

Bernie Sanders Wants to Cut Aid for Israel and Give It to Hamas

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The appalling tale is [here](#).

Addressing a meeting of the left-wing J Street, a Jewish organization devoted to pressuring Israel to meet Palestinian demands, Bernie Sanders outdid himself:

“My solution is to say to Israel: you get \$3.8 billion dollars every year, if you want military aid you’re going to have to fundamentally change your relationship to the people of Gaza,” Sanders said. “In fact, I think it is fair to say that some of that should go right now into humanitarian aid in Gaza.

Sanders denounced the situation in Gaza as “absolutely inhumane,” “unacceptable,” and “unsustainable.”

“The Palestinian people have a right to live in peace and

security as well. It is not anti-Semitism to say that Netanyahu's government has been racist," Sanders continued.

If the situation in Gaza is "absolutely inhumane," "unacceptable," and "unsustainable," as Bernie seems to think – it's not nearly that dire – that is due entirely to the corrupt lords of misrule in Hamas, whose top leaders have stolen up to \$7.5 billion of that aid (see the discussion below) and spend what is left not on things which benefit the people of Gaza, such as residential housing, power plants, and water treatment plants, but on amassing an expensive armory of rockets to use against Israel.

It is up to the Palestinians in Gaza to chose whether to live in "peace and security." It is they who have been making war, while Israel is only responding to their attacks. Israel has been the target of thousands of Hamas rockets, not the other way round. Israel never initiates attacks; it responds to them. Israel wants nothing more than to live, with its neighbors in Gaza, in "peace and security," but it has discovered that the only way to end the attacks from Gaza is to respond with decisive force. This buys a certain period of "peace and security," then the Gazans renew their rocket attacks; Israel again responds; the Gazan rockets again stop being sent into Israel, and "peace and security" is again reestablished, until the next time Hamas decides to break both the peace and the security.

How has Netanyahu's government "been racist"? Presumably by defending itself against Hamas, the terrorist group that runs Gaza, when it sends rockets by the hundreds into Israeli civilian centers, or lets loose incendiary kites to set Israeli farms on fire, or attempt to breach Israel's security fence, with Molotov cocktails, grenades, and sometimes live fire, in order to kill Israeli soldiers and civilians? In attempting to defend itself from those who attack it and call for its destruction, is Israel being "racist"? The only

“racism” is that directed by the Muslims at the Jews, all Jews, and not just those in Israel. Hamas has repeatedly called on Palestinians to kill all Jews. This past summer, Hamas official Fathi Hamad told Palestinians that “there are Jews everywhere! We must attack every Jew on planet Earth – we must slaughter and kill them, with Allah’s help. Enough warming up!” Is Sanders familiar with Hamas’s murderous rhetoric? Does he know of any Israeli who talks about Palestinians in such a way? Does he know that Fath Hamad’s virulent Jew-hatred can also be found on Palestinian children’s shows, and in Palestinian textbooks?

And when Sanders attacks the “racist” Israelis, he overlooks how Arabs fare in Israel. Does he realize that Israeli Arabs serve in the Knesset, on the Supreme Court, as senior diplomats, even – as volunteers – in the IDF, where they rise high in the officer corps? Does he know that Arabs study at Israeli universities, that in Israeli hospitals Jewish and Arab doctors and other medical personnel work side by side treating both Jewish and Arab patients? Does he know that Arabs and Jews work together in factories, on farms, in service industries? And all this in “racist” Israel.

Sanders appears not to realize that Israel does not occupy Gaza; that not a single Israeli has remained there since the final pullout in 2005. Nor does he mention – does he know and not think it matters? – that Gaza is run by Hamas, a terrorist organization which has sent thousands of rockets indiscriminately into Israel. Even the left-wing Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have both defined these Hamas attacks as “war crimes.” Hamas is murderous not just towards Israelis, but toward its Arab opponents as well; it has crushed Fatah in Gaza, killing hundreds of its members.

Israel’s blockade of Gaza is only a response to Hamas attacks. It is mainly directed at preventing construction material, such as concrete and iron, from being imported into Gaza, that can be used to reinforce Hamas military emplacements. Is

Sanders aware that Israel allows fuel into Gaza precisely, as one Israeli spokesman said, to “prevent the civilian-humanitarian deterioration of the Strip”? Is he aware that Israel also allows humanitarian agencies to provide Gaza with millions of liters of diesel fuel and gasoline, fruits and vegetables, wheat, sugar, meat, chicken and fish products, dairy products, animal feed, hygiene products, clothing and shoes? Somehow one doubts that Bernie Sanders has been paying attention. And of course Gazans who cannot find suitable medical care in the Strip are allowed to use Israeli hospitals. Among them have been the relatives of several Hamas leaders, including Ismael Haniyeh and Khaled Meshaal, who have sought and been given treatment in Israel – that, too, would surely come as a surprise to Bernie Sanders.

The true enemy of the people of Gaza are not the Israelis. When they left Gaza, they handed over the greenhouses, then worth \$14 million, that Israelis had built, as part of a thriving multi-million-dollar business in flowers that, it was hoped by Israel, could eventually bring the Gazans as much as \$200 million in income. Israel had assumed the Gazan Arabs would continue to operate and expand the business, but instead, the Arabs destroyed the greenhouses completely, grabbing irrigation hoses, water pumps, and plastic sheeting in a blow to this fledgling efforts to reconstruct the Gaza Strip.

Israeli employers have also given work to tens of thousands of Gazans, both in Gaza and in Israel itself. In response to Hamas rocket attacks, some of those who used to travel to Israel for work can no longer do so. Should Israel then be blamed for taking such security measures?

Hamas has organized the “Great March of Return,” which every Friday since March 2018 sends Palestinians marching toward Israel’s security fence, to attempt to breach it in order to kill Israeli soldiers and civilians. It is the Palestinians who are attempting to attack Israelis in their own land;

Israel has merely been defending its security fence. The Palestinians throw Molotov cocktails, grenades, incendiary kites, and sometimes use live fire. Meanwhile, the Israeli soldiers first use tear gas and rubber bullets, to head off the rioters, and if that doesn't deter sufficiently, they use live fire, ordinarily aiming at the legs and then, and only as a last resort, when some rioters have actually breached the fence, they will aim above the waist. If there were no marchers with Molotov cocktails, grenades, incendiary bombs, and other explosives, relentlessly attempting to breach the security fence, there would be only peace from the Israeli side.

Bernie Sanders does not appear to know that whatever "humanitarian crisis" there may be in Gaza, it is not Israel, but Hamas that has caused it. Hamas has harmed the Gazan Arabs in several ways. First, despite the fact that Gazans have received many billions of dollars in aid, the fantastic corruption of its leaders has siphoned off a good deal of it. Both Khaled Meshal, the former head of Hamas' political wing, who now lives in Qatar, and Moussa Abu Marzouk, a senior leader of Hamas who now lives in Egypt, have each amassed fortunes of at least \$2.5 billion; some Arab investigators believe that Meshaal may now have as much as \$5 billion. This amount, of between \$5 and \$7.5 billion, was meant to be aid for the people of Gaza. Israel had nothing to do with such a diversion of funds. Ismail Haniyeh, the current leader of Hamas, is reported to now have his own fortune of tens of millions of dollars, for he receives the proceeds of a 20% tax on all goods smuggled into Gaza from Egypt. In addition, there are at least 600 "Hamas millionaires" living in Gaza. There are no signs that Hamas leaders will end this corruption; they, after all, are the prime beneficiaries.

The second way that Hamas has caused a "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza is by misusing funds meant for such things as residential housing, improvements to energy infrastructure so

as to avoid frequent power cuts, and wastewater treatment plants (such as the North Gaza Wastewater Treatment Plant, finally put into operation in 2018 after years of delay, paid for entirely by foreign – European – donors. including the World Bank). Instead of undertaking such improvements, all of which would instantly improve the lives of the Gazan Arabs, Hamas chooses to use that aid in building a huge military armory; rockets and missiles are expensive. And when Hamas uses part of that armory in an effort to rain death down on Israeli towns, it is not just Hamas, but all the Gazans, who suffer from the inevitable retaliation.

If Bernie Sanders were willing to do a little investigating – less than a half-hour of googling would do – he could find out about the fantastic theft of many billions in aid money by Hamas leaders, about the use for military purposes of much of the aid that remains, instead of spending it on reconstruction for the sake of Gazan civilians. He would discover that Israel's "blockade" does not extend to food, nor, any longer, to fuel. And he would learn about the thousands of rockets that Hamas has hurled at Israel. He would also find out about Hamas' blood-curdling threats to kill not just all Israelis, but all Jews, everywhere.

He would find out that Israel tried, from the very moment it left Gaza, to help its inhabitants economically. Israel turned over, as a turn-key business, the 3,000 greenhouses that the Palestinians could have continued to run and expand, in an operation worth hundreds of millions of dollars a year. Instead, they chose to destroy them. Israeli employers also hired tens of thousands of Gazans, to work both in Gaza and in Israel, and only cut back later on such employment for security reasons.

Here's what, having duly informed himself, Bernie Sanders could say about Gaza:

"I am deeply concerned about the ordinary people of Gaza, who

are held in thrall by Hamas, a terrorist group that continues to attack Israel's civilians with rockets and mortar fire. Billions of dollars have been given by aid groups to Gaza, too much of which ends up in the coffers of Hamas, the terrorist group that rules Gaza with an iron fist. And Hamas leaders have diverted billions – think of that, billions! – of that aid to themselves. Two of its top leaders, Khaled Meshaal and Moussa Abu Marzouk, have managed to amass fortunes of \$2.5-5 billion and \$2.5 billion respectively. In addition, the current leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, is said to now have a fortune of tens of millions of dollars; there are 600 Hamas members in Gaza who are believed to be millionaires, all of those fortunes are in the midst of so much poverty among the ordinary Gazans. I think that the people of Gaza deserve to have that money returned, clawed back, for their benefit.

“I also think that Hamas should be shifting its priorities. Instead of spending money on expensive rockets and missiles, the use of which by Hamas only brings Israeli retribution, and does not improve the life of a single Gazan, all the aid money should go to reconstruction of housing, power plants, the electric grid, and waste-water management. Let every penny of that aid money be used to improve the lives of ordinary Gazans, instead of enriching a handful of Hamas leaders..

“And there is another thing that has always disturbed me. Why is it that tens of billions of dollars in aid have been given by the West, including the United States, as aid to the Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank, while so little is given to them by their fellow Arabs? Why can't the Gulf Arabs come through with real money to help the Palestinians, and not just with a billion here and a billion there? Those Gulf Arabs have annual incomes of tens, and in some cases even receive hundreds of billions of dollars; surely they can spare some for the Arabs of Gaza and the West Bank? At that meeting in Manama, \$50 billion in aid for the Palestinians was discussed – a sum that really would make a difference in the

lives of Palestinians. And the Gulf Arabs can easily afford that. I call on them to contribute their fair share, without further excuses or delays.

“And to make sure that corrupt leaders do not again help themselves to much of that aid, or spend it on weapons, the disbursement of the aid should be the responsibility of financial technocrats assigned to the task by a U.N. oversight committee. Let’s see how that arrangement fares, and let’s for decency’s sake please stop – and I am ashamed to say that I was one of them – blaming Israel for the Gazans’ plight.”

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