

The endless prevarications of Ilhan Omar

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Ilhan Omar often blames America and Israel for the world's problems. In early May, Omar denounced US sanctions against Venezuela intended to force out its socialist dictator after she was asked about the problems in the country.

"People like Elliott Abrams, neocons and warmongers, you know, for so long pushed for policies that are now – we can see, not only in Central America, but in many parts of the world, the kind of devastations that they've [not] seen for decades," Omar said on Democracy Now. "Many of the sanctions we impose ultimately lead to devastations – and we are seeing it now in Venezuela."

Just as in the case of her tweet about "Black Hawk Down," Omar makes America out to be the bad guy, and ignores the greater

context. In this case, she turns a blind eye to the repression and impoverishment that has been brought about by the corruption of Maduro's regime and his predecessor, Hugo Chavez.

Furthermore, Omar also blamed Israel after Hamas and PIJ launched 700 rockets toward Israeli cities last week. Omar tweeted...

"How many more protesters must be shot, rockets must be fired, and little kids must be killed until the endless cycle of violence ends? The status quo of occupation and humanitarian crisis in Gaza is unsustainable. Only real justice can bring about security and lasting peace,"

Comment:

"How many more protesters must be shot..."

The people Omar calls "protesters" are not mere "protesters" at all; "protesters" do not throw Molotov cocktails and other explosives including grenades, or even, from time to time, fire guns. Ordinary "protesters" do not throw into the air incendiary kites, as these people do. Organized and directed by Hamas, those who have taken part over more than a year in the so-called Great March of Return are attempting to breach Israel's security fence, in the hope of then attacking Israeli soldiers and civilians. These are not "peaceful protesters" as Omar would have you believe.

Israel tries every non-lethal way it can to stop them, using tear gas and rubber bullets. Only when the marchers come very close to, or are just at, the security fence, attempting to cut through the barbed wire, throwing Molotov cocktails and other explosives, including grenades, or sending incendiary kites aloft to set fire to Israeli farmland (thousands of acres have been destroyed that way) do the Israelis use live fire. They almost always aim for the lower legs. Only in the

most extreme and threatening of cases do they shoot to kill. Of course there would not have been a single Arab wounded or killed had Hamas not chosen to organize these attempts to breach Israeli security. And Israel has a right and a duty to defend itself; that is all Israel is doing.

“How many rockets must be fired...”

Omar appears to have forgotten it is not Israel that has been firing rockets, but Hamas. It is Hamas that has fired 690 rockets at Israeli cities and towns. That there was not enormous civilian loss of life in Israel is only because so many of those Hamas rockets either landed harmlessly on uninhabited land, or were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defense. Omar needs to keep straight, too, who started the latest flare-up in Gaza: it was Islamic Jihad, firing on and wounding Israeli soldiers, that began the conflict. Israel retaliated, then Hamas massively escalated the conflict by firing several hundred rockets at Israel. Israel again retaliated, Hamas then fired hundreds more. In the end Hamas fired 690 rockets, while Israel destroyed 350 Hamas sites in Gaza. At any point Hamas could have stopped the fighting simply by ceasing to fire those rockets at Israel.

“[How many] little kids must be killed”

Indeed. Omar should be asking: Why does Hamas deliberately put children (“little kids”) in the front of the marchers, actually hoping they will be injured or killed, in order to stoke anti-Israel propaganda? The only reason to include children is the cruel calculation that some will be wounded or even killed, providing Hamas with a great propaganda victory. Israel makes enormous efforts not to harm children, but the problems with visibility – smoke from burning tires and the tear gas – and the general chaos of thousands of people, running here and there, flinging their explosives toward the Israeli soldiers, makes it impossible to completely avoid wounding children.

“The status quo of occupation must be ended [in Gaza]..”

What can Ilhan Omar be thinking? There is no “occupation” of Gaza. There are no Israelis occupying any part of the Gaza Strip. The 9,000 Israelis who had been living in settlements in Gaza had all been removed by August 16, 2005. Since then Gaza has been ruled, first by the Palestine Authority, and then by Hamas. The Israelis handed over intact 3,000 greenhouses to the Palestinians, in the hopes that they would continue, and expand, the business Israelis had started. Instead, Palestinians vandalized and destroyed the greenhouses. Since coming to power in Gaza, Hamas has made a choice to invest hundreds of millions in weaponry of all kinds; in building its weapons warehouses, attack tunnels, offices, cyberattack headquarters. The money all of this cost could have been spent on bettering the lives of the Gazan Arabs but Hamas chose not to do so. Ilhan Omar wants you to think Israel’s “occupation” that ended 14 years ago is to blame.

The wretched “status quo” in Gaza has nothing to do with a non-existent “occupation” but with the choices made by Hamas leaders. They prefer spending money on war-making than on building the civilian economy. Furthermore, the catastrophic levels of corruption have impeded economic growth. During the last decade more than \$5 billion in aid money has been siphoned off by just two Hamas leaders, Moussa Abu Marzook and Khaled Meshaal, for themselves. There are estimated to be another 600 Hamas millionaires in Gaza. Does Ilhan Omar think this corruption is Israel’s fault?

“Omar also retweeted a post by journalist Mehdi Hassan blaming Israel for a missile strike that killed a pregnant woman and child in Gaza. That retweet remained active – and Omar was silent – following the revelation that a PIJ rocket was responsible for the deaths, not an Israeli airstrike as pro-Hamas propaganda claimed.”

The revelation came directly in a communication by Islamic Jihad, confirming what Hamas had posted for its members online (and then quickly taken down for fear the Israelis might see it). Here is the story:

"TPS (Jewish News Agency) has learned that the [Palestinian] baby was killed when Islamic Jihad terrorists launched a rocket towards Israel from within a populated area in the east of Gaza City, but the rocket misfired and landed short, exploding in a nearby house and killing the baby.

"The baby's mother was not killed, but she did have a miscarriage.

"Mahmoud H., a local resident, told TPS about a massive pit he saw inside the house after the rocket's explosion.

"The rocket was locally produced and may have malfunctioned or exploded prematurely because of the low-grade explosives.

"The Hamas-controlled Gazan Ministry of Health initially announced that Saba's mother was killed, but then claimed that another woman named Falastin Abu 'Arar was killed in the explosion. She may be Saba's aunt.

"A source in Gaza told TPS that Islamic Jihad representatives met with the Abu 'Arar family on Sunday morning and offered them full compensation and a registry of the baby as a "Shahid" entitled to long-term support in exchange for their silence.

"Arab journalists in Gaza are aware of the facts, but have refrained from reporting on them due to the sensitivity of the situation.

"TPS was successful in capturing Hamas' report on the Islamic Jihad's culpability.

"Hamas' al-Risala News published a news item on the issue in its Telegram account on Sunday afternoon, but removed it

shortly after. The item then appeared on another Hamas-lined Telegram channel and quickly disappeared.

“The item says: “A leak from the heroes of the [Islamic Jihad’s] Sarayat al-Quds (Jerusalem Brigades) on the circumstances of the death of the baby Saba Abu ‘Arar indicates that a rocket of the resistance exploded inside the family’s home due to a technical failure, and prematurely exploded. There is a claim that the technical failure was caused by low-grade explosives in the rocket.”

“There is no doubt that the baby’s death has nothing to do with the enemy’s (Israel’s) planes,” the report added.

“The IDF stated Sunday afternoon that “Palestinian weapons caused the tragic death of a mother in Gaza and her baby.”

Yet more than a week has gone by since Hamas reported that the death of the pregnant woman and of the baby had nothing to do with Israel, but were the result of a technical failure leading to the premature explosion of an Islamic Jihad rocket. Ilhan Omar certainly knows of this admission by IJ reported by Hamas, but has left up her retweeting of a post by Mehdi Hassan blaming Israel for the killing of the baby and her mother. She should not only have removed that retweet, but also straightforwardly admitted that both Hamas and Islamic Jihad have told their own members the truth: a malfunctioning IJ rocket, not Israel, was responsible. Being Ilhan Omar means never having to apologize or explain. She has repeatedly stated falsehoods, refused to retract them, and then ridden out the political storm. When she insisted that CAIR was formed in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, as a response to fears of “islamophobia,” and then learned that CAIR was actually formed in 1994, she never admitted, much less apologized for, her gross error. Her teflon is remarkable.

Omar should be asked the following by some intrepid reporter:

1. Why do you describe Gaza as under “occupation” when Israelis had been pulled out by August 16, 2005?
2. Why did the Palestinians in Gaza destroy the \$14 million dollars worth of greenhouses that Israel had turned over to them at that time, hoping that the residents of Gaza would take over the turnkey operations and thrive?
3. When you speak of “little kids” being endangered, who is doing the endangering? It is a fact that Hamas has put children toward the front of its weekly Great March of Return, hoping that they will be wounded or killed, so that Hamas will win a propaganda victory. Do you think it is right for Hamas to include these “little kids” in these marches, given the violence the marchers deliberately engender?
4. Do you think the condition of the people of Gaza has been at all improved by the vast sums spent on the manufacture, storage, and use, of very expensive weapons, on attack tunnels, and on cyberwarfare? Couldn't those hundreds of millions of dollars be spent on building up the economy, so as to relieve the financial misery of Gazans, who must endure high levels of unemployment and a pitiful infrastructure? How many water purification plants, or irrigation projects, might have been built with the money spent on the 690 rockets that were just fired at Israel by Hamas?
5. Are you aware of the enormous corruption at the highest levels of Palestinian leadership, and especially of Hamas? Did you know that two of its leaders, Moussa Abu Marzouk and Khaled Meshaal, each has a fortune of \$2.5 billion? What could have been done with that \$5 billion to improve the lot of the people of Gaza? Do you care about real people in Gaza, or only about scoring points against Israel? And there is much more corruption below that top level – there are now 600 Hamas millionaires in Gaza. And in the PA there's the same kind of corruption,. Do you know about the \$400 million that Mahmoud Abbas and his two sons have acquired as their business empire?

Or the millions his cronies in Ramallah have been taking as their share? And all of this is money taken from the foreign aid meant to improve the lot of the people. Why have you, Ilhan Omar, never spoken out, not once, about the corruption among the Palestinian leaders? Don't you care?

Questions for study and discussion, if only Ilhan Omar would dare to study, would dare to discuss. She will, alas, do neither.

But let's at least scratch off as much of that teflon as we can.

First published in