

In Gaza, Israel Will Be Held Responsible for Keeping the Coronavirus in Check

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Some 55 Palestinians in the West Bank are currently positive for coronavirus, and last Thursday [March 19] the first two cases were reported in the Gaza Strip – both Palestinians who returned to Gaza from Pakistan, via Egypt, and are now quarantined at Rafah.

Prof. Eyal Zisser thinks the coronavirus threat may bring Israel and the Palestinians closer together. His argument – which has not convinced me – is [here](#).

The Gaza Strip faces a very problematic combination of third-world healthcare, one of the highest population densities in the world, and difficulty in enforcing instructions issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

The Palestinians are being pushed into Israel's arms by the arrival of the epidemic, since they are entirely dependent on the medical aid Israel provides them with to stop the spread of the virus. But the coronavirus crisis has turned the spotlight on a familiar and complicated truth, which many still deny – that it is difficult and maybe impossible to separate the Palestinians and the Israelis, and that the 2005 disengagement from Gaza did not truly “disengage” Gaza from Israel.

*Day-to-day life in Judea and Samaria, where Jewish and Palestinian communities exist side by side, along with the fact that tens of thousands of Palestinians make their living in Israel, make any attempt to separate the two populations in an attempt to stop the virus impractical. But **Gaza, too, which is supposedly cut off from Israel, is becoming Israel's responsibility since Hamas can fire on Sderot or Tel Aviv but cannot care for the residents of Gaza in a humanitarian crisis of the kind the world is currently facing.***

Hamas long ago made its choice. It chose to spend time and money and attention on making life as difficult and dangerous as it could for Israelis. Almost every Friday, for the past two years, it has staged the Great March of Return to try to breach Israel's security fence. The script never varies: Israel first tries to head off the marchers by firing rubber bullets and tear gas. Those who continue and get very near to the fence then are subject to non-lethal fire, but the Israelis aim below the knee only in order to temporarily prevent ambulation. The protesters who get right up to the fence, throwing Molotov cocktails, grenades, occasionally gunfire, at Israeli soldiers, and let loose incendiary kites to set Israeli farmland on fire, are the ones whom soldiers fire at above the knees, in the most threatening cases, shooting to kill.

Hamas has spent a lot, too, on hundreds of terror tunnels it

has built from Gaza into both Israel and Egypt. These tunnels are very long and very deep – many built at a depth of 100 and reaching 2640 feet in length. They were to be used by Hamas fighters who, it was planned, would emerge at the Israeli opening, to kidnap or kill Israeli civilians, then quickly disappear into the tunnel and back to Gaza. Life for Israeli civilians near the Gaza border, with such a threat a constant possibility remains tense even in times of quiet.

Had Hamas given up its Jihad against Israel in 2005, today Gaza would be a very different place, and so would its ability to withstand the spread of the coronavirus. When the last Israeli pulled out of Gaza in 2005, the Israelis left intact 3,000 greenhouses, which they had built and with which they had established a thriving business growing, and exporting to Europe, vegetables, fruits, and flowers. These greenhouses were turned over to the Palestinians, who then proceeded to vandalize the greenhouses, with individual looters stripping away the copper pipes and anything else of value they could take. The Palestinians didn't care. They had grown used to living on foreign aid, chiefly supplied by the Infidels in Europe and the United States.

Much of that aid was stolen by Hamas leaders. Two of them, Khaled Meshal and Mousa Abu Marzouk, are each believed to have amassed fortunes of \$2.5 billion dollars. Some of those stolen billions should have gone to improving the wretched medical system in Gaza. Some of the aid that was not stolen was used not as its Western benefactors intended – on the medical system – but instead went to pay for weaponry – rockets, missiles – as well as for terror tunnels, and for financial support for terrorists (if they were in prison) and for their families (if they had been killed)– the infamous “Pay For Slay” program. Again, the medical services in Gaza were scanted; new hospitals were needed but not built; instead the existing hospitals were often places where rockets were stored, or from where rockets were fired into Israel. This

naturally made them targets of Israeli bombing. And many medical personnel in Gaza who could practice their skills anywhere naturally preferred to emigrate, to the Gulf Arab states, to Europe, to North America.

As for claims about Israel causing shortages of medicines in Gaza “because of the blockade,” Israel has never blockaded any medicines for Gaza. It is the Palestinian Authority that retains the power to order medicines for Gaza. Since 2017, as part of the sanctions it has placed on Gaza in its ongoing contest for power with Hamas, the PA has sometimes blocked even critical medicines from being transferred to Gaza. The PA has also made a major reduction in Gaza’s overall health budget. Little of this is ever reported in the Western press.

*So Israel is shouldering responsibility for the Gaza Strip, both because it wants to contain the epidemic in Gaza and because it wants to avoid criticism at home and abroad for not taking responsibility for the health of the residents of Gaza. In fact, **Israel is already supplying coronavirus testing kits to the Hamas government and preparing to provide medical aid, including field hospitals, for thousands of Gazan corona patients if the situation takes a turn for the worse, as has happened in many places all over the world.***

Have you heard or read anything, until just now, about Israel supplying test kits to the Hamas government? No. And did you know that Israel has already been preparing to provide medical aid, including field hospitals, for thousands of potential corona patients in Gaza? No, you have not. And when that aid is deployed, what are the chances that it will be mentioned on the BBC, on CNN, in The New York Times or the Washington Post? Israel’s help will likely be mentioned only if something goes wrong, such as if Israel-supplied test kits are found defective, or Israel is accused of “not providing enough ventilators” or of “failing to provide the same level of care for patients in Gaza as Israelis get,” or some such

predictable, and predictably baseless, accusation.

When it comes to the PA in the West Bank, for now Israel is just stepping up coordination between the IDF's Civil Administration and Palestinian authorities. But it's clear that if the coronavirus situation there worsens, Israel will need to get more involved in attempts to stop it from spreading throughout Judea and Samaria, or across the Green Line.

The near-total quiet on the Gaza and West Bank borders does not necessarily mean that the Messiah has arrived and the Palestinians have turned into Zionists because of their increasing dependence on Israel. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh, for example, is demanding that terrorists be released from Israeli prisons to keep them from contracting coronavirus in Israel, and Hamas isn't doing anything to reduce tensions, either. But the facts on the ground speak for themselves, and reflect the reality of intertwined lives that cannot be changed by rhetoric.

The lion is not lying down with the lamb, either in Gaza or the West Bank. But there is relative quiet; no rockets are being fired at Sderot, the Great March of Return as of now has been cancelled. The Palestinians know that they are counting on Israel to rescue them from this invisible plague. They can hold off on violence for now. There will be time, once the pandemic has ended, to renew their Jihad against the Jewish state. But that renewal of violence doesn't mean that the next time there is a health crisis, the Palestinians won't again be expecting Israel to come to their rescue yet again. They will.

Prof. Zisser is hopeful:

The corona crisis could turn out to be a positive turning point in Israeli-Palestinian relations, in which the latter acknowledge the importance of their ties to Israel, making them not only difficult to cut, but also in the Palestinians'

interest to maintain.

I doubt that Palestinians will feel any lasting gratitude to their Israeli Samaritans. The most morally advanced Palestinians may recognize that the Israelis have treated them well, but theirs will be a small minority of voices, and for their own safety they may not express such sentiments in public. Most of the Palestinians will treat Israeli medical and humanitarian aid as theirs by right; they are entitled to it, they deserve it. Let's not forget that "the Jews" owe it to them for stealing the Palestinians' land in the first place and besides, "the Jews" almost certainly created the virus, tested it out in China, and then made sure it arrived in the West Bank and Gaza, so they could then treat the stricken Palestinians and get credit for this from a gullible world that yet again falls for the schemes of the wily Zionists.

That's too crazy a notion, even for these past masters at conspiracy theories, you say? I think that in the bizarre world of Muslim Arabs what is crazy is the perfectly sensible belief of the eminently sane Prof. Eyal Zisser, that the "corona crisis could turn out to be a positive turning point in Israeli-Palestinian relations." How will we know who was right? Let's just keep checking back with MEMRI.

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