



WEEKLY UPDATE ON THE CURRENT SITUATION
IN ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST
AND
ANSWERS TO TOUGH QUESTIONS



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ISRAEL ADVOCACY UPDATE

September 22, 2009
4 Tishrei 5770

1. Military affairs

a. Several short-range rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel. Three smuggling tunnels from Egypt into Gaza were bombed. Two Palestinians were killed attempting to plant explosives along the Gaza border.

2. Middle East diplomacy

a. U.S. President Barack Obama met Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in New York. White House sources stressed there were no "grand expectations" but both U.S. and Israeli officials expressed hope the symbolic meeting would spur resumption of negotiations. Netanyahu and Abbas also had separate meetings with Obama before the three-way meeting.

b. After the meeting Obama stated "Permanent status negotiations must begin and begin soon. And more importantly, we must give those negotiations the opportunity to succeed." He added that "the United States is committed to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, which will result in two states living side by side - Palestine and Israel. It remains important for the Arab states to take steps to promote peace in the region," and that while "Palestinians have strengthened their efforts on security," more had to be done about incitement. Obama said Israel has "facilitated greater freedom of movement for Palestinians, and discussed important steps to restraining settlement activity, but they [Israel] need to translate the discussion into actions on that and other issues."

c. Hamas and other Palestinian factions condemned Abbas for meeting Obama and Netanyahu.

d. Unconfirmed reports indicate the North African and Gulf states will provide Israel airlines with the right to overfly their countries in exchange for a settlement freeze. Also rumored are the opening of interest sections in Israel by Arab countries and end of travel bans on Israeli citizens.

3. Nuclear affairs

a. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) general assembly passed a resolution calling on Israel to open its nuclear complex in Dimona to international inspectors and to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

b. A secret IAEA document leaked to the Associated Press (AP) indicates that Iran "has sufficient information to be able to design and produce a workable implosion nuclear device" and has "probably tested" a key component. The agency denied the AP report. Outgoing IAEA secretary general Muhammad el-Baradei had previously claimed the report did not exist.

c. A newly published letter from Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan describes Pakistan's nuclear co-operation with China, Iran, North Korea, and Libya. Among the new information is that Pakistan provided China with enrichment technology in return for nuclear weapons blueprints. Under U.S. pressure Pakistan had arrested Khan as a rogue scientist and proliferator. Khan claims his activities were directed by successive Pakistani governments.

4. Military cooperation and sales

a. U.S. naval vessels have arrived in Israel for the biennial U.S.-Israeli 'Juniper Cobra' joint military exercise scheduled for October. The exercise, the largest joint exercise undertaken by the two countries, simulates a missile



ISRAEL ADVOCACY UPDATE

attack on Israel from multiple adversaries and incorporates U.S. and Israeli systems including U.S. PAC-3 missiles, ship-based Aegis interceptors, X-band radars and the Israeli Arrow anti-missile system. Analysts suggest that the upcoming exercise has particular significance given the recent U.S. decision not to deploy anti-missile systems in eastern Europe. Unconfirmed reports suggest the U.S. may permanently deploy anti-missile systems in or near Israel to increase its defense against Iran.

b. South Korea will purchase the Green Pine radar and early warning system from Israel. Green Pine is the principal system used in conjunction with the Arrow anti-missile system. The deal is reported to be worth \$200 million.

5. Boycott and divestment

a. The British Trades Union Congress general council has voted to "support a boycott (where trade union members should not put their own jobs at risk by refusing to deal with such products) of those goods and agricultural products that originate in [Israeli] illegal settlements - through developing an effective, targeted consumer-led boycott campaign working closely with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign - and campaign for disinvestment by companies associated with the occupation as well as engaged in building the separation wall."



ISRAEL ADVOCACY UPDATE

August 25, 2009

5 Elul 5769

1. Several mortar shells were fired from Gaza into Israel, causing one injury. A smuggling tunnel from Egypt into Gaza was bombed in retaliation by Israel, with three reported fatalities. Two Palestinians attempting to infiltrate Israel from Gaza were injured by Israeli fire.

2. Middle Eastern Diplomacy

a. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is in London for meetings with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and with U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell. He will meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel later this week.

b. Egyptian intelligence chief General Omar Sulieman will visit Israel shortly for meetings with Defense Minister Ehud Barak. Israeli sources indicate the visit will be to finalize a deal to exchange Gilad Shalit for Palestinian prisoners in Israel.

c. Hamas sources have denied a breakthrough in negotiations regarding Gilad Shalit is imminent but add that Germany is now involved in mediation efforts.

3. Palestinian Politics

a. Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has announced that a 'de facto' Palestinian state would be established within two years, which would include a public sector, security forces, and a 'thriving economy.' The proposal is a departure from previous Palestinian approaches which emphasized negotiations with Israel over building Palestinian infrastructure and institutions.

b. The Palestinian Authority has released a number of Hamas prisoners in the West Bank as a goodwill gesture for the beginning of Ramadan.

c. Hamas has accused Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas of sabotaging a deal to exchange Gilad Shalit for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

d. Reports indicate that Hamas is now requiring girls to wear a head covering and full length robes in order to attend school. Jeans are banned. A similar rule was previously enacted for women lawyers. Girls who do not comply will be expelled from school. Males are now forbidden from teaching girls.

e. Israeli television networks have aired footage that appears to show Hamas forces executing captured extremist Jund Ansar Allah members. The Jund Ansar Allah mosque in Gaza was destroyed and at least 25 persons killed on August 15.

4. Concerns Over Iran

a. Unconfirmed reports suggest that Iran has not increased the number of centrifuges for uranium enrichment since May. Unnamed diplomats believe shortages of uranium oxide may be the cause rather than a policy decision to slow production.

b. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has threatened energy sanctions against Iran if it fails to improve cooperation with the international community on its nuclear program, saying "If there is no progress, we would have to react with further sanctions...What is clear is that Tehran, whose president constantly questions Israel's right to exist, must not get the atomic bomb."



ISRAEL ADVOCACY UPDATE

c. Iranian 'president' Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has nominated Ahmad Vahidi for defense minister. Vahidi is accused of involvement in the 1994 bombing of the Argentine-Israel Mutual Association in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people and injured about 200 others. Argentina has protested the nomination. Iran has responded that Argentina was reacting to "pressure, bribes and propaganda by Zionist lobbies."

5. The accusation made in a Swedish newspaper that Israeli soldiers have killed Palestinians and stolen internal organs continues to be an issue.

a. The editor of *Aftonbladet* denied that the article was antisemitic and stated that "Rightist populists in Israel, especially Lieberman, took advantage of the publication for their own personal aims." He also stated that there was no evidence to indicate the story was true but that "It may not prove anything factual, but the claims remain and this is why we published the story."

b. The Palestinian news service Ma'an 'confirmed' the story, quoting an 'expert' who stated "It's possible that all those missing prisoners, or a large number of them, were deliberately killed so that their organs could be stolen and used illegally." Ma'an, is funded by Denmark and the Netherlands.

c. The parents of the Palestinian named in the story, killed in 1992 in a confrontation with Israeli security forces, have stated they could not confirm the allegation.

Suggested Reading:

David Feith

[What Palestinian Moderation Looks Like](#)

Wall Street Journal

Laura Rozen

[Getting to yes on Middle East peace talks. Then comes the hard part: negotiations](#)

Foreign Policy

Tariq Alhomayed

[Hamas...Jihad in Switzerland](#)

Asharq Al-Awsat

Michael Doran

[Naïve Pan-Arabism in Washington](#)

Middle East Studies at Harvard

Uzi Rubin

[New Developments in Iran's Missile Capabilities: Implications Beyond the Middle East](#)

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

Melik Kaylan

[Alawite Underwear](#)

Forbes



Answering Difficult Questions on the Current Situation in Southern Israel & Gaza

Allegation: Israel is deliberately targeting civilians in Gaza and has killed hundreds of women, children and noncombatants.

This is completely incorrect. Israel is targeting Hamas infrastructure and terrorists while going to great lengths to avoid civilian casualties.

So many of these casualties are a direct result of Hamas using civilians as human shields. By transforming private homes and public institutions such as mosques, schools, and even hospitals into bases of operation, Hamas has placed the Palestinian citizens in harm's way and effectively taken the civilians of Gaza hostage.

At the same time, Hamas has directed its rockets at Israeli cities in an attempt to maximize Israeli civilian casualties. Close to a million Israeli citizens are under constant threat of Hamas rockets and mortar shells. Since the disengagement from Gaza in 2005, Palestinian terrorists have indiscriminately fired more than 6,000 rockets and mortar shells at Israeli men, women and children.

It is time for the international community to hold Hamas accountable for its extremist ideology and commitment to terrorism.



Allegation: Israel is responsible for creating a humanitarian crisis in Gaza

The suffering of civilians during conflict is regrettable and tragic, but it is misleading and inaccurate to argue that Israel is responsible for causing the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Israel is making substantial efforts, which rarely receive a mention in the media, to alleviate Palestinian civilian distress. This has involved the transfer of more than 10,000 tons of aid into the Gaza Strip, including blood units, medical supplies and food staples. On the twelfth day of the current situation, Israel opened a humanitarian corridor into Gaza so that Palestinians could replenish supplies. Israel is also treating a number of Gazans in Israeli hospitals. Furthermore, it has been documented that Hamas has been pilfering a significant portion of relief supplies for its own operatives instead of allowing aid to reach the civilian populace.

The true responsibility for the difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza lies with Hamas, as it was their incessant rocket fire into southern Israel that precipitated military action in the first place. No country in the world would allow its citizens to live in fear of daily attack for years on end without responding. If Hamas had chosen peace instead of war, then there would be no humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Israel is deeply committed to providing innocent Palestinians with essential aid, but like every country in the world it has an obligation to defend its own citizens.



Allegation: Israel is using disproportionate force against the Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel – like all other states - has the right, the duty and obligation to protect its citizens as guaranteed by Article 51 of the UN charter.

According to international norms, Israel is permitted to use necessary and appropriate force to defeat the threat, and is not obligated to adjust its capabilities to those of Hamas. Israel's actions are a justified, legitimate and proportional use of force to protect a population from an ongoing barrage of rockets and mortars. As the President of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, Rosalyn Higgins, has noted, proportionality "cannot be in relation to any specific prior injury - it has to be in relation to the overall legitimate objective of ending the aggression."

Israel's legitimate use of force against military targets stands in stark contrast to Hamas' deliberate targeting of civilian areas and use of civilians as human shields. Those actions are unethical, immoral and a violation of international law.

No country can tolerate the indiscriminate targeting of its civilians. Israel's use of a force is a legitimate act of self-defense to protect its citizens.



Allegation: Hamas' actions are a legitimate response to Israel's siege and continued occupation.

This claim is totally incorrect. It is falsely used by the Hamas terrorist regime to perpetuate its image as the victim and to undeservingly win world sympathy.

In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza, and evacuated thousands of Israeli citizens from their homes, as part of her ongoing commitment to establishing peace and coexistence with the Palestinians. At the same time, Israel has continued its commitment to the security of its citizens. In the initial transition phase, therefore, Israel took necessary precautions such as retaining control of border crossings and sea routes until Palestinian leaders demonstrated that they were able and willing to create a peaceful and stable government and society.

But the rising Hamas government and its sponsored terrorists failed to deliver. Since 2005, it has launched over 6,000 rockets and mortars at Israel, making the lives of hundreds of thousands of Israelis unbearable. Furthermore, Hamas has taken advantage of Israel's good intentions and smuggled thousands of weapons and explosives in order to increase their terror campaign against Israeli civilians. Notwithstanding, Israel has allowed an extensive flow of goods through its crossings, including tons of basic necessities such as medicine, food, water and gas. Even during this past week of increased Hamas attacks, Israel has allowed the transfer of over 6,500 tons of humanitarian supplies to the residents of Gaza.

As long as Hamas continues to instigate terror, Israel has a responsibility and right to defend its people who have been living under a continuous siege and will continue to protect its borders.



The Gaza War
Online Exclusive
by [Mitchell G. Bard](#)

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourcemyths2/gazawar.html>

MYTH

“Israel broke the cease-fire with Hamas.”

FACT

On June 17, 2008, after several months of indirect contacts between [Israel](#) and [Hamas](#) through Egyptian mediators, [Hamas](#) agreed to a cease-fire (tahadiya). Almost immediately afterward, terrorists fired [rockets](#) into southern [Israel](#). Despite what it called a “gross violation” of the truce, [Israel](#) refrained from military action.¹ In fact, during the six months the arrangement was supposed to be observed, [329 rockets and mortar shells](#) were fired at [Israel](#).²

While there were considerably fewer Palestinian assaults after the agreement than before, [terror](#) continued. Nevertheless, the [IDF](#) did not respond to the provocations. On the contrary, [Israel](#) significantly increased the amount of goods delivered to the [Gaza Strip](#).

During this period, [Israel](#) also expected to negotiate the release of [Gilad Shalit](#), the Israeli soldier taken hostage by [Hamas](#) in June 2006. The group repeatedly increased its demands for the number of prisoners it wanted released in exchange for the lone Israeli captive, but never agreed to grant his freedom.

Violence escalated in early November after the [IDF](#) carried out a military operation close to the border security fence on the Gazan side that killed seven [Hamas](#) terrorists. [Israel](#) acted after discovering that [Hamas](#) had dug a tunnel under the fence and planned to abduct more Israeli soldiers. [Hamas](#) responded by shelling Israeli towns and has continued the rocket barrage ever since.

When the [Hamas](#)-imposed six-month deadline expired in December, [Israel](#) hoped an agreement could be reached to extend the cease-fire. Instead, [Hamas](#) began firing what would be hundreds of rockets into [Israel](#).

When the bombardment began, it became apparent [Hamas](#) had used the lull to upgrade its arsenal with weapons that were too sophisticated to have been designed or built in [Gaza](#). These advanced [Qassam and Grad rockets](#), which have placed 1 in every 8 Israelis in



mortal danger, originated in [Iran](#). They were smuggled into [Gaza](#) in pieces, assembled, and fired from launch pads well-hidden and shielded in Palestinian population centers.

Once launched, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have as little as fifteen seconds to reach a bunker before a rocket detonates. [Hamas](#) has turned all of southern [Israel](#) into a place that more resembles a post-apocalyptic world, rather than a modern, civilized society. Imagine never being able to step outside without remaining in sprinting distance of a concrete bunker. Imagine having to dive into the safety of a bunker 30 times a day, everyday. Try to imagine the terror of the rocket whistling down, not knowing whether it will land a mile away, or directly above your head. Can you imagine the sudden shock when you feel the impact, the relief that overcomes you that you are still alive and the immediate sorrow and concern that follows when you realize that others like – your family and friends – may not have been so lucky this time?

MYTH

“Israel has reacted to Hamas rocket fire with ‘disproportionate force.’”

FACT

[Article 51 of the United Nations Charter](#) reserves to every nation the right to engage in self-defense against armed attacks. As Professor Alan Dershowitz has also noted, “The claim that [Israel](#) has violated the principle of proportionality -- by killing more [Hamas](#) terrorists than the number of Israeli civilians killed by [Hamas](#) rockets -- is absurd. First, there is no legal equivalence between the deliberate killing of innocent civilians and the deliberate killings of [Hamas](#) combatants. Under the laws of war, any number of combatants can be killed to prevent the killing of even one innocent civilian. Second, proportionality is not measured by the number of civilians actually killed, but rather by the risk posed. This is illustrated by what happened on Tuesday (December 30, 2008), when a [Hamas](#) rocket hit a kindergarten in [Beer Sheva](#), though no students were there at the time. Under international law, [Israel](#) is not required to allow [Hamas](#) to play Russian roulette with its children’s lives.”³

As the *London Times* said in response to this charge during [Israel's](#) war with [Hezbollah](#), this criticism “is lazy and facile in several ways, especially in implying a moral relativism between the two sides that does not exist. This is not the contest between misguided equals that many in the West seem to see. One is the region's lone democracy, which for much of its existence has faced a very real existential threat and would like, if possible, to live in peace with its neighbors. The other is a terrorist organization, bent on preventing such a future.”⁴



Furthermore, Since [Hamas](#) ' stated objective is the destruction of [Israel](#) , isn't the appropriate response the destruction of [Hamas](#) ? Wouldn't random missile strikes on Palestinian cities be proportionate to [Hamas](#) rocket attacks on southern [Israel](#) ? Can you imagine any of [Israel's](#) critics accepting those responses?

When [Palestinian terrorists](#) plant bombs at Israeli shopping malls and kill and maims dozens of civilians, would the "proportionate response" be for Israelis to plant bombs in Palestinian malls? No one in [Israel](#) believes this would be a legitimate use of force. Thus, [Israel](#) is left with the need to take measured action against specific targets in an effort to either deter Palestinian violence or stop it.

What would America do if terrorists fired thousands of rockets targeting U.S. cities? After 9/11, we saw that America took the same type of action as [Israel](#) by launching military strikes against the terrorists. U.S. forces used overwhelming force and though they never targeted civilians, some were inadvertently killed. Americans believe in [Colin Powell](#) 's doctrine, which holds that "America should enter fights with every bit of force available or not at all."

The United States uses overwhelming force against its enemies, even though the threats are distant and pose no danger to the existence of the nation or the immediate security of its citizens. The threat [Israel](#) faces is immediate in time and physical proximity, and poses a direct danger to Israeli citizens. More than [6,000 rockets](#) have now fallen on [Israel's](#) cities and now that [Hamas](#) has acquired long-range missiles, more than 900,000 civilians are in danger. Still, [Israel](#) has not used its full might as the [Powell Doctrine](#) dictates. The use of force has been judicious and precise.

Israeli soldiers do not deliberately target noncombatants. The murder of innocents is the goal of the [Palestinian terrorists](#) . In fact, what other army drops leaflets to warn people to leave an area they intend to attack even though it gives up the element of surprise and allows the bad guys to hide as well as the innocent to escape?

[IDF](#) activities are governed by an overriding policy of restraint and a determination to take all possible measures to prevent harm to innocent civilians.

No innocent Palestinians would be in any danger if the [Palestinian Authority](#) took steps to stop terrorism or if the international community, especially the Arab world, had pressured [Hamas](#) to stop attacking [Israel](#) .

No innocent Palestinians would be in danger if [Hamas](#) terrorists did not deliberately hide among them. If the peace-seeking Palestinians prevented the terrorists from living in their midst, [Israel](#) would have no reason to come to their neighborhoods.



It is a tragedy whenever innocent lives are lost, and Israelis have consistently expressed their sadness over Arab casualties. By contrast, when innocent Israelis are murdered by terrorists, [Hamas](#) holds rallies to celebrate the murders.

MYTH

“Palestinians in Gaza are innocent victims.”

FACT

It is tragic that many Palestinians who are not directly involved in [terrorism](#) are suffering as a result of the actions of their leaders. While no one wants to see any noncombatants harmed, it is important to acknowledge that all Palestinians in [Gaza](#) bear some responsibility for their current predicament. After all, they voted to empower [Hamas](#) in an election in which they knew the organization's platform called for the destruction of [Israel](#) and the use of terrorism to achieve its aims.

The Palestinians in [Gaza](#) have done nothing during the last three years to stop [Hamas](#) from launching rockets into [Israel](#). At any time the people could have said, “Enough! We do not support terror.” Instead of allowing rocket crews to fire [Qassams](#) from their houses, yards, or neighborhoods, the people could have said, “Stop! I will not allow you to make us a target. I will now allow you to use my family as a shield.”

For the last three years, the Palestinians of [Gaza](#) have said, in effect, “We don't mind if Israelis are murdered by [Hamas](#) rockets, but the world should support us.”

During [World War II](#), the German people were not spared suffering from the Allied invasion because they were noncombatants or because some could claim they were not [Nazis](#) and did not support [Hitler](#). All the German people were held to account for their failure to stop their leaders from carrying out their aggression and genocidal policies.

The Palestinians now are also being held to account. What is different, however, is that unlike the Allies in [World War II](#), [Israel](#) is doing everything possible to avoid hurting Palestinian noncombatants despite their culpability. Even now the Palestinians have the power to stop the war by demanding that Hamas cease firing rockets. Alas, they refuse to take the one step within their power to ease their suffering.

MYTH

“Israel's operation in Gaza will only embitter Palestinians and make them seek revenge rather than peace.”



FACT

After the [Blitz](#) in [World War II](#), the British did not worry whether Germans would hate them for bombing their cities. In fact, unlike [Israel](#), the allies had little concern during the war for inflicting suffering on German civilians. Undoubtedly, many Germans still harbor anger toward the British and other allies for their actions during the war, but this did not prevent [Germany](#) from ultimately coming to terms with its neighbors and becoming a peaceful member of the international community.

It is not Israeli actions that provoke Palestinians to choose terror over peace, it is the indoctrination of [Hamas](#), which teaches children from an early age to hate Jews, to seek the destruction of [Israel](#) and to glorify martyrdom.

MYTH

“Israel should negotiate a cease-fire with Hamas.”

FACT

[Hamas](#) does not negotiate with [Israel](#). [Hamas](#) denies [Israel's](#) right to exist. [Hamas](#) refuses to abide by previously signed agreements. Even the recently-expired six-month “cease-fire” between [Israel](#) and [Hamas](#) had to be slowly and painstakingly negotiated through [Egypt](#) because [Hamas](#) would not talk to [Israel](#).

Throughout 2008, [Israel](#) worked with the [United States](#) toward an equitable two-state solution with the [Palestinian Authority](#) while [Hamas](#) did everything in its power to disrupt and derail the peace process – firing thousands of [rockets](#) into Israeli towns and cities, firing on Israeli soldiers and civilians and attempting to infiltrate [Israel](#) for the purpose of committing suicide bombing attacks. [Hamas](#) also continues to hold 22-year-old [Gilad Shalit](#), the Israeli soldier the group kidnaped in June 2006.

[Hamas](#) made clear that the “cease-fire” was not a prelude to peace. On the contrary, [Hamas](#) used the time to build more tunnels to smuggle weapons and supplies from [Egypt](#); to build more [rockets](#) and to improve the range and accuracy of its existing arsenal. A new cease-fire before the tunnels and weapons are destroyed or neutralized would simply give [Hamas](#) the opportunity to follow the example of [Hezbollah](#) and rearm and regroup for a future battle to achieve its goal of [Israel's](#) destruction.

MYTH

“Hamas targets military objectives.”



FACT

[Hamas](#) consistently judges the success of their attacks by the number of Israelis they kill – men, women, children. [Hamas](#) does not even try to attack military targets; their rockets are directed toward towns, cities and farms rather than military bases. The group's [rockets](#) land on playgrounds, apartment buildings, public parks, schools and private homes.

[Hamas](#) terrorists choose not to expose themselves by firing these weapons from open areas. They construct launch pads in densely populated regions in [Gaza](#) , using the local Palestinian population as a shield because they do not care if their fellow Palestinians are killed by their own misfiring rockets (as frequently occurs) or by retaliatory strikes by [Israel](#) . The leaders of [Hamas](#) , like their ideological soulmates in [Hezbollah](#) , actually prefer that [Israel](#) hits back because they know that if civilians inadvertently are casualties, the international community will blame the Israelis.

MYTH

“ Hamas fears Israel's military might. ”

FACT

[Hamas](#) terrorists believe they are fighting a [holy war](#) against infidels and that is why no diplomatic agreement with them is possible. It is their religious conviction that they must create an Islamic state and that there is no place in the Islamic world for a Jewish state (or a Christian one for that matter).

Because of their faith, [Hamas](#) foot soldiers believe Allah will welcome them to Paradise if they are killed by [Israel](#) in what they see as their defense of Islam. The [Hamas](#) terrorists' extremism goes much further. It would be one thing if they were willing to sacrifice their own lives for their beliefs, but they also are prepared to jeopardize the lives of others as well. That is why they have no reticence about using their fellow Palestinians as shields. If [Israel](#) is dissuaded from attacking for fear of killing innocents, [Hamas](#) can continue to terrorize Israelis with impunity. If [Israel](#) does attack, [Hamas](#) will use the death of any noncombatants for propaganda purposes and to rally support.

At the first sign of danger, the leaders of [Hamas](#) typically run and hide. Their bravery extends to sending young disciples to become martyrs and using the rest of the population to protect themselves.

MYTH

“ At the end of Operation Cast Lead, Israel will have to negotiate with Hamas. ”



FACT

Some analysts suggest that [Israel](#) cannot destroy [Hamas](#) or provoke regime change in [Gaza](#) and, therefore, Israelis will have to negotiate in the end with [Hamas](#), making [Operation Cast Lead](#) a pointless exercise in destruction.

[Hamas](#) has not hidden its objective of destroying [Israel](#). It has conducted a three-year terror war since [Israel's](#) evacuation of [Gaza](#), which followed the five-year [Palestinian War](#) that claimed more than 1,000 Israeli lives. No country would show the degree of restraint that [Israel](#) exhibited as its cities were rocketed.

The purpose of the Israeli operation is to reduce the possibility of [Hamas](#) threatening Israeli lives to as close to zero as possible. No one should expect that the outcome of the war will be a desire on the part of either side to negotiate with the other. [Article 13 of the Hamas covenant](#) makes clear the group's raison d'etre: "There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavors" (Article 13).

For [Israel](#), the notion of negotiating with [Hamas](#) was best summed up by [Golda Meir](#) when she [said](#), "They say we must be dead. And we say we want to be alive. Between life and death, I don't know of a compromise."

MYTH

"Israel deliberately attacked a UN school."

FACT

They say that truth is the first casualty of war and [Israel](#) has frequently found this to be the case. Reports of Israeli atrocities in its military operations are often out of context, misleading, half-truths, or outright fabrications. [Israel](#) often reinforces negative media reports by reacting in a knee-jerk way to accept blame when asked for a reaction to allegations. The media does not wait to learn the truth because that typically requires careful, dispassionate analysis that does not conform to journalists' need to immediately fill time and space.

The best example of this was the infamous case that occurred during an Israeli anti-terror operation in Gaza in 2000 when a TV broadcast showed a Palestinian father shielding his son from bullets. The child was allegedly killed and [Israel](#) was immediately blamed. It took many months, but we now know Israeli troops did not kill [Mohammed al-Dura](#).



Israel faced a similar rush to judgment after reports of an Israeli attack on January 6, 2009 on a UN-run school in Jabalya. The building was not being used as a school at the time but was sheltering Palestinian noncombatants. Initial reports said at least 30 Palestinians were killed and [UN](#) officials claimed they had given Israeli forces coordinates of this building and others that they said were not associated with [Hamas](#). The incident was immediately portrayed as a deliberate Israeli attack on innocent people.

The details of what happened are still under investigation, but [Israel](#) maintains it was not aware that the building was being used as a shelter and that Israeli forces fired at the building because they were attacked by [Hamas](#) terrorists launching mortars from the area. [Israel](#) later identified two of the casualties at the site as Imad and Hassan Abu Asker, who served as heads of the [Hamas](#) mortar units in [Gaza](#). A witness from Jabalya said that he had seen Abu Asker in the area of the school right before the attack when he answered a call for volunteers to pile sand around the camp “to help protect the resistance fighters”.⁵ In addition, two residents of the area near the school told the Associated Press they had seen a small group of terrorists firing mortar rounds from a street close to the school.⁶ A series of explosions followed, indicating the presence of munitions and explosives in the building, which was not being used as a school at the time.

This is [not the first time](#) terrorists have fired mortars from a school in [Gaza](#), nor is it the first time [terrorists](#) have exploited [UN](#) facilities. [UN](#) officials in [Gaza](#), who never condemn [Palestinian terror](#) (the [UN](#) never passed a resolution condemning [Hamas](#) terrorism), have a long record of looking the other way while [Hamas](#) carries out its activities. [UN](#) officials in [Gaza](#) are there to help Palestinians and their bias often clouds their judgment and therefore independent verification is needed before accepting their claims.

We do know that through its use of civilians as shields, [Hamas](#) has brought death and destruction to the people of [Gaza](#) as well as southern [Israel](#). The loss of life in Jabalya is tragic and would not have happened if [Hamas](#) was not rocketing [Israel](#). The rush to blame [Israel](#) is also a reminder that first reports out of [Gaza](#) cannot be trusted.

MYTH

“Media coverage of Operation Cast Lead is fair and accurate.”

FACT

[Israel](#) has learned that its enemies will do everything they can to manipulate the media to influence public opinion during conflicts such as the one going on in the [Gaza Strip](#). [Israel](#) will be accused of massacres, fabricated casualty figures will be distributed, photographs will be doctored and journalists will be threatened. These and other ploys



will be used to create sympathy for the Palestinians and cast aspersions on Israeli forces in the hope of turning world opinion against Israel.

Too often, irresponsible journalists have repeated unverified and often inaccurate information in their haste to be the first to report a story. In an effort to present an evenhanded account, some reporters have the mistaken belief that allowing an Arab spokesperson to lie and then giving an Israeli a chance to respond represents a balanced account. This is like allowing a spokesperson to accuse Israelis of beating their spouses and then inviting an Israeli to deny that they beat their husbands and wives. [Israel](#) is always put on the defensive, often through outrageous and false accusations, which are repeated by other media so lies become accepted as truth.

One of the [first examples](#) of this in the [Gaza war](#) occurred after Israeli forces fired on a [UN](#)-run school on January 6, 2009. The press immediately reported that more than 30 Palestinians seeking shelter in the building were killed and the attack was portrayed as a deliberate assault on innocent people. Hours later, Israeli investigators reported that they had fired on the building because they were attacked by [Hamas](#) terrorists launching mortars from the area. Witnesses supported the Israeli account, but the initial impression was already created and reinforced by repeated claims by UN officials discounting the Israeli version.

France 2, the same television network that broadcast the notoriously inaccurate story about [Mohammed al-Dura](#) during the [Palestinian War](#), broadcast a false report showing dead children allegedly killed in the Gaza fighting. The amateur video of the dead toddlers being laid out on a white sheet was actually shot after they were killed by the explosion of a [Hamas](#) ammunition truck during a parade in Gaza in September 2005.^{6a}

[Israel](#) was consistently victimized by Arab propaganda and media irresponsibility during the 2006 [Lebanon War](#). Israel was accused of massacres that never happened. Reuters was duped by doctored photos and had to withdraw them. Other photos, showing [Hizballah](#) fighters setting up rockets in civilian neighborhoods were suppressed because they did not conform to [Hizballah's](#) propaganda message that [Israel](#) was indiscriminately attacking innocent Lebanese.

[Hamas](#) has adopted a similar approach. As CNN's Anderson Cooper reported, "Inside [Gaza](#), press controlled by [Hamas](#) is heavy-handed. There are few press freedoms inside Gaza and [Hamas](#) controls who reports from there and where they can go. While pictures of wounded children being brought to hospitals are clearly encouraged, we rarely see images of [Hamas](#) fighters or their rockets being fired into Israel."⁷

[Israel](#) naturally wants to shape media coverage as well, but Israelis know the first time they are caught telling the type of lies common to the other side their credibility will be



shot. Moreover, while they may want to exert some influence by, for example, limiting reporters' access to troops, the other side still succeeds in making its case. As CNN's Nic Robertson noted in criticizing Israel's decision not to embed reporters during the Gaza operation, "The officials we talk to say it's for security and our safety, but it creates an impression that they don't want the suffering that's happening in the [Gaza Strip](#) right now to be witnessed by the world, but it is and right now you could make a real case that the message that's coming out is one that's essentially controlled by people that are perhaps more partisan to the situation inside the Gaza Strip than a lot of international journalists".⁸

Given the history of coverage of the Middle East conflict, it behooves journalists to take great care in how they report stories from both sides of the [Gaza](#) battlefield and it will be up to those following the coverage to hold the reporters to the highest journalistic standards.

Even before Israel initiated [Operation Cast Lead](#), many journalists were quick to report whatever they were told by [Hamas](#). When [Hamas](#) staged blackouts in [Gaza](#), the media incorrectly reported that Israel was preventing the Gazans from having fuel and electricity. Israel was regularly blamed for a "humanitarian crisis" in [Gaza](#) while, at the same time, truckloads of goods were sent in from Israel each day. While Israel's air attacks on [Gaza](#) immediately made the front page of newspapers around the world, the rocket barrages on southern Israel, and the impact they have had on the population over the last three years, have rarely been mentioned.

The media often turns conflicts into numbers games, keeping running tallies of casualties. Israel always is accused of disproportion because fewer Israelis typically die in confrontations. Israelis, however, are under no obligation to take greater casualties for the sake of looking better in the media box score. It also should come as no surprise that a regular army that is highly trained and is targeting [terrorists](#) will kill more people than the terrorists who are indiscriminately firing explosive rockets at civilian population centers in Israel.

The casualty figures reported by Palestinians have also proven completely unreliable in the past and no one should take them as fact. We know that the Palestinians will routinely call attacks "massacres" and invent large numbers of fatalities, so journalists should be on guard for such unverified claims. Even when bodies are presented as evidence, we have learned that they are often not the victims of an Israeli attack and sometimes they are not even dead (a classic Palestinian video shows a funeral in which the pall bearers drop the stretcher with the "corpse" who then gets up and runs away). Perhaps the most dramatic example occurred when the *Washington Post* published a photograph⁹ during the first [Lebanon War](#) of a baby that appeared to have lost both its arms. The UPI caption said that the seven-month-old had been severely burned when an Israeli jet accidentally hit a



Christian residential area. The photo disgusted [President Reagan](#) and was one reason he subsequently called for Israel to halt its attacks. The photo and the caption, however, were inaccurate. The baby, in fact, did not lose its arms, and the burns the child suffered were the result of a [PLO](#) attack on East Beirut.

Early in the [Gaza war](#), the media reported that nearly three hundred Gazans were killed in the incursion. These numbers came from Palestinian sources. Moreover, what many reporters left out is the fact that even Palestinians admitted the majority of those casualties were [Hamas](#) and [Islamic Jihad](#) terrorists.

Some reports have also cited [UN](#) officials on conditions in [Gaza](#) and these must also be treated as suspect. [UN](#) representatives in [Gaza](#) are not impartial observers; they are individuals there specifically to aid the Palestinians and are naturally sympathetic to their cause. [UN](#) operatives in Palestinian territories have often been found to be apologists for terror with an animus toward [Israel](#). Richard Falk, the special rapporteur on the Palestinian territories, for example, has a long history of venomous anti-Israel remarks.

The media is reporting how the Arab world is outraged by Israeli actions, but this is also not a complete account of the facts. First, most of the Arab world does not get its news from the Western media, which at least claims a measure of objectivity; the leading source of news for most Arabs is Al-Jazeera. This network has no pretensions that it is balanced and presents non-stop coverage from a Palestinian perspective with the aim of generating hostility toward Israel. Al-Jazeera has not been reporting on the incessant rocket fire on Israel or its impact on the population. Still, what is striking is how many Arab leaders and commentators have blamed [Hamas](#) for provoking [Israel](#). Also, while [Hamas](#) has received some rhetorical support from Arab states, they have shown no interest in coming to the group's defense. Accurate reporting would note that for all their statements of support for the Palestinian cause, none of the Arab states are willing to do any more to defend them.

It is a journalist's duty to report on every situation in as unbiased a manner as possible. To do this, reporters who interview Palestinian spokespeople or hospital officials should check their facts with other sources, including the [IDF](#) and the Israel Foreign Ministry, both of which have been historically honest in their fact-collecting. If journalists are not careful in their reporting of the situation in [Gaza](#) they will be later castigated by their colleagues, as was the case after the last [Lebanon War](#).

MYTH

"The media is unable to report from Gaza."

FACT



Anyone who has picked up a newspaper or turned on the television in the last two weeks has seen plenty of coverage of the war in [Gaza](#). Many reporters are complaining they do not have the access they would like, but there is no shortage of information coming from the battlefield.

It is true that [Israel](#) has restricted journalists' access; however, this is no different than the policy of the United States and other armies which do not allow reporters' unfettered access during military operations. [Israel](#) learned a lesson from the degree of freedom it granted reporters during the war with [Hizballah](#) that journalists sometimes hampered military operations and endangered troops. Still, [Israel](#) has begun to allow press in with troops to provide pool reports.¹⁰

It is hard to argue that [Israel](#) has benefited from any limits placed on journalists as the story coming from [Gaza](#) has been largely told from the Palestinian point of view, with no pictures of [Hamas](#) terrorists or rocket crews but a steady stream of images of suffering and injured Palestinians.

While the journalists sitting on the Israeli side of the border with [Gaza](#) complain and criticize [Israel](#), none of them seem to be interested enough in going to [Gaza](#) to try to enter through the Egyptian side of the border. If [Egypt](#) is placing restrictions on journalists, they don't seem to be complaining about them.

Notes

¹[Associated Press](#), (June 25, 2008).

²[“The Six Months of the Lull Arrangement.”](#) Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, (December 2008).

³Alan Dershowitz, “Israel’s Policy is Perfectly ‘Proportionate’,” [Wall Street Journal](#), (January 2, 2009).

⁴[London Times](#), (August 1, 2006).

⁵Taghreed El-Khodary and Isabel Kershner, “Israeli Shells Kill 40 at Gaza U.N. School,” [New York Times](#), (January 6, 2009).

⁶Yaakov Katz and JPost.com staff, “Witnesses: Hamas Fired From School,” [Jerusalem Post](#), (January 7, 2009).

^{6a}Haviv Rettig Gur and Ehud Zion Waldoks, ‘Ask Egypt to let you into the Gaza Strip,’” [Jerusalem Post](#), (January 7, 2009).

⁷Anderson Cooper, “Covering the Gaza Crisis,” [CNN](#), (January 6, 2009).

⁸Anderson Cooper, “Covering the Gaza Crisis,” [CNN](#), (January 6, 2009).

⁹August 2, 1982.

¹⁰Haviv Rettig Gur and Ehud Zion Waldoks, ‘Ask Egypt to let you into the Gaza Strip,’” [Jerusalem Post](#), (January 7, 2009).