**A response to Israel’s haters**

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My article appearing in Canada Free Press last Friday entitled “Hamas apologist Norman Finkelstein attacks Israel again” (along with its publication by FrontPage Magazine under the title “Finkelstein’s Slander Against Israel”) has apparently brought the haters of the Jewish state of Israel out from under their rocks. And I mean that literally, since the terrorist organization Hamas, which they so zealously defend, still has its founding Charter in force which quotes the prophet Mohammed:

 “The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Muslims, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.”

Those who take what the Hamas Charter says seriously about the goal of obliterating the Jewish state are told not to worry. Hamas has changed and wants peace, its supporters argue. It is the villainous Jewish state that refuses to negotiate a peaceful resolution of the conflict, we are told.

Yet, would any sane person trust an organization whose leaders have made statements in the last few years such as the following?

Sheik Yunus al-Astal, a Hamas legislator and imam, in a column in the weekly newspaper Al Risalah in 2008 discussed a Koranic verse suggesting that “suffering by fire is the Jews’ destiny in this world and the next.” Astal concluded “Therefore we are sure that the Holocaust is still to come upon the Jews.”

“We will not rest until we destroy the Zionist entity” stated Hamas leader Fathi Hammad in Gaza on Friday January 2nd 2009.

In a sermon aired on Hamas’ Al-Aqsa television, cleric Yunis Al Astal stated, “Today, Rome is the capital of the Catholics, or the Crusader capital, which has declared its hostility to Islam, and has planted the brothers of apes and pigs in Palestine in order to prevent the reawakening of Islam.” He went on to say that Rome would become, “an advanced post for the Islamic conquests, which will spread though Europe in its entirety, and then will turn to the two Americas, even Eastern Europe.”

Hamas has repeatedly refused to recognize the right of Israel to exist, refused to disown its Charter and refused to abide by the previous commitments of the Palestinian Authority.

With that as background, let’s examine a few of the arguments that the Israel haters have thrown my way, when they weren’t engaging in their customary ad hominem attacks.

The Jewish Zionists stole the Palestinians’ land and are not entitled to have a state of their own on any portion of “Palestine.”

Hamas’ apologists love to cite international law when it suits their purposes in holding Israel to account, but then reject the international legal framework under which the Palestinians could have had their own state more than 60 years ago. They have nothing to say that would justify why the surrounding Arab states torpedoed the original UN-sponsored two-state solution in 1947-8.

All they do is whine that the land of “Palestine” was stolen from the “Palestinian” Muslim inhabitants. Aside from the long historical connection of the Jewish people to the land, including Jerusalem, that pre-dated Islam by well more than a thousand years, the region the British called the Palestine Mandate (the area that included Jordan, Israel and the “West Bank”) and out of which the British offered the two state solution adopted by the United Nations, emerged out of the pre-World War I Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire had been ruled for 400 years by the Turks who lost it when they, fighting on the German side, were defeated in World War I.

Many Jews who were living in this area had bought their homes from the absentee Turk landlords. Arab masses immigrated from outside this area along with the Jews. Most of those who were called “Palestinian Arabs” were members of families who migrated into the same region that Jews were migrating into beginning in the late 19th century. And there had been a continuous Jewish presence in the region for many centuries.

To say that European Jews had less of a right to emigrate to the ancient Jewish homeland starting in the late 19th century (and develop the land from a desolate swamp) than did Arabs who emigrated during the same period from other regions outside of the Palestine Mandate is racist, not Zionism. In any case, the majority of Jews living in Israel today are non-European – some from Africa and many expelled from their homes in surrounding Arab countries.

Jordan was created on about 75% percent of the Palestine Mandate. The majority of its population was, and still is, Palestinian. Thus, even before the two-state solution was offered with respect to the 25% remainder of the Palestine Mandate, a state made up of a majority Palestinian population was already in existence. The fact that the minority rulers of a different Arab tribe run things in Jordan is a problem for the Palestinian majority that pre-dated the creation of the state of Israel.

The 1947 UN Resolution 181 partition plan was to divide the remaining 25% of Palestine into a Jewish state and a second Arab Palestinian state (Trans-Jordan being the first) based upon population demographics. The partition was offered even though the Arab inhabitants’ leaders had sided with the Nazis in World War II.

The Jewish inhabitants accepted the partition. The Arab inhabitants rejected the partition and the rest, as they say, is history. The Palestinians could have had their own independent state more than 60 years ago but for the rejectionism of their Arab neighbors who violated international law in trying to drive “the Jews into the sea” and the refusal of the Palestinian inhabitants themselves to negotiate a two-state solution in good faith.

Israel has illegally occupied the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem since 1967 and “oppressed” the Palestinian people in violation of international law.

Isn’t it strange how the friends of Hamas blithely skip over 20 years of history? Why weren’t the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, while those territories were in Arab hands, provided the land to create their own independent state? Where was the outcry for justice under international law back then?

After Israel took over the territories following the June 1967 war, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 242 which (i) called on Israel to withdraw its armed forces “from territories occupied in the recent conflict”; and (ii) called for “termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.”

The resolution deliberately omitted the word “all” before “territories” in (i) above to allow the parties to negotiate a peaceful solution that would best achieve the goals set forth in (ii) above.

Israel has since returned the Sinai to Egypt as part of a peace treaty, normalized relations with Jordan, withdrawn unilaterally from Gaza and offered to give back 90% of the West Bank and negotiate the fate of Jerusalem – all of which was rebuffed by Arafat and his successors.

There were no security fences or elaborate checkpoints in the years immediately following 1967. What has Israel received in return?

Every year Israeli civilians have been murdered by Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Al Aqsa Martyr’s Brigade, Hezbollah or some other terrorist group. Islamic terrorists use suicide bombers and increasingly sophisticated rockets, launched from lands relinquished by Israel to the Palestinians, to kill innocent Israeli civilians. Their killing machines of choice tomorrow will be whatever weapons of mass destruction they can get their hands on, including from their buddies in Iran whose president has vowed to wipe Israel off the map.

Israel is falsely accused of ‘collective punishment’ when it strikes back to defend its citizens. Yet it is the Palestinian and other Islamic terrorists who continually violate the Israelis’ human rights under the Geneva Conventions, which state that “Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited.” The innocent Israeli women and children, who have been slaughtered while going about their daily lives in their homes, their schools, on buses, at shopping malls, and places of worship, have committed no wrong against the Palestinian people. They are the victims of the Islamic terrorists’ measures of intimidation and terrorism, which violate their most basic of human rights - life itself. The Islamic terrorists are pursuing nothing less than the collective annihilation of the Israeli people. Just look at the Hamas Charter and the statements of their own leaders.

When the Israeli government responded with stern but non-violent, defensive measures to protect its most vulnerable citizens from murder – for example, with border closures, security checks, economic sanctions and a separation wall which came years after the 1967 war – the terrorists’ apologists complain that it is Israel which is violating the Palestinians’ human rights under international law. Although Hamas has controlled Gaza since 2005, it is Israel’s citizens who continued to suffer intimidation and terrorism launched from Gaza in violation of their international human rights. Israel ceded the Gaza Strip to the Palestinians in a good faith effort to advance peace. Gaza turned instead into hostile territory under Hamas’s control. More than 4200 rockets were launched from Gaza into Israeli residential areas after Gaza was no longer “occupied territory.”

Israel broke the cease-fire with Hamas and launched Operation Cast Lead that turned into a “massacre” of innocent Palestinian civilians. Israel’s “war crimes” are incontrovertibly documented in the Goldstone Report.

Hamas Does Not Honor Truces

Hamas, not Israel, unilaterally decided against extending the six month ceasefire that had expired in mid-December 2008.

One fundamental problem overlooked by the Goldstone Report and other so-called “human rights” reports is that Hamas does not abide by truces or cease-fires for very long, even when it decides to enter into one. To Hamas, truces are just stalling tactics to use as lulls during which the terrorists build up their military capability. Don’t take my word for it. When asked if he could envision a 50-year hudna (cease-fire) with Israel, Hamas leader Nizar Rayyan (who was since killed in an Israeli bombing attack) responded, “The only reason to have a hudna is to prepare yourself for the final battle. We don’t need 50 years to prepare ourselves for the final battle with Israel. Israel is an impossibility. It is an offense against God.”

Gaza’s fellow Arab neighbors in Egypt have witnessed first hand Hamas’s destructive ways. In the wake of the militants’ blasting of the barrier between Gaza and Egypt, more Egyptians finally realized themselves where the source of the Palestinians’ problems and of the real threat to peace lies.

For example, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies director Dr. ‘Abd Al-Mun’im Sa’id criticized Hamas’s failed policies in a column he wrote for Egypt’s ruling National Democratic Party weekly Al-Watani Al-Yawm:

“Hamas’s election by the majority of the Palestinian people has invested it with the formidable responsibility of leading the Palestinian people, protecting its interests, developing its abilities, and managing its relations with the world and with Israel. Its military coup against the Palestinian Authority and its [currently] exclusive control of the Gaza Strip have forced it to assume complete responsibility over the Gazans, in financial, social, and security matters.

However, Hamas has failed to fulfill this responsibility, both after it was elected and following its [Gaza] coup. In fact, it has done nothing but publicly condemn Israel and the PA, on television and in daily communiqués to the world, and to the Islamic Arab countries…

The rockets, [which are being used] as a means of opposing the peace process and applying pressure [on it], are not for pressuring Israel, but for gaining popularity among the Palestinians…”

The editor of the Egyptian government daily Al-Gumhouriyya and Egyptian MP Muhammad ‘Ali Ibrahim was even blunter in his column:

“The Hamas fighters are not satisfied with Abu Mazen’s [i.e. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’s] way of reaching a permanent and definitive solution with the Hebrew state that will ensure the establishment and continuity of the Palestinian state. This is because the only aim of [Hamas Political Bureau head] Khaled Mash’al and his men is to keep this issue hot, so that regional [forces] such as Iran and Syria can continue playing the card of the Palestinian problem to promote their private interests – that is, Iran’s nuclear dossier, the liberation of the Golan Heights, etc…

The Egyptians know their Gazan neighbors very well. They blame Hamas for sabotaging any prospects for peace with Israel and for the Gazan residents’ current suffering. Egypt wants to be left alone from Hamas’s aggression and interference with its sovereignty. So does Israel. And don’t tell me that Egypt is in cahoots with Israel. They have what is called a cold peace. They are barely on speaking terms.

Hamas uses its own civilians as human shields

This is not some wild charge of Israeli propagandists. It is based on the boasts of Hamas officials themselves.   Following are excerpts from a speech delivered by Hamas MP Fathi Hammad, which aired on Al-Aqsa TV on February 29, 2008:

Fathi Hammad: [The enemies of Allah] do not know that the Palestinian people has developed its [methods] of death and death-seeking. For the Palestinian people, death has become an industry, at which women excel, and so do all the people living on this land. The elderly excel at this, and so do the mujahideen and the children. This is why they have formed human shields of the women, the children, the elderly, and the mujahideen, in order to challenge the Zionist bombing machine. It is as if they were saying to the Zionist enemy: “We desire death like you desire life.” (Emphasis added)

The Goldstone Report

The Goldstone fact-finding panel, commissioned by the anti-Israel United Nations Human Rights Council, concluded that Israel “may” be guilty of war crimes based on the assumption that the country’s military forces and leaders deliberately targeted civilians. Israel’s enemies have seized on this conclusion to brand Israel’s military operation a “massacre,” to use Norman Finkelstein’s term. It is worth noting that not once in its 575 page report did the Goldstone panel actually use the term “massacre” to describe Israel’s actions during the Gaza conflict.

One of the most serious charges leveled against Israel’s operation during Project Cast Lead was its use of white phosphorous. Yet while the Goldstone Report concluded that Israel was reckless in its use in built-up areas it also noted that “white phosphorous is not at this stage proscribed under international law.” The report cited one specific example of a family in which children were alleged to have died as a result of injuries from white phosphorous. This is tragic to be sure, but it hardly demonstrates a widespread pattern of deliberate and indiscriminate burning to death of Palestinian children by Israel’s military that Norman Finkelstein and his followers try to portray.

It is curious why Israel’s enemies felt they had to exaggerate the Goldstone Report’s findings since the Goldstone panel was biased against Israel in the first place. It consisted of four members, three of whom considered Israel guilty before their investigation began. Judge Goldstone was outnumbered 3-1, even giving him all the credit in the world for his own objective judicial temperament.

Here are just a few examples of the Goldstone Report’s distortions of the facts as compiled and written up by the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America:

REPORT: There is no evidence of Palestinian fighters using civilian clothes.

FACT: Journalists and eyewitnesses repeatedly noted the use of civilian clothes by Hamas fighters.

REPORT: There is no evidence of armed groups directing civilians to areas where attacks were being launched or forcing them to remain in the vicinity of attacks.

FACT: Palestinian witnesses and video evidence reveal that fighters did direct civilians to areas where attacks were being launched.

  REPORT: There is no evidence that hospitals or ambulances were used for military activities.

FACT: Eyewitnesses describe Palestinian firing from hospitals and using ambulances. Why, for example, did the Goldstone fact-finding mission choose not to visit the al-Shifa Hospital or investigate allegations that Hamas leaders and fighters used this hospital as a base, especially given the testimony by a captured Islamic Jihad fighter to this effect?

  REPORT: The mission could not determine whether mosques were used for military purposes.

 FACT: There is video evidence of weaponry stored in a mosque, and of secondary explosions of mosques consistent with the storage of explosives. While the Report refers to allegations of mosques being used for military purposes and notes that it cannot rule out the inappropriate use of other mosques by Palestinians, the Mission nevertheless chose not to further investigate these possible war crimes by Palestinians and dismissed or ignored the readily available pictorial and testimonial evidence indicating that this was indeed the case.

CONCLUSION

I could go on and on, but one thing is clear. There can be no real peace so long as the Palestinian terrorists and their state sponsors such as Iran want more innocent Jews to die for death’s sake and will settle for nothing short of Israel’s extermination. As long as they allow Hamas and other extremists to rule them, the Palestinians will remain their own worst enemies.