

Real-Life Shakedown From the Gaza Strip Hits New Low in Humanity

This past week, under cover of darkness, a man arrived in a remote location carrying \$30 million cash as a payoff that went largely unnoticed. Was it bribery, extortion or just someone making a cash investment?

If you weren't paying attention, you might think this was a scene from *The Godfather* movie series. Except the accents were Arabic, and the names are Ahmed, Mahmoud, Mohammad and Hassan. Rather than exotic Sicily, you'd hear about Gaza City.

And while on the surface it would seem like the level of violence between the two places was similar, one would quickly realize that today's version is far more depraved. In *The Godfather*, we're reminded of violence, "It's not personal, it's strictly business." In Gaza, under Iranian- and Turkish-backed Hamas, and supporting actor Islamic Jihad, the violence is based in extremist Islamic intolerance and hatred that's all part of an age-old holy war that they believe is God inspired and ordained. Their "business" is murdering Jews and destroying Israel. Their marketing strategy is incitement to violence and terror. How many of their own people, for whose well-being they claim to advocate, are victimized and harmed in the process is incidental. In fact, per their marketing strategy, the more Palestinian Arabs hurt, the better.

Not that there are any less Mafia shakedowns and family wars today, but the shakedown from the Gaza Strip takes the level of humanity to a new low.

As much as you probably didn't hear about the arrival of \$30 million from Qatar as the latest pay off to give Hamas cash to disburse to Gazans and pilfer what it needs, you probably also

don't know that this is just one in a series of multimillion-dollar payoffs, now in the hundreds of millions. It allows Hamas to continue to rule by throwing \$100 crumbs to families as if they're doing average Palestinian Gazans a favor. Imagine if the money went to truly invest in the Gazan infrastructure and economy, providing a way to generate revenue and jobs, rather than extort the world to sustain a failed and evil model.

Why did Qatar make this payoff now? According to Hamas' model of hate and terror, the UAE agreeing to normalize relations with Israel is bad for business. Its only response is to reject peace. The opposite of peace is violence, and that's just what they did. It's how Hamas maintains control, brainwashing its own people and the international community by portraying themselves as victims rather than doing anything positive to bring peace. Hamas uses escalated violence to force further concessions from anyone they can shake down.

Part of the violence recently was directed at getting Qatar to provide this latest infusion of cash. Part is directed at winning concessions from Israel. Part is playing victim to the international community to maintain political cover and financial support, without regard for or especially because so many countries' economies have taken a hit. Hamas wants to be sure to protect its funding sources.

It's legitimate to understand that because of the UAE normalizing relations with Israel, Hamas' only card to play is terror. It's no coincidence then that they have taken to firing rockets at Israeli communities almost daily. Israel's Iron Dome limits the threat of these rockets, allowing millions of Israelis to live in a sense of "normalcy" that rockets are fired, and the Iron Dome takes them out. Most of the time. Recently, a terrorist rocket ripped through someone's house. As if all terror weren't bad enough, Hamas lowers the bar by "innovating" new forms of terror that are not only pure evil, but they have something for everyone to

hate and decry from environmentalists to animal rights activists. Yet few do.

Dozens of arson fires were ignited in Israel due to Hamas using colorful helium balloons and inflated condoms to carry explosives over the border and burn anything they can. Acres and acres of farmland have been scorched. One of the terror balloons—no that's not an oxymoron, it's a real thing created by these evil terrorists—landed next to a kindergarten. Another on a basketball court. The use of colorful balloons has the dual purpose of trying to get kids to play with them in order to inflict maximal harm and death.

Hamas is not content to be the world leader in rockets and incendiary devices. This week, it also undertook a new form of environmental terrorism, flooding Israel with raw sewage.

If the fires weren't bad enough, the toilet terror should have environmental activists up in arms. But they're not. To them, Hamas and other Islamic terrorists are just doing "business." The double standards are outrageous.

While the world has been riding out the corona crisis, Hamas has not stayed silent. Early on, the group threatened to blame Israel for pandemic deaths in Gaza if Israel did not provide or allow medical equipment into the Strip, which it did. Then, after making no news and no progress toward "liberating" Jerusalem and destroying Israel, Hamas threatened again. Threats became a new round of firing dozens of rockets and releasing scores of incendiary devices to scorch Israel.

Peace and terror go hand in hand, not because the lack of terror means peace, but because when there are overtures for peace, Hamas and other terrorists respond with terror. Due to the recent increase in terror, the Israeli army is preparing for a major outbreak of violence, perhaps not an all-out war, but a multi-day battle, as has happened before. These typically end after Hamas can claim credit, then is pushed

into a corner, and uses the threat of more violence to extort concessions.

In typical fashion, and to raise the ante and threaten more terror, Hamas says it is planning to send “messages” to Israel. Look for increased terror as a tool to try to push Israel into a corner, and Israel’s increasingly harsh response until Hamas is in the corner and needs to back down.

Because of peace, because of the economy and in order to maintain its relevance, Hamas is demanding new concessions, including this additional aid from Qatar, along with funding for other projects which eventually gets diverted to funding its terror infrastructure. In order to pressure Israel, it has been increasing the violence, believing that by doing so, there will eventually be a ceasefire. Based on past experience, Israel is likely to give in to halt the violence along the border, like paying protection money to the mafia. But unfortunately, that’s just until Hamas starts to feel irrelevant again or needs cash, and the next flare-up and shakedown begin. {eoa}

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has become a respected bridge between Jews and Christians and serves as president of the Genesis 123 Foundation. He writes regularly on major Christian websites about Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He can be reached at FirstPersonIsrael@.