



## ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel  
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of  
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

### Commentary...

#### The Israeli Solution By Caroline Glick

Operation Cast Lead caused many people to reassess the viability of the sacrosanct "two-state solution." A growing number of observers have pointed out that Hamas's Iranian-sponsored jihadist regime in Gaza is proof that Israel has no way to ensure that land it transfers to the PLO-Fatah will remain under PLO-Fatah control.

This reassessment has also provoked a discussion of the PLO-Fatah's own failures since it formed the Palestinian Authority in 1994. Despite the billions of dollars it received from Israel and the West, its Western trained armed forces numbering more than 75,000 and the bottomless reserve of international political support it enjoys, the PLO-Fatah regime did not build a state, but a kleptocratic thugocracy where the rule of law was replaced by the rule of the jackboot. Instead of teaching its people to embrace peace, freedom and democracy, the PLO-Fatah-led PA indoctrinated them to wage jihad against Israel in a never-ending war.

These reassessments have led three leading conservative thinkers - former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton, Middle East Forum president Daniel Pipes, and Efraim Inbar, director of Bar-Ilan University's Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies - to all publish articles over the past month rejecting the two-state solution.

Bolton, Pipes and Inbar not only agree that the two-state paradigm has failed, they also agree on what must be done now to "solve" the Palestinian conflict. In their view the failed "two-state solution" should be replaced with what Bolton refers to as the "three-state solution." All three analysts begin their analyses with the assertion that Israel is uninterested in controlling Gaza, Judea and Samaria. Since the Palestinians have shown they cannot be trusted with sovereignty, the three argue that the best thing to do is to return the situation to what it was from 1949 to 1967: Egypt should reassert its control over Gaza and Jordan should reassert its control over Judea and Samaria.

Bolton, Pipes and Inbar acknowledge that Egypt and Jordan have both rejected the idea but argue that they should be pressured to reconsider. They explain that Egypt fears that Hamas - a sister organization of its own Muslim Brotherhood - will destabilize it. Jordan for its part has two reasons for refusing their plan. The Hashemite kingdom is a minority regime. A large majority of Jordanians are ethnic Palestinians. Adding another 1.2 million from Judea and Samaria could destabilize the kingdom. Then too, both the PLO and Hamas are themselves threats to the regime. The Hashemites still remember how with Syrian support, the PLO in 1970 attempted to overthrow them.

As for Hamas, its popularity has grown in Jordan in tandem with its empowerment in Gaza, Judea and Samaria. By integrating the west and east banks of the Jordan River, the chance that Hamas would challenge the regime increases dramatically. If we add to the mix Syrian subversion and sponsorship of Hamas, and al-Qaida penetration of Jordan through Iraq - particularly in the event of a US withdrawal - the danger that merging the west and east bank populations would manifest to the Hashemite regime becomes apparent.

It is often noted that Hamas's popularity among Palestinians owes in part to the corruption of the PLO-Fatah-controlled PA. It has also been noted that due to the PLO-Fatah-controlled PA's jihadist indoctrination of Palestinian society, the population's transfer of political loyalty from PLO-Fatah to Hamas was ideologically seamless.

What has been little noted is the strategic significance of the nature of Hamas's relations with the PLO-Fatah from the establishment of the PA in 1994 until Hamas ousted it from Gaza in 2007. When the PA was established in 1994, then prime minister Yitzhak Rabin argued that the PLO-Fatah shared Israel's interest in fighting Hamas because Hamas constituted a threat to its authority.

What Rabin failed to recognize was that Hamas's threat to PLO-Fatah was and remains qualitatively different from the threat it poses to Israel. PLO-Fatah never had a problem with Hamas attacks against Israel, or with its annihilationist ideology as regards Israel. This ideology is shared by

PLO-Fatah and is widely popular among the Palestinians. Consequently not only did the PLO-Fatah never prevent Hamas from attacking Israel, it collaborated with Hamas in attacking Israel and did so while disseminating Hamas's genocidal ideology throughout the PA. PLO-Fatah did

crack down on Hamas when it felt that Hamas was threatening its grip on power, but in all other respects, it supported Hamas - and continues to do so.

The same unfortunately is the situation in both Egypt and Jordan. Hamas's Nazi-like Jew hatred is shared by the vast majority of Jordanians and Egyptians. Islamist calls for the extermination of the Jewish people and the destruction of Israel dominate the mosques, seminaries, universities and media outlets in both countries. Popular opposition to the peace treaties that Egypt and Jordan signed with Israel stands consistently at more than 90 percent in both countries.

In spite of repeated Israeli demands for action, PLO-Fatah never ended its support for jihadist anti-Semitism. The PLO-Fatah never believed - as Israel hoped it would - that its best chance for remaining in power was by teaching Palestinians to reject hatred, embrace freedom, democracy and the blessings that peace would afford them. So too, neither the Hashemites in Jordan nor President Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt have ever believed that the best way to stabilize or strengthen their own regimes is by preaching openness and peace and rejecting jihadist anti-Semitism. To the contrary, in recent years, Egypt has become the center for jihadist anti-Semitism in the Arab world and Jordan has one of the highest rates of Jew hatred in the world.

The situation on the ground in Jordan, Egypt, Gaza and Judea and Samaria make two things clear. First, a Jordanian reassertion of control over Judea and Samaria and an Egyptian reassertion of control over Gaza would likely increase the chances that the moderate regimes in both countries would be weakened and perhaps overthrown. Second, like Fatah-PLO, neither Egypt nor Jordan would have any interest in protecting Israel from Palestinian terrorists.

Bolton, Inbar and Pipes take for granted that Israel is uninterested in asserting or retaining control over Gaza, Judea, and Samaria. This is reasonable given the positions of recent governments on the issue. However, the question is not whether Israel is interested or uninterested in asserting control over the areas - and most Israelis are uninterested in giving up control over Judea and Samaria in light of what happened after Israel withdrew its forces and civilians from Gaza.

The salient question is now that it is clear that the two-state solution has failed, what is the best option for managing the conflict? Not only would Israel be unable to trust that its security situation would improve if the areas were to revert to Jordanian and Egyptian control, Israel could trust that its security situation would rapidly deteriorate as the prospect of regional war increased. With a retrocession of Gaza, Judea and Samaria to Egyptian and Jordanian rule, Israel would find itself situated within indefensible borders, and facing the likely prospect that the Egyptian and Jordanian regimes would be destabilized.

Today Israel has the ability to enter Gaza without concern that doing so would provoke war with Egypt. It has minimized the terror threat from Judea and Samaria by controlling the areas with the massive help of the strong Israeli civilian presence in the areas which ensures control over the roads and the heights. IDF forces can operate freely within the areas without risking war with Jordan. The IDF controls the long border with Jordan and can prevent terrorist infiltration from the east.

If the current situation is preferable to the "three-state solution" and if the current situation itself is unsustainable, the question again arises, what should be done? What new policy paradigm should replace the failed two-state solution?

The best way to move forward is to reject the calls for a solution and concentrate instead on stabilization. With rockets and mortars launched from Gaza continuing to pummel the South despite Operation Cast Lead, and with the international community's refusal to enforce UN Security Council resolutions barring Iran from exporting weapons, it is clear that Gaza will remain an Iranian-sponsored, Hamas-controlled area for as long as Hamas retains control over the international border with Egypt.

So Israel must reassert control over the border.

It is also clear that Hamas and its terrorist partners in Fatah and Islamic Jihad will continue to target the South for as long as they can.

So Israel needs to establish a security zone inside of Gaza wide

enough to remove the South from rocket and mortar range.

From an economic perspective, it is clear that in the long run, Gaza's only prospect for development is an economic union of sorts with the largely depopulated northern Sinai. For years, Egypt has rejected calls for economic integration with Gaza. Cairo should be pressured to reassess its position as Israel stabilizes the security situation in Gaza itself.

AS FOR JUDEA and Samaria, Israel should continue its military control over the areas in order to ensure its national security. It should also apply its law to the areas of Judea and Samaria that are within the domestic consensus. These areas include the Etzion, Adumim, Adam, Ofra and Ariel settlement blocs and the Jordan Valley.

Israel should end its support for the PLO-Fatah-led PA, and support the empowerment of non-jihadist elements of Palestinian society to lead a new autonomous authority in the areas. These new leaders, who may be the traditional leaders of local clans, should be encouraged to either integrate within Israel or seek civil confederation with Jordan. Jordan could take a larger role in the civil affairs of the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, by for instance reinstating their Jordanian citizenship which it illegally revoked in 1988. At the same time, Israel should end its freeze on building for Israeli communities in the areas.

It is obvious today that for the Palestinians to develop into a society that may be capable of statehood in the long term, they require a period of a generation or two to rebuild their society in a peaceful way. They will not do this in environments where terrorists are ideologically aligned with unpopular, repressive regimes.

The option of continued and enhanced Israeli control is unattractive to many. But it is the only option that will provide an environment conducive to such a long-term reorganization of Palestinian society that will also safeguard Israel's own security and national well-being.

While it is vital to recognize that the failed two-state solution must be abandoned, it is equally important that it not be replaced with another failed proposition. The best way to move forward is by adopting a stabilization policy that enables Israel to secure itself while providing an opportunity for Palestinians to integrate gradually and peacefully with their Israeli, Egyptian and Jordanian neighbors. (Jerusalem Post Feb 2)

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#### **No to the Reconstruction of Gaza** By Efraim Inbar

The developing international campaign to reconstruct Gaza is strategic folly. It is also unlikely to be effective. And, under current circumstances, it is also immoral.

Since the Hamas takeover of Gaza in June 2007, most of the international community has argued that the best way to prop up the more moderate Palestinian Authority (PA) leader, Mahmoud Abbas, was to ensure economic support for his fiefdom in the West Bank. This, it was said, would make it clear to every Palestinian that Hamas is the "bad guy" unable to bring prosperity. This path would convince Palestinians that it is unwise to support the radical Islamist organization. Under this rationale, the PA has continued to draw unprecedented economic support from the world.

Israel's recent military offensive against Hamas inflicted heavy damage on Gaza. Aside from punishing Hamas for its rocket attacks on Israel, the beating was meant to demonstrate to reasonable Palestinians that Hamas attacks on Israel would only bring them havoc and suffering. Theoretically, the results of Operation Cast Lead would seem to complement the international community's efforts to make the lives of the Palestinians under Mahmoud Abbas better than those of the Gazans.

Yet, this rationale seems to evaporate in a mush of sentimentalist manipulation. Instead of using the tough pictures coming out of Gaza to tell Gazans: "We told you all along that Hamas leadership would only make things worse" (just as it has in other places where radical Islamists gain power), Western leaders seem to have foolishly decided that Gaza should speedily be rebuilt!

This, of course, sends the wrong signal. It tells Palestinians that their leadership can make grave, deadly mistakes, and nevertheless gullible Westerners will bail them out. It also signals to Hamas that it can continue shooting at Israel; for if Israel repeats its military action, merciful Westerners again will repair the damage.

There is no way to reconstruct Gaza without strengthening Hamas. The PA has no standing in the Strip anymore. Aid through the UN is less objectionable, but Hamas will benefit from this too. Which leads us back to square one, because Hamastan must not be rebuilt by the world. The reconstruction of Hamastan in Gaza – an Iranian base that threatens Israel and many moderate Arab regimes – makes no strategic sense.

America helped reconstruct Western Europe and Japan after World War II to make sure they would be ruled by friendly democratic regimes. Hamas is authoritarian and anti-Western. It is simply daft to facilitate the continuation of Hamas rule.

Does the enlightened international community really believe that Mahmoud Abbas is interested in the reconstruction of Gaza and consolidation of the Hamas regime? Is this what the Egyptians and the Saudis are after? Is it not clear that they also prefer the fall of Hamas and

will be ready to cooperate against Iranian attempts to channel support to Gaza?

Looking at Palestinian economic performance, it is also clear that reconstruction of Gaza is unlikely to be successful. Since the Oslo process started in 1993, the Palestinians received many billions of euros and dollars, scoring the highest per capita aid in the world. Much of it was squandered by corruption and ineptitude. Very little aid filtered down to the people. Like many Third World countries, the Palestinians lack the legal and institutional infrastructure needed for effective dispersal of economic aid. Gaza is behind the West Bank in its development, making it an even less suitable candidate for effective international aid. Nevertheless, the standard of living of the Gazans is still higher than the Egyptians.

From what we know of the fortunes of the humanitarian aid transferred to Gazans in recent years, it is clear that a large proportion of the benefits of the external aid will be siphoned off to the Hamas leadership, followed by Hamas activists; and only what is left will go to the destitute. Those with arms always get the first and best cut from international aid sent to the suffering.

Finally, the morality of pouring money so that Gazans can live better is questionable as long as Hamas does not stop its terrorism against Israel and the smuggling of weapons. Unfortunately, Hamas was popular among the Gazans and continues to be so. Moreover, all polls show staggering support among Gazans for violence against Israelis. What moral justification exists for helping people that support an organization intent on destroying the Jewish state and who are actively engaged in killing innocent Israeli citizens?

The international community must think strategically with regard to Gaza, and not be drawn into sentimental escapades of rebuilding and humanitarian assistance that undercut our paramount strategic goals. It is time for tough love for Gaza. (BESA Perspectives Feb 2)

*The writer is director of the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University.*

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#### **A Missed Opportunity** By Moshe Arens

As if expressing some extremely wise adage, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni pronounced after the Israel Defense Forces' withdrawal from the Gaza Strip: "You have to know when to go in, and you have to know when to go out." As a matter of fact, the IDF was ordered into Gaza far too late, after hundreds of rockets launched from the Gaza Strip had already fallen on Israeli towns and villages in the south. And the IDF was ordered to leave the Gaza Strip before the mission had been completed. It was a missed opportunity. When Livni threatened that the IDF would be ordered back into the Strip if there were renewed rocket fire on the south, she demonstrated her lack of experience in these matters, thinking that an operation like Cast Lead could be launched every other week.

But it was our defense minister, Ehud Barak, who should have known better, who announced before the order to withdraw was given, that the operation had been completed and there was no reason to maintain the IDF's presence in the Gaza Strip. He and Livni were of one mind - they claimed that Hamas had been taught a lesson. A price tag had been set for their past acts of terror, and that price tag would intimidate them from repeating the rocket attacks against Israel.

As it turned out, the Hamas leaders had learned arithmetic from a different book than Barak and Livni and their acts of terror against Israel were not based on considerations of price tags. It was Barak and Livni who had to learn a lesson. Namely, that whereas you can deter a nation-state from taking hostile action, deterring terrorists is quite another matter.

And another lesson had to be relearned. When dealing with enemies you may be able to assess their capabilities to harm you, but guessing what their intentions are is frequently next to impossible. This is the traditional conundrum of military intelligence. Israel found this out during the Yom Kippur War, when the capabilities of Egypt and Syria were well known but their intentions were completely misread by Israeli intelligence. Such a mistake is all the more serious when the enemy broadcasts its intentions, as the Egyptians did when Sadat repeatedly announced that he was preparing for war against Israel, and yet you decide not to take their threats seriously.

And again with Hamas. They do not hide the fact that their aim is to destroy Israel, and their rocket capabilities are known, but rather than ordering the IDF to destroy that capability, Livni and Barak led themselves to believe that the incomplete IDF operation in Gaza would affect their intentions and lead them to abstain from any future acts of terror against Israel. It looks like rather than Hamas being taught a lesson, it is Israel that is being taught a lesson it should already have learned in the past.

The IDF operation was late to get started, proceeded at a leisurely pace, and then halted before the objective of eliminating the Hamas capability to rocket Israel had been accomplished.

It is obvious that the Olmert government formulated the goal of Operation Cast Lead primarily out of political considerations. Ambiguously phrased as "changing the security situation in the south," the cabinet ministers thought that they had cleverly hit on a formula that would allow them to assert after completing the operation that the goal had been accomplished. After all, there was bound to be a change in the security situation in the south as a result of the operation. And there was, no doubt, such a change. But not having destroyed the Hamas capability to launch rockets against Israel, the population in the south remains at the mercy of Hamas terrorists even after the IDF's withdrawal.

The IDF should have been given the task of destroying Hamas' rocket capability and accomplishing that task within a short time, something that the IDF easily had the ability to do. As things stand, the basic situation in the south has not changed, and will not change as a result of another cease-fire with Hamas. Like the previous cease-fire with Hamas, it will be a period giving Hamas a respite for rearming and preparing for the next round while Israeli citizens in the south will have to keep listening for the sound of rocket alerts.

So here is another lesson for Livni and Barak: No cease-fire with terrorists. Terror has to be wiped out. (Haaretz Feb 3)

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### **Daniel Pearl and the Normalization of Evil** By Judea Pearl *When will our luminaries stop making excuses for terror?*

This week marks the seventh anniversary of the murder of our son, former Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl. My wife Ruth and I wonder: Would Danny have believed that today's world emerged after his tragedy?

The answer does not come easily. Danny was an optimist, a true believer in the goodness of mankind. Yet he was also a realist, and would not let idealism bend the harshness of facts.

Neither he, nor the millions who were shocked by his murder, could have possibly predicted that seven years later his abductor, Omar Saeed Sheikh, according to several South Asian reports, would be planning terror acts from the safety of a Pakistani jail. Or that his murderer, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, now in Guantanamo, would proudly boast of his murder in a military tribunal in March 2007 to the cheers of sympathetic jihadi supporters. Or that this ideology of barbarism would be celebrated in European and American universities, fueling rally after rally for Hamas, Hezbollah and other heroes of "the resistance." Or that another kidnapped young man, Israeli Gilad Shalit, would spend his 950th day of captivity with no Red Cross visitation while world leaders seriously debate whether his kidnappers deserve international recognition.

No. Those around the world who mourned for Danny in 2002 genuinely hoped that Danny's murder would be a turning point in the history of man's inhumanity to man, and that the targeting of innocents to transmit political messages would quickly become, like slavery and human sacrifice, an embarrassing relic of a bygone era.

But somehow, barbarism, often cloaked in the language of "resistance," has gained acceptance in the most elite circles of our society. The words "war on terror" cannot be uttered today without fear of offense. Civilized society, so it seems, is so numbed by violence that it has lost its gift to be disgusted by evil.

I believe it all started with well-meaning analysts, who in their zeal to find creative solutions to terror decided that terror is not a real enemy, but a tactic. Thus the basic engine that propels acts of terrorism -- the ideological license to elevate one's grievances above the norms of civilized society -- was wished away in favor of seemingly more manageable "tactical" considerations.

This mentality of surrender then worked its way through politicians like the former mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. In July 2005 he told Sky News that suicide bombing is almost man's second nature. "In an unfair balance, that's what people use," explained Mr. Livingstone.

But the clearest endorsement of terror as a legitimate instrument of political bargaining came from former President Jimmy Carter. In his book "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid," Mr. Carter appeals to the sponsors of suicide bombing. "It is imperative that the general Arab community and all significant Palestinian groups make it clear that they will end the suicide bombings and other acts of terrorism when international laws and the ultimate goals of the Road-map for Peace are accepted by Israel." Acts of terror, according to Mr. Carter, are no longer taboo, but effective tools for terrorists to address perceived injustices.

Mr. Carter's logic has become the dominant paradigm in rationalizing terror. When asked what Israel should do to stop Hamas's rockets aimed at innocent civilians, the Syrian first lady, Asma Al-Assad, did not hesitate for a moment in her response: "They should end the occupation." In other words, terror must earn a dividend before it is stopped.

The media have played a major role in handing terrorism this victory of acceptability. Qatari-based Al Jazeera television, for example, is still providing Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi hours of free air time each week to

spew his hateful interpretation of the Koran, authorize suicide bombing, and call for jihad against Jews and Americans.

Then came the August 2008 birthday of Samir Kuntar, the unrepentant killer who, in 1979, smashed the head of a four-year-old Israeli girl with his rifle after killing her father before her eyes. Al Jazeera elevated Kuntar to heroic heights with orchestras, fireworks and sword dances, presenting him to 50 million viewers as Arab society's role model. No mainstream Western media outlet dared to expose Al Jazeera efforts to warp its young viewers into the likes of Kuntar. Al Jazeera's management continues to receive royal treatment in all major press clubs.

Some American pundits and TV anchors didn't seem much different from Al Jazeera in their analysis of the recent war in Gaza. Bill Moyers was quick to lend Hamas legitimacy as a "resistance" movement, together with honorary membership in PBS's imaginary "cycle of violence." In his Jan. 9 TV show, Mr. Moyers explained to his viewers that "each [side] greases the cycle of violence, as one man's terrorism becomes another's resistance to oppression." He then stated -- without blushing -- that for readers of the Hebrew Bible "God-soaked violence became genetically coded." The "cycle of violence" platitude allows analysts to empower terror with the guise of reciprocity, and, amazingly, indict terror's victims for violence as immutable as DNA.

When we ask ourselves what it is about the American psyche that enables genocidal organizations like Hamas -- the charter of which would offend every neuron in our brains -- to become tolerated in public discourse, we should take a hard look at our universities and the way they are currently being manipulated by terrorist sympathizers.

At my own university, UCLA, a symposium last week on human rights turned into a Hamas recruitment rally by a clever academic gimmick. The director of the Center for Near East Studies carefully selected only Israel bashers for the panel, each of whom concluded that the Jewish state is the greatest criminal in human history.

The primary purpose of the event was evident the morning after, when unsuspecting, uninvolved students read an article in the campus newspaper titled, "Scholars say: Israel is in violation of human rights in Gaza," to which the good name of the University of California was attached. This is where Hamas scored its main triumph -- another inch of academic respectability, another inroad into Western minds.

Danny's picture is hanging just in front of me, his warm smile as reassuring as ever. But I find it hard to look him straight in the eyes and say: You did not die in vain. (Wall Street Journal Feb 2)

*The writer, a professor of computer science at UCLA, is president of the Daniel Pearl Foundation, founded in memory of his son to promote cross-cultural understanding.*

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### **How I Survived Gaza** By Joshua Eastman

Eleven days ago today, Israel terminated an operation after having reached a state of cease-fire with a cowardly and murderous foe. We pulled out of Gaza. I pulled out of Gaza.

We were first called up on a Shabbat, right at the end of ten months of regular training and an extra two months of specialized training with the whole brigade in the Golan Heights. We were told that Israel was preparing for a possible conflict with Gaza. We were allowed to stay in phone contact at the beginning, and we listened for news from our families, always better informed than the army. We heard the bombs falling near the Strip, and readied our gear. And we waited. And waited. Every day another rumor came in.

"We're going today"

"We're going today"

We waited a week. We were sent the following Shabbat.

The first time we came back out, after twenty four hours, our unit was under the impression that all the other units would be coming out as well. A little R & R, and then back in. But only our soldiers arrived at the base. The others were in till the very end.

The next two weeks we were deployed over and over again into neighborhoods whose names are ingrained as if from childhood memory, and we were told to ready ourselves for the final operational steps the army was preparing.

Thank God, for us, those steps never came. After fighting through less densely packed urban neighborhoods and villages, as an army, we never had to enter the tightly packed urban nightmares of the inner cities. "The world is already trying to fault Israel, telling everyone that civilians died, and Israelis murdered. But I was there. I saw the twelve year olds with missiles and RPGs strapped to their backs. We watched in anger as our bombs, so as not to fall on large civilian centers, fell on our own troops."

A cease-fire was signed, and we pulled out with hatches open on our vehicles, waving flags and flashing the peace symbol even though no one was there to photograph it. After all, we were one of hundreds of squads returning. There was no way to record every tank and APC that came home. But it was cathartic, and made it official.

I saw many things. I heard things while I was in Gaza.

I saw soldiers who were virulently anti-religious don tztzit under their bullet-proof armor. As one soldier said, "Why do I put it on now, if I never wore it before? When do you ask your father for help? When you need it."

I saw heroes. Boys just out of high-school, young men who should have been playing sports or starting families or going to college, loading weapons and placing armor on their fragile frames, securing helmets, and checking gear. They suppressed the fear that lurked at the edges of their minds, and as a unit swept across the fence and planted unwavering lines of boots in the soil of Gaza. I watched them fight like grown men against evil.

The first night we went in, we were unable to wear bullet-proof armor in my unit, and had to settle for flak vests (we couldn't wear armor when we first went in because, due to the weight we were carrying, it would have hampered our movements, creating a safety hazard). My young commander, who had an easy load to carry that wouldn't interfere with his vest, still left without bulletproof armor. "If my men don't, I don't". I told him the next day, I would have followed him through the entire Arab world if need be, my respect for him was so great. I saw my brave wife, Chana, who came down to volunteer, just to be close to me, braving rockets and missiles, and watched her help soldiers by handing out desperately needed winter gear and food. I watched Chabadniks who came to us every day and inspired the soldiers with song and mitzvot. I saw heroes praying for our safety, and feeding us, and caring for us.

I saw pain. Just today, I ran into yet another friend from another unit, who tells me, when asked how he is, "I am fine from the neck down." Sixteen of his friends were injured in a blast on the first night. He lost many more before the end. He is still sweet, still charming, but his laugh is more weary, and his eyes are sadder. Another friend in a different unit lost two-thirds of his whole platoon when a bomb destroyed their house. He says he walked in, and he saw limbs moving or laying still, and bodies unattached to them, hurting, dead. He still hasn't pulled back completely. A former commander of mine died, and a friend lost his arm and use of his legs, and is still in a coma.

I saw lies. The world is already trying to fault Israel, telling everyone that civilians died, and Israelis murdered. But I was there. My feet were on the ground and I saw the truth. I saw that warnings were given. I saw the enemy that fought us. I saw the twelve year olds with missiles and RPGs strapped to their backs. I saw that it was with sadness and great anger Israeli troops recognized the need to fire on people who crossed the red line, the danger zone which meant they saw us, and knew where we were. Old people mined with bombs, children armed with detonators, tunnels that opened in the ground to swallow our soldiers. I watched my commanders passing out all of our food to the children who were taken prisoner. I received the commands "closed to fire on the right" if our intelligence had reported civilians in the area. I watched us, more often than not, taking cover when supposed civilian positions fired on us from "the right". Yet the world thinks it can bend the truth. We were not allowed to fire on schools. We were told not to loot. We watched in anger as our bombs, so as not to fall on large civilian centers, fell on our own troops, so that we could tell the world we were attempting to scare the enemy while limiting civilian losses.

Yet they won't say that in the press.

You are the reason we returned. You are the reason I am alive.

I saw cowardice. We listened with concern when Hamas threatened to use snipers and bombs on us, to fight us every step of the way with their fifteen thousand man army, and we watched videos of full brigades parading, waving their weapons and threatening Israel. But as we invaded, they fled. They would attack in small groups, hit us with missiles and sniper fire, and then flee. The 'warriors' of Hamas were brave when their rockets fell unanswered on the schools of children and the homes of elderly, but they did not stand when the enemy called them up to answer for their crimes.

I saw miracles. Rockets that blazed past our houses, bullets that scarred the outside of windows we were watching from. A unit near ours that was walking in to Gaza had RPGs pass straight between their ranks without hitting a single soldier. Mines that didn't explode, mortar rounds that landed next to friends that didn't explode. RPGs that blazed into the earthen barrier directly in front of our APC, detonating before penetration. The night walk through a neighborhood that wasn't on the map, that was full of snipers and mines according to reports, that we walked through unawares, by accident, without harm or incident. And that was just what we knew.

I felt fear. Every time I entered, every time I squeezed the trigger, every time a missile landed nearby, I was struck with fear. It is a deep fear, hard to explain. Your body shivers as if you are frozen to the core. You find yourself staring at the ground, trying to adjust to the ringing in your ears. You freeze, and unless someone slaps you, or you manage to shake yourself, your eyes stay downcast, and you lay numb on the earth, waiting without realizing. Eventually, your training pulls you out and forces you to stay alert, your gun snaps up, and adrenaline masks the fear and hurt. You roll on seemingly fearless, with adrenaline telling you that you are invincible.

I have felt weakness. I have felt my supposedly mighty muscles shudder, felt my devastatingly powerful weapon shake in my hands, felt my heart hammer against my armor, felt my soul and mind search for some way to avoid pain and the nightmares that were becoming real.

I felt strength. I would have been lost, but for the words of my Rebbe. "Ein od Milvado" There is no one but Him. The mere utterance strengthened limbs, and a surge of faith and hope carried me through the invasion, through the detonations and whistling of ricocheting rounds and falling bombs. For I knew, for once KNEW and understood absolutely that I was in the hands of the greatest general on earth. A veteran of every war and every conflict, the ultimate warrior and defender of His people. I remember the joy that swept through the lines when they said the head commander was entering the field, because of his experience and strategies, everyone felt safer. It reminded me that an even greater Commander had been there all along. I understood the words of Tehilim 147, "Not in the strength of the horse does He desire, and not in the legs of man does He favor. God favors those who fear Him, those who hope for His kindness." My strength had failed me, yet when I begged God to allow me to be a conduit for His strength, to be His shield and a sword for His people, I was able to stand and fight. Those nights, my body was there, but God fought on that field.

I am not free of sin, and was by no means worthy of the miracles that befell me. That God aided me; that my entire battalion walked out, against all odds, while every other unit suffered losses, without serious casualty or mental scarring, was a miracle beyond any. That I was able to feel His strength replace mine, a gift for which I was undeserving.

My strength lay in the thousands of people who prayed for me, who prayed for the wellbeing of the army, who cried for the return of the fragile and precious Jewish youth who fought like lions where men twice their age would have fled. You are the reason we returned. You are the reason I am alive. You, the people who pray and cry and feel you are not the front lines, are truly the army of Hashem. The IDF, as people should see, is merely the physical arm of what your prayers accomplish. You are the ones in the battle. We are the holding action, delaying the physical evil while you battle to clear the path for Moshiach. Never again will I feel a yeshiva student who learns all day is not brave for not being with us on this field. Because I watched the words and letters that he learned and prayed march ahead of us, thousands deep, and millions strong, absorbing the bullets and metal meant for me. I thank you, humbly, warriors of my heart and faith. You let me come home to my wife.

During this war, we received a tremendous outpouring of love and support; letters, donations, food, and clothing. In specific, because I know them, although without diminishing the greatness of all the people I don't know, I want to thank my mother and her tireless blogging efforts, my family for their support and letters, my wife for being brave beyond any woman or man I have ever known.

I want to thank Congregation Tiferes Yisroel for remembering an old neighborhood kid, and multiplying that to help all my brothers in uniform. I want to thank all of the community in Baltimore for the davening and love that we felt even in the heart of darkness.

I want to thank the little six-year old who wrote, "Dear IDF, I am proud of you." I cried over that letter, my tears running through the pain and stress as we recovered from Gaza.

I want to thank the people who donated money for the vests that saved our lives, the people that gave us clothes to warm our bodies, candy to warm our hearts, and letters to warm our souls. You cannot know what one pair of socks, one chocolate bar, or one hastily written sentence can do to save the minds and hearts of your children from despair.

I am not as gifted with words as my mother, nor a hero as great as those who marched beside me or filled the air with prayer around me, but I hope from this letter, from my fumbling thoughts you can draw for yourself the love and hope I am trying to convey.

I have seen this people, my people, at its best and at its worst. I can see why Redemption will come soon. As a nation, we drew together. Disunity, differences in Kippot or sects fell away, and everyone reached out to help as best they could. No one said, "I have no part" or "This isn't my war". May Hashem see the greatness of His holy, beautiful people, and allow me to sing that old song to my child, with absolute truth and great joy: "I promise, my little one, that this is the last war." (OU.org Jan 28)

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