

July 11, 2014

Shalom from Israel. This is the first in a series of daily updates and reflections from one Israeli soldier during the latest rain of rockets designed to terrorize Israel and shake the faith of its supporters. It is carried out by a terrorist army; Hamas, just as ISIS is a terrorist army, just as Hezbollah is a terrorist army, so exactly is Hamas.

First there is a myth put forth in a good deal of the media that needs to be dispelled. That myth goes like this:

Hamas, the democratically elected rulers of Gaza, resisting Israeli occupation, are the victims of an Israeli onslaught, which is part of a cycle of violence, starting with the murder of three Jewish teens, the torture and revenge murder of a Palestinian teen, riots by Palestinians, brutally put down by the Israelis, as evidenced by the beating of a Palestinian/ American teen, which was then answered by relatively harmless rocket fire by Hamas (as evidenced by the lack of even one Israeli civilian death, while Israel has unleashed it's air force against the defenseless people of Gaza, killing some one hundred, of which forty may have been women and children in a completely disproportionate responses evidenced by the Palestinian loss of life and lack of even one Israeli fatality.

So let's set the record straight.

1. There is no Israeli occupation of Gaza and hasn't been for almost ten years. In 2005, Israel used it's army to uproot 10,000 JEWS not Palestinians, from their homes, businesses, farms and synagogues, in which they had lived, worked and worshipped for almost forty years in order to quite literally give peace a chance. It was done in the hopes that if by giving land, we would get peace in Gaza, the same formula could be applied for an overall agreement with the Palestinians. Indeed Israel wanted Gaza to become the Singapore of the Middle East, and left behind, completely in tact, agricultural enterprises which could have provided employment for thousands of Palestinians and millions of dollars in exports. Instead the Palestinians uprooted all that was left behind and turned it into rocket launching sites and began firing rockets at Israel, literally as we were leaving. That is neither opinion nor hyperbole. It is a fact.

2. While Hamas indeed won one election, that is not what gave them rule over Gaza. They staged as blood thirsty a coup as has ever been seen, not against Israel, but against their fellow Palestinians, lining people up against walls and machine gunning them, tying people up and blind folding them and pushing them off three

story buildings to their deaths. Anyone who dared speak out against them had their knee caps shot off for starters. That's not a claim. That's a fact. The videos are still on the Internet for anyone who has the stomach to see them.

3. The present hostilities are not part of a cycle of violence. They are a carefully planned and orchestrated Hamas offensive. Hamas wants and believes it needs this war and has done and continues to do everything to bring it about and keep it going. Before the three teenaged Israeli boys were kidnapped and murdered, Hamas began firing rockets into Israel. Israel did not respond. It repeatedly said that calm would be answered with calm. When it did react it attacked EMPTY training camps, to show what it COULD do if calm were not restored. No lives were lost, because Israel did not want a war. That is not opinion. That is fact. When Israel didn't respond to rocket fire, Hamas had one of its terrorist cells respond to the calls of its chairman to kidnap Israelis, and they did just that, and then murdered them in cold blood. And Israel STILL did not respond by attacking Gaza! Then a group of murderous Israeli thugs kidnapped and murdered a poor Palestinian teenager. But to give some sort of equivalence to the two acts is to say there is no difference between Charley Manson and Osama Bin Laden. Unfortunately, every society has heartless murderers. Israel is a democracy which apprehended the killers in a matter of days (while it still hasn't caught the terrorists who murdered the three Israeli boys). Hamas is a terrorist organization and army that dispatched the murderers and then celebrated their achievements. We will try and punish the murderers of the Palestinian teen to the fullest extent of the law. Unfortunately our Palestinian neighbors name streets and squares after those who have murdered our children and hand out candy to celebrate their murderous acts and train their own children to emulate them. That is the difference. That is not opinion. It is fact.

4. Israelis haven't been killed because Hamas' rockets are harmless or because they haven't been trying to kill Israelis. Israelis haven't been killed because of first and foremost a Merciful G-d and also because of the Iron Dome anti-missile system which has had over a 90% success rate and the most outstanding civil defense system in the world. That's why Israelis haven't been killed. But one certainly can't claim that Hamas hasn't been doing its utmost to change that.

5. Hamas wanted this war because they were being squeezed from two different directions. Once they took over Gaza in their murderous coup, they had a problem, they actually had to govern. They had to collect garbage and run an economy that could provide jobs for their people. But through incompetence and corruption they doomed their own people to poverty and misery. There is forty percent unemployment in Gaza. They cannot even pay their own soldiers and for the first time there were signs that their own people might topple them because of their incompetence and corruption.

At the same time, new groups like ISIS and Al Qaida have begun operating in Gaza, for whom Hamas is too tame, and who threatened to topple them as well. So Hamas calculated that it was better for them to fight and even lose a limited war with Israel than be toppled from within. That way if the economy is bad, it's the Israelis fault. Look how they bombed us! If you think we're not radical enough, you're wrong, look how many rockets we launched at them and look how far they reached. We terrorized Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Who else could have done that but us?! So, for Hamas a losing war is a win as long as it keeps them in power. Now they are desperate for one tangible gain; one soldier they can hold hostage, one terrorist attack they can pull off, one rocket attack that kills scores so they can declare a divine victory, when in fact all they will have delivered to their own people is more misery, more poverty, more death and destruction.

As for Israel, we are in territory that has been familiar to us since the days of King David. We are in the valley of the shadow of death once more, and we fear no evil.

July 12, 2014

It's been a calm day relatively or so it seemed in Sderot which usually gets the brunt of the rockets Hamas likes to fire off. Now I'm in one of the Eshkol region communities. Thus far there have been five hundred and fifty rockets fired at Israel in just the last few days and each one of them, a war crime. Rockets are fired at civilians while Hamas hides behind their own hapless civilians. Now the Sabbath peace is broken with rockets falling and the sounds of sirens and then the explosions. The drill is when you hear the siren you go into one of the hundreds of life shields, as they call them, little more than reinforced concrete the size of a bus stop. You stay there for ten minutes and then if you hear nothing else you come out, because Hamas likes to shoot off barrages and one or two rockets falling could be just the beginning. So there I am in uniform along with a few passersby who ducked into the nearest shelter as if coming in out of the rain, except it's raining potential death out there. The shrapnel can travel a thousand meters and take your head off. There is a religious woman with her little girl, and a non-religious Moroccan teen aged girl, maybe fourteen years old. The little girl is frightened. These particular explosions were close and she's on the verge of hysterics, her mother trying to sooth and calm her saying, "See, nothing can happen to us in here. We're in a shelter with an army officer." She looks up at me with eyes like my grandson's and asks, "Are you an officer?"

"I'm a captain" I say, "and there's a very strict rule that nothing can happen to little girls when there's a captain around. That's a rule".

"In truth?" she asks

“Absolutely.” I answer.

Just then the fourteen year old, to distract her, plays a tune on her iPhone. It’s Elvis Presley’s “Fever” and all I can think of as there’s another explosion and the little girl trembles, is that I never knew Elvis did a version of “Fever”. The little girl is on the verge of tears again, so I do my best Elvis impression, complete with lip curl and sing ”Ya give a me fever... boom, boom, boom” Hamas is picking up the rhythm section, “Fevah when ya’ hold me tight.” The little girl laughs, and why not? I’m bringing out the “A+ material”. Then she gets a worried look on her face and asks her mother ”How will Rochelleh get married with all these booms and rockets?” I’m guessing Rochelle is her older sister.

I say, “You know I was in the second Lebanon War and there was a Moroccan girl in one of the shelters who was crying because it was her wedding day and there she was in an air raid shelter. And she said how could I get married. I don’t even have flowers or a wedding dress. Even if we had the wedding here in the shelter there’s nothing to feed the guests. No way to celebrate at all. I waited my whole life for this day and now we’re in this shelter that stinks.”

"This one stinks too" the little girl said" like pee pee"

Well, you know what?"

“What?” she asks

“Some friends and I had wanted to help so we had gone and brought a bunch of fruit to bring up to this town because we heard they were running low on fresh fruit. And someone had offered us some flowers as well. So we said, here are flowers for your wedding.. and my friend said, and nothing makes better refreshments than fresh fruit! It’s better than the very best wedding cake!”

“But she didn’t have a wedding dress” the little girl said.

“That’s true” I said, but one of the other people in the shelter said he owned a bridal shop and he ran out in the middle of the rocket attack and got a wedding gown off one of the mannequins in his store front window and brought it back to the shelter, and altered it so it fit the girl perfectly. And you know what?” I asked.

“What? “ she said, by this time enthralled with the story.

“Our bride...that’s what we called her...our bride got married at four o’clock that afternoon with our flowers and fruit for her guests and the most wonderful wedding dress in the whole world that fit her beautifully. Your sister Rochelleh

will be just fine. Hashem (which is what religious people call God. It simply means "The name" since it's forbidden to take the Lord's name in vain) Hashem, "I said, "Will see to it."

"Is that a story of truth?" she asks again with eyes like my grandson's and before I can answer that it was indeed a true story, the fourteen year old pipes up, "That's a story of truth" she says. I look around surprised.

That girl who got married in the shelter was my best friend's cousin. It was in Kiryat Shmonah wasn't it?"

"Yes." I say, and this time I sound like the child full of wonder. The little girl looks up at her mother and says, "Look how much Hashem loves us."

The distant thunder of explosions has stopped for the moment, but the sweetness of this Sabbath, in which Hamas' rockets are completely powerless to put a dent in the wondrous ways of the Lord, is with me still.

July 13, 2014

The woman on the pop music show on army radio in Israel has a sexy voice; not sexy like she's trying to vamp you. Sexy like cute, like friendly, like you want to take her to the prom, like you want to share an ice cream cone with her or hold hands in the movies. That kind of sexy, friendly sexy, easy going sexy, hasn't got a problem in the world and is ready to go to the beach with you sexy. She's just finished announcing a Michael Jackson song as if she had just heard it for the first time, as if that Michael Jackson song is the biggest, brightest, coolest thing in her day. She says it in a way that you'd never know there was a war going on. Now that's not unusual for Tel Aviv girls, because if there's a war going on in the south or the north, the girl from Tel Aviv, like her tall and tan and young and lovely counterpoint from Ipanema, just goes walking, while everyone else, especially the soldiers fighting the war in the north or the south, just go "awww."

But the odd thing is, there are rockets falling on Tel Aviv too, and still her voice is cool and calm, friendly, soothing, not rushed, not panicked, just there, tall, tan, young and lovely and friendly and reassuring as she says after the Michael Jackson bit, "And please remember if you're driving in your car and you hear the air raid siren go off, pull off to the side of the road, turn off the engine and take shelter, lie flat and cover your head with your arms and stay that way for ten minutes because just because you heard one explosion doesn't mean there aren't more on the way, Ok? Take care of yourselves."

And then she plays another song, Queen singing "Find Somebody to Love"

And I think to myself how very, very much I love this country and this people, who refuse to let war put fear into their voices, much less their lives. And as I am experiencing that reverie and wondering what the girl on the radio actually looks like, the air raid siren goes off. I am just entering Ashkelon and per the drill I pull the car off to the side of the road as do all the drivers in front of me. We have fifteen seconds to take cover. A religious couple is in front of me, the husband with his arm protectively covering his wife's head. I can see the rocket, can trace it's arc. Interesting war in which almost none of Israel's soldiers are under fire and almost all of it's civilians are.

Suddenly I hear the husband reciting the words of the 121st psalm. It's a psalm that is part of the Sabbath service and though Shabbat is over the words seem to be written for right now, this very instance, as the grad rocket traces it's arc over our heads, "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help?."

And I remember 2012, lying in a ditch by the side of the road with a rocket coming straight toward the small group of people with whom I've taken shelter, except I think the rocket is coming directly for me. I think it has Captain Dan Gordon written on the side of it and I am taking the whole thing, in the words of Sonny Corleone, "very personally". Then suddenly out of nowhere, like Mighty Mouse, an Iron dome missile swoops down and blows the grad rocket with Captain Gordon's name on it to smithereens.

"My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved, he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep...The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and forever more"

And out loud I find myself saying amen, and I also find myself thinking, "That's another difference between Hamas and us. We build our missiles to defend our women and children and they use their women and children to defend their missiles."

The rocket passes overhead and after a few minutes the drivers get up from the side of the road, get back in their cars and continue with their day as if nothing had happened and I try to imagine that scene on the 405 in LA or the Long Island Express Way and I love this people, and the Lord who watches over her even more.

I've come to Ashkelon to interview Dr. Ron Lobel.

Because his hospital is the nearest to the Gaza border I ask if he has any Palestinian patients.

“Only from Hebron, and Bethlehem, not from Gaza” he says.

“Oh” I say, quite reasonably, “After the war you stopped admitting them?” That makes sense to me. Why would you treat the people who are trying to kill you?

“Not at all.” he says, “ We would never turn them away. Hamas stopped letting them come for treatment.”

“And before the war?” I ask

“Before the war on any given day you might find a Palestinian, possibly someone who was trying to infiltrate or plant an I.E.D. who was wounded by one of our soldiers, and in the next bed you might find an Israeli who was wounded by a rocket that one of the first guy’s friends shot off. And the Palestinian might be treated by a Jewish doctor and the Jew might be treated by either an Israeli Arab doctor or a Palestinian resident.”

“You train Palestinian doctors here?!” I ask incredulously.

“Yes of course”

It turns out that when Israel occupied Gaza up until roughly ten years ago, Dr. Lobel was in charge of their health care system , supervising 5 hospitals, 28 clinics and three birthing centers

“And do you still maintain relationships with some of the doctors there?”

He looks at me as if I were a slow witted child, “They’re my friends “ he says simply.. If it wasn’t for Hamas, he believes we’d have peace with the Palestinians of Gaza.

“You really believe that?” I ask.

“Absolutely.” he says.”

“And has the hospital ever been targeted, ever been hit by Hamas’ rockets” I ask.

He nods his head, “In 2008 a Grad rocket landed 300 meters from the emergency room. And another landed four meters from the delivery room and nursery. Luckily the Iron Dome shot it down”

“And you still think there can be peace? When they try to hit a hospital?

(Coincidentally while setting their own command and control post underneath THEIR hospital in Gaza City...the hospital the Israelis remodeled for them)

Things aren’t always like they seem, he says

And we talk about the case of Wafa al bas. She was a Palestinian girl who had been burned over a good deal of her body when a cooking stove exploded in her home in Gaza. She was brought to Israel for treatment at Siroka hospital and burn center. The doctors saved her life and she went home. A few years later she tried to cross back into Israel, ostensibly for additional surgery on her burns. At the border crossing she was stopped, because the guards had received a tip that a female suicide bomber was coming to blow up an Israeli hospital. In fact that’s exactly what Wafa al bas was intending to do, except at the last minute her

handlers told her to hit a more Jewish hospital because there were too many Arabs being treated at Siroka. When she realized she was caught and attempted to pull the cord and detonate the twenty pounds of explosives she had on her suicide bomber vest. When the bomb failed to detonate she pulled it again and again, like an inconsolable child. They finally diffused the bomb and she was arrested. The Israeli public thought she was a monster at first. How could they not?! How could a person do that to the very doctors who had saved her life.?

Then her story came out. When she had come back from the hospital to her parents home in Gaza her father said she looked like a monster because of her scars. What man would ever want to marry her now? Now she was a burden on the family and so the Hamas dispatchers put the suicide belt on her in her parents' house. This way she could die an honorable death and not be a burden on her family because she was so ugly. When she tried to detonate the bomb, there were no Israeli soldiers around. The only person she would have killed would have been herself. Which is what she ACTUALLY wanted to do. It wasn't that she wanted to kill Jews. She just wanted to end a life that had become unbearable.

Like the doctor said. Things aren't always what they seem. Of course when she was one of the prisoners exchanged for Gilad Shalit and was sent back to her parents' house in Gaza she issued a public statement urging Gazans to take another Shalit (prisoner) every year.

Like the doctor said, things aren't always as they seem.

I ask the doctor if he minds if I ask a personal question. "Not at all" he says. "Do you believe in Hashem (the word religious Jews use for the Almighty). "I'm not what you would call a religious Jew" he says, " but yes of course I believe in Him"

"And have you ever felt him manifest in your life"

"Every hour of every day" he says.

Then the phone rings. The rocket that missed me earlier that day has seriously wounded a sixteen-year-old boy with a piece of shrapnel to his head.

The doctor and his team will be doing everything possible to save him, and they will pray, as will I.

Hamas has fired almost a thousand rockets at Israel thus far. A THOUSAND!! And this is the first serious injury.

As I drive back another barrage of rockets slams into the country. As I write this, I count half a dozen exploding not far away. The Iron Dome takes out the majority.

Just before I came here I got into a disagreement with a very pleasant, very well intentioned American woman.

“War is never the answer” she says.

“It is when people are trying to kill you “ I say, “ And then you better be good at it”

“I’d rather die than kill” she says with that wonderfully innocent American Midwestern look, which means she’s never had to seriously consider either one.

“My people tried that once” I say, “ It didn’t work out well”

Later today I’m with some very elite soldiers and in my hand is a Tavor assault rifle, and over head are Israeli made drones on their way to take out missile launchers in Gaza as Iron Dome ties another rocket out of the skies above us.

“I lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help? From the Lord who made heaven and earth” and by whose Holy Grace my people can finally defend us, by ourselves, instead of hoping for the kindness of strangers, or even friends.

July 14, 2014

I’m a citizen soldier. That means I live most of my life out of uniform, towing nobody’s party line, following no one’s orders or even talking points, but my own. Eleven months out of the year I’m in jeans and t-shirts or shorts and flip flops, the least military looking person on the face of the earth. I can get away with looking like a slob because I’m a writer. It’s not looked down upon in my profession because it’s almost expected.

I’ve worked in media for over forty years; everything from feature films to running news crews, some of them in the Middle East.

I remember one reporter for a major European network who was based in Jerusalem in the 1980s. A nice man, in that he would always buy me drinks whenever we met, he was indeed a raging alcoholic, ostensibly covering the events in the West Bank. He used to hang out at a bar called Goliath’s, which advertised itself as being “ a stone’s throw” from the King David Hotel. He wore what was then the expected uniform of the hard bitten foreign correspondent; namely a well wrinkled safari jacket complete with sweat stains to make it look as if he was reporting live from some native uprising in the Sahara.

Next to Goliath’s was a building made of Jerusalem stone that was half in ruins. If you held him in a tight enough shot, it looked like he was standing next to a recently demolished Palestinian house. He would sit in Goliath’s bar and drink all day and send “stringers,” another name for free lancers, out to the West Bank to

get footage of whatever the day's riot was occurring during the lead up to the first Intifada. His stringers would come back and describe the footage they had taken of stone throwing on the Palestinian side and tear gas from the Israelis. Then he would get up from the bar, finish his martini, go outside and stand next to the ruined stone house. He would call for a tight shot of him in the Safari jacket and record his "heads and tails," the lead in and tag to the report he hoped would land him some network time on the nightly news. He would look suitably somber and end each report with his name (let's say it was Sam Jones") by saying, "This is Sam Jones, reporting from somewhere in the Occupied West Bank". Then he would take off the safari jacket, go back into the air-conditioned bar, and order another martini.

I always got kind of a kick out of the old fraud, because though he was a drunken huckster of the first order, and a lazy one at that, A) he did pay for the drinks, and B) outside of lying about the fact that he wasn't even there, he basically just covered the story. He even, occasionally provided context.

But I... I miss him.

So the other day I'm watching a network correspondent, reporting from Gaza. He looks into the camera. His look is concerned, empathetic, suitably somber and even, saddened, in a kind off handed way. Not enough to be maudlin mind you. That wouldn't be cool and it wouldn't play well to his audience who want to be, while, not entertained, necessarily, suitably moved to click their tongues, but not enough to be actually upset. The report needs to re enforce beliefs he feels they already hold, so they can feel...well righteous, not righteously indignant. That would be too upsetting. Just morally superior. That's the effect that will guarantee his following.

But there's one other element he needs to make sure he hooks them and keeps them, so they don't channel surf.

He needs blood.

There's a saying in broadcasting, which is to say, show business, "If it bleeds, it leads."

And nothing leads like the death of a child.

How could it?

Who could turn away from that?

Whether it's a toddler left in his car seat to bake to death by a father having an Internet affair, a starving third world infant, or, in this case, the truly tragic death of a Palestinian child killed in an Israeli air strike on the house of a known terrorist, if it bleeds, it leads.

He gets the saddened, somber look, his eyes looking straight into camera and speaks his truth, "There's no such thing as a surgical air strike."

I'm a professional and this guy's good. This guy's close to perfect. He goes on to talk about the fact that the Israelis attacked the house of "an alleged terrorist". Well that's only fair right? I mean the terrorist in question didn't actually have a trial, he just murdered people and bragged about it and announced his intention to murder others. So it was an air strike on "an alleged terrorist" and yet who got killed,? This innocent child. This poor sweet little girl who couldn't possibly have posed a threat to Israel or anyone else. And yet the Israeli air force, with all it's might and it's American made planes (as if the US. is an accomplice to this clear act of infanticide), murdered her.

Then we cut to footage of the child's funeral, her bereaved parents, her infuriated neighbors, family and friends; the tragedy of the latest senseless act in, at best, this cycle of violence, and at worst, this barbarous act of a European colonial power against the brown skinned indigenous and rightful inhabitants of this portion of the world.

Permit me, if you will a few comments, and a bit of context which the reader may find of some interest.

First, no one needs to educate me, unfortunately, as to the tragedy of losing a child in a fiery death. My son was killed at the age of 22 and to this day I cannot talk about it. My heart goes out to this and every parent who must go through the absolute horror of burying their child. It is a pain that never leaves, a wounded, unhealable, a loss of a whole world. All the experiences that would have been, go into the grave with the child, joyous occasions never experienced, weddings never celebrated, grandchildren, unborn and in the grave before drawing a first breath. I don't need to be trained in a somber look on that one.

But let me tell you what the Israel Defense forces have done in this war in order to do everything humanly possible to avoid loss of innocent life, to prevent the death of that poor child about whom the network correspondent was seemingly so concerned, and every other woman, child and non combatant in Gaza.

Before targeting any area we drop leaflets. The leaflets are in Arabic and they warn the citizens of a number of things. If they live near a Hamas smuggling or

terror tunnel (one which has been dug in order to go under the Israeli border and carry out a terrorist attack against Israeli troops or civilians) they are warned to leave immediately, because that tunnel will be a target for an air strike. If they live with or next to a known Hamas operative, they are warned to leave immediately because the house of that operative will be a target of an Israeli air strike. If they live next to a missile launching site, or rocket storage facility (which many do because Hamas hides its rockets and operatives amongst its civilian population, which is by the way, recognized as a war crime under international law) they are warned to leave immediately because that will be the target of an Israeli air strike.

Now there are any number of Western armies which have dropped similar leaflets in similar campaigns for years. But here is what, I believe, only the Israeli military does. We have an entire unit whose sole purpose is to call Gazans up on their cell phones (yes we have their numbers) and warn them in Arabic, to leave immediately because we are about to attack that particular house, tunnel, launching site or storage facility.

Let me say that again, WE CALL THEM UP AND WARN THEM TO LEAVE BEFORE THE OKAY IS GIVEN TO ATTACK!!!

Then, as if that is not enough, we have even dropped flares on the house about to be hit to show that the attack is imminent and its inhabitants still have a chance to leave.

And what does Hamas do?

Do they have a civil defense unit standing by ready to evacuate their people before an impending Israeli air strike?

No.

They tell their people to stay in the house, to become a human shield to protect their so called fighter, who hides behind his own wife and children, or their weapons, for which they are prepared to sacrifice their own people, in order to have a few more rounds to fire off at Jewish civilians.

So what is the choice offered to Israel in this instance?

A) Do nothing and let them kill your civilians

B) Do everything you humanly, possibly can to prevent innocent loss of life, but at the end of the day, do that which any armed force has been formed to do; protect your civilians...not your troops mind you, because by and large Hamas doesn't attack our troops, but your women, your children, your old and infirm.

A reporter once asked a gentleman by the name of Abu Odeh, a Hamas spokesman, what was the difference between Hamas and Al Qaida. Abu Odeh was indignant. How could the reporter possibly compare Hamas to Al Qaida? “Well”, said the reporter, in a moment of candor and not a little courage, “ You both target civilians, do you not?”

“Absolutely not!” Abu Odeh declared with his own righteous indignation, “We never target civilians! We only target Jews.”

Like the old drunk standing outside of Goliath’s bar in his Safari jacket, that was in the good old days. Today Hamas finds itself competing with Al Qaida, Islamic Jihad and ISIS for terrorist street cred.

Colonel Richard Kemp, a former British regular army officer and commander of Nato troops in Afghanistan, and not a Jew, last time I looked, has said that no army in the history of warfare has ever done as much as The Israel Defense Forces to avoid and prevent loss of innocent human life.

The numbers, by the way, bear him out. When the US bombed Bosnia and Kosovo, the loss of civilian life compared to the loss of combatant life was three or four to one. In the battle for Fallujah the loss of civilian life compared to combatants was even higher.

According to the unverified Palestinian figures 172 Palestinians have been killed thus far out of which 35 were children and 25 were women. That is a ratio of less than one to one. It’s still horrible, but not because Israel hasn’t done everything in its power to avoid civilian loss of life.

No Israelis have been killed thus far.

Not because Hamas hasn’t tried their best. You have to give them credit where credit is due. They have fired roughly 1000 rockets at Israel in this latest round of fighting, almost all of them fired exclusively at civilian targets. I’ve been under more than a dozen of them myself and can testify to two things:

- 1) Israel’s iron dome anti missile system works. It has over a 90% success rate. But that still leaves a hundred rockets that got through, all of them are aimed at our civilian population centers.
- 2) Israel has a civil defense system second to none, with shelters every fifty meters in the border towns which get the most rocket fire and a disciplined home front, which has not panicked and has followed civil defense measures which have saved countless lives.

What has Hamas done to save the lives of their own people? They have told them to ignore Israeli warnings to leave, and in some instances have ordered them to be human shields, have invested hundreds of millions in finding ways to kill our people and almost nothing to save their own.

And it's not by chance. It is a cold, cynical calculation, which allows them to commit acts of absolute terror, while claiming the mantle of victimhood.

No. There's no such thing as a surgical air strike but not for our lack of trying. To paraphrase Golda Meir, I believe peace will finally come when our adversaries want their own children to live, more than they want ours to die. Sadly, that day doesn't seem to be coming any time soon

July 15, 2014

I'm driving to Sderot, the border town that for years has gotten the brunt of the rockets Hamas aims at Israel, and in particular at the kindergartens in Sderot. They like to shoot their rockets off exactly at the hour that parents drop their kids off at school, because that creates the most terror in Jewish parents. And that's the point after all. It's not military versus military. Hamas is a terrorist army. And how do you plant terror in the heart of a Jewish parent? Go after their children. And still these people stand fast and raise their kids as "normally" as possible. So I'm driving to Sderot to look at a playground filled with gaily painted bomb shelters so the kids will think they're playhouses. They're supposed to have a lot shelters like that in that playground, so wherever the kids are, when the rockets start falling they'll be safe; that's how we live, spitting terror in it's eye as best we can. But today I'm running on fumes. Got only three hours sleep last night and right now I'm more in danger of nodding off at the wheel than getting hit by a Hamas rocket. Besides there's supposed to be a cease-fire. Israel's already accepted it. Hamas hasn't given their answer. Actually that's not true. They've been firing rockets at us for the last two hours. Maybe that's their answer. Any way Hamas is not my concern right now. Coffee is. I'm dying for one of those little Demi glasses of real Turkish coffee, the kind with three teaspoons of sugar and grounds turned to mud at the bottom of the glass, like my friend Itzik makes. I pull into a gas station, because you used to be able to get great Turkish coffee in any self respecting gas station. Not any more. Today it's all espresso, cappuccino. Pishkeh! But any port in a storm, so I pull into a crowded gas station with a little coffee bar, order my double Pishkeh espresso and look for a place to sit down. There are a lot of army guys, reservists and regular army and truck drivers. No place to sit. There's an old guy in his mid eighties by the looks of him sitting alone at a table.

"Any one sitting here" I ask.

"Looks like you are "he says dryly.

I love this kind old guy so I sit down. He looks me over, notices my grey hair and says "They mobilized YOU?"

"Shows you how desperate we are" I say.

"Bah! how old are you? " he asks

"67" I say

"Tsutsik! " it's a great word. It means " baby!"

I like this guy even more. He asks where I am in the army. I tell him I'm driving to Sderot to see the playground. I might want to write about it.

"I know that play ground" he says." My grandson lives in Sderot, my great grandson plays there. I take him often. Little cutie. Nice playground. Very sweet. You have grandchildren?" he asks and noisily sips his coffee and that's when I see the faded blue numbers on the inside of his forearm, and in spite of myself I get the feeling I always get in the presence of a holocaust survivor; complex feeling, pity, somehow shame, somehow pride, humility, there but for the grace of God go I. I have a friend who is Israel's greatest writer, Amos Oz. I'm not worthy to bring him a glass of water. He said once, scratch any Israeli, I don't care what age he is, how tough he looks, and you'll see the numbers just under the surface of his skin. That's the sentiment.

I tell him I have a grandson, three years old . I show him a picture on my iPhone that my son just sent" my grandson found a caterpillar " I say as if such a thing has never happened before. The kid's a genius!

" ah " he says and smiles, but there's not a lot of mirth in that smile "my great grandson found a caterpillar too. He plays inside it. In that playground you're going to?"

"What do you mean he plays inside a caterpillar?"

"It's a sewer pipe" he says, " they painted it to look like a caterpillar. So he plays in it and if a rocket falls... So, he's safe... In the sewer pipe."

And I suddenly feel sick to my stomach because I know this guy spent some time in a sewer pipe himself, hiding from other Jew haters looking to kill a Jewish child.

There's a lot of talk on TV about the Palestinians who have been killed in Israeli air strikes, compared with the fact that no Jews have been killed thus far.

But that's forgetting the three Jewish boys who were forced to kneel by Hamas terrorists and shot in the back of their heads just as neat and clean as any Nazi ever did the same when this old guy was hiding in a sewer pipe somewhere.

My heart goes out to the Palestinian parents whose innocent children were killed despite the super human efforts of the Israeli army to prevent those deaths. As a bereaved parent I know their pain and my heart aches for them in an all too familiar pain.

But don't bring that bill to my people. Don't even think about it.

You take that bill and deliver it straight to the leaders of Hamas who started this

war despite Israeli pleas that "calm will be answered with calm"

You take that bill to the leaders of Hamas who hid behind their wives and children and built their headquarters under their hospital and turned their own women and kids into human shields, not for jihad, not to resist an occupation of Gaza that hasn't existed for almost ten years, but to save their sorry asses and their own greed for political power, bought and paid for with the blood of both our peoples. And just for the record, I thank God every day of my life for the army of Israel which wants neither empire, nor Caliphate, but just to protect our people; our women and children and our elderly, some of whom wear numbers on their arms and memories too horrible to contemplate, while Hamas happily pledges to finish the work Hitler began.

So don't you dare present that bill to us. And with all due respect, we make no apologies for defending our nation in a war we never began, from an enemy which has so far answered our agreement for a ceasefire with dozens of rockets fired in the last two hours alone.

I'm a movie guy. I appreciate great writing and I remember a scene in the movie Exodus, written by the great Dalton Trumbo, based on the book by Leon Uris. I don't remember the exact dialogue but I think I'm pretty darn close.

An American woman is trying to persuade an Israeli haganah fighter played by Paul Newman, to allow her to adopt, take to America and thereby "save" a Jewish holocaust survivor child. Newman is giving her a hard time and she says "how can you be so cynical? I'm trying to save a human life.. A Jewish life!"

"Don't get hysterical" he tells her, "and don't expect me to get hysterical either. You're too late, lady! They butchered Jewish children and nobody cared! And don't tell me about Jewish life, because nothing is cheaper in this world than Jewish life! Not beef, not herring, not even chopped liver"

Well, no more, Pal

No more.

Not as long as the IDF has anything to say about it.

And on the day that the Palestinian people demand of their leaders that they place a higher value on THEIR lives... On that day we won't just have a cease-fire. We'll have peace.

And not a day before.

July 16, 2014

If there was ever any doubt before, there is none now.

This is Hamas' s war.

They wanted it.

They got it.

They own it.

And they own all the consequences which will befall their own people whose lives and well being, whose property and livelihoods, they have so callously exploited for two reasons:

The first and foremost reason they wanted this was, and is, to maintain their own power, to maintain the literal stranglehold they have on the hapless people of Gaza. As mentioned in an earlier article, Hamas was feeling pressed from two sides. When they seized power from their own Palestinian brothers in an absolutely bloodthirsty coup, during which they lined people up against walls and machine gunned them, pushed them, bound and blind folded off of buildings and terrorized them into submission, they faced what seems to have been an unexpected problem. Now that they had indeed “occupied” Gaza, they had to rule it. That means mundane things like providing electricity and water, processing raw sewage and collecting garbage and providing the conditions which would create , if not economic growth, at least prevent Gaza from falling into abject misery and poverty.

At all of these things, they have utterly and completely failed.

There is over forty percent unemployment in a place that literally should, could , and still can, be the Singapore of the Middle East. Indeed they have failed so miserably that within the last few months they were not able even to pay the salaries of their own soldiers and bureaucrats.

Thus for the first time they were actually beginning to face demonstrations against their completely corrupt and incompetent regime, which they feared could become the first cracks in the dikes holding back a flood of discontent that could sweep them from power.

At the same time they were being pressured from newer breeds of terrorists like ISIS and Al Qaida and Islamic Jihad, who perceived them as too tame toward Israel. Thus their calculus was that a limited war against Israel, even one they knew they would lose, would be to their advantage. It would rally the populace around the flag, focus it's anger at Israel instead of the Gazans' own rulers and prove their terrorist street creed to their competitors.

In order to hype a conflict for which their own population showed absolutely no appetite, they promised ”surprises” for the Zionist enemy, if not actual military victory. They dug a tunnel under Israel's border and intended to use it to infiltrate their most elite commandos, who would then kill and kidnap as many Israeli CIVILIANS as possible.

Instead Israel discovered the tunnel, and used it against them, used it to allow our

own commandos to attack and wipe out the entire force which Hamas had hoped and promised would provide their own version of “Shock and Awe.”

They infiltrated a terrorist cell onto Zikim beach near Ashkelon. Israeli forces discovered and destroyed them.

They have to date launched over 1300 short, medium and long range missiles against Israel, promising to devastate the Israeli civilian population against whom their rockets were aimed. They promised to “Open The Gates of Hell” on the Zionist enemy.

Instead, thanks to it’s Iron Dome missile defense system, a civil defense operation second to none in the world, and a civilian population which has displayed the grace and courage under fire reminiscent of London under the Blitz, yesterday Israel suffered it’s first and only fatality; a civilian, father of three who had gone out to deliver food to the soldiers. Just a nice man who doing a good deed. That is, thus far, Hamas’ Divine Victory.

The only misery they have managed to inflict has been that which they have visited against their own people.

There is one other reason Hamas decided to go to war against Israel. Their Iranian puppet masters told them to. In that way, Iran, engaged in supposed nuclear negotiations with the West could now say, “How can we make concessions of any kind when the Zionist enemy is committing genocide in Gaza.” That, after all is the tune, to which Iran has taught to it’s Hezbollah and Hamas puppets to dance; a terrorist two step if you will. The idea is to commit acts of terror against Israel’s civilian population while hiding behind your own civilian population. Launch your rockets from schoolyards, mosques, hospital courtyards and crowded neighborhoods and then when Israel, having no other choice but to strike those rocket launchers and once an attack has occurred, accuse Israel of genocide. That way you can both be a terrorist and claim the mantle of victimhood.

One can’t blame them for doing it, because to a degree it works. There are only too many apologists and enablers in the West for whom this perversion of morality and logic, has almost taken on the aura of religion. Israelis are white European colonialists oppressing the brown skinned indigenous people.

Never mind that the majority of Israel’s population comes from the Middle East and have lived here for thousands of years and were turned into homeless refugees when they were driven from their homes in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, and other Middle Eastern states for the crime of being Jews. Facts don’t matter. Only the mantra does.

That Hamas started this war is beyond doubt. They began by launching rockets into southern Israel unclear violation of the 2012 cease-fire agreement, which was the result of the last war they started with Israel.

But Israel didn't respond, saying instead that "calm would be met with calm".

Then Khaled Mashal, Chairman of the Hamas political bureau, not it's military wing mind you, but the supposedly more moderate, political wing, issued a public call for Hamas cells in the West Bank to kidnap Israelis. And one of those cells answered the call, and kidnapped three Israeli schoolboys, on their way home from school and then murdered them in cold blood, laughing and singing as they did so, "We got three! We got three".

And still Israel did not attack Gaza. Instead it carried out a police action in the West Bank trying to put Hamas out of operation there before they could turn the West Bank into another Hamasstan only a few miles from Tel Aviv.

Of course there were those who then pointed to the horrific torture and murder of an Palestinian teenager by a demented group of Israelis, murderous thugs as a sure sign that there was a moral equivalence in this struggle. "The Palestinians killed three Jews, The Jews killed a Palestinian teen." What's more, a handful of Israeli police brutally beat the Palestinian /American teen aged cousin of the murdered boy." If that isn't evidence of moral equivalence between Hamas and Israel what is?"

But every society has cold-blooded murderous thugs. To confuse the Charley Mansons or Ted Bundys of the world as being one and the same with Osama Bin Laden is either intentionally disingenuous, or betrays a flawed moral or intellectual compass, or both.

Moreover I was a specialist reserve officer with LAPD at the time of the Rodney King beating. It was an awful thing, a horrible thing, and betrayed the fact that LAPD had real problems, especially with regard to its attitudes and practices towards LA's minority communities. But that did not make the United States of America the moral equivalent of Al Qaida or Hamas.

But let's say you just don't buy that. Let's say you simply believe the Zionist racist society was indeed committing genocide in Gaza. Yesterday Egypt, a Islamic Arab state, offered up a cease fire proposal which Israel accepted unconditionally. It was to have gone into affect at 9:00 a.m. this morning. There was a chance to end the blood shed, end the suffering, not just of the Israeli people, but especially that of the Palestinian people in Gaza, about whom so many

in the world have rightly expressed so much concern. There was a chance to put an end to the supposed cycle of violence. Hamas gave its answer within an hour. They launched a barrage of rockets at Israel's most populous city, Tel Aviv. Had it not been for the Iron Dome intercepting all of them there would have been thousands, not hundreds of casualties. Since then another hundred rockets have rained down on Israel. I had the dubious honor of having the Iron Dome keep me alive once again.

This morning there was a chance for a cycle of peace.

Hamas has answered that with war. Now there can be no doubt as to the legitimacy of what Israel must do. And what, all in all are Israel's goals in this conflict?

Not peace. We know that won't happen as long as Hamas' charter says "We look forward to the fulfillment of the promise that the time will come when the Muslims will rise up and kill the Jews until the rocks and the trees cry out , O Muslim, there is a Jew hiding behind me. Come and kill him." That's their charter. That's their "We the people." No we're not so naive to believe that this will be the war to end all wars and the peace will descend upon our beleaguered nation. Our goal, our hope, our prayer...is just for a few more years of quiet in which to raise our children and grandchildren, until the next time we have to fight simply for the right to live in the Jewish State.

But make no mistake. From now on, this is Hamas's war.

Only those who prefer to see the sheep's clothing, rather than acknowledge the wolf within will see it for anything else.

July 17, 2014

Yesterday, Israel unconditionally accepted the Egyptian cease fire proposal, which had also been endorsed, by the Arab League, That cease fire would have put an end to the so called "cycle of violence" and Israel, by accepting the proposal was, in effect trying to initiate a "cycle of peace". Hamas responded to that cycle of peace by launching a hundred new rocket attacks against virtually all of Israel's major population centers in the center and south of the country, putting some five million Israelis fifteen seconds away from being blown to pieces, were it not for the Iron Dome missile defense system. So much for the "cycle of peace. "

It's hard for Westerners, and even many in the Middle East, to understand terrorist armies like Hamas, ISIS, Hezbollah and Al Qaida. They simply fight by different

rules. In April of 2011 a Hamas terrorist cell tracked a clearly marked, big yellow school bus, the kind my grandson sings about in pre school, the big yellow bus, with the wheels that go round and round. They tracked that big yellow school bus through the sights of a Kornet anti tank missile. It was near kibbutz Nahal Oz which is on the border with Gaza. Nahal Oz is not a “settlement.” It is not on any “occupied territory” (more on that later). It’s land was seized from no one but the desert, which had never yielded anything but dust until it’s environmentally conscious agriculturalists turned arid sand into fertile farm lands. The Hamas terrorist cell tracked the clearly marked big yellow school bus as it was dropping off children coming home. They tracked it through the anti tank missile’s sight for almost a mile till they had a perfect, straight on kill shot.

And then they pulled the trigger.

Luckily it was the last stop, so only the driver was injured, and a 16-year-old boy named Daniel Viflic was killed. For those of you unfamiliar with anti tank missiles, that means the sixteen year old was both riddled with shrapnel and burned alive.

That was Hamas’ Divine Victory that day.

I remember it more clearly than many because my name is Daniel and in 1963 during the Hanukah vacation, when I too, was just sixteen, I left my kibbutz in the Valley of Jezreel and went down to Nahal Oz, which was a much younger kibbutz and where there was a very cute girl whom I had decided to pursue. I was given the job of digging holes to plant palm trees when a group of what were then called Fedayeen, forerunners of today’s modern terrorists, opened up on me and a Canadian boy with machine gun fire. Thanks to a merciful God, we escaped unscathed. It was the first time I’d ever been shot at, though certainly not the last. The “crime” of which I was guilty, was the same crime that Daniel Viflic committed. We were both guilty of being Jews trying to live in our own country, because at that time what yesterday’s terrorists called “occupied territory” was Tel Aviv and Haifa.

You see, to them "occupied territory" means any land on which Jews try to live in a sovereign state of our own, anywhere at all in our ancient homeland.

Those are the rules by which they pursue their Divine Victories against us.

Here is what Israel does when defending itself against those acts of war, those rocket attacks against Jewish civilian populations, while the terrorists hide behind their own Palestinian civilians. The following is an exact translation of the leaflets, which were dropped yesterday over areas from which terrorist rocket attacks have

been launched against today's school children. It was addressed to the residents of Shuja'iya, Zeitun and Beit Lehiya. It reads as follows;

"In spite of the ceasefire (which Israel unconditionally accepted), Hamas and other terrorist organizations continued to fire rockets, therefore it is the intention of the IDF to carry out aerial strikes against terror sites and operatives in Shuja'iya, Zeitun and Beit Lehiya. A high volume of rocket fire has originated against Israel from these areas. For your own safety you are requested to vacate from your residence immediately and head towards Gaza City by Wednesday morning, July 16, 2014 at 8:00 a.m. The IDF does not want to harm you or your families. The evacuation is for your own safety. You should not return to the premises until further notice. Whoever disregards these instructions and fails to evacuate immediately, endangers their own lives as well as their families."

Israel then followed the leaflets up with SMS messages and phone calls saying the same thing and when they saw that not everyone had evacuated in the allotted time it postponed the operation and has initiated a humanitarian pause, a unilateral cease fire which will be observed by the IDF from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. today to provide additional time for the residents to get out of harm's way.

While Israel was preparing for its humanitarian pause this morning Hamas sent thirteen of their most elite commandos through a terrorist tunnel dug under Israel's border in an attempt to launch an attack against the Israeli civilian kibbutz of Sufa. The IDF discovered and thwarted the attack, which would have resulted in dozens of civilian deaths and hostages.

Despite that attempted terrorist attack and the rocket attacks which continued this morning Israel will maintain the humanitarian window allowing Palestinian civilians to get out of harm's way. Only If Israeli civilians are attacked during that time will The IDF will act in their defense.

Think about that the next time you hear claims of so called Israeli genocide against Palestinian civilians. Think about Daniel too.

July 18, 2014

The Government of the state of Israel has declared in the clearest possible manner that the purpose of the ground incursion which began last night and continues today, is first of all to deal with the "homicide tunnels" which the terrorist army Hamas, has burrowed beneath the borders of, and well into the pre-1967 territory of the state of Israel. The only people who could possibly think of this area as being "occupied territory" are the same ones who think of Tel Aviv as "occupied

territory,” or for that matter any square inch of land in this part of the world, where Israel has the effrontery to declare it’s sovereignty under international law.

In other words, contrary to the perception of some, that the core reason behind this conflict is Israel’s occupation of lands conquered in the defensive war of 1967, Hamas could not, and does not, give a tinker’s care about “occupied territory.” This is so because Hamas regards ANY territory on which there is a sovereign Jewish state as, “occupied territory”.

Moreover, Hamas believes that any such Jewish state has no right to exist.

Indeed, Hamas believes it is duty bound by both religious and political ideology, to destroy such a state, on its road to establishing the kind of Caliphate which ISIS is in the process of making a reality. According to both of their ideologies and religious beliefs, everything from the Persian Gulf to Spain is by virtue of once having been ruled by jihadists, “occupied territory,” which they mean to liberate, by any means possible.

Starting with Israel, of course.

Jews are, and seem always to have been the canaries in the mine. Europe may have thought Hitler would content himself with murdering Jews. To their sorrow they found out otherwise. Churchill referred to such thinking as the vain hope of being the last in the room to be eaten by the tiger

This brings us to the matter of the homicide tunnels. I refer to them as such, because that is exactly what they are. These are not smuggling tunnels meant for the underground transport of drugs, money, prostitutes, fancy cars, narcotics, weapons or cash, as is the case with many of the other underground smuggling tunnels which Hamas has constructed, taxed, and were their main source of illicit income.

Homicide tunnels are something else indeed. They are meant for one purpose only: to allow terrorists to move undetected into, preferably, civilian territory. Those same terrorists, having thus evaded look out posts, aerial and /or electronic surveillance, then quite literally pop up from the earth, like zombies arising out of their crypts in order to kill, maim and capture as many soldiers, or hopefully, innocent civilians, as humanly possible. That is, after all, why they call them terrorists.

Hamas aren’t militants. They’re terrorists. Worse than that, they are a terrorist army.

They want to literally spread terror primarily amongst civilians, because soldiers have weapons, with which they tend to shoot back, be it at fictitious zombies on The Walking Dead, or real life terrorists, who literally pop up out of the ground in order to try to kill, maim and capture as many of their victims as possible.,

And that is precisely what happened yesterday.

A group of highly trained, indeed, elite terrorists, popped up out of the earth, well inside Israeli territory, armed with a dozen anti tank weapons, machine guns, grenades and thousands upon thousands of rounds of ammunition. The slaughter they could, and would have inflicted, would have been on a scale unheard of in the State of Israel. It would have been Hamas's shock and awe. Their Divine Victory. .

Instead they were detected by the all female surveillance unit, and intercepted and neutralized by Israeli ground and aerial forces.

It was Israel's worst nightmare scenario and Hamas's greatest dream. And we foiled it. But it was precisely because not only could it have succeeded, but because of the fact that there are as many as dozens of other such tunnels and terrorist units waiting to use them that, what some have described as the overly cautious government of Israel, finally, in the face of ceaseless provocation, and the prospect of more homicide tunnel operations, finally okayed what it had sought so long to avoid- a ground war.

I've seen these tunnels up close and personal. I don't have nightmares about many things in life, but I still have nightmares about them.

In 2009, during Operation Cast Lead, Hamas forced Israel into a ground incursion, just as it has been today, though then the purpose was somewhat different. In 2009 Hamas actually believed it could win. At that time their notion of an offensive was based around the thought of taking a year to prepare the battlefield on your territory, fill it with booby traps, ambushes, I.E.D's ...and homicide tunnels. Then suck the Israeli army into coming onto your turf, which you've prepared for a year and grinding them up like sausage. And truth be told, it was actually a very good plan.

I went into Al Atatra with our airborne troops, arranging a briefing in the field by the Paratroop Brigade Commander, whom we'll just call Colonel H. Between a third to a half of the houses in Al Atatra were not just booby trapped, but, as Colonel H explained, they were riddled with homicide tunnels. The plan was to allow the Paratroopers to enter the village and then draw fire from the booby-trapped houses. The terrorists in those houses would then withdraw into hiding places. Because Israel's rules of engagement demanded that you couldn't

just order artillery or tanks to flatten any house from which gunfire was directed against your troops, the foot soldiers, literally had to go into the houses and clear them room-by-room. The terrorists would wait until the initial group entered the house and then detonate a massive I.E.D. behind them, thereby killing and wounding them but also cutting them off from the rest of their platoon. Hamas terrorists would then pop up from a tunnel whose opening was beneath a rug, let's say, in the house, or a cabinet. They would pop up and grab the killed and wounded, drag them down into the homicide tunnels, and within five minutes they would have whisked them out of the village. The goal was to have literally hundreds of Gilad Shallits (the soldier they had kidnapped with a similar tunnel).

Happily, and by the grace of a merciful God we found the map which showed every tunnel they had dug and booby trap they had prepared, and we foiled their battle plan and dealt them a very deep set back indeed.

Now however they have evolved their battle plan. The idea now is not just to draw soldiers into their prepared territory, but to PENETRATE ISRAELI CIVILIAN territory, to kill and maim and capture, not just soldiers, but preferably civilians, preferably the kind of kids they kidnapped and murdered only a few short weeks ago on their way home from school.

That is what we are up against. And when the government of Israel realized just how close it had come to the worst civilian slaughter in our history, it did the only responsible thing it could have done. It ordered the military in to find and destroy the homicide tunnels and the terrorists who would use them against us. Ground wars have a way of evolving and the old saying is that the first casualty of war is the battle plan. So no one can say with certainty where this all will lead. But Israel has clearly articulated its objectives: to find and destroy the homicide tunnels and those who would use them against our civilians.

War is a horrible and messy business. I don't care how strict your rules of engagement are, how accurate your fire or how good your soldiers. Stuff happens in war. In 1978, I and several members of my platoon, were almost killed in a live fire training exercise when our own artillery fouled up its coordinates and began shelling us. And that was a training exercise! Innocent people are killed in wars sometimes by intent, some times by mistake.

Israel regards the death of every innocent civilian, Palestinian or Israeli as a tragedy.

Hamas regards the death of any innocent civilian, Palestinian or Israeli as a triumph.

For Hamas, it's either a dead Zionist enemy, or a dead martyr to prove its victimhood.

But ask yourself this. Who bears the responsibility for the innocent people, Palestinian and Israeli, who will surely die in this useless conflict? The party that accepted the ceasefire unconditionally? Or the party who destroyed what could have been the start of a new cycle of peace, with a new cycle of death, destruction....and homicide tunnels?

July 19, 2014

I am not, as most Israelis are not, what anyone would call religious. But Shabbat is something else. I believe in God and I'm not ashamed of it. Though it is not exactly a career enhancer in Hollywood, not proud of it either, as it is as natural to me as one of my limbs. It's part of me, and I am grateful for that. But I certainly don't follow all the rules, not even most of them. Not close.

But Shabbat is something else.

There is something about being in a feminine presence as the candles are lit, of blessing the wine and sweet Challa bread, of the hauntingly beautiful melodies. I was raised partly on a kibbutz. Not religious either but every Friday night, the whole kibbutz would gather in the dining hall, one woman would light the candles for the community, someone would read a portion from the Bible and those beautiful songs ingrained themselves in my heart and soul and wherever I am in the world, hearing them, I am home, and at peace. That's the greeting. Shabbat Shalom, Sabbath Peace. Shalom is the every day greeting. You say it probably with as much feeling as a Malibu kid says, "Wazzup, Dude?" But "Shabbat Shalom" is something else. You are wishing someone Sabbath Peace, real peace, tranquility, wholeness, quiet peace, joyous peace, and the peace of those melodies.

It might seem strange, then, to say that we Israelis feel it absolutely most poignantly, in those horrible times when we are called upon to take up arms and defend our homes, our families, our lives, our right to live in peace in our land, the land that gave birth to everything in our religion and culture and language, whether our ancestors were from Israel, Yemen, Ethiopia, Kiev, Baghdad, Cairo, L.A., New York or New Delhi.

So there I am on the border of Gaza and it's getting near sundown last night (Friday night) Erev Shabbat, Sabbath eve. Because my job in the Military Spokesperson Unit has me out operating by myself, there is no base nearby to go back to. No place to eat with my mates, as it were, engages in the camaraderie that means so much to a soldier in a war zone. And it's Shabbat. And on this particular

Sabbath eve when I have had the pleasure of being under six different rocket attacks today, when my heart is with my fellow soldiers who are now operating in Gaza, I want Shabbat. I yearn for it.

I'm standing near a place, which is an entry point to Gaza. I see some soldiers with kippoth, skullcaps, on their heads, identifying them as religious soldiers. I walk up to one of them.

"Shalom, Achi" I say (Hello my brother)

He answers with the Hebrew equivalent of 'wazzup.' It's not yet Shabbat after all.

"Where are you guys going to be celebrating Shabbat?" I ask. I explain I'd like to celebrate with them. He points over at the border opening. He and his guys are getting ready to mount up and go back into Gaza. That's where they'll be celebrating Shabbat, in armored personnel carriers, under fire, looking for homicide tunnels and dodging the booby traps and I.E.D.s that await them.

"Take care of yourself Achi, my brother," I say and there is nothing perfunctory about it. We shake hands warmly. "Listen" he says, "You're not religious, right?" "Right" I say.

"So do me a favor then."

"Tell me what it is and I'll do it bisimcha (with joy)"

"Celebrate Shabbat for me tonight. And for my chèvre (my pals, my guys)."

He and his guys mount up. Dust clouds choke the air, engines roar to life as in the not so distant distance we hear the sounds of war to which they are headed to instead of lighting candles, blessing wine, eating the sweet challa or singing the songs.

Within moments they're inside Gaza. I take off in my car looking for some lunit with whom to celebrate the Sabbath, and there by the side of the road I see possibly the two saddest looking sad sacks in the Israeli army.

They are military police. They can't be guarding anything important. There are only two of them. They're reservists and look like slobs, which is to say, like reservists. Unshaven, uniforms stained with sweat and dust, stuck out in the middle of nowhere with the heat reaching around a hundred degrees and probably eighty percent humidity and they're in their flack jackets.

I pull my car up to them. I can't say they snap to attention. They get up as laconically, as phlegmatically as it's possible to imagine. But one of them gets the "cop" look on his face.

“Who are you? What do you want here? This is a closed area.”

Nothing but attitude.

This guy is a private. I’m a captain. For some inexplicable reason I forget what army I’m in and say, “First of all I’m a Captain”

“What do I care?” he says with even more attitude. Oh...that’s right, I’m in the ISRAELI army and he’s a reservist and he couldn’t give a rat’s orifice. He’s a cop and I’m not. “Second of all” I say, “I’m looking for a place to celebrate the shabbati. “There are only two of us here.” he says, “We’re not exactly a synagogue.”

“You have any wine for the blessings?”

“What kind of wine you think they’d give us?! We’re in the middle of nowhere?”

“Candles? Challa?”

“Zip” he says, or the equivalent.

“So how are you going to bring in the Sabbath?”

Now he knows I’m serious.

“Would you like to join us?” and he says it hopefully. Two guys isn’t much of a shabbat, but maybe with three...

“Are you inviting me?”

“Are you joining us?”

“If you invite me.”

“So, okay, “ he says, “ You’re invited”

We said the kiddish over a bottle of sun-warmed water. Instead of Challa, we ate a stale piece of pita after reciting the blessings, and for candles we lit two matches. And for that moment in the gathering darkness of war, there was light, and I swear to you the Feminine presence of the Lord, the shechina, as it’s referred to in Hebrew, was with us.

We sang “Peace be upon you Ministering angels, angels of the Almighty, Bless me unto Peace Oh you Ministering angels, Angels of the Almighty, May you arrive in Peace, may your departure be in Peace, O Angels of Peace.”

28July 20, 2014

The international Red Cross asked for a cease-fire so the dead and wounded could be tended to, bodies removed, injured taken to hospital. Israel said yes to the cease-fire, and Hamas immediately violated it. Israel had hit the Saja’iyah neighborhood of Gaza and hit it hard. Scores dead. Women and children amongst them. Survivors, justifiably crying out, “What did we do to deserve this?!” And the horrible answer is, “Nothing. You did nothing to deserve it. Hamas used you as human shields. It fired a hundred and sixty rockets from your neighborhood at Israel’s heartland. It riddled

your neighborhood with tunnels, some of them, by all reports, terrorist tunnels, leading under Israel's border, built to murder and kidnap Israeli civilians; people just like you who only want to live in peace. You did nothing to deserve this. You've been betrayed and used by your own leaders in the most cynical way imaginable. And you didn't even ask for these leaders. They seized power in a bloody coup by lining up your fellow Palestinians against walls and machine gunning them to death, by blindfolding and binding and pushing them off three story buildings. If you dare to dissent they begin the interrogation by shooting your kneecaps off. You didn't deserve this. And neither did we.

This is a war. It is not a war of Israel's choosing. In the days leading up to the aerial campaign which Israel initiated in response to constant and escalating rocket attacks from Gaza on its civilian centers of population, Israel has said repeatedly that it did not want an escalation let alone a war and that "calm would be answered with calm." In other words, "don't shoot at us and we won't shoot at you." That seems like a pretty straightforward request, and an easy one to implement if one's interest is in saving lives instead of taking them. Hamas's answer was more rockets. And still Israel's answer was "calm will be met with calm". But there wasn't any calm. Instead there were more rockets, and more rockets still. And so Israel answered with aerial attacks... ON DESERTED TRAINING CAMPS!!!

Let me say that one again. The government of Israel responded to Hamas rocket attacks that had millions of Israelis running for bomb shelters, with aerial strikes on empty tents! That was not because of faulty intelligence or near sighted pilots. It was to demonstrate to Hamas what Israel COULD do unless Hamas ceased its rocket attacks. Hamas' response? More rocket attacks, in greater numbers and over wider areas until it was no longer just the Southern border towns under attack but Israel's equivalent of New York City and L.A. rolled into one. The rockets began falling in the greater Tel Aviv area. Unlike past campaigns, in the face of similar provocations in 2009 and 2012, Israel did not immediately respond with a massive aerial attack on Gaza. There was no shock and awe. Instead there was a very, very slowly ratcheted up, less than proportional, response, in the hopes that by offering Hamas a way out of the escalating situation, it would take it.

It didn't.

Israel responded now with aerial strikes that were far less than all out war. Egypt proposed a cease-fire. The Arab League endorsed it. Israel accepted it. Hamas gave their answer in the form of a new massive rocket assault and by sending in thirteen terrorists via an underground tunnel that went beneath the border with Israel and came up within a few hundred meters of an Israeli civilian farming community.

This was to be their shock and awe; to kill, maim and kidnap dozens of Israeli civilians. Finally with no other recourse Israel launched a ground campaign. Now we are at war. And Hamas, like the boy who murders his parents and then throws himself on the mercy of the court on the grounds that he is an orphan, is crying fowl.

Hamas had long since turned the Saja'iyah neighborhood into a fortified center of terrorist attacks, armament workshops and now we know, terrorist tunnels. Prior to its attack, for days running, and referenced fully in earlier articles I have written, the IDF warned the residents of this neighborhood of its intent to attack and urged them, for the safety of themselves and their families, to evacuate. It dropped leaflets to that effect. It followed up the leaflets with SMS and text messages, by actually calling the residents' cell phones and through Arabic media, up until the very last moment urging people to flee for their lives. And Hamas's response to those warnings? In the street and from the mosques, through every means of mass communication at their disposal, they told their people not to evacuate, to stay put. Hamas has committed one of the vilest of all war crimes against its own people. It has used them as unwilling human shields.

So here was Israel's choice. Attack a neighborhood used for attacking its own civilians, or permit its own civilians to be attacked. An army, any army's first responsibility is to protect its own people. Israel has fulfilled, albeit reluctantly, that first commandment. Hamas has done the opposite. They have sacrificed their own people on the alter of their own greed for political power. An Egyptian newspaper today, not an Israeli one, accused Hamas leaders of being liars, who live pampered lives, staying in five star hotels and driving expensive luxury cars while they sacrifice their own peoples' lives. And what did the Hamas spokesman say today?

"We will fight to the last drop of the blood of Gaza."

Of course he meant to say, "To the last drop of the blood of others."

July 22, 2014

Ernest Hemingway had great advice for writers. "Write one true declarative sentence," he said, "Then write another." By that standard Papa Hemingway would be proud, indeed, of Sami Abu Zuhri's literary prowess. Sami Abu Zuhri is a Hamas spokesman. He summed up the current situation in Gaza perfectly. And he did it in two true declarative sentences. "We (Hamas) aren't leading our people to destruction. We are leading them to death." That wasn't Israel's Prime Minister who said that. That was an official Hamas spokesman, and he said it without apologies. Two true sentences. Hundreds of Palestinians have been killed. Each and every one of those deaths, since Hamas rejected the Egyptian cease-fire proposal, which the Arab league endorsed was completely predictable, tragic beyond word, and absolutely, one hundred percent preventable. Because Israel accepted that same cease fire proposal, immediately and unconditionally. All the killing could and would have been stopped immediately, right then and there. But as Sami said, that's not where Hamas is leading the Gazan Palestinian people. And that sentences by the way is neither "Posturing, spin, amelioration and explanation." I use that last phrase because a reader of my last posted article, "To The Last Drop of Others' Blood" wrote in response, "The truth is shame, horror, death. The rest is posturing, spin, amelioration and explanation." As a writer by trade, I can, to a degree, appreciate

the rhythm of that sentence. As they used to say on the American Bandstand programs of my misspent youth, "It has a good beat and you can dance to it." But with the greatest respect, it is not the truth of this conflict. An event occurred yesterday, which may, in the parlance of our time, provide a teachable moment. Israeli forces, operating in Gaza, yesterday were approached by what they suspected was a female suicide bomber. They ordered her to stop. She did not and they, in retrospect, chose the correct course of action. They shot her. And she exploded. Or rather the suicide bomber vest that would have killed them all exploded. This was not the first suicide bomber Israeli forces encountered since entering Gaza. The first one was a donkey. It appeared loaded down with an unusual load on its back and was beaten by its "handler" in order to urge it forward, toward the Israeli troops. The "Handler" was a Hamas operative, who, having dispatched the donkey, promptly disappeared, quite literally, according to what I heard, down a rat hole. In retrospect, those Israeli troops also chose the correct course of action. They shot the donkey. It too exploded, or rather the donkey-sized suicide vest with enough explosives to murder dozens of people exploded. I bring these two incidents up because, while I have no first hand knowledge of Hamas's evolving policy of using beasts of burden as unwilling suicide bombers, I have, at least second hand knowledge, of Hamas's past and evolving policy regarding using women as female suicide bombers. I know the world's leading expert on female suicide bombers. Dr. Anat Berko has a PHD in criminology and advanced degrees in psychology. She speaks fluent Arabic and her parents were Jewish refugees from Iraq, where they had lived for several thousand years and from which they were expelled in the wake of the Israel/Arab conflict which made some 800,000 other Middle Eastern Jews, refugees as well. (Ironically that is almost the exact number of Palestinians who became refugees in 1948 as a result of the same conflict.) Dr. Berko carried out the most comprehensive study of female suicide bombers and their handlers ever undertaken. She interviewed almost every female suicide bomber in Israeli custody. These were women whose suicide belts failed to detonate or who were caught before they could carry out their attacks. Her two books, "The Path to Paradise: The Inner World of Suicide Bombers and their Dispatchers" and "The Smarter Bomb: Women and Children as Suicide Bombers" have become classics on the subject. What Dr. Berko found was that the majority of female suicide bombers were not motivated by ideological or religious reasons. Nor were most of them motivated by the desire for revenge or even hatred of Israel. The majority of female suicide bombers were unwitting, unwilling, or chose the path of so-called "Martyrdom" as the lesser of two evils with which they were presented. In many, if not the majority of instances, the female suicide bomber was approached by operatives of one terrorist organization or another and told that she had been seen with men other than male relatives and had thus "dishonored" her family. In such an instance she would either be the victim of an "honor killing" to be carried out by her, father, brother or another male relative, or she could choose to become a suicide bomber, strap on an explosive vest, blow herself up with as many Jews as possible, and thus die not in shame, but a martyr who would be admitted to Paradise where she would sit at the right hand of the prophet, and where, by the way, she could choose her own husband, as opposed to being forced into a heavenly marriage with someone

not of her choosing. Another category which provided fertile ground for female suicide bombers were victims of rape and incest from within their own families.. One girl was raped repeatedly by her cousins, another by her brother. Both saw the "suicide" part of suicide bomber, as preferable to the literal hell on earth, which they were living. Others had seen relatives killed by Israeli soldiers and wanted revenge and others, and were motivated by nationalistic reasons, not religious. But as noted these were far less in number than the women who were unwilling martyrs or those choosing martyrdom instead of honor killing or as a means of escaping an intolerable life. But what I remembered was that Hamas had at least at one time a firm policy AGAINST using female suicide bombers. Indeed Dr. Berko had once interviewed Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, one of the founders and the spiritual leaders of Hamas until his death in 2004, at the hands of the IDF. Dr. Berko interviewed the Spiritual Leader in 1996. "At that time," Dr. Berko told me this morning, "Yassin said, "I'm 32 against sending women (as suicide bombers) because they have a special role. It is to give birth to children. There is not equality in Islam. Suicide bombing, that's not a job for women. And then, too we have enough men to be suicide bombers. So we are against it. We don't use them." "What happened to make Hamas change it's mind ?" I asked. "In 2002, there was the first female suicide bomber. "Dr. Berko told me. "She was not from Hamas. But it got a lot of good publicity for the organization that sent her. It got good media attention, and Hamas felt they had to compete with the other terrorist organizations that were getting all the attention because of the female suicide bombers. So Hamas didn't want to be left behind." "And that's why Hamas changed its mind. Because it was effective media?!" " Yes" she said, " Hamas had to compete with the other terrorist organizations."

We will probably never know what motivated the female suicide bomber who exploded prematurely thanks to an Israeli marksman. But we absolutely know the motivation of the terrorist army of Hamas and it's political wing as well, which dispatched her and the donkey and which has turned their own people into human shields, and which celebrate their deaths because of the great media attention it brings them. That is the truth, the shame, the horror. It is not my, or Israel's or anyone else's posturing, or, Heaven forbid, amelioration. We know it because Sami Abu Zuhri, the Hamas official spokesman told us so, in two declarative, Hemingway-esque sentences. "We are not leading our people to destruction. We are leading them to death."

July 23, 2014

Years ago in my misspent youth, as a film student at UCLA, I saw a World War II documentary called "Why We Fight." So this is my go at it. But I'm not a good enough writer to do this one the way it ought to be done. I apologize for that up front.

You won't be able to feel what I felt yesterday in the warm embrace of a an amazing family who live in one of the small agricultural communities on the border they share the Hamas's Terrorist enclave in Gaza, and who have been under almost

constant fire for thirteen years. I won't be able to convey the emotion, the frustration, the courage, the grace, the anger at a world that refuses to see what's right in front of them, the love, even for their so called enemies, their unbelievable determination not to give in to the terror their terrorist enemies try day and night to instill in them, their determination to live their lives in peace in their own country, a right every American, Canadian, Frenchman Brit, you name it, takes for granted. And why not? Even if those countries go to war, no one is sworn to kill every last one of them. No one denies them their right simply to breathe. Besides, America and NATO's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, in Bosnia and Kosovo are a world away.

This family's war is literally a few hundred meters away.

Read that one again. I didn't say it was a few hundred miles away.

Say you lived in LA ,and the war was in Las Vegas. I didn't say it was a few hundred kilometers away. Say you lived in New York, and it was at the other end of New Jersey. I didn't even say it was a mile away. The war they face and have faced almost constantly for thirteen years is about two thousand meters, as the rocket flies, from their front door. At least that's the distance away from their front door that it was up until a few days ago when the first thirteen terrorists popped up like zombies from graves opening up on their FRONT LAWN! Except these weren't zombies on a cable TV series. There's no way to switch channels on this one. These were terrorists, armed to the teeth with anti tank missiles, machine guns, grenades, handcuffs, tranquilizers, all bent on murdering, maiming, kidnapping and taking hostage as many of them and their children as possible.

Imagine if Afghanistan wasn't in Afghanistan. Imagine if it was on your front porch. That's their reality. That's where the war is- quite literally in their front yard. You have gophers who come up out of holes and eat your petunias. They have Hamas terrorists who come up out of sophisticated tunnels, some of them built, by the way with YOUR TAX DOLLARS!

A dear friend of mine, Vicki, is married to my high school classmate who has been one of my best friends since I was a kid in Israel fifty years ago. She knows I'm "down South" in the war zone. So is her son Benji who serves as a medic in the home front command. She said, "Listen, if you want a shower or a chance to rest or a hot meal or even someone to wash your uniform, I have a dear friend in one of the border communities. She and her family have opened up their home to any soldiers in the area. And check with Benji and give him a ride down there too if he wants a break. So I check with Benji, but he's not getting any breaks today, not with the amount of rockets Hamas is launching against our civilians. He's on constant alert. But I'm not that important. If I want a break I can take it. I'd kill to stretch out on a mattress right now and take a nap. I smell a bit ripe because one tends to sweat a tad in a flack jacket. I'd love a shower and a change of uniform. So absolutely, I'm headed down to see her friend. Let's call her Rachel. Not her real name because she

asked me not to use it. So I plug the name of the community into the GPS and I'm off.

The closer I get the louder the sounds of war and the more I have to pull off to the side of the road and take cover from the rocket attacks. The rockets don't bother me as much as the mortars because there's no warning with a mortar round. No siren, no Code Red alert on the radio, no phone app that says watch out you might just get killed if you don't take cover in the next fifteen seconds. Besides the closer I get the less time there is to take cover. Fifteen seconds is going to seem like a life time in a few more kilometers. Now understand, I'm a former kibbutznik. I know what a little agricultural village looks like. But reality begins to change the closer I get. The MPs have closed the road leading to this little community and the dozens of others down here. Only residents and military personal can get through. But I'm in Uniform and flak jacket and show my officer's I.D. and they wave me through, assuming obviously, I must be a fighter, a warrior on his way to take up his position on the front. In reality I'm a lazy so and so who wants a shower, a free meal and a cot. But when I get to this little community the thing that assault your senses first are the sounds of battle. It's deafening and constant. Because this is where the war is. It's not in Afghanistan or Bosnia or anywhere else far away. It's not even like the wars of my youth in Sinai or the Golan Heights.

It's right here! It's in their front yard.

I don't mean their metaphorical front years. I mean the front yard they water. Soldiers, and not any soldiers, not sad sack, rear echelon guys someone gave a weapon to, and said go stand guard at that latrine, type soldiers. I mean elite combat soldiers in full battle gear. I mean as good as it gets soldiers, weapons at the ready, helmets, flack jackets, locked and loaded soldiers. Except this isn't an army base or some battlefield "somewhere" else, anywhere else but here, in these peoples' front yard. I ask directions to Rachel's house and get there and it's locked. She's not there. I go next door. Maybe I have the wrong house. This looks like the right one because someone has set up cots on the front porch. They've even put a TV outside. I'm already eyeing the cot I mean to sleep on.

I knock on the door and a big-hearted woman with a smile that could light up the world comes to the door. "I'm making the pizzas " she says, "But they're not ready yet." "I'm Vicki's friend" I say. "She said if I was in the area." "What Vicki?" she says.

OK I must have the wrong house. "I'm looking for Rachel" I say "I'm Rachel " she says. "But you don't know Vicki?" "You must want the other Rachel. She lives next door." "Oh " I say, "She's not home" "Okay, " She says, " So come on in. Sit down, rest. The pizzas will be ready soon. You want something to eat?" This woman doesn't know me from Adam, but I'm a soldier, so now I'm quite simply family, even though I have the wrong house, I have the right one. The house smells of all good things . Onions and mushrooms being sautéed for the pizza, the aroma of coffee, dough beginning to bake into fresh bread while in the oven. It smells like home but it sounds like war.

Artillery, tank fire, small arms fire, rockets and mortars . 'How can it sound like war?' I think, 'She's making pizza. She has kids and two dogs, and vegemite, if somebody ever wanted anything like that. But it's a home, a normal home. Except there's a war going on not miles away but a few thousand yards away.' She introduces me to her daughter and son, two of four or five kids she has. The daughter is 30 and a beauty, in that feisty, friendly, farm girl way. The son is a teenager, tall, handsome kid, very much being the man of the house while the father is away. In addition to the pizza and the onions and mushrooms being sautéed, I smell something else. I smell a story.

I explain who I am, what I'm doing, and ask if I can interview her and her son and daughter about what it's like to live literally in a war zone, under constant fire and threat of being killed. "I don't want to be interviewed" she says. The daughter says, "Come on Imma (Mom), it's a chance to unload, to say what's in your heart." "I'm not unloading anything. I'm making pizza." Just then on the TV. There is a some kind of an app. It shows that rockets have just hit a few miles down the road. "Imma," the son says, again, being the man looking after his mother and older sister, "They're coming our way." The mother glances at the TV. Then she looks at her stove as if to see if there's anything that needs attending to before the rockets begin to fall. I turn to the daughter. "What's it like living like this?" And the floodgates open up. I'm just someone to talk to right now. Someone whom she can tell what it's like. The words come out staccato, pouring out of her, as if she can't speak quickly enough to keep up with the emotion driving each word."

What's it like?

"It's constant. We haven't slept in two weeks" the mother says, and I know I won't have to ask another question of anyone. All I'll have to do is listen, "I don't know how we function. I don't know what day it is." "It hurts your ears." The daughter says, "when we're in the reinforced room and the rocket hits, it changes the pressure or something, the shock waves, it hurts your ear drums." "I've already lost some of my hearing." The mother says, "In this ear. I can't hear well anymore." Just then the code red alert sounds. We don't have fifteen seconds here. We have five seconds. That's it. There isn't a bomb shelter outside because you'd never get to it in time. There's a reinforced concrete room with an iron door. The mother moves quickly to the front door and shouts to the soldiers who are outside like a mother hen "Boys!" She shouts, "Get in the shelter. Now!" Nobody messes with Mama Rachel and no one has to be asked twice. This isn't like it is even ten kilometers away where people walk a little slower. Here it's five seconds. Suddenly the tiny reinforced room is packed with soldiers, each with his weapon, combat slung across his shoulder.

People are laughing that it interrupted a good joke someone was telling. It's the bravado of the bomb shelter and then the building shakes and the sound is deafening and the shock wave or change in air pressure or whatever it is whacks your ear drums. One rocket, two and then another one, all of them close. Then

there's the all clear. "The pizzas will be ready in a few minutes" Mama Rachel says, patting some of her olive drab, machine gun wearing baby chicks as they go back to their posts. "That's what it's like." says the daughter "and it never ends." The son, a teenager, says, " It's all I've known my whole life. Rockets falling. Mortars."

"Thirteen years! " says the daughter, "What country in the world would put up with that? Thirteen years of rocket attacks? Would the Americans let that happen to I don't know, San Diego, New York? Texas? For thirteen years? Would France put up with that? Would England? What do you think Putin would do? And we're supposed to " show restraint" Show restraint?! How much more restrained can we be?! For thirteen years we've been under attack!

Even after the last two operations in 2009 and 20012, when there was supposedly a ceasefire." "What ceasefire?!" the mother says, "Every month Hamas would fire a rocket here, a rocket there, ten rockets , twenty in a month...." "And Israel said, well it's only a few rockets a week, so we can't react to that!" says the son. "A few rockets a week?! Is the whole world insane?!" The daughter says, not to me, not to anyone. To God maybe." Are they all crazy?! Listen to that, only a few rockets a week and for them that's normal! That's how we're supposed to live! Only a few rockets a week! Only what they call a drizzle of rockets! And we were restrained. We didn't do anything because after all it's only a few rockets! And I don't even care about the rockets! But the tunnels, now! The terrorist tunnels. Right out there!" She points to her front door, " Right out there!"

"You know what happened here today?" the son says. "They tried to attack again. The terrorists."

The daughter says," They came up out of a tunnel that just opened up in the ground. The army got some of them but then said that two were still on the loose so they tell you to go into the fortified room and lock the door."

"Do you have any weapons in the house?" I ask. "What weapon?! " she says, " They have anti tank missiles with them! Anti tank missiles that can rip a tank apart and kill everyone inside, except this isn't a tank. It's my home!"

"So why do you stay here?" I ask. "It's our home!" the son says. "I work in the dairy" the daughter says, " Someone has to take care of the cows. Someone has to milk and feed them. What did the cows do to anyone?. We're farmers. We have to take care of the farm."

The Mother says, "I work in the day care center. There are still children here. I can't abandon them. Someone has to take care of them. They're children. So when the army said the terrorists were out there... I don't mean a thousand meters away, they were somewhere within a few hundred meters from here. How fast can you run two hundred meters? That's how fast they could get to us." "You know they want to murder us" says the daughter, as if revealing a deep secret, "You know we're the

targets, don't you? Not the army. They want us. We're the Divine Victory they could have. To murder us, to take us hostage and drag us back through the tunnels into Gaza. We're the targets."

"So" says the mother, "I'm in the day care center. I take the children into the fortified room and lock the door and say this is just an exercise. It's just pretending. So we know what to do. Like a fire drill. I do puzzles with them, and color and promise them ice cream and all the while I know there are terrorists out there and the only thing between them and those little children, are our soldiers, the ones you saw on the porch, the ones you see patrolling our village, and the ones who are in Gaza fighting.

What do you think they're fighting for? "You think this is politics" the daughter asks, " We're what they're fighting for! This is our home. This is their home! Hamas wants to kill us. And they say they want to kill us! They go on television and say we want to kill the Jews! They don't lie about it. They announce it to the whole world and, what? They don't see? They don't hear."

This beautiful girl suddenly grabs both sides of her head as if her head is about to explode with the insanity of the life she lives, "You know the story about the Palestinian boy who got the transplant here? There was a boy from Gaza and he needed an organ transplant and the mother brings him over here to Israel so we can save her little boy's life. And that's fine. I say it's fine if we can help them, if we can save a life, a child's life? Yes of course! Bring him. So whose organ gets transplanted? There is a Jewish boy, an Israeli boy who is killed in a terrorist attack and his father gives the ok to transplant his dead son, his murdered son's kidney or whatever they transplanted, into the Palestinian boy from Gaza, to save his life. And they say you know who will get your boy's kidney? It will be a boy from Gaza, from the place that dispatched the terrorist that killed your son. And he says, yes I know and I want to do it. I want to do it, so they'll see who we are and we'll have peace. We'll start with this boy and his mother. That's how we'll build the peace. So they do the transplant and the boy lives. And you know what the woman says? She says it on television so the whole world can see it and hear it. She's not ashamed. She says, you saved my son's life and you Jews have a right to be angry about what I'm going to say. That's your right and I don't care. Because now that you've saved him, when my son grows up, I want him to become a " Martyr " and kill Jews, as many as he can! That's who we're dealing with and the whole world hears her and says well you know, you're stronger than they are so you know that's okay that's the only way they can fight you. But we don't want to fight them. We want them to live in peace and let us live in peace! And they shout it from the roof tops that they want to kill us and when one of them blows himself up, whether he kills Jews or not, their parents hand out candy and celebrate. If they kill a few Jews, they hand out more candy. But as long as he tried to kill Jews that's the main thing. Then you can hand out the candy. Then they're happy. So when I see a woman on the television and she's crying because her child has been killed in this war, I'm a woman, my heart aches for any child who is killed, it's awful but I think to myself, if this is the woman who wants her child to

grow up so he can blow himself up while killing Jews, while trying to kill me or my mother or my brother or my neighbor, what's the tragedy? Is it that the child didn't live long enough to kill me? Is that the tragedy for her?! Or is it that she's afraid that if she doesn't raise him to kill Jews the Hamas will kill her, or kill him. It's insane!! Do you hear that? It's insane."

Again she holds the sides of her head as if her skull is about to explode; as if it can't possibly contain the insanity of it all. "And we don't hate them!" She says, "Do you understand? We don't hate them. We had good friends in Gaza. We know there are good people there and what kind of chance does a child have there to grow up NOT to want to kill me? That's all he's raised with, rocket and guns and hand grenades.

They dress their toddlers up in suicide vests and take pictures of them. That's like their Purim costume, their Halloween. Isn't that cute? Isn't that sweet? He's a little suicide bomber. Here we'll take his picture and send it to grandma so she'll be proud. We know they have a gun to their heads. But what should we do when they come to kill us? When they pop up out of the ground on our front lawn and want to kill us? What should we do? And the world blames us because not enough of us are dead? That's the crime? We built too many shelters for our people while instead of building shelters for their people they build terrorist tunnels to come and kill us? That's our crime? That we spent money we don't have, that we should have spent on education, to build the iron dome which saves us from their rocket attacks?! And still we warn them first. We drop leaflets and send text messages and call them on the phone and say listen, we're very sorry but we have to bomb you in a few hours so in order that you shouldn't be hurt could you please leave? That's what we do. And Hamas puts a gun to their head and says no, go up on your roofs and they celebrate their murders and they lie!! My God how they lie! Here did you see this picture?"

She opens the Internet and shows me a picture of a Palestinian family; father mother and child, all killed by an Israeli bomb strike. Except she shows me that this is really a picture of a SYRIAN family killed by Assad's forces, in their civil war. "That's really bad luck, huh?" she says, "To be killed twice? Once in Syria and again in Gaza!? And the world sees it and they don't care. They open up their wallets and say here we have to give them money so they can rebuild. Like they did after 2009. You Jews destroyed their homes. They need concrete and steel to rebuild. They're not going to make bombs out of concrete and steel. So the world pays for it and we let it in and no, they didn't build bombs out of it. They built the tunnels that they dug to come and murder me and my family and my neighbors and their families. That's what it went for! Did they build shelters for their children? Did they build schools for them? They hid their rockets in The UN schools! The UN just said it. That's who we're dealing with! And they fire them from mosques and crowded neighborhoods and WE'RE the aggressors? We're the evil ones and they're the poor victims?! Egypt offered a cease-fire and we said YES. What's that expression? Learn to take yes for an answer? We said yes! But they didn't have enough dead babies yet. Not enough dead Palestinian babies, not enough dead Jewish babies. And the world looks and it

doesn't see. That's what makes me ill. Not the rockets. Not even the tunnels and the terrorists. The world looks and it doesn't see or it doesn't care. And we tell them and it doesn't matter. It's like trying to empty the ocean with a teaspoon. It's insane." A

fter a few moments she calms down." I'm glad you're here, " she says, " I just had to get that all out. Just had to say it to somebody. Somebody who would listen. With all the Tsuris (troubles), you know what? We're not going anywhere.

This is our home. Not just our country. Our home. And everyone in it is our family. I go to bed at night and I can't sleep because I hear the gunfire and I think of those boys out there and I now they're fighting for me! And here I am in a nice bed. Thanks to them." " The pizzas are ready" Mama Rachel says and gives me a slice and then calls to the "boys." " Boys" she says, "Here, eat while it's still hot." I was with a Golani officer. Some of "the boys" had come out for a few hours rest. How were they doing? "We're strong. The guys are excellent. We're going to complete the mission. We're going to destroy the tunnels, and we're going to put a serious dent in Hamas's day (loose translation) and we'll be victorious. Because we know what we're fighting for. We're not NATO. We're fighting for our homes." Golanchick is an endearing term for a member of the Golani Brigade. "Golanchick," I say, "If you want to get a shower and some rest and maybe some pizza, I have some dear friends. The woman's name is Rachel."