

Violence and Lies

What, Exactly, is Israel's Mission?

By NEVE GORDON

The first bombardment took three minutes and forty seconds. Sixty Israeli F-16 fighter jets bombed fifty sites in Gaza, killing over two hundred Palestinians, and wounding close to a thousand more.

A few hours after the deadly strike, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert convened a press conference in Tel-Aviv. With Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni sitting on his right and Defense Minister Ehud Barak on his left, he declared: "It may take time, and each and every one of us must be patient so we can complete the mission."

But what exactly, one might ask, is Israel's mission?

Although Olmert did not say as much, the "mission" includes four distinct objectives.

The first is the destruction of Hamas, a totally unrealistic goal. Even though the loss of hundreds of cadres and some key leaders will no doubt hurt the organization, Hamas is a robust political movement with widespread grassroots support, and it is unlikely to surrender or capitulate to Israeli demands following a military assault. Ironically, Israel's attempt to destroy Hamas using military force has always ended up strengthening the organization, thus corroborating the notion that power produces its own vulnerability.

The second objective has to do with Israel's upcoming elections. The assault on Gaza is also being carried out to help Kadima and Labor defeat Likud and its leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who is currently ahead in the polls. It is not coincidental that Netanyahu's two main competitors, Livni and Barak, were invited to the press conference – since, after the assault, it will be more difficult for Netanyahu to characterize them as "soft" on the Palestinians. Whether or not the devastation in Gaza will help Livni defeat Netanyahu or help Barak gain votes in the February elections is difficult to say, but the strategy of competing with a warmonger like Netanyahu by beating the drums of war says a great deal about all three major contenders.

The third objective involves the Israeli military. After its notable humiliation in Lebanon during the summer of 2006, the IDF has been looking for opportunities to reestablish its global standing. Last Spring it used Syria as its laboratory and now it has decided to focus on Gaza. Emphasizing the mere three minutes and forty seconds it took to bomb fifty sites is just one the ways the Israeli military aims to restore its international reputation.

Finally, Hamas and Fatah have not yet reached an agreement regarding how to proceed when Mahmoud Abbas ends his official term as President of the Palestinian National Authority on January 9th, 2009. One of the outcomes of this assault is that Abbas will remain in power for a while longer since Hamas will be unable to mobilize its supporters in order to force him to resign.

What is clearly missing from this list of Israeli objectives is the attempt to halt the firing of Qassam rockets into Israel's southern towns. Unlike the objectives I mentioned, which are not discussed by government officials, this one is presented by the government as the operation's primary objective. Yet, the government is actively misleading the public, since Israel could have put an end to the rockets a long time ago. Indeed, there was relative quiet during the six-months truce with Hamas, a quiet that was broken most often as a reaction to Israeli violence: that is, following the extra-judicial execution of a militant or the imposition of a total blockade which prevented basic goods, like food stuff and medicine, from entering the Gaza Strip. Rather than continuing the truce, the Israeli government has once again chosen to adopt strategies of violence that are tragically akin to the one's deployed by Hamas, only the Israeli ones are much more lethal.

If the Israeli government really cared about its citizens and the country's long term ability to sustain itself in the Middle East, it would abandon the use of violence and talk with its enemies.

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