented the idea of global empathy. On our large-screen televisions we're joined up momentarily with the suffering faces of far-distant innocents, the better to make sense of the sorrows of the world. That's why, when the stories came in last week about the emaciated children discovered beside their dead mothers in a shelled house in Gaza, we immediately visualised the scene in our mind's eye. And our hearts felt a stab, as if these were our own children. Neither geographical distance nor paucity of factual detail is any longer a barrier to our capacity to feel.

Global empathy is one of those illegitimate children of the imperial experience whose origins we like to forget. In the days of the British Empire, Australians greeted reports of distant massacres of British soldiery with a new urgency, as if we too were witness to the Indian Mutiny or overrun by African tribesmen at Mafeking. Even today, the same impulse appears to unite the sympathy of pious Muslims everywhere - towards suffering peoples of their own kind. After the catastrophe of World War I, however, a new generation of critical intellectuals turned the tables on imperial sympathising, rerouting all that emotional energy towards the victims of European colonialism.

This was the generation that took Gandhi, that eminently Western non-Westerner, as its moral hero. But there were few enough Gandhis in the moral history of the 20th century. And so that generation's offspring switched their sympathies to new, more troubling heroes, from Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh to Yasser Arafat. In the process, empathy became, in effect, the handmaiden of ideology. We learned to bestow empathy on those we approved of in our political fantasies, and to withhold empathy, with determined efficiency, from those we did not. We became gymnasts of the heart.

And so the '60s generation wept bitter tears for that young girl, half-alight with napalm, who ran naked down that Vietnamese road. But the curious economy of empathy required them to avert their eyes from the massacre of civilians by the Viet Cong or the barbaric behaviour of North Vietnamese prison guards. Just as, today, we weep bitter tears for those hapless prisoners of war at Guantanamo Bay even as we withhold them from the wretched political inmates of Cuba's Guantanamo Provincial Prison, a few

hundred metres away.

The same complicated moral logic was on evidence in The Netherlands last week when two high-profile Dutch political figures assumed leadership of a demonstration against Israel's invasion of Gaza. Harry van Bommel, a former schoolteacher, serves as Socialist Opposition spokesman on international affairs. Gretta Duisenberg, once a flamboyant socialite, is the socially conscious wife of the former Dutch central bank chief. Each has spoken at great length about the Palestinians' plight. (According to Duisenberg, Israeli rule in Gaza is worse than wartime Nazi rule in Holland.)

And each looked thoroughly comfortable in their skins as they led the crowd in chants of that old party tune, "Intifada, intifada, Palestinian state!" Even as, in the background, their fellow demonstrators could clearly be heard singing the more uninhibited political ditty: " Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas!" And so here they were together: the warm heart of the global conscience and the icy blood of Hamas, united within the same pulsing breast.

For the discriminating empathist, Israel presents special problems as an enemy. After all, it's hard for someone who trades in the currency of sympathy to deny any moral capital whatsoever to a state founded as a refuge for one of the most persecuted peoples on the planet.

The easiest solution to this dilemma is not to ignore the past, but rather to reconfigure it for your own purposes. Hence those familiar formulas, which hardly merit sober political analysis: Zionism equals fascism; Israel equals Nazi Germany; Gaza is a concentration camp; the Palestinians are the new Jews. Indeed, these aren't political slogans in the normal sense. They're a ritual language of degradation, employed to place your defiled opponents beyond the empathetic pale.

When empathy isn't serving as ideology's handmaiden, it puts in overtime as its usher. And while the present wave of sympathy towards the inhabitants of Gaza is no doubt sincerely felt, in some quarters it's also serving to usher in an altogether more pragmatic political calculation. For some time now many Western supporters of the Palestinian cause have been discreetly shifting their political allegiance away from Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority -- whom they mistrust as Western collaborators -- and towards that superlative foe of Western interests, Hamas.

So Britain's The Guardian last week editorialised in favour of reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, to be engineered by withholding EU funds from the West Bank until Fatah submits. The alternative, the paper thundered, was a Fatah "satrap" (that old imperial imagery again!) under Israeli dominion. And editorialists everywhere have been talking about Hamas's military wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, as if they were now the acknowledged spokespeople for Palestinian interests.

Yet, without lubrication from our discriminating tears, this change in political sympathies might be a little hard to swallow. After all, this is the same Hamas whose websites extol the divine achievements of its suicide bombers and whose children's TV exhorts a new generation of martyrs shaped in the same incandescent image. On Hamas's Friday-night TV sermons, the imam likes to recall the perfidy of the Jews towards Mohammed 1300 years ago: a broken pact that, as readers of Ibn Ishaq's biography will know, obliged the prophet to behead an entire Jewish tribe with his sword. Hamas, demonstrably, does not trouble itself much with the politics of empathy beyond the confines of its own kind.

And so, having elevated empathy to a universal faculty, it seems we've come full circle. Now we're willing to authorise any kind of exotic political creed, with any kind of consequences, so long as it promises to rid us of the spectre of those distant children in

distress.

## Guess who cares about dead Palestinians? Jews!

**Dennis Prager | Townhall.com | 13 January**

For those individuals - such as nearly all members of the world news media -- who, in light of Israel's invasion of Gaza - see moral equivalence between Israel and the Palestinians, here are some clarifying thoughts.

First, it would be difficult nearly to the point of impossibility, to find Israeli or other Jews who celebrate the deaths of Palestinian civilians. Jews both within and outside of Israel cringe when they see pictures of dead Palestinian men, women, and children in Gaza. For thousands of years at their Passover seders, Jews have removed wine from their cups to ceremonially weep for the Egyptians - their erstwhile slave owners for 400 years - who died during the Jews exodus. Jews have never stopped weeping for enemies.

The opposite is the case with the large majority of Palestinians. It would be quite difficult to find many Palestinians who do not celebrate the deaths of Israeli Jews or non-Israeli Jews. This is not only reflected in Palestinian polls that show majority support for terrorism - and terrorism means killing innocent Jews - it is also reflected in Palestinian media, Palestinian schools, and Palestinian mosques that routinely glorify murderers of Jews, and refer to all Jews as monkeys and the like.

Take for example, Palestinian reaction to the 2001 Palestinian terror bombing of a Jerusalem Sbarro pizzeria in which 15 Jews, five of whom were two sets of parents and their children, were murdered and an additional 130 people were injured, some permanently maimed.

As reported by the Associated Press, a month later, Palestinian university students opened an exhibition that included a grisly re-enactment of that mass murder. The students built a replica of the Sbarro pizzeria, with fake blood, splattered pizza, a plastic hand dangling from the ceiling, and a fake severed leg wearing jeans and a bloody black sneaker.

The exhibit also includes a large rock in front of a mannequin wearing the black hat, black jacket and black trousers typically worn by ultra-Orthodox Jews. A recording from inside the rock calls out: O believer, there is a Jewish man behind me. Come and kill him, paraphrasing a verse in the Koran. It became a popular tourist attraction for Palestinians, to which Palestinian parents took their little children.

Here is the question: Can anyone even imagine Jews, in Israel or anywhere else on earth - no matter how right-wing they are politically or religiously - doing something analogous to celebrate the death of Palestinian civilians? I have spoken to Jewish groups on both U.S. coasts since the Israeli invasion of Gaza, and when the subject of Palestinian civilian deaths is mentioned, all I hear is regret and sadness.

This moral chasm that separates Israel from its enemies, and separates the Jews from their enemies, merely confirms what Hamas repeatedly says about itself: We love death more than the Jews love life. This motto is so true that Hamas not only doesn't weep for dead Israelis, it doesn't weep for dead Palestinians. It uses living Palestinians as human shields and uses dead Palestinians as propaganda. The moral disequilibrium is such that Jews weep for dead Palestinian far more than Hamas does.

The second point to be raised is about perspective. If during World War II, Western news

media had reported German and Japanese civilian casualties in the same detail and with the same sympathy they report Palestinian civilian casualties in Gaza, it is doubtful that the Nazis and the Japanese militarists would have lost that war. Certainly, at the very least, the anti-Nazi, anti-Fascist war effort would have been severely compromised.

The analogy is entirely apt. Hamas is on the same moral level as the two World War II enemies. Do those who condemn Israel for its attacks on Hamas fighters that have tragically resulted in hundreds of civilian Palestinian deaths also condemn the Allied bombings of German and Japanese military targets that resulted in far more civilian deaths? I suspect not since most critics of Israel still regard World War II as a moral war. The overriding issue, therefore, is whether fighting Hamas is moral. If it is, then the unintended death of Palestinian civilians is a tragedy, not an evil (except on the part of Hamas, because it situates its fighters and its missiles among civilians, including schools).

Third, if Hamas had the same ability to bomb Israel as Israel has to bomb Gaza, would the number of Jewish civilians be in the hundreds? Or would there be the Holocaust in Israel that Hamas and its Iranian sponsors dream of?

The answer is so obvious that this consideration alone renders moral Israel's war to destroy Hamas. In a short period of time Hamas will have more accurate missiles and longer-range ones. One of them could kill a thousand or more. Another one could destroy passenger planes coming into Ben-Gurion Airport, thereby causing foreign airlines to stop flying into Israel. It is that inevitability that Israel is fighting to prevent. But in the morally confused world we live in, only with thousands of Israelis dead, would Israel's invasion of Gaza be proportional, and therefore acceptable. But Israel is more interested in living with world condemnation than in dying with world sympathy.

## Hamas prefers war as an alternative

**Dr Sami Alrabaa | National Post Canada | 12 January**

Once again some of us Arabs are as usual in a big mess. The Islamist extremist group Hamas, which came to power in 2006 through an un-Islamic political process, namely democratic election, has since hijacked Gaza, established its rocket factories in residential areas, in bunkers under mosques, schools and hospitals. Over the past three years, the Hamas jihadis and their affiliates have frequently targeted their Kassam rockets at residential areas in Israel. Even during the ceasefire brokered by Egypt in 2008, Hamas shot their rockets at Israel. On top of all these, Hamas, like the PLO before the Oslo Accords, rejects the existence of Israel, a UN member state. Its ultimate aim is liberating all Palestine, which includes Israel, by wiping out the Jewish state from the world map and possibly by genocidal massacre or deportation of all Jewish people.

The "struggle" of Hamas is backed by Islamists across the globe, by state-controlled media of the Arab world, and by one-eyed anti-war campaigners in the West. Ban Ki-Moon, the Secretary General of the UN, has condemned the latest Israeli military operations in Gaza as "disproportionate".

All these organizations and groups have voraciously consumed the Hamas propaganda; they allege that the Israeli blockade has caused abject misery in Gaza, people there are starving. Some compare Gaza to a huge prison, to Holocaust. But who is to blame for all this calamity?

Israeli politicians have repeatedly stated that once Hamas stops its terrorist activities and launching of missiles, the blockade would be lifted. The Israeli cabinet even approved aid convoys into Gaza despite Hamas' continued shooting rockets. The Hamas leadership

ignored such conciliatory Israeli gestures and carried on the rocket-attacks on residential areas in Israel.

We Arabs are very good at twisting facts and exaggerating them, when it suits us. Mustafa Barghouthi, a Fatah activist, told CNN that "It was Israel which broke the ceasefire with Hamas." Buthaina Sha'ban, a Syrian cabinet minister, called the recent Israeli attacks on Hamas' military targets "the most atrocious Holocaust in the history of mankind"

We Arabs also prefer to be mystical, wishful rather than realistic. Waleed Al Tabtaba'i, an Islamist member of the Kuwaiti parliament, hoped that Allah would come to rescue the Gazans as he did with his prophet Muhammad in all his raids against the infidels. Yusuf Al Qaradhawi, the renowned radical Islamic cleric, told the Al Jazeera TV that "We Muslims, we are a bunch of donkeys if we do not stand up and fight the Israelis and their supporters wherever they are."

Hamas and its affiliates are feeding on wishful thinking. They believe that an escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will bring them closer to their aim: Arabs and Muslims will take to the street and urge their governments to take action against Israel. Islamists in Iran and Indonesia have registered themselves to fight Jihad against the Jews.

We Arabs have learned nothing from the two major disastrous wars against Israel. Some of us still believe that the Israelis understand only the language of defiance and violence. Violence is the only "argument" we possess. Rational, realistic thinking has never been a part of our discourse and action.

Especially Islamists, they rejoice at the on-going maiming and killing in Gaza, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. None of those Hamas-sympathizers has ever condemned the atrocities inflicted upon innocent people, arbitrarily killed in these countries by suicide bombers in the name Islam.

In Arabic we say, Ja'ja'a bila taheen" (It is all noise without flour). We Arabs are most boisterous, shrill people, but less effective or inclined to seeking pragmatic, workable solutions.

According to a clandestine survey by Bielefeld University conducted in Syria and Egypt (2006), over 70% of the population in these countries want peace with Israel. They are "sick and tired", as many put it, of the belligerent discourse of the Islamists and the biased and instigatory propaganda of their national media. They, of course, don't dare say that openly.

Khaled, who wants to be identified by his first name only, told me, "Our leaders and their affiliates suffer from some kind of personality disorder. They keep us busy with Israel to distract from their failure to establish democracy and remove poverty. They also support radical organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah as tools to keep that distraction alive."

Fatima said, "Israel left South Lebanon and Gaza. Yet, for Hezbollah and Hamas this is not enough. What do these people want? They are making the life of their people and ours miserable. We feel hijacked by these murderers. We want peace."

Hamas and its affiliates are among the bloodiest in the history of mankind. They do not value human life. They deliberately provoked the Israeli offensive and were aware that that would cause death to hundreds of civilians living in areas where Hamas had stored its rockets. Hamas leadership has been banking on images of death and destruction as a means to rally support in Arab, Muslim, and Western streets.

According to a recent opinion poll, conducted by Emnid Institute in Germany, more than 80% of the German population blame Hamas for the high toll of deaths among civilians in Gaza. One interviewee put it this way, "Hamas is acting like armed criminals who have barricaded themselves among innocent civilians and arbitrarily fire at people around them. As the criminals adamantly refused to stop shooting, the police had no other choice but to storm the area to catch the criminals, or kill them. Unfortunately, several innocent people were killed. You can not blame the death of innocent people on the police. It is the criminals to blame for all this." Israel must carry on its offensive until the Hamas leaders surrender. There is no peace without sacrifice. All Israelis and decent Arabs would be grateful to the Israeli army if it rids us from those thugs. We want to live in peace.

In view of the fact that Kuwait and Lebanon allow relatively higher freedom of speech, columnists like Ahemd Al Sarraf, Ali Al Baghli, Hasssan El Essa, Fouad Al Hashem, and Khaleel Haidar in these countries have blasted Hamas and the Islamists for the calamity in Gaza.

The Arab world has never experienced any semblance of political freedom and stability. Since independence over the last half of the 20th century, the Arabs have been ruled by despots, either military or hereditary. Demonstrations are basically forbidden; calls for political reforms are ruthlessly squashed. But when people demonstrate against a foreign powers—Israel or the USA, for instance—they are then most welcome.

The Syrian regime even allowed a hand-picked group of people to protest against the Egyptian embassy for not opening the border with Gaza. The Egyptian government also allowed demonstrations against the Israeli strikes against Hamas, while the authoritarian regime of Husni Mubarak deals with demonstrators for political reforms ruthlessly. The Arab regimes have always projected the "Palestinian cause"—the "Wound of all Arabs" or the "Nakba" (calamity) as some Arabs prefer to call it—as a pretext to keep the people distracted from calls for political and economic reforms at home. The occupation of Iraq and the rise of Islamism have provided Arab regimes with new opportunities to defer socio-political reforms.

Besides, Arab regimes, such as the Egyptian, Syrian and Saudi governments, have appeased Islamists by antagonizing the same enemy, namely Israel and the USA, at least in the media. The radicals have stopped their arbitrary attacks in these countries; instead, they cross borders to wage Jihad against the foreign infidel enemy: in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

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All that being said, the road to democracy, freedom and liberty in the Arab world will yet be long one; the Arabs will still have to wait for decades before they can enjoy these basic rights of man.

In the meantime, the name of the game in the Arab world remains demagoguery, irrationalism, political schizophrenia, defiance and violence.

[Dr. Sami Alrabaa is a Professor of Sociology and an Arab/Muslim culture specialist. Before moving to Germany he taught at Kuwait University, King Saud University and Michigan State University]

## Gaza doesn't make antisemitism OK

The Israeli Foreign Ministry has expressed "concern and revulsion" at reports of attacks on Jews worldwide in the wake of Israel's current operation in Gaza.

"We have received with great concern and revulsion many reports of physical, moral, verbal and other manifestations of antisemitic attacks towards Jews and Israeli citizens in many parts of the world," Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said in a statement released on Monday evening. "Examples of these include physical assault, violence and abuse towards Jews, the desecration of cemeteries and synagogues, the use of antisemitic incitement in pro-Palestinian demonstrations, the writing of antisemitic graffiti on Jewish property, as well as cartoons, editorials and other press stories reminiscent of the kind that appeared in the media of certain countries during the darkest days of the early 20th century".

In Britain, France and Sweden there have been reports of attacks on Jews and Jewish communal buildings. Firebombs have been hurled at a synagogue in Paris, and an arson attempt was made on a synagogue in north London. There have also been a number of cases of physical assault. Livni said in her statement that difference of opinion over the Gaza operation could not be used as an excuse for the legitimisation of antisemitism.

The Foreign Ministry called on governments around the world to "condemn, suppress and curb" the outbreak of antisemitic attacks against Jews in the wake of the military operation in Gaza.