

The Uncertain Cease Fire in the Middle East

by Michael Curtis



The scorpion wants to cross the river Jordan but cannot swim, so asks a frog to carry it across. The frog hesitates afraid the scorpion might sting, but the scorpion says if it did that, they would both drown. The frog accepts this, lets the scorpion climb on its back and begins to swim. Midway across the river the scorpion stings the frog, dooming them both. The dying frog asks the scorpion why it stung, despite knowing the consequences. The scorpion replied, "I could not help it, it's in my nature."

Emulating the scorpion, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, on May 10, 2021, launched the attack on Israel which it wishes to destroy totally and has fired over 4,300 rockets, using an extensive network of tunnels, into the civilian population of Israel from the Gaza Strip and some from Lebanon. The attacks are in the Hamas nature. Against the indiscriminate firing of rockets on its population centers, Israel responded with air strikes and artillery bombardment of Gaza, aiming not at innocent

civilians, but at the military infrastructure, the rocket sites, the 60 miles of underground tunnels, and the commanders and militants of Hamas.

After 11 days of fighting, Hamas and Israel on May 21, 2021 agreed to an Egyptian brokered cease-fire. Similar agreements have been brokered and broken in the past as Hamas will not end its fanatical irredentism and refusal to accept the legitimacy of the State of Israel.

It was predictable that Osama Hamdan, the senior official of Hamas that had initiated the war and fired rockets against Jerusalem, declared that Israel had agreed to stop its "aggressive actions." He is aware that Hamas still has thousands of rockets left, including the most advanced short range rocket Badr-3, based on an Iranian model, and has the expertise to build more rockets, aided by Iran, and Iran's Quds Force, and can continue "to bomb Israel if it chose to do so."

Hamas has suffered 232 deaths and thousands injured and witnessed the destruction of its tunnel network for firing rockets and the death of some of its leaders. But it also galvanized ethnic violence among Israeli Arabs and Jews, and has inspired anti-Israeli and antisemitic demonstrations in many countries.

There are many aspects of the war that deserve comment, but a few comments may suffice.

First is the fallacy of the argument of equivalence on both sides. This is inherent in analyses by many in the media and in diplomatic circles such as the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. He stated that "I am deeply shocked by the continued air and artillery bombardment by the IDF in Gaza. But indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas and other militant groups towards population in Israel was also unacceptable." A similar and familiar evaluation is pointed at Israel's lack of

“proportionality” in its actions, best stated that Israel has a right to defend itself against unacceptable attacks, but should limit the number of casualties. In this formula, “proportion” is never numerically defined.

A second issue is that of responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities. Some actions by Israel are controversial. Among them are protests and police actions at the Al Aqsa mosque/Temple Mount compound in Jerusalem, the real estate dispute involving the threatened eviction of some Palestinian families by Jewish settlers in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, the 1970 Israel law that allows Jews to reclaim land in East Jerusalem that was owned by Jews before 1948. However, two factors are more relevant. One is that Hamas for more than twenty years has continually launched thousands of missiles, starting with the Qassam rocket that had a range of about six miles, and mortar fire against Israel from Gaza. This continual attack led Israel to develop the Iron Dome system to intercept the rockets.

The other factor is the rivalry between Hamas founded in 1987 as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood and Fatah led by President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority which have dominated Palestinian politics since 2006. A brief civil war took place between the rivals and an attempt to form a united government failed. Since 2007 the Palestinian leadership has been divided, with Fatah and the PA governing the West Bank and Hamas governing Gaza. Hamas had hoped to win in the election that was scheduled for May 22, 2021, which was postponed indefinitely by Abbas. Hamas linked the movement to protecting Jerusalem, claimed to defend “Muslim Palestine,” and fired rockets to show solidarity with Palestinians protesting against Israeli police who were controlling access to the Damascus Gate, an entrance to Jerusalem’s Old City. By launching the attacks on May 10, Hamas is making a bid to increase its popularity and to displace Fatah as leader of the Palestinian movement.

The first surprise of the war is the sophistication and seriousness of the terrorist organization Hamas has built an extraordinary arsenal despite the Israel-Egyptian blockage imposed in 2007 and surveillance and restrictions. Hamas has been aided militarily by patrons Iran and Syria by a well-organized process by which rockets were shipped to Sudan, then to the Egyptian desert, then smuggled through tunnels beneath the Sinai Peninsula. Iran, which also provides \$100 million a year to Hamas armed groups, started missile production after which Hamas developed most of its own. The Hamas arsenal at the start of the war included 7,000 rockets of various ranges, 300 anti-tank and 100 anti-aircraft missiles, attack drones, unmanned submarine drones, and enhanced rockets such as the Ayyash, 150 mile range, Katyushas, and Iran Fajr-5. Hamas has no moral problem putting the operation rocket sites near or in schools, hospitals, nurseries, and residential buildings.

Hamas can be regarded as part of Iran's proxy war against Israel. It has received aid from Iran as well as being the recipient of help from Turkey and Qatar which has provided \$1 billion to Hamas. It is almost certain that Iran is advising Hamas on its tactics. Iran has announced it is increasing its financial support of Hamas to \$30 million a month. Iran, experienced with reconnaissance drones, has supplied Hamas with an armed unmanned aerial vehicle. Iran's head of the Revolutionary Guard, Hossein Salami speaks of the Zionist regime's faulted defense system and claims that the balance of power in the Middle East has changed with the ability of Hamas to launch so many missiles against Israel. The central truth is that Hamas and other Palestinians are more interested in fighting than in finding a solution. Neglected is the Oslo Accord of 1993 that the status of Jerusalem will be settled in a permanent peace settlement.

As always in issues concerning Israel, much of the media and many leftist activists have blamed Israel for starting what is

a Hamas initiated war. Anti-Israeli rhetoric and antisemitic protests have become intermingled more with leftist politics than with Middle East realities or objective analysis. The conflict has gone viral around the world with displays of destruction in Gaza and personal tragedies, especially of children, sparking protests in many countries.

Yet ramifications of the supposed issue are bewildering, because they indicate the presence of antisemitism. For example, on May 18, 2021, a convoy of cars drove through areas with a sizable Jewish population in north London calling for Jewish women to be raped. For three hours the cars with the crusaders shouting "f...the Jews, f...all of them. F...the mothers. F...the daughters." Similarly, in Los Angeles, diners outside a restaurant were attacked by people, in a caravan of cars, flying Palestinian flags, who shouted "Israel kills children." In protests in Boston, San Francisco, Austin, Texas, and Skokie, demonstrators held signs that Israel was committing a Holocaust against Palestinians.

Two aspects are particularly troubling, the actions of some Democrats in Congress and some in the BLM movement.

In Congress the group known as the Squad and associates, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Ilhan Omar, Cori Bush, and Jamaal Bowman have declared their solidarity with Hamas and talked of black and brown bodies being brutalized and murdered by Israel, and designating Israel as an apartheid state.

Members of BLM tweeted solidarity with Palestinians and condemned "Israel's settler colonialism," and called for Palestinian liberation. They took part in violent protests outside the Israel consulate in NYC. The BLM members equated the conflict in Gaza with racial unrest, anti-police protests in the U.S. and called for ending settler colonialism in all its forms. The BLM has long supported the BDS movement. In return, the BDS officially thanked BLM for its support,

symbolically from Ferguson to Palestine, in common struggle against racism and white supremacy.

Ongoing protests have little relation to the war started by Hamas. A policewoman in London shouted "free Palestine," and hugged protestors at a rally outside the Israeli embassy in London. Many anti-Israeli and antisemitic messages have appeared on social networks. Although the Gallup poll indicates that 75% of the U.S. population is favorable to Israel, the number of those more sympathetic to the Palestinians is increasing. Most of this comes from Democrats.