Beware of well-meaning Hypocrisy

02.01.2009 | Marmur, Dow

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The calls for proportionate retaliation by Israel may be sincere, but does that mean that it would have been OK if it had set up rocket launchers on its side of the border with Gaza and match the daily barrage from the other side with an equal number? As the missiles that Hamas and its stooges are firing fall indiscriminately on Israelis, should Israel's missiles also be imprecise to let casualties be, literally, a matter of hit and miss? Would that be a better protection for the civilians in densely populated Gaza? And would it in any way stop Hamas and its Iranian pay masters from continuing doing damage to life, limb and property?

All war is horrible and war against terrorists even more so, because the enemy usually operates from among civilians and exposes them to additional dangers. There's much to suggest that Israel knows it and is trying to minimize innocent casualties, but it's also clear that it cannot prevent them. Thus even in the current war situation it allows some humanitarian aid to get through. Therefore to sign pious petitions, however well-meaning, seems little short of hypocrisy.

The urge to do so is often fuelled by media reports. Journalists, in their legitimate endeavors to tell what they see and hear, describe the carnage and the devastation they witness. Being far away from where the action is we, in turn, are tempted to offer simplistic explanations and apportion blanket blame. A state known for its military prowess like Israel is more likely to incur the wrath of indifferent bystanders than "freedom fighters," even if they're nothing more than terrorists.

In their blind zeal and total disregard for human life, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Taliban in Afghanistan have much in common. Each puts blind ideology before the welfare of real persons. When Afghanistan was identified as the main locus of the terrorism that led to 9/11, the international community intervened. The result has been many civilian deaths. Yet nobody recommends proportional retaliation by NATO forces, because that would be quixotic. The situation in Gaza is comparable.

Thus, in the same way that many women and men on the political Left in the West have accepted joint responsibility for bringing stability to Afghanistan, so it seems reasonable for them to hope that Israel will do the same in Gaza. Even Israel's Left-wing Meretz party concurs. Abu Mazen, the president of the Palestinian Authority, seems to be in a similar frame of mind, for he has stated

truthfully that Hamas is the real culprit when it broke the truce with Israel and provoked it to respond. In their muted reactions neighboring Arab states reflect a similar opinion.

Israelis have responded with relief that, at last, their government is doing something about it and that this time its armed forces are better prepared than they were some two-and-a-half years ago when the country had to respond to a similar situation in the north where the population was exposed to Hezbollah rockets. Though it's quiet there now, albeit uneasily so, the price was unnecessarily high. We all hope that it'll be different here, not least for the hapless population in Gaza.

But nobody I've heard is over-optimistic or believes that it'll be easy. The war on terror seems never ending, yet even democratic states engage in it because the alternative is worse. That's why few of us are in the mood to sign petitions urging "both sides" to sue for peace. Everybody knows that in this case it only requires one side – Hamas – to declare a truce and Israel will respond, as it did during the previous six months, even though the rockets never quite stopped raining over its population.

Jerusalem 29.12.08

Dow Marmur, Rabbi emeritus at Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, who now spends half the year in Jerusalem and the other half in Toronto, sent this out to his list today.

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