Operation Protective Edge Q & A

1. Why did Israel kill so many civilians in Gaza?

Deaths of innocent civilians are a regrettable and tragic byproduct of war. Unfortunately, Palestinian extremists have forced Israel into defensive wars, from Lebanon in 1982 to Hamas' escalating rockets attacks since Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. Israel has had to respond militarily to disable Hamas' capabilities and save the lives of Israeli men, women, and children. We still do not know the ratio of Palestinian civilian to combatant deaths, but Hamas, the aggressor, is responsible for casualties. Israel has consistently sought to protect Israeli and innocent Palestinian civilians, while Hamas has sought to maximize civilian casualties by targeting Israelis and systematically using Palestinians as human shields, placing its weaponry in and fighting from civilian centers, and reserving its underground shelters only for Hamas leaders. As former President Bill Clinton noted, Hamas' "crass…strategy is to force Israel to kill Palestinian civilians." Yet, as UK Col. (ret.) Richard Kemp noted, "[T]he Israeli Defense Forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare."

2. Is Israel trying to "ethnically cleanse" the Palestinian people, starting with Palestinians in Gaza?

Israel launched Operation Protective Edge for two reasons only: to stop the barrage of longer-range, Iranian-supplied rockets that reached as far as Tel Aviv and Haifa and to destroy Hamas' elaborate system of cross-border attack tunnels that open into Israeli communities and pre-schools. Israel discovered Hamas' "Rosh Hashanah Plot" of 2014 that was to involve over 200 fighters simultaneously infiltrating Israel through the tunnels to carry out mass killings and kidnappings. These were intolerable threats. It is Hamas, not Israel, that seeks ethnic cleansing. Its charter calls for the murder of Jews everywhere, the "obliteration" of Israel, and its replacement with an Islamist caliphate. As a sermon on Hamas TV on July 25 emphasized, *"Our doctrine in fighting you (the Jews) is that we will totally exterminate you. We will not leave a single one of you alive, because you are alien usurpers of the land."*

3. Hamas says its goal is for Israel to lift its blockade of Gaza. Isn't this a reasonable request, and wouldn't ending the blockade end Hamas rocket attacks?

Ending the blockade is only Hamas' short-term goal. Its long-term goal, expressed in its charter and by its leaders and actions, is genocide of Jews and destruction of Israel. Egypt, which blockades Gaza's southern border, and Israel imposed legal blockades for the same reason: Hamas is a dangerous Palestinian terrorist group and must be prevented from importing more munitions and Iranian weaponry. Despite the blockade, Israel ensures the regular transport of humanitarian goods to Gaza's civilians. Even under the current blockade, Hamas has amassed weapons and used cement intended to build Gaza's infrastructure to instead build terrorist cross-border attack tunnels. This is why the blockade cannot be eased unless Hamas is neutralized and Gaza is demilitarized.

4. Shouldn't Israel respect Hamas as a democratically elected political party that is a legitimate negotiating partner?

Hamas was democratically elected in 2006 but has never held another election, though its term expired in 2010. Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007 after staging a bloody coup, and the people of Gaza are now trapped under its repressive rule. Hamas is akin to other violent extremists surging across the Middle East and Africa, such as ISIS, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Boko Haram. Major Arab countries, from Saudi Arabia to Jordan, from Egypt to the Gulf states, view Hamas as a threat. Hamas is not a legitimate negotiating partner. Hamas' charter and leaders reject all negotiations, cite the anti-Semitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and are pledged to the destruction of Israel. It is a genocidal, anti-Semitic Palestinian terrorist group pledged to violence to achieve its goals.

5. Given that Israel has one of the strongest militaries in the world, shouldn't it exercise more restraint against the weaker Palestinians?

Israel has exercised enormous restraint. Hamas has been carrying on a terrorist war against Israel since 2000 through incessant rocket fire and terrorist attacks, but Israel has repeatedly sought calm. Few countries would tolerate even one rocket fired at its civilians, let alone hundreds. With its military power, Israel could destroy

Gaza. It has never done so and would not. Instead, Israel only targets terrorists and their infrastructure and risks the lives of its own soldiers through ground operations rather than exclusively rely on more damaging aerial attacks. Furthermore, Israel consistently sacrifices military advantages to protect innocent Palestinian civilians. It drops millions of leaflets and sends phone and text messages warning civilians to move to safety, regularly aborts missions if too many civilians are close to terrorist targets, and adopts unilateral truces to ensure the supply of humanitarian goods even when Hamas violates the truces. Israel is a model for other nations that are forced to engage in urban warfare and wish to do so humanely.

6. Given that Hamas and Israel are both firing rockets, aren't they morally equivalent?

There is no moral equivalence between Hamas and Israel. Hamas is a terrorist organization bent on destruction, while Israel is a multicultural democracy defending its citizens. Hamas boasts of this crucial moral difference, repeating, "We love death more than you love life." Israel closely adheres to the Geneva Conventions to fight lawfully and humanely, while Hamas willfully violates all those laws, from using human shields to enlisting minors as combatants and indiscriminately targeting Israeli civilians. Unfortunately, Hamas manipulates journalists and has turned the media into another front in its war. Hamas does not permit journalists to photograph Hamas fighters to make it appear that Israel is fighting innocent Palestinians, not battle-hardened combatants, and journalists often omit reference to the Hamas charter and Hamas leaders' statements, which would clearly expose Hamas' fanatical, genocidal intentions.

7. Isn't Israel overreacting to the tunnels, which are really used to smuggle goods into the impoverished Gaza Strip?

The cross-border attack tunnels were not built to bring humanitarian goods into Gaza. Their sole purpose was to infiltrate Israel and murder or kidnap Jews. Israel was stunned by the sophistication and extent of the tunnels. They had openings near Israeli communities, kindergartens, dining halls, and homes. They were equipped with special rooms, handcuffs, and tranquilizers for kidnapped Israelis. Israeli residents of southern communities were terrified that one day as they sat sipping coffee, terrorists could emerge and murder or kidnap them and their loved ones. The tunnels pose an unacceptable, lethal threat that no Israeli—and no civilized nation—can tolerate. Ninety-six percent of Israelis, an unprecedented majority in a politically fractious country, supported the ground operation intended to destroy the tunnels, stop the rockets, and neutralize Hamas.

8. Isn't Israel creating a humanitarian disaster in Gaza?

Hamas caused the humanitarian disaster in Gaza. Its military aggression does nothing to help Palestinians. Hamas diverted tons of cement, intended to build schools and homes, to instead build cross-border attack tunnels. The 350 truckloads of building materials needed for one tunnel could have built 86 homes, seven mosques, six schools, and 19 medical clinics. Hamas turned civilian structures into legitimate military targets by using them to conduct its war. Hamas knew its barrage of rocket attacks on Israel would force Israel to respond militarily, leading to tragedies in Gaza. Hamas could easily end the blockade, the war, and the suffering of Palestinians if it renounced terrorism, accepted past PLO-Israel agreements for peace, and chose to build up Gaza instead of using it as a staging ground for its merciless terrorist war against the Jews in Israel.

9. Why did Israel deliberately strike UNRWA schools and Gaza hospitals?

Israel did not strike the UNRWA schools or Al Shifah Hospital even though Hamas used them to store weapons and as military command posts, converting them into legitimate military targets. According to the IDF, the July 24 bombing of an UNRWA school in Beit Hanoun and the July 28 bombing of Al Shifah Hospital and Shati Park were caused by Hamas rockets that fell short and landed in Gaza. An Italian journalist confirmed Israel's claim and tweeted, "[M]isfired rocket killed children yday in Shati. Witness: militants rushed and cleared debris." Approximately 475 Hamas rockets fell short and landed in Gaza during Operation Protective Edge. Israel did strike Al-Wafa Hospital on July 23, but only after issuing a warning two days before that it should be evacuated and only after double-checking that it had been evacuated before proceeding with the operation. The many secondary explosions confirmed the IDF's claim that the hospital had been turned into a Hamas command post.

StandWith**Us**

08/2014