
Exclusive : The Gaza Lesson Plan : Our Insane View of the Conflict

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The Israelis have withdrawn from Gaza seemingly faster than they entered it. This particular round of violence between Hamas and Israel is over. Yet judging from what the international press has printed, and what the academia has published, I fear our present debate over Israel and the Gaza Strip transcends collegiate-level discourse, and trespasses on the emotionally irrational and intellectually infantile.

Historical precedent is nonexistent. Palestine, the ancient home of Jewish peoples, has been conquered and subjugated by Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines, Franks, Arabs, Ottomans, and the British Crown ' amongst others ' but is now 'occupied by the Zionist entity.' Israel, it seems, is an unparalleled example of supremacist colonialism. Lesson No. 1: World history started in 1948.

Relativity is abundant. God, as it were, apparently told the patriarch Abraham that the Jews could have Palestine. Centuries later, God, wheelin' and dealin' as always, sends the winged-stallion Buraq to lead his noble warrior-messenger Muhammad on a 'night journey' across the sky, Aladdin-style. The flying horse takes a rest stop at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Walah! ' the Islamic claim to the neighborhood is born.

These two divinely-guaranteed, irreconcilable real estate deals are, on their face, equally illogical. But whether in a New York Times op-ed piece, the BBC green room, or a post-modern Western faculty lounge, the Judeo-Christian claim brings rolled-eyes; the Islamic, all the 'respect' and 'deference' mandated by multicultural etiquette. Where else in the world do we consider granting an unsubstantiated theological claim territorial dominion and state sovereignty? Where else is the supernatural considered the geopolitical? Lesson No. 2: Pat Robertson is, in fact, nuts; Hamas killer and detonations-expert Ismail Haniyeh, however, is a theological scholar.

Concerns about 'occupation' are selective. China swallowed up Tibet. Greek Cyprus was ransacked by the Turkish. Morocco controls the Western Sahara. Syria occupied Lebanon for three decades, killing its bravest and brightest. Egypt occupied Gaza, Jordan the West Bank. Kurdistan is the property of four states. Russia has yet to hand over the Kurile Islands back to the Japanese from World War II.

The whole history of state relations is littered with examples where a perpetually defeated adversary acquiesces and concedes because, to the sane and sober, a settled resolution is preferable to unending war. Germany reconciled itself to the loss of Prussia. Armenia dealt with losing Azerbaijan; Azerbaijan, the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh. Indonesia gave up East Timor; Tanzania, large swaths of Uganda; the Serbs, and their beloved Kosovo; Argentina gave up the Falklands.

The West Bank, Gaza, southern Lebanon, and the Golan were all captured by Israel ' and subsequently withdrawn from ' as 'buffers,' after a defensive war others started. It seems only the Arab world thinks these rules don't apply. Everywhere else on the planet, lost territory is the bastard child of losing a conflict you started ' let alone as an oil-rich subcontinent, humiliated in a half-dozen wars against tiny, barren Israel.

But no, not here, not in the Middle East. The Madrid Conferences, Oslo I and II, the Hebron Agreement, the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, the Camp David summits, the 'Road Map,' the Taba diplomacy, the talks at Annapolis, etc., are all prerequisites to attacking the Israelis. In this moral calculus, when a PLO leader is offered 97% of what he demands, like Arafat was offered in 2000, the natural counteroffer is an immediate intifada. Lesson No. 3: The only ongoing 'occupations' Americans should care about are the 'illegal' ones in Iraq ' legalized by Res. 1546, 1637, 1723, of course ' and in Hamas-controlled, Israeli-vacant Gaza.

Moans and whines over 'atrocities' expose misplaced moral outrage. Russia raids Muslim Grozny, massacring everyone. Syria bulldozes the Muslim city of Hama, flattening more than 10,000. Jordan green-lights Black September, killing upwards to 25,000 Palestinian nomads. Angry Kuwaitis ethnically cleanse a third of a million Palestinians, after their 1990-'91 alliance with Saddam Hussein. Nothing much is said anywhere, by anyone. One could go on for hours detailing Arab atrocities committed against the Middle East's own unfortunate 'untouchables' ' the Palestinian people ' whereby the region's leaders are their brethren in rhetoric, their overlords and oppressors in practice.

Yet a few dozen Hamas hoods are mowed down by Israelis in the town Jenin, and we have 'Jeningrad.' A few hundred Hamas dead? 'Palestinian holocaust.' Lesson No. 4: We are to reserve our brave criticism of slaughter only when it is committed by the under-siege democracy which purposefully attempts to avoid it, which does so the least, most infrequent, and most reluctantly; only when committed by those who can legitimately call it self-defense and counterterrorism.

Intentions mean nothing, 'proportionality' everything. Israel's precision-guided missiles are targeted at Hamas leaders, like the late Nizar Rayan (now in paradise). Hamas fires rockets at Israeli civilian centers indiscriminately with intent on killing as many non-combatants as possible, and then hides behind the human shields of their own families and civilian population ' both of which are war crimes, in their own right.

Anyone who has studied the basics of intentionalist and consequentialist ethics can decipher the moral difference more or less immediately: one seeks to kill unsuspecting civilians in peace, the other avoids civilians in war ' indeed, going so far as to endanger the lives of their own to avoid civilian deaths. With Israel and the international press, however, this distinction has gone the way of the dinosaur. That standard is so everybody else. (And I mean, what kind of standard is it, really, if the Jews are not held to another one?)

Rather, for Israel, abstract notions of 'proportionality' are more in vogue. The logic goes something like this: the Palestinians have suicide-vests and the occasional rock-thrower, the Israelis have a deadly Westernized-military (the beneficial fruits of an alliance with the Great Satan). Therefore, since the Israelis invariably kill more than their weaker adversaries, they are engaging in 'disproportionate' measures. Of course, according to this mode of thinking, by 1944-'45 it was the surrounded Axis powers who were in the right; the far deadlier Allies, in the wrong.

The lethality of weaponry cannot be separated from the morality of the society which devises and fields the arsenal itself: if the Dark Age theocrats in Hamas were open to secular inquiry, scientific deliberation, and equal-opportunity egalitarianism, they too would be able to offer their people weapons of far greater worth. Ironically, such liberality would defang the Palestinian polity to such an extent that they

would, alas, put down their weapons and begin to conduct themselves like every other defeated adversary in history Lesson No. 5: The justification for Israel's wars rest no longer on issues such as culpability, or questions as to who struck first, but rather on a strange tit-for-tat fairness, whereby Israel must not kill a lot ' or get killed that much either ' lest they exercise the full might and potential of their arms, and actually go do something crazy like triumph over their enemies.

Victimization is paramount. In 2005, the international community gave Gazans everything they requested: an Israeli withdrawal, economic assistance, and free and fair elections. In return, the Palestinians democratically elected anti-democratic Jihadists who swore they would demolish the democratic mechanisms that brought them to power ' and in 2007, they did just that. Hamas subsequently declared a temporary 'truce' (or hunda) with Israel, the country their founding charter swears to destroy.

Since then, it's been rocket attacks on the Israelis all day, nearly every day. Tyrants like Hamas, of course, need external enemies to maintain internal vulnerability, and to keep a lid on any possible dissent. Who better than Israel? When confronted with an enraged populace, it is far easier to publicly blame one's own self-induced failures on the Israelis, even as on the sidelines Hamas feebly asks the evil Jews for their chemotherapy and dialysis machines.

Hamas blows up innocents with impunity, and then boasts to its domestic audience for doing so. But to the international news cameras, they give us crocodile-tears as Israeli war planes rein hell over their safe-houses. Poor babies, huh? To quote Victor Davis Hanson, 'At least the Japanese militarists did not cry out to the League of Nations for help once mean Marines landed on Iwo Jima.' Lesson No. 6: One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter ' regardless of any terrorist tactics used, or the 'freedom fighter's' own totalitarian views and objective hatred of democratic ideals. In this view, the downtrodden Samir Kuntar, who crushes Israeli toddler's skulls, is more Mandela than Zarqawi, more Lech Walesa than bin Laden. Western holy-rollers like Rick Warren are bigoted threats to secular liberal democracy, yet murderous, homophobic, religiously fanatic, rabid anti-Semite racists like Khalid Mashal are merely the oppressed 'other' lashing out at the excesses of Western globalization.

These are just some of the peculiar academic views regarding the current situation in Gaza. I do not expect them to change, nor does anyone who has any sense of moral and political clarity. Until then, our allies in Israel will be held to a different standard than everyone else in a comparable position. We have these historical precedents, but not the intellectual capacity, moral fiber, and backbone to state them aloud. What a shame.

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