

'There's a Feeling This Will Never End'

In case you've been on vacation, or missing news from Israel that's been supplanted by news from Missouri or ISIS in Iraq, things in Israel are still pretty tenuous. There's a new cease-fire in place that is largely based on the same terms offered over a month ago.

Israel said yes then, and, recently, said yes again. Had Hamas only done so, many lives could have been saved. Nevertheless, there's no peace and no quiet, and no sense that this one will last any longer than the others have lasted.

Some Israelis joke that Hamas broke as many cease-fires as they fired rockets at Israel (over 4,500). Of course it's an exaggeration, but the sense is that cease-fires are temporary at best. In the week between this cease-fire and Hamas breaking the previous one, several hundred rockets were fired at Israel, with several buildings hit, many more injuries, and the death of a 4-year-old boy and two other civilians.

In one of the most recent incidents, Arab Israeli taxi drivers waiting at the Erez crossing between Israel and Gaza, came under fire. What's particularly perverse about this is that they were waiting to transport ill and injured Palestinian Arab Gaza residents to Israeli hospitals. One of the taxi drivers was seriously injured and had to be evacuated to the hospital himself.

There are many things that are perverse about this:

- Hamas controls who comes across the border at Erez, so the firing of mortars on the Erez crossing was callous at best because they knew people would be waiting for those being allowed to cross.
- That the injured were Arab Israelis who are free and

equal citizens is a vast juxtaposition of the lack of freedom that Arabs in Gaza have under the Hamas terrorist leadership.

- That Israel continues to receive and treat injured and ill Arab patients from Gaza speaks clearly as for our sanctification and respect for life.

Hamas firing on the one civilian crossing between Gaza and Israel that facilitates such humanitarian services speaks clearly to their disgusting abuse of life, though there are many recent examples including ongoing rocket fire from populated areas, use of human shields to protect their leaders and weapons, many of their rockets falling short and hurting their own people, and the recent round up and murder of 18 more alleged “collaborators”

I came back from a wonderful and much needed-vacation last week. It was strange to be in the northern Galilee and Golan, areas that were under an equally harsh barrage of rocket fire from Lebanon just eight years ago, and being able to have such a wonderful and relaxing time when two or three hours away, millions of Israelis were/are still living in range of rockets from Gaza. As if to remind me that our vacation was over, as soon as I walked into my house and my iPad picked up our wireless network, and the too familiar Red Alert dinging started, indicating incoming rockets at that moment. Vacation over—back to reality.

As the cease-fire ended and Israel responded forcefully by targeting Hamas leaders and buildings housing their communications equipment, we spent evenings of our vacation as a family watching news updates as if waiting for the first lunar landing. At one point, one of my daughters looked at her phone and announced that she recognized the voice of the TV announcer and knew who it was without having to look. I guess that’s one of the obsessive things that come out of spending most of your summer vacation attached to the news as we have.

In response to a Facebook post that Hamas succeeded in setting a new record of nearly 180 rockets fired at Israel in one day, one friend in the U.S. who also has the Red Alert app and follows all the rockets being fired at us with great concern, wrote back that she's pained by the ongoing attacks and each time the Red Alert notice of a new rocket being fired is sounded, it's her cue to pray. "As the rockets go up, so do my prayers."

This caused another friend to quip, "The rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that Iron Dome was still there ..." There are things for which we are thankful.

While driving recently, I listened to a radio broadcast. It's common for radio and TV programs to be interrupted with announcements of where air raid sirens were being fired. At one point, the announcer listed a breathless, full minute of names of communities where sirens were being heard. Literally, it was a full minute. This caused the program host to pause afterward and say "Wow." It was dramatic.

I thought for effect, how it would be in church or synagogue for someone to stand up and read a list of names of nearby communities, as far as 50 miles away, interrupting the sermon, for a full minute. I don't want to advocate for it, but think about it. At their most frequent, rockets are being fired at Israel at the rate of one every ten minutes. But usually they come in barrages of dozens at a time, setting off sirens in dozens of Israeli communities. .

I have realized how disheartening it all is. It's taking a toll on me. There's a feeling that this is never really going to end. I sympathize with others who are much closer and living with it much more regularly, but still wondering and waiting for a siren in our town. Recently, that happened again, sort of, with some hearing it and some not, and many hearing the distant "boom" of the explosion that was not

nearby, but still too close for comfort.

And then there's my 9-year-old son. We recently went out to dinner in Jerusalem to celebrate his birthday. One daughter stayed home to see a friend who had just come back from summer vacation. During dinner she sent me a text message, asking if we heard a siren because although she didn't, she heard that there was one. I texted my other daughter at home who had heard something, but not in our neighborhood. Then we checked Facebook to see who heard a siren and where. It turns out only some neighborhoods in our town and several other adjacent towns had sirens, but not ours.

All of this taking place in real time upset my son, and he announced he didn't want to go home yet. What he didn't know is, at the same time, sirens were heard in parts of Jerusalem just not where we were. He didn't find it funny when, as we were walking to the car, I made a sound of an air raid siren.

The next day he was off to the pool on one of his last days of summer vacation. The pool is on a kibbutz about 15 miles closer to Gaza, therefore much more in range. He was already traumatized there with an air raid siren while they were driving home a few weeks ago.

He has also taken to sleeping with a nightlight again, wanting to be able to see if an air-raid siren goes off in the night. Kids get afraid of the strangest things in their dark bedrooms. Mine needs a nightlight to give him comfort in case of a rocket attack.

As summer vacation draws to a close, it's been a frequent topic of conversation as to whether schools will open on schedule. In places like Sderot that are closest to Gaza, where frequent rocket fire has been common for more than a decade, schools have bomb shelters in the playground, in every hallway, and even many schools are built with special reinforcements. Above one school there's a concrete umbrella

like structure to absorb the impact of a rocket over a building that's older and doesn't have the most up to date infrastructure to protect the students.

Yet with rockets in range of so many more communities that don't have any of this infrastructure, there's a great public debate as to whether schools will or won't open on schedule. It's not an easy decision, but generally considered safer to have kids at home near their own bomb shelters than in one place, even at school, just in case.

Then-Senator Obama, when visiting Sderot in July 2008, said, "The first job of any nation state is to protect its citizens. ... If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I'm going to do everything in my power to stop that. And I would expect Israelis to do the same thing."

What a difference it makes now that he is president. His administration frequently criticizes Israel for not doing enough to limit civilian casualties while protecting its citizens.

Last week, I was interviewed for a U.S. radio program about my experiences this summer during the war. At one point, the host asked an interesting question, if was I surprised at how long the war was going on? I gave him an honest, yet very Jewish, answer, "Yes and no."

Yes, I am surprised because in Israel's history, with little exception, active battle like we have been living for several weeks is rare. During my recent trip to the U.S. when I was filming programs to be broadcast later, I was careful to use language that didn't refer to the "current" fighting but the "recent" fighting, thinking that by the time these were broadcast, the situation could be very different. It's quiet today, but who knows about tomorrow.

But I am not surprised it's going on this long, as Hamas and

all Islamic extremists are singular in their goal. They use violence and death to achieve their agendas and they do not respect life. As long as it is in their interest to continue with active fighting, we will continue to see fighting. Added to Israel's targeting several Hamas leaders, which may have been the catalyst for Hamas to agree to another cease fire—to protect the remaining leaders who must not be ready to become martyrs and go to heaven to get the 72 virgins they believe are waiting for them—there's quiet now, but no reason to think that fighting will not continue, or that Hamas will look to score a big victory with a major terrorist attack, maybe in Israel or maybe overseas.

It's projected that Hamas' supply of rockets is now “only” a few thousand. That means they can continue an active war of attrition with 100 rockets or so per day for a month or more. It also means that Israel may have to re-engage a ground operation.

It certainly means that Hamas' demand that Israel allow a port and unrestricted transfer of things to Gaza will never take place because they will just rearm.

Stay tuned.

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