

War on Gaza: Israeli Action, Not Reaction

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Stubbornly insisting on getting the carriage before the horse as the approach to a “durable and sustainable” ceasefire in Gaza Strip, U.S. and European diplomacy in particular is building on an Israeli misleading premise that the 22 - day military operation, dubbed “Cast Lead,” against the Palestinian Gaza Strip was a reaction and not a premeditated long planned scheme that found in the change of guards in Washington D.C. an excellent timing. It was “not simply a reaction,” but “a calculation,” Daniel Klaidman wrote in Newsweek on January 10.

U.S. and European diplomats are reiterating the Israeli propaganda justification: “What would any normal country do if they were threatened by rocket fire? They would act.” U.S. President Barak Obama was the last western leader to uphold this Israeli claim. “But Israel is not a normal country, it is an occupying country,” former Palestinian - Israeli member of Knesset Azmi Bishara said. Moreover what country would tolerate an eight -year siege and not consider it an act of war without any national reaction? Why should western diplomacy judge Palestinians in Gaza as universally abnormal.

Western diplomacy is building on the Palestinian reaction in self - defense as the igniting cause of violence and on the Israeli aggressive action as the resulting effect. It is a non starter. It could win EU high representative Javier Solana, the international middle East quartet of peace mediators’ envoy Tony Blair, who are regular visitors to the region, and U.S. newly appointed Middle East envoy George Mitchell some audience among their Arab and Palestinian peace partners who might still hope that the United States and the European Union may yet be able to deliver on their two - state promise, but this audience was not and is still not the key player in Gaza. Israeli and Hamas’ non - abiding reaction to the UN Security Council resolution 1860 proved British Foreign Secretary David Miliband right when he said immediately thereafter that “peace is made on the ground while resolutions are written in the United Nations.”

Hamas has survived the Israeli “Operation Cast Lead,” which failed to remove it as a key player, to remain the only player on the ground in Gaza and not only as a key player there as well as a major much stronger player among Palestinians in the West Bank and the Diaspora. To build their diplomacy for a “durable and sustainable” ceasefire on the recognition only of the Israeli player while bypassing or sidelining the other protagonist is a dead end approach that could only encourage more Israeli aggressive actions and would for sure invoke more Palestinian violent reaction.

Unfortunately this has been the focus of UN resolution 1860, the so - called Egyptian initiative, the recent European summit meetings with Arab and Israeli leaders, the Israeli - U.S. memorandum of understanding of January 19, George Mitchell’s Middle East eight - day

tour, a focus that President Obama had subscribed to two days after his inauguration. It might not be too long before western diplomacy regrets this approach. Hamas should be “engaged ... as there could be no solution to the issue” by keeping it out in the cold, Nathan J Brown, an expert from Carnegie Endowment, was quoted as saying by Indian “The Hindu” on January 25, a view shared also by former U.S. president Jimmy Carter.

In historical perspective, nothing proves the Israeli action and the Palestinian reaction more than the very existence of Hamas. While founding the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was the reaction of the Palestinian refugees in exile to the Israeli action of forcing them out of their homeland in 1948, the founding of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in Gaza was the Palestinian reaction to the Israeli military expansion in 1967, which led to the occupation of the rest of historic Palestine.

More recently, the Palestinian reaction managed to develop some locally - made primitive rockets in self - defense, and to smuggle in some “Grad” systems, which Israel used in addition to the tunnels under the Gaza - Egypt borders as justification for military action, while imposing a media blackout to hide the horrible humanitarian disaster unfolding in Gaza as the result of its eight - year old blockade of the territory, which left the besieged Palestinians with one of two choices: Either to starve slowly to death or die instantly en masse in “Operation Cast Lead.” Israel imposed siege, in itself an act of war, as a collective punishment against Gaza civilians. U.S. and European strong advocates of Humanitarian Intervention, led by French *foreign minister* Bernard Kouchner, who call now for such interventions in Darfur, Myanmar and Zimbabwe and who did intervene militarily for humanitarian reasons in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo, have kept mum on Gaza.

Swedish Foreign Minister [Carl Bildt](#) hit directly at the root cause of the Gaza conflict. “They will dig tunnels out of desperation and there will be no way of stopping all these tunnels if you don’t open up the border,” he said. Bildt was joined by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown who urged ending “Gaza’s economic isolation by reopening the crossings that link it to the outside world.” European leaders seem to have finally awakened to the real equation of cause and effect in the conflict. However they are calling for opening Gaza border crossings as a sideshow, as the effect and not as the root cause of Palestinian reaction, as a prerequisite for a “durable and sustainable” ceasefire and not as an obligation that Israel must abide by in its capacity as the occupying power under international law, as merely a humanitarian outlet for the besieged civilian population and not as a national right of the Palestinians in Gaza Strip in the context of the Israeli unilateral military redeployment from the coastal strip in 2005.

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