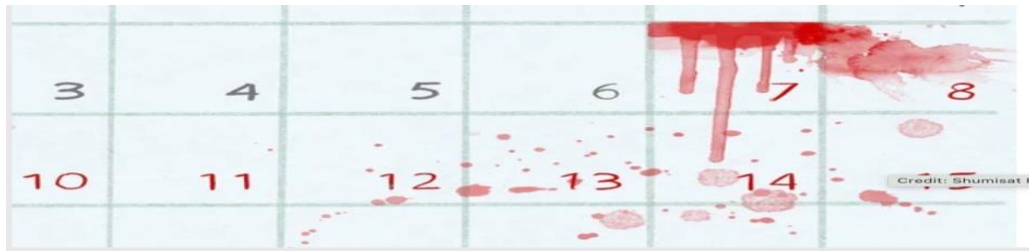


Special Report 96, Israel Under Attack



Genocide?

A recent correspondent addressed an issue on many people's minds:

"I have to admit something to you ... I have so many mixed feelings and, if I do as a committed Israel supporter, I can't expect better from others. I worry so much about world opinion, even if much of it is misguided. I'm just not one that feels that being critical of Israel is because of anti-Semitism. I'm far from an anti-Semite. But Israel's conduct in the war is increasingly hard to defend. Is it really what it claims to be, 'the most moral military in the world'?"

My response:

No doubt, Israelis are not the only ones to suffer in the course of the present conflict in Gaza. Many thousands of Gaza civilians are suffering too. Their homes have been destroyed; they have been displaced; food and water are scarce and the ramshackle houses or tents in which they are forced to live during the cold winter months are, at best, poor shelters. No one should be indifferent to their suffering.

The difference is that suffering on both sides of the conflict has been brought on by Hamas' cynical cruelty and radical extremism. This suffering is premeditated by Hamas, which views it as a tool in its paraphernalia of war, the goal of which is the utter extermination of the State of Israel and its citizenry. The IDF, on the other hand, is defending Israeli civilians from the kind of barbaric attacks Hamas has vowed to perpetuate "again and again and again" while exerting itself at the cost of its own troops in a consistent effort to avoid or at least reduce Palestinian civilian casualties.

Like most Israelis, I served in the IDF reserves for many years. I can affirm without a moment's hesitation that IDF commanders as well as its soldiers, on principle and not due to international pressure or President Biden's demands, go above and beyond anything any army has ever done to avoid Palestinian civilian casualties, although many of the civilians in Gaza are far from innocent. Many of them voted for Hamas in 2006, supported Hamas ever since, aided Hamas on October 7, and celebrated every time Hamas killed or injured an Israeli. One needs only to recall the thrill in the voice of the Gaza mother whose son called to tell her he had murdered 10 Israelis, or visit the homes of thousands of Gaza civilians, in which weaponry and attack shafts were found, or who held abductees. Thousands of them sent incendiary ballots onto Israeli fields, hid Hamas militants as they crept up to the border to lay mines, and so on. A high percentage of those employed in Israel turned out to be scouts for Hamas — their information served Hamas well on October 7.

Still, Israeli soldiers would never knowingly kill or maim civilians except in the rare cases when, under the rules of war, there was an absolute military justification. Repeated Israel Air Force attacks were called off at the last moment. Repeated assassinations of terrorists were stalled due to the presence of unarmed civilians.

I can go further. Even if the Israel Government or senior IDF officers ordered IDF troops to act differently, they would refuse. I can personally testify to that: I was the senior fighting medic in a scouting unit, one third of whom were officers. There was a situation in which it seemed like we were about to be ordered into a densely populated area and our objective would entail a disproportionate number of civilian casualties. Just about every single man in the unit informed our commanding officer that, if ordered to attack, we would lay down our weapons and march off to prison. That is the *esprit de corps* of the IDF. There were, are and will be exceptions. Mistakes will be made. The heart of battle often leaves little room for hesitation, and the regrettable consequence is sometimes the loss of civilian life. But I am proud of the IDF and confident of its moral stance.

As far as the numbers of casualties Hamas' Ministry of Health reports, given its reputation and previous experience, I will be extremely surprised if the numbers are not inflated. Even if they are not, some 9,000 of the casualties are known to be Hamas militants — about a third of the total. Hamas is estimated to have 30,000 fighters, buttressed by Islamic Jihad's 10,000. By way of comparison, during the US's effort to retake Mosul (Iraq) from ISIS, *The Independent* reported some 40,000 civilian casualties, 10,000 of them by US bombardments, 1,260 in the course of the fight to free the city from 3-5,000 ISIS militants (some say 9,000). Estimates at the time referred to a cost of \$50 billion to reconstruct the city once fighting subsided. No effort was made to relocate civilians before the city was attacked. Israel, on the other hand, developed elaborate means by which to forewarn civilians of impending attacks so as to enable them to remove to safer areas, even though this meant that Hamas was likewise warned.

Some of you, my readers, you know me personally and are aware of my moral sensitivities. I would never — but never! — back my country if I had the slightest doubt of the morality of its conduct. I have been critic; of Israel's political stances precisely on moral grounds. Our present Government is intransigent and has treated Palestinian political aspirations poorly. I fear God, who forbade the destruction even of the enemy's fruit trees in the course of war. But I do not hesitate to support Israel's present, military actions in Gaza. Where Israel fails — again — is in the present Government's refusal to think ahead, of Gaza in terms of Palestinian aspirations for the future.

Gaza

Intense fighting is being conducted in Khan Yunis both above and underground. In one instance, 21 Israeli soldiers were killed when a house in which they were operating collapsed due to a targeted explosion. Hamas continues to use hospitals as staging grounds and shooting positions. Thirty abductees held in the El Nassar hospital were moved shortly before Israeli troops approached the hospital grounds. Ambulances are used for the transport of militants and weapons.

Israel surprised Hamas by approaching the city from the west, rather than the north, where the IDF operated for the last three months. As a result of the military pressure Hamas is experiencing, the organization expressed its willingness to consider Israel's proposal of an extended pause in hostilities and the release of many Palestinian militants in exchange for the release of elderly, women and wounded abductees, and the remaining children. There are rumors that Israel has also offered senior Hamas leadership the option of exile to any country willing to receive them in exchange for the remainder of the abductees.

Rafah, on the border with Egypt, is the last Hamas stronghold and has not yet been subject to attack. This smaller city is highly important to Hamas because it is the gateway – again, both above and under ground – for the provision of weaponry smuggled into the Strip, as well as a source of income because Hamas taxes all goods brought in legally and sells many of the goods smuggled through the tunnels. Its proximity to Egypt renders any attack on the city highly sensitive and may well require Egyptian cooperation, or at least assent.

Hamas published a pamphlet in which it seeks to justify the October 7 massacre, claiming Israel has no right to self-defense and calling upon Palestinians in the West Bank to rise up and follow the example set on that day. It cynically denies atrocities were committed on the grounds that “the Koran forbids attacks on children, women or the elderly” (while they continue to hold abductees who exactly fit that description, not to speak of the other barbaric actions their jubilant militants recorded).

[Iran in Syria and Lebanon](#)

Israel continues to eliminate senior Iranian military commanders serving Iran's efforts to surround Israel by means of trained, armed and directed proxies such as Hamas in Lebanon, Syria and the west Bank, the Hezbollah and the Houthis.