

COMMENTARY



AHMED ZAKOT/REUTERS PHOTO

Hamas militants launched more than 600 rockets on Israel this year before firing 100 in less than a week.

The wrong war

By DANIEL KAMIN

Israel has been fighting the wrong war against Hamas. Everyone should be happy about the recent cease-fire that was agreed to and hopeful that it will hold. Yet Israel — and everyone else for that matter — has been playing by Hamas rules; it is a game Israel cannot win, and that is why some Israeli officials describe the Israel Defense Forces' own efforts as "mowing the grass," because no matter how short you cut it, the grass will inevitably grow again.

When Israel fights this wrong war, it loses ground in the only war it can and must win against intractable enemies: the war of ideas.

Listen to what Israeli government and military officials say about Hamas tactics in its endless jihadist struggle to destroy the Jewish state. Repeatedly and accurately, Israeli leaders affirm that Hamas both targets Israeli civilian population centers and hides behind its own Palestinian population centers in an effort not only to terrorize Israelis but also to put its own people in the line of fire. Hamas does this either to deter an Israeli response or to garner international support when Israel does strike back to defend its citizens from incessant rocket fire that no nation should have to tolerate.

But for the foreseeable future, the likelihood of Hamas inflicting heavy Israeli casualties by launching hundreds of mostly primitive rockets at Israeli civilians is inversely proportional to the likelihood that Israel will inflict heavy Palestinian civilian casualties as collateral damage when it responds.

All should applaud the cease-fire negotiated by the Egyptian and American governments. But that effort will also be akin to mowing the grass unless Israel and its allies improve their ability to combat Hamas using the tools available to vibrant democracies.

These tools center on a war of

ideas, and make no mistake about it; these ideas will save both Israeli and Palestinian lives. The West — through its two most significant entities, the U.S. government and the European Union — has deemed Hamas a terrorist organization. Israel and the West, then, must loudly broadcast that message and bring pressure to bear on Hamas for its never-ending targeting of civilians. This needs to occur at least as relentlessly as efforts to ward off any upcoming Iranian threat. It must be continuously pushed to the forefront of media and international attention.

The cease-fire agreement affirms that Hamas is in control of Gaza.

If President Barack Obama, EU heads of state and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stay on this message, the media and Israel's enemies will be forced to listen to what emanates from their bully pulpits. No longer will they be able to imply a moral equivalency by use of euphemisms such as "militants" or "fighters" toward those who unabashedly violate the laws of armed conflict.

But the time for such an effort is not after more than 100 rockets fall on Israel in less than four days, it is when any rockets fall. More than 600 rockets were launched on Israeli civilians this year before Hamas ratcheted up its barrage this month.

While zero tolerance is not a viable military strategy, it is a realistic and pragmatic strategy in the war of ideas. Why does the West not get this? Why does anyone who cares about the lives threatened in this conflict — Palestinian or Israeli — not understand this and act accordingly?

Israel ended its occupation of Gaza in 2005. In 2012, there is no Israeli occupation of Gaza; if there

were, there would not have been concern about a possible Israeli incursion into Gaza as Israel would already be in Gaza. Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said exactly that in an interview with Lebanese TV last March.

Why was Israel unable to widely disseminate and echo Haniyeh's sentiments? Why was this not picked up by both the administration and Congress, most of whom were forced to address this foreign policy issue in the course of this year's election campaigns?

The cease-fire agreement affirms that Hamas is in control of Gaza. There are indications that the terms mean there must be no rockets emanating from Gaza toward Israel whatsoever. This would mean Hamas is responsible for violent actions not only from its own brigades but also from smaller groups, such as Islamic Jihad, that are not party to the agreement.

If this turns out to be the case, Israel will not only have to ease its blockade of Gaza, it will have to be even more proactive to demonstrate its interest in resolving its conflict with the Palestinians. The Israeli government must do more to repudiate settler violence and to alleviate the discomfort Palestinians face when passing through checkpoints in the semioccupied West Bank between towns under the rule of Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority. Apologizing for the security realities that require checkpoints is not some liberal, bleeding-heart position; it goes to the heart and soul of the state of the conflict today.

Israel has publicly committed to a two-state solution in which it will cede the vast majority of the West Bank to a Palestinian state. Israel must absolutely stay on this message and do its utmost to make this vision a reality if it wants to win the war of ideas and bring lasting security to its citizens.

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Why was there fighting in Gaza?



CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

WASHINGTON — Why was there an Israel-Gaza war in the first place? Resistance to the occupation, say Hamas and many in the international media.

What occupation? Seven years ago, in front of the world, Israel pulled out of Gaza. It dismantled every settlement, withdrew every soldier, evacuated every Jew, leaving nothing and no one behind. Except for the greenhouses in which the settlers had grown fruit and flowers for export. These were left to help Gaza's economy — only to be trashed when the Palestinians took over.

Israel then declared its border with Gaza to be an international frontier, meaning that it renounced any claim to the territory and considered it an independent entity. In effect, Israel had created the first Palestinian state ever, something never granted by fellow Muslims — neither the Ottoman Turks nor the Egyptians who brutally occupied Gaza for two decades before being driven out by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Israel wanted nothing more than to live in peace with this independent Palestinian entity. After all, the world had incessantly demanded that Israel give up land for peace.

It gave the land. It got no peace.

The Gaza Palestinians did not reciprocate. They voted in Hamas, who then took over in a military putsch and turned their newly freed Palestine into an armed camp from which to war against Israel. It has been war ever since.

Interrupted by the occasional truce, to be sure. But for Hamas a truce — *hudna* — is simply a tactic for building strength for the next round. It is never meant to be enduring, never meant to offer peace.

But why, given that there is no occupation of Gaza anymore? Because Hamas considers all of Israel occupied, illegitimate, a cancer, a crime against humanity, to quote the leaders of Iran, Hamas' chief patron and arms supplier. Hamas' objective, openly declared, is to "liberate" — i.e. destroy — Tel Aviv and the rest of pre-1967 Israel. Indeed, it is Hamas' *raison d'être*.

Hamas first killed Jews with campaigns of suicide bombings. After Israel built a nearly impenetrable fence, it went to rockets fired indiscriminately at civilians in populated areas.

What did Hamas hope to gain from this latest round of fighting, which it started with

a barrage of about 150 rockets into Israel? To formally translate Hamas' recent strategic gains into a new, more favorable status quo with Israel. It works like this:

Hamas' new strength comes from two sources. First, its new rocketry, especially the Fajr-5, smuggled in from Iran, that can now reach Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, putting 50 percent of Israel's population under its guns.

Second, Hamas has gained strategic strength from changes in the regional environment. It has acquired the patronage and protection of important Middle Eastern states as a result of the Arab Spring and the Islamist reversal in Turkey.

For 60 years, non-Arab Turkey had been a reliable ally of Israel. The vicious turnaround instituted by its Islamist prime minister, Recep Erdogan, reached its apogee last week when he called Israel a terrorist state.

Egypt is now run by Hamas' own mother organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is simply the Palestinian wing. And the emir of Qatar recently visited Gaza, leaving behind a promise of a cool \$400 million.

Hamas' objective was to guarantee no further attacks on its leaders or on its weaponry, launch sites and other terror and rocket infrastructure. And the lifting of Israel's military blockade, which would allow a flood of new and even deadlier weapons. In other words, immunity and inviolability during which time Hamas could build unmolested its arsenal of missiles — until it is ready to restart the war on more favorable terms.

Yet another *hudna*, this one brokered and guaranteed by Egypt and Turkey, regional powers Israel has to be careful not to offend. A respite for rebuilding, until Hamas' Gaza becomes Hezbollah South, counterpart to the terror group to Israel's north, with 50,000 Iranian- and Syrian-supplied rockets that effectively deter any Israeli preemptive attack.

With the declaration of a cease-fire Wednesday, Israel seems to have successfully resisted these demands, although there may be some cosmetic changes to the embargo. Which means that in any future fighting, Israel will retain the upper hand.

Israel has once again succeeded in defending itself. But, yet again, only until the next round, which, as the night follows the day, will come. Hamas will see to that.

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VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

No mandate

If I read or hear one more comment about President Barack Obama's "mandate," I'll need to release a primal scream.

Here are two facts for the faithful to consider:

First, on Election Day voters re-elected a strong Republican majority in the House of Representatives.

Second, the popular vote reveals that half of the voters did not vote for the president.

A slim victory over a weak opponent does not a mandate make.

— James A. Byrne, Lansing

Ignoring laws

I am struck by the realization of how utterly selfish and careless our representatives in Springfield have become. First, laws are passed to regulate and protect the citizenry, and



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then, if they seem inconvenient or not in their interests, they just start to be ignored and shoved to the side. Such is the case with the notion to now give illegal aliens driver's licenses, with the idea that this will make the roads safer.

Is there no shame left in these people? There are

laws governing illegals on the books, issued by the federal government. It should not be hard to figure out why the country is divided when everybody does what he or she wants with no regard for the good of the citizenry.

— Jacob Westra, Tinley Park

Congested roads

Recent Chicago Tribune coverage has helped increase public awareness of congestion pricing as a tool to manage traffic for faster, reliable travel times. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning is urging that Gov. Pat Quinn, the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Illinois Tollway commit to congestion pricing on five expressway projects recommended in the GO TO 2040 comprehensive regional plan, which was adopted in 2010 by the seven counties of northeastern Illinois. CMAP has created www.cmap.illinois.gov/congestion-pricing, with information about the benefits to our region's residents.

Five GO TO 2040 expressway projects lend themselves to this approach: The tollway's new lane on the existing Interstate Highway 90 Addams expressway and new expressways (the Elgin-O'Hare West Bypass and the Illinois Route 53 north extension and Illinois Route 120 bypass) and IDOT's planned additional lane on two existing expressways (I-55 Stevenson and I-290 Eisenhower).

CMAP's analysis shows that express-lane drivers during the morning rush, for example, on I-55 traveling from I-355, would reach downtown 25 minutes faster for \$2.75. With congestion pricing, toll rates in express lanes rise at times when more drivers want to use the highway, and tolls fall when demand is low. Supply and demand will help manage highway resources more effectively, as drivers choose when to use the express toll lanes based on the variable cost.

In the past two decades, 10 other states have successfully implemented congestion pricing, and public support has in-

creased as drivers become familiar with it. A recent survey of drivers on the SR-91 Express Lanes in Orange County, Calif., found that 90 percent of users were satisfied with the facility.

While express-lane revenues could help pay a portion of a roadway's costs, the primary rationale of congestion pricing is to manage traffic more effectively. Congestion pricing would yield travel time savings of 23 minutes on I-290, 25 minutes on I-55 and 11 minutes on I-90. On the two new tollway facilities, compared to current travel times, the express lanes would improve by 10 minutes on the Elgin-O'Hare West Bypass and 31 minutes on the Illinois 53 north extension and Illinois 120 bypass.

With construction approaching for these two new expressways and three new lanes on existing ones, now is the time for our state and region to make a strong commitment to congestion pricing. It is a crucial step to ensure reliable travel times and maximize the benefit of these

transportation assets.

— Randy Blankenhorn, executive director, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

GOP dilemma

The Republicans were surprised at their loss in the election. Now they are reviewing the damage and discussing what went wrong. They seem to have decided the fault is with their nominee for president, but many have noticed how many women and minority voters selected the nominee of the Democrats. So a big item on their agenda is to try and attract more women and minorities to their ticket.

What do they plan as their first step? Reject the nomination of Susan Rice as Secretary of State.

— Cal Audrain, Chicago
Editor's note: It's that time of year again! What is the best part of this season? We will devote space in the Voice of the People section during holiday time for readers to share their thoughts about their favorite traditions. Please submit letters by Dec. 5.