The Cost of Ending the War

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Those in Gaza are subject to Israeli military action that has diminished their number and reduced much of their resources to rubble. Those in Damascus are at a safe distance from the fighting but fulfill a vital role through their cooperation with Syria and, above all, Iran in providing the wherewithal for Hamas activities on both sides of the Gaza border.

But judging the fighting at a distance, Mashal & Co are prone to be militant and uncompromising. It's an attitude characteristic of many diasporas.

The common denominator is expressed by their rhetoric. Thus Haniyeh, presumably in a safe bunker inside Gaza, delivered a taped message on Hamas television that was broadcast yesterday in which he reassures his people that "our victory over the Zionists is near." The Damascus branch, moving about in freedom and comfort, has "confirmed" that "victory is closer than ever." Those on the ground may be forgiven if they find it impossible to share this assessment but they may nevertheless be comforted by it and its religious passion.

However, the two branches of Hamas diverge when it comes to the ceasefire. It appears that the Gazans are ready for it, the rhetoric of their leaders notwithstanding. The people in Damascus are not, perhaps largely because Iran doesn't want them to - and Iran calls the shots. There's also the suspicion that those away from the action are less moved by the suffering of their people on the ground.

Egypt's natural sympathy for the cause of all Palestinians is tampered by its apparent impatience with Hamas, both in the field and around the negotiating table. I've seen serious analyses that suggest that Egypt would be relieved if Hamas were destroyed, not because it supports Israel but because it wants to protect its own regime, which is always under threat from Hamas-like fundamentalism, and the regimes in other Arab countries with which it wishes to cooperate.

For its own reasons Egypt has assumed the role of peace broker and, judging by the constant stream of visitors to President Mubarak in Cairo, it has the support and cooperation of many countries. Its efforts seem much more realistic than the resolution of the Security Council that once again has shown itself to be as impotent as ever.

Whether it likes it or not, Israel will accept an Egyptian proposal, even if it doesn't mean the end of Hamas but only the end of its rocket attacks and the elimination of the tunnels that have hitherto been its main supply route. The present intensification of the Israeli war effort is, it seems, a

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paradoxical way of bringing about the ceasefire sooner rather than later. It's difficult to assess if the strategy will work,

It's clear, though, that not only terrorists but many innocent Palestinians have been killed and maimed and that, in addition to their casualties, almost a million Israelis live in fear that the next Hamas missile will hit them. From this human – not just humanitarian – perspective, the sooner the fighting ends, the sooner will relief come to all concerned, Relief, not celebration! The cost of ending a war is no smaller than waging one, nor does it seem to require less preparation.

Rabbi Dow Marmur, Toronto, Canada, spends half the year in Jerusalem and the other half in Toronto. He sends his observations and comments out to his list. See also Beware of well-meaning Hypocrisy

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