Robert Fulford: What’s Israel Supposed to Do? Ask the UN For Help?

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Hamas, the gang that controls the Gaza Strip and hopes to destroy Israel, makes war in its own peculiar way.

It conducts a terror campaign by randomly sending unguided missiles across the border, traumatizing the civilian population. Rather than using its payments from Iran to feed its own people, it spends a fortune digging tunnels under the border to Israel, infiltrating the country from beneath the ground. It places artillery on top of apartment buildings and beside schools, so that Israel’s attempts to destroy the artillery will kill as many Palestinians as possible. Hamas built a military command centre underneath Shifa hospital, which Israel built for the Gaza population.

Having counted the dead, Hamas announces the fatal casualties, attempting to shame Israel for mass killing. This is an original form of propaganda warfare, suicide-by-proxy.

If someone attempts to arrange a cease-fire between the combatants, Hamas at first refuses to co-operate, then finally signs on and accepts praise for its peace policy. Eventually, it breaks the cease-fire. Between wars Israel maintains a permanent one-sided cease-fire, having no reason to attack Gaza; in 2005 it closed its Gaza settlements and removed its military forces from the Strip. Hamas can always re-start the war, arousing the ire of their soldiers by complaining about Israel’s enforcement of Gaza’s borders. The borders are shut to keep Hamas from importing arms but Hamas depicts it as hard-hearted retaliation.

On Monday a UN committee passed judgement on last summer’s 50-day Hamas-Israel war with a document The New York Times described in a headline: “UN Report on Gaza Finds Evidence of War Crimes by Israel and by Palestinian Militants.”

That headline, and the story describing it, were true, in a way, and also not true. The report, from a committee headed by an American judge, Mary McGowan Davis, said that both sides made war in ways that could amount to war crimes. But there wasn’t much context to give that statement meaning. News stories on the Davis committee didn’t say much about who started the war (Hamas) and didn’t make any fuss about who turned civilians into shields by placing military establishments among families (Hamas).

Israel quarrelled with the report’s conclusions but Hamas said that it could be used as evidence in a prosecution of Israel at the International Criminal Court. Hamas had no complaints about the Davis charges. The recriminations against Israel were duly delivered, and that made the process a success. All over the world, those disposed to dislike Israel no doubt found this one more reason to justify their feelings and their demand that the West boycott Israeli products, scholars and artists.

Davis acknowledged that Hamas fired rockets at civilians from within civilian areas but concluded that Israel should have been more careful about harming non-combatants. Israel resented the criticism — “flawed and biassed,” said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — because it takes pride in the attempt of its soldiers to avoid civilian casualties.

The Israel Defense Forces have a strict code of ethics dealing with the protection of civilians in combat zones. In Gaza the IDF dropped leaflets and made phone calls asking civilians to leave the battlefield. Judge Davis said in an interview that she wanted to make a strong statement against “the use of explosive weapons in densely populated neighbourhoods. It is not OK to drop a one-ton bomb in the middle of a neighbourhood.”

She didn’t say what Israel should do the next time unguided missiles fired from a housing complex begin falling on Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. Call the UN?

Few of us understand the unique role of the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Every time the Committee meets, the agenda lists Israel as an item, in case it has committed some infraction not otherwise covered in the meeting. No other country appears on every agenda. Israel is also unique in having its own UN-assigned Special Rapporteur to investigate alleged violations. In the Committee’s nine-year life, it has condemned Israel’s actions on 61 occasions, more than all other countries combined. The non-Israel condemnations listed by UN Watch as “Rest of World Combined” total 55. Syria occupies second place, with 15. Countries not so far condemned by the Human Rights Committee include China, Cuba, Iraq, Russia and Yemen.

The name “Human Rights Committee” provides a smokescreen of bogus good intentions, declaring to the innocent that the UN is helping protect all of us. Millions of people who are unaware of its record have no doubt gathered from the latest report that Israel is as worthy of rebuke as Hamas. In treating Hamas and Israel as equivalent, Judge Davis has blackened the name of the UN and its many offshoots. This one might more accurately call itself the United Nations Committee on Defaming Israel.