

Response to Stephen Shalom's Blog on Israel's War Crimes in Gaza

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There is something missing from Stephen Shalom's blog post on Israelis crimes in the recent Gaza conflict and it is full recognition of Hamas' war crimes and vile ideology.

Stephen Shalom mentions in passing the "unjust" nature of Hamas's rocket attacks and mortar fire on Israel, but reduces the harm they did to "six civilian deaths." In reality, they made life in southern Israel unlivable for many thousand Israelis. He also fails to grasp the indiscriminate nature of these rocket attacks, every one meant to kill civilians, be they Jews, Arabs or foreign residents of Israel. He also ignores the tunnels Hamas built under the Israel/Gaza border for the sole purpose of attacking civilians on the Israeli side.

What does B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights organizations, say about Hamas' conduct?

Hamas did, indeed, violate international humanitarian law (IHL) during the fighting: its operatives fired at civilians and civilian locations within Israel, concealed weapons in civilian buildings and institutions in the Gaza Strip, and even fired from locations close to civilian structures or from within such structures. In doing so, Hamas endangered civilians within Gaza, forcing the civilian population to be a part of the sphere of fighting. Such conduct is unlawful, as B'Tselem has repeatedly stated and wishes to underscore once more.

And here are the words of Israeli's greatest peace advocate Uri Avnery:

The war deteriorated into an orgy of killing and destroying, with both sides "dancing on the blood", blessing every bomb and missile, completely oblivious to the suffering caused to the human beings on the other side. And still without any realizable aim.

I expect that if pressed, Shalom will admit that he accepts B'Tselem's findings and Avnery's conclusion, yet there is something about the pro-Palestinian movement in the US that cannot openly admit that Hamas commits war crimes.

Consider the way the conflict began. Local Hamas operatives, acting on their own, abducted and then murdered three Israeli teenagers living on the West Bank. Hamas' response was to disclaim responsibility but to praise the abduction and murders. Does this justify the Israeli rampage on the West Bank that killed 12 Palestinians? Of course not. But what does it say about Hamas that it relishes in the murder of Israelis?

What is Hamas' record? Hamas was responsible for numerous suicide bombings inside Israel that took the lives of hundreds of Israeli civilians. Although there have been no such atrocities recently, Hamas has not repudiated this tactic and expresses no remorse. In fact, it refuses to draw any distinction between Israel soldiers or civilians. They are all fair game.

To this day Hamas's charter calls for the destruction of Israel and the killing of Jews. To this day, it claims it cannot agree to a two state solution because Islam forbids the ceding of Muslim land to infidels. From time to time, Hamas officials claim the organization is willing to sign a long term "truce" with Israel, but a truce is a far cry from normal relations and Hamas would only sign one if

all Palestinians (not just those living in the West Bank and Gaza) approved it and its terms guaranteed the unqualified right of Palestinians to return to pre-1967 Israel. This is a nothing like the two-state solution advocated by most progressives and even a left-wing Israeli government would never agree to it.

Hamas is overtly anti-Semitic. In an article that appeared in the April 27, 2012 issue of the Jewish newspaper the *Forward*, based on an interview with Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzook, Marzook is quoted as saying that he has nothing against Judaism as a religion or Jews as individuals, but in the next breath he vouches for the accuracy of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a notorious forgery circulated by anti-Semites for over a century, in which Jews are depicted in the ugliest possible terms.

Lifting the Israeli blockade is a worthy goal. Shalom is right to point out that it has kept out products essential to the Gaza's economy and the well being of its population. But what about the cement that did get in? If Hamas was sincerely interested in improving quality of life of the people it was elected to represent, it would have used the cement for civilian purposes, not for building tunnels to attack Israel.

Stephen Shalom is the director of Gandhian Forum for Peace and Justice. Hamas's reactionary philosophy and violent conduct is the antithesis of Gandhi's teachings. Shalom should say so loud and clear.