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PART B6

From: sbwhoeop [redacted]
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Gaza: it's Hamas's move now

Hamas must seize the initiative if there is ever to be an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine



- o [Jeremy Greenstock](#)
- o guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 2 June 2010 12.29 BST

So it has happened again. Nearly 18 months after the Israelis bombed Gaza to a wasteland, with barely a load of building materials allowed in since then, Turkey has taken the brunt of an operation of humanitarian assistance gone wrong. The UN must establish the facts impartially and independently and, if laws have been broken, those responsible must be held to account. Political demonstrations posing as relief flotillas go wrong too easily and Israel understandably has to prevent weapons being smuggled into Gaza. But was this really the best way to bring the ships to shore for examination? A commando attack on civilian ships looks callous and disproportionate. No one should have been hurt, whatever the emotions behind all this.

Why is Gaza under siege in the first place? Under international law, the Israelis are responsible as the occupying force for the proper administration of the territory; and half the point of Israel is not to be above the law. Yet they are creating a traumatised territory of 1.5m neighbours, many of whose children seem to want to grow up to be suicide bombers. They are also pouring fertiliser on al-Qaida's ground.

The director of UNRWA operations in Gaza, John Ging, gave a speech in London this week entitled "Illegal, inhuman and insane: a medieval siege on Gaza in 2010". This objective humanitarian practitioner should be listened to. How has Israel, the only democracy in its region and a symbol of the need for racially inspired violence to end, come to risk any claim to international legitimacy in its handling of this situation?

Hamas are the enemy of Israel, but they do not have to be. They preach violent resistance too readily, yet over the past 17 months they have been trying to control the militant groups intent on threatening Israel with rockets – imperfectly perhaps, but not a single Israeli citizen has been killed (alas, one immigrant worker was) by a rocket since the Gaza bombing stopped in January 2009. They are also the implacable opponents of al-Qaida. They won a fair election in 2006 and claim to respect democracy. Let's test them on that. At present, Hamas security people are being sniped at by the Israeli Defence Forces when they try to arrest other militant groups. This is genuinely getting insane.

The unwisdom of reliance on angry military responses is all the clearer when the mood in Palestine, in both the West Bank and Gaza, is steadily moving towards a negotiated end to the occupation. I am convinced from my own direct experience that Hamas is prepared to establish and respect a long-term ceasefire so that the talking can start without the threat of violence, and that they would enter in good faith, if that were reciprocated, into negotiations to establish two states in the disputed territories, Israel and Palestine, with their own rights and responsibilities under international law. The distortion of their position, a little of it the fault of their own PR, does no side any good.

If a comprehensive negotiation is too much to expect for now, what about a first step? I believe an arrangement to end the blockade is within reach if only Israel, Egypt and Gaza would test the possibilities of dialogue. Hamas have indicated that they could cease all attacks on Israeli soil, close the tunnels, release Gilead Shalit and stop the import of arms into Gaza if the blockade was ended, an agreed number of Palestinian prisoners were released and Gaza began to be rebuilt.

The Palestinians of course have work to do on their own internal reconciliation, while the relationship between Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza remains so bad. But the UN, the US, Russia, the EU and the Arab world must make a much more serious attempt to test the possibilities, putting ordinary Israelis and Palestinians first, not their own political comfort.

We are coming close to losing the chance of a two-state solution. US policy, based on a West-Bank-only approach, is locked in a cul-de-sac if Gaza is left out of the equation, because majority Palestinian support will be lacking. Israel is confident in the knowledge that it cannot be militarily defeated.

But that ignores the huge danger of losing the political, diplomatic, legal and moral high ground. This matters in today's world, as the US and the UK discovered in Iraq, because government authority and public opinion interact closely, and legitimacy breeds support.

Israel's relationship with Turkey was the key to a broader understanding with the Islamic community and others beyond the west. That now lies in tatters. If Israel is left as the permanent occupier, or controlling a one-state structure with part of its population downgraded or imprisoned, it will truly be a disaster for its people and what they stand for.

I hope that Hamas will not sit back and enjoy Israel's discomfiture. They have so far, for a political organisation, attracted much too narrow a range of international support. If they wish to be widely accepted as a negotiating partner, they must unequivocally accept the only fully justified condition set by the international Quartet – the cessation of violence – underline that their objective is a two-state settlement, and win international friends for the ending of the occupation. In whoever's hands, bombs, bullets, rockets and iron bars will achieve nothing. But a push for justice will.

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