

Chances for a Palestinian State Hijacked by Hamas

After more than seven weeks of rocket fire at Israel, as of this writing, it seems that the latest ceasefire between Israel and Hamas is holding. After several previous ceasefires—all accepted by Israel but all broken by Hamas—there's a sense that this one may hold for a while.

Of course, that could change at any moment. However, even if it does, a ceasefire should not be confused for peace. We may have quiet, but peace is distant and elusive.

Conventional wisdom is that in order for there to be peace, Israel and the Palestinian Authority need to come to an agreement for an end of the conflict and the establishment of a Palestinian state. Though Israel's pre-nationhood leaders accepted a two-state solution in 1947 and have reiterated that repeatedly in recent decades, the recent conflict may have made that possibility even more distant. One might even say that Hamas has successfully hijacked the possibility of a Palestinian state.

Throughout the recent combat, Hamas and other Islamic terrorists fired more than 4,600 rockets, missiles and mortar shells at Israel. This averaged nearly 100 a day, sometimes as many as 170, targeting half of Israel's population. Israel defended itself, blowing up terror tunnels built with supplies meant for civilians, destroyed communications and arms centers, and targeted Hamas leaders, fighters and terrorists.

Strangely, as a parallel war unfolded in Iran and Syria with Islamic extremists murdering Christians, Yazadis and others and the world called for fighting to destroy the terrorist army doing this, when Hamas fired rockets at half of Israel, too many employed a perverted sense of moral equivalence and

blamed Israel for the outcome of Hamas's actions that put Palestinian civilians directly in harm's way.

Increasingly throughout the fighting, there came calls to include Hamas in a diplomatic role. These were from people with "credentials" such as Jimmy Carter, under whose presidency Iran became an Islamic extremist state. Sadly, giving more credibility to Hamas is exactly what occurred, as if they were the legitimate authority for the well-being of Palestinian Arabs, a sad and dangerous thought.

Some background: In 2005, Israel withdrew unilaterally from Gaza; all civilian and military presence, even digging up and reburying remains of those who had died and been buried there, leaving Gaza under full control of the Palestinian Authority (PA). In 2006, the PA held parliamentary elections, which were won by Hamas receiving 44 percent of the vote as compared to Fatah's (the PLO) 41 percent. Things went downhill when in June 2007, Hamas violently expelled and killed Fatah leaders, throwing them off 12- to 15-story buildings and leaving more than 100 dead and more than 500 wounded.

Since then, Hamas has been the de facto authority in Gaza, but not with any legitimacy other than bullying through terrorism and fear. I had hoped that one outcome of the recent fighting would be the uprooting of Hamas as any kind of authority. This would have sent a message to Hamas in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and Islamic fundamentalists in other places.

Going back to elections, the terms of the PA president and parliament expired long ago. So, basically there's a sitting president whose term expired years ago, a parliament that's not really legally elected to anything, both Gaza and Judea and Samaria supposedly under PA control, but Hamas in control of Gaza. Oh, and during the fighting, Israel uncovered a plan by Hamas for another bloody revolution in Judea and Samaria to kill and unseat the rest of the PA.

Through all this, Fatah has clenched onto its unity government with Hamas, making them equally responsible for the actions of the total "government" and complicit in all the terror Hamas has been perpetrating.

Unity governments come and go, and the rivalry and fighting between Hamas and Fatah will continue. The recent fighting with Israel proves two essential reasons the probability of a Palestinian state is less and less likely. First, rather than standing on its own, ousting Hamas from the government, and crafting a positive approach to peace and statehood, Fatah has entrenched itself in a kinder and gentler form of extremism, but they are no less extremist. Rather than building opportunities with Israel and using the fighting with Hamas to their advantage, they have cozied up to Hamas even more, underscoring their partnership, giving Hamas increased credibility and power.

Second, with Hamas firing more than 4,600 rockets, digging and reinforcing dozens of terrorist tunnels, targeting millions of Israel's civilians even through attempts from the Mediterranean, Israel would be foolish to try to negotiate with a Palestinian Authority that has little authority, that continues to embrace Hamas, while Hamas continues to plan for a much wider and more violent overthrowing of the existing leadership and which would put terrorists within miles of the majority of Israel's population.

Making this as clear as can be, Hamas did score a minor victory in targeting Israel's main airport with rockets that (along with political factors in the United States) caused the FAA to suspend the ability for U.S. airlines to fly to Israel. This was followed by almost every other international airline that flies to Israel, resulting in a successful albeit short-lived economic hijacking. Once they realized what they had been able to do, Hamas continued to continue to threaten to do more. If armed on the Samaritan mountains, less than 10 miles from the airport, with weapons that are much easier to hide

and bring even greater accuracy, Hamas or others could threaten Israel's main airport daily. It's much harder than ever to imagine Israel ever allowing that, and therefore much harder to imagine Palestinian Arabs ever seeing a state as a result of the terrorism Israel experienced this summer.

There are many arguments for and against a Palestinian state. I don't want to address these here. However, in order for the Palestinians to demonstrate that they are capable of being a responsible state that doesn't by definition threaten Israel, the Palestinians need to take responsibility for their future and stop blaming Israel for all their real and contrived problems, many of which are self-fulfilling.

Let them use their security to take over Gaza and eliminate Hamas because it's in their own interest to do so. Let them invest and build infrastructure rather than using money and resources to arm themselves and try to destroy Israel and kill Israelis.

Any United Nations agencies involved need to be objective, provide true humanitarian services, and not be a front for Hamas and other terrorists as they have been. In case you missed it, several known U.N. facilities were used to store weapons, served as territory from which to fire rockets, and allegedly even to transfer funds directly to terrorists. If the U.N. cannot do its job, it should be disbanded, defunded and expelled from Gaza and the region as ineffective at best, but complicit at worse.

While the U.N. voted in 1947 to establish two states, I have been wondering if that has an expiration date. Does a second Arab state have to exist in what was then British Mandate Palestine if that state is necessarily a state that glorifies and supports terrorism? Didn't the establishment of Jordan, in what was some 80 percent of British Mandate Palestine, already fulfill that objective?

At what point does that become invalid or irrelevant, and why is it necessary to continue to dump billions of dollars into a society that has yet to be able to cease terror and violence and hasn't used that money to invest and build? Someone once said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. At some point, that paradigm needs to change.

Looking around the rest of the Arab and Islamic world, one has to ask whether a mere (quasi) democratic election once gives credibility to a state and its viability, no matter the extremism and violence, whether among themselves, or against Israel and other neighboring states. When is enough, enough?

The Gaza war this summer did not give any reason for any thinking person to conclude that Palestinian society is anymore ready for, responsible or deserving of a state. If this is their national aspiration, the PA lost big time this summer, and it's very hard to imagine them fielding a team in the short term, or ever, that will change that reality.

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