**Israel's Just War in Gaza**

July 22, 2014

By Fernando Espuelas

The Hill http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/212975-israels-just-war-in-gaza

Imagine terrorists targeting Miami. Now think of thousands of missiles raining down on Miami and neighboring cities every year — for more than a decade. What would America do? Is there the slightest doubt that the president would order a strike to destroy the missiles? Absolutely not. One missile hitting the homeland would rightly spark an overwhelming American military response.

Yet this is the reality that Israel faces every day. The jihadist group Hamas, categorized as a terrorist organization by both the United States and the European Union, has been using Gaza — self-governing since 2005, when Israel withdrew its forces and citizens — as a giant base for terror.

Israeli cities like Ashkelon, Kiryat Malachi and Ashdod are frequent targets of these attacks — in "normal" years, [**Hamas fires hundreds of rockets at southern Israel**](http://www.idfblog.com/facts-figures/rocket-attacks-toward-israel/). Schools and houses have had to be reinforced against attacks, the people highly trained to take cover in myriad shelters the moment the rocket alarms sound.

It's important to make a distinction often lost in the media. Hamas is not equivalent to the Palestinian people. While most of Hamas is made up of Palestinians, very few Palestinians have joined Hamas. Historically, most Palestinian people, like most Israelis, have favored the two-state solution championed by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Israeli government.

Hamas, however, has a very different goal. An affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas is funded and armed by Iran and Syria, and has a deadly mission clearly stated in its own charter: destroy the state of Israel. According to the [**preamble of the charter**](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp), "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it."

This fact may help explain why Israel has accepted the four cease-fire agreements brokered by the international community during this conflict, while Hamas [**rejected all**](http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-israelis-palestinians-cease-fire-20140714-story.html) of them.

The third Gazan war started some weeks ago with a [**similar chain of events**](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/11/15/3-dead-after-gaza-rocket-strikes-southern-israel/) as the two previous wars. While Hamas has been firing rockets with steadily increasing frequency at southern Israel, this time, as at the start of the previous wars, an [**ever-escalating campaign of terrorizing Israeli civilians**](http://www.smh.com.au/comment/hamas-rocket-attacks-provoked-israels-ground-offensive-into-gaza-strip-20140720-zuysx.html) with rocket strikes reached a tipping point — some 2,000 rockets have been fired at Israeli civilians in the span of four weeks.

Israel has maintained a policy of extreme restraint over many years, not responding militarily to the daily barrage of rockets from Hamas. Yet over the last few weeks, as one Israeli official who requested anonymity because he is not authorized to speak with the media, told me, the number of missiles that Hamas launched at Israel has reached the "level of rocket fire that is not livable."

The rate of fire has increased to an average of one rocket launched every four minutes, around the clock. As conditioned to daily rocket attacks as Israelis have become, this dramatic escalation of force by Hamas has electrified Israelis and their government. In this context, military response in order to meaningfully degrade Hamas' offensive capabilities is not just logical, it is also necessary and just.

The principal reason for the existence of all government is to confer safety to its citizens. If the government of Israel did not respond to the escalating danger from Hamas, it would be failing in its most basic reason for being.

As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [**recently said**](http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/middle-east-unrest/netanyahu-says-hamas-wants-pile-bodies-sympathy-n161236), "What would you do if American cities, where you're sitting now ... would be rocketed, would absorb hundreds of rockets? ... You'd say to your leader, 'A man's got to do what a man's got to do.' And a country's got to do what a country's got to do. We have to defend ourselves."

Some have argued that the rising toll of Palestinian civilian deaths is proof that Israel is targeting civilians as a form of deterrence, or even vengeance, yet even as missiles are fired at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Israel continues to deliver essential supplies to the Palestinian people of Gaza.

Israel has defended the Kerem Shalom border crossing that is a critical lifeline to the civilian population in Gaza, providing electricity, cooking oil and medical supplies, among other essentials. This crossing, unfortunately, has been repeatedly targeted by Hamas. The power station in Israel that supplies electricity to Gaza has been attacked – and after each attack, Israeli electricity company workers repair and restore the power into Gaza. Israel has also maintained its compassionate assistance programs for Palestinian civilians seeking medical attention in Israeli hospitals.

So what is the reason, then, for the terrible toll of civilian deaths in Gaza? The answer is as simple as it is tragic: Hamas is [**using the Palestinian people as shields**](http://online.wsj.com/articles/thane-rosenbaum-civilian-casualties-in-gaza-1405970362). Even as Israel [**warns Palestinian civilians**](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/09/world/middleeast/by-phone-and-leaflet-israeli-attackers-warn-gazans.html?ref=middleeast&_r=0) of an impending attack on a military target — sending text messages, making phone calls and dropping leaflets to people in harm's way — the bulk of Hamas's missile sites, command and control installations and communications facilities are located in civilian buildings.

Schools, hospitals and private homes have been commandeered by the terrorists for their offensive operations and equipment. Innocent families are being terrorized by Hamas, forced to live above arsenals, rocket factories and the dormitories of Hamas militants. Some in the American media have insinuated that Israel is flexing its muscle to crush innocents and send a message of military might. One CNN reporter [**referred to Israelis as "scum"**](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/cnn-reporter-calls-israelis-cheering-missiles-striking-gaza-scum-article-1.1871699) in a tweet, betraying the profound anti-Israel media bias that dominates the coverage of this conflict.

The reality is quite different. While Israel uses rockets to defend its people — such as the defensive Iron Dome missile interceptors — Hamas uses people to defend its offensive rockets.

Palestinian civilians are hostages of Hamas, a shield of vulnerable people forced to protect an army of terrorists.

The old saying that the first casualty of war is the truth applies to this conflict as you see the proliferation of biased, anti-Israeli reports. But the empirical evidence is clear and leads to only one logical conclusion — Israel is fighting a defensive and just war to protect its citizens from highly aggressive, dangerous and amoral terrorists.