

Moral Outrage against Israel

By Yair Miller

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Last weekend saw the announcement of a unilateral Cease-Fire by Israel in the tiny sliver of land know as the Gaza Strip. It was followed a few hours later by a similar declaration by Hamas, limited however to seven days.

No rational person could question that the human tragedy surrounding the fighting in Gaza has been enormous. Innocent people have undoubtedly suffered greatly. All civilian populations do in a theatre of war. And the civilian suffering has been compounded in this case by manifestly negligent lack of planning and civil management by the leadership of the Palestinians – over many years. Tens of millions of dollars of international aid, and money transferred by Israel through a tax agreement, instead of being applied to build institutions and a functioning society, has been used to line the pockets of corrupt officials, to fight an internal civil war, to indoctrinate yet another generation against Israel and the West, and to prepare for military aggression against Israel, in breach of existing agreements.

Israel has attempted to minimize injury to civilians in Gaza to the best of its ability. Is there any other case that can be found where an army, in the midst of battle, has agreed to a three-to-four hour cease fire on each day of the conflict to allow the flow of aid, thereby prejudicing its military operations and troops in the field? Can anyone point to another case where an army has gone to the lengths of notifying civilians of impending military activity by not only letter-drop but by calling individual households and mobile phones in the affected area?

This is in stark contrast to the Hamas leaders, who have deliberately and cynically used their own population as a massive civilian shield in direct contravention of the Geneva Conventions. They have used hospitals, mosques and schools as military bases, weapons stores and launch areas. This has even involved the buildings and schools of the United Nations. As Hamas representative to the Palestinian National Assembly, Fathi Hamad, said in February last year:

“For the Palestinian people death became an industry, at which women excel and so do all people on this land: the elderly excel, the Jihad fighters excel, and the children excel. Accordingly [Palestinians] created a human shield of women, children, the elderly and the Jihad fighters against the Zionist bombing machine, as if they were saying to the Zionist enemy: We desire death as you desire life”.

The complexity and depth of this conflict are often overlooked or over simplified. The media often dramatically simplify their reporting due to time constraints or lack of background knowledge. Those in the media who do take the time to research and give an honest view of events achieve more balance and nuance. As *Time* journalist, Tim McGirk, recently wrote:

“... there's something tragic, too, in Israel's predicament: in any confrontation with its enemies, it is damned if it does and doomed if it doesn't”.

In that one sentence, McGirk summed up what so many others have failed to, or chosen not to, realise. This is not a simple story. This is not a one-sided conflict or a single-dimension issue. There is no automatic wrong or right in this saga. There is human tragedy on both sides - a Palestinian mother mourns the death of her child and an Israeli mother mourns the death of hers.

Why then is Israel singled out for moral outrage?

Why have there been protests on the street about the suffering of innocent Palestinians for the last three weeks and none for the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Israeli's who have had to endure over 8,000 rocket attacks in the last few years? The Palestinian Civilian Death toll currently stands at about 650 according to the United Nations (or about one third of about 1300 casualties according to the Israelis.

Why protests and outrage at the suffering of the Palestinians when there has been none for the suffering of tens of thousands suffering because of a deadly cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe – an outbreak that could have been avoided but has been denied by a tyrannical despot? The death toll from this preventable and treatable disease had reached 2,225 according to the United Nations last week.

Why hundreds of column inches and thousands of dollars wasted on paid adverts reporting the suffering of Palestinians when there has been no comparable reporting of the unthinkable situation in Darfur and the Sudan which still sees thousands murdered and millions turned into homeless refugees? The death toll there is currently possibly as high as 400,000 people according to the United Nations.

We also need to be wary of the use of the word civilian casualties. As Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz recently wrote:

“There is a vast difference – both moral and legal – between a 2-year-old who is killed by an enemy rocket and a 30-year-old civilian who has allowed his house to be used to store Katyusha rockets. Both are technically civilians, but the former is far more innocent than the latter. There is also a difference between a civilian who merely favors or even votes for a terrorist group and one who provides financial or other material support for terrorism.”

The conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis is a human tragedy and has lead to deaths and trauma on both sides over many decades. It is a tragedy that is not going to be solved by inadequately founded accusations, by a lack of critical thinking and questioning or by the acceptance of any one narrative or account without thorough evaluation and understanding.

Israel is an open and democratic society where such discussion and debate occurs on a daily basis. It is a society where the media and academics can research and report freely – without fear of persecution. The same cannot be said, unfortunately, of most of the Arab world which regularly produces reports, narrative, commentary and accusations that are exaggerated, fabricated or inadequately substantiated.

The next time you feel inclined to accuse Israel of being a murderous, colonial apartheid state, please take some time to do real research, thinking, analysis and even soul searching before coming up with your answers. Israel, as with any other country in the world, is open to criticism and actions that are not always correct – but she and her citizens and soldiers should be judged by the same standards as any other country's – no better or worse.

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