

The Embedded

By Robert Lewis

War does not determine who is right, only who is left.

Bertrand Russell

Ten soldiers wisely led will beat a hundred without a head.

Euripides

People all over the world are railing against the loss of innocent lives in Gaza because they don't think Israel has the right to bomb residential buildings where Hamas fighters are embedded. This raises the question of whether there should be sanctuary or safe haven in times of war?

The long and the short answer must be categorically NO because Hamas, or any disgruntled faction, militia or nation could wage war and then retreat to a safe haven with impunity. In most wars, hospitals and places of worship have served as safe havens provided they exercise neutrality, refusing to accept neither combatants nor weaponry in their spaces. So when Hamas embeds itself with the local population, it knows that it is asking of it, without explicit consent, to risk the ultimate sacrifice.



A satellite image issued by the IDF shows what the military says are Hamas command centers located underneath Shifa Hospital in Gaza, October 27, 2023 (IDF)

In dealing with the embedded, Israel has four options. (1) With respect to sparing the lives of women and children and non-combatants, it can grant

Hamas safe haven and either fail in its mission, or resign itself to being in a permanent state of war. (2) It can lay siege to the residential building, mosque or hospital and eventually flush out the adversary, a dangerous and costly – in terms of time and resources – proposition in an hostile environment. As far as I know this has not been tried. (3) In respect of world opinion, it can send in and purposefully sacrifice its soldiers in lethal urban, door to door combat. (4) And finally, with the goal of minimizing casualties, it can explode a verified enemy target, neutralizing both the embedded enemy and civilians, and suffer the consequences of hostile world opinion.

From the Hamas perspective, it has to hunker down somewhere, and it can't be somewhere easily identified as a military target, so it would seem that it has little choice but to embed itself with the local population. Since there has been no widespread protest from the Gazan people demanding that Hamas vacate their dwellings or surrender, we must conclude that in general the locals aren't as disturbed as world opinion on the sacrifice they are being asked to make, just as Hamas is self-evidently OK with it, otherwise it would surrender, and the slaughter, or in media-speak, the genocide,

would immediately end.

As it concerns the tragic loss of life of non-combatants (children, mothers, the elderly and infirm), Hamas is no less responsible than Israel since it refuses to surrender. Which means Hamas is winning the all important messaging war because the world is blaming Israel for the murder of innocent women and children when Hamas is at least as responsible by staying put and pat.

Which isn't to say that on a daily basis there aren't [outraged Palestinian voices](#) cursing Hamas for the destruction it has wrought, but in the absence of a unified front calling for Hamas to surrender, one is forced to conclude that the conditions in Gaza before the war were such that despite the suffering, the tragic loss of life and devastation of infrastructure (hospitals, schools, mosques) the principals in the guesome conflict would rather continue fighting than capitulate, that no sacrifice is too great for the cause of freedom and self-determination.

Nonetheless, one must wonder: If prior to the war Hamas enjoyed the support of 75% of the population but [only 25% supported military intervention](#), why did it turned a deaf ear to the general will of the people it was elected to serve and instead opted to do Iran's bidding?

Without exception, every people in the world, defined by language, culture and religion, feel compelled to acquire a territory in order to fulfill their destiny. What we learn from history is that some people get their territory and others don't – and whether that is fair or not is beside the point.

In realpolitik, [every land belongs to the occupier](#) until someone takes it way. That's the law of life, or as Mark Twain observed, "There is not an acre of land on the globe that's in possession of its rightful owner."