**World Too Hasty In Judging Israel’s Conduct In Gaza**

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“This was the first air campaign in history where only precision-guided munitions were used. (We) approached each individual targeting decision with extraordinary caution. We had solid intelligence and a very strict target selection process . . . to minimize any risk of civilian casualties.”

You might think that this was the response of the Israeli government to accusations of using excessive force in Gaza recently. But actually, it was a statement of NATO rebutting the same kind of allegations regarding its 2011 air campaign in Libya.

The statement regarding the Israeli conduct of war goes as follows: “I don’t think there’s ever been a time in the history of warfare when an army has made more efforts to reduce civilian casualties and deaths of innocent people than the IDF is doing today in Gaza.” Again, these were not the words of an Israeli official spokesman, but of Col. Richard Kemp, former commander of the British forces in Afghanistan, someone who probably knows what he is talking about.

Was there a UN commission established to investigate NATO’s Libyan campaign? Were there threats to drag [Lt.-Gen. Charles Bouchard](http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2011/03/28/a_canadian_takes_charge.html), the Canadian commander of the operation, to the International Criminal Court? Nothing of the sort. On the other hand, whenever it comes to Israel, there is this UN knee-jerk reaction to blame and prosecute.

No wonder Israelis are suspicious of UN commissions of inquiry. The one headed by [Judge Richard Goldstone](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/03/goldstone-regrets-report-into-gaza-war?guni=Article:in%20body%20link) in 2009 condemned Israel for alleged crimes in the 2008 Operation Cast Lead. Goldstone regretted this later, writing in the Washington Post that contrary to what had been written in his report, “civilians were not intentionally targeted as a matter of policy.” But that was too little too late.

Now comes the sequel, with a new UN commission headed by Canadian professor [William Schabas](http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2014/08/12/canadian_appointed_head_of_un_commission_on_gaza_dismisses_antiisrael_charge.html) — a man who in 2012 already concluded that Israel was a serial war criminal. That this “judge” didn’t recuse himself shows how fair all this façade of international justice is.

Apart from this double standard, what bothers Israelis is that world public opinion can’t see that unlike Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan, which are thousands of kilometres away, death tunnels from Gaza open up in the backyard of Kibbutz Nahal Oz, 500 metres away, and short-range mortars from Gaza have just killed two of the kibbutz members.

Perhaps people will start changing their opinion about what Israel is doing when Abu Khalid al-Kanadi (“the Canadian”), John Maguire of Ottawa and the likes of Calgary suicide bomber Salman Ashrafi return from the battlefields of the Islamic State and start practising their holy war back home.

In the meantime, Israel is also facing an internal challenge, with its 20 per cent minority of Israeli Arabs. If Israel were smart, it would have made them the happiest people in the country, fully equal to the Jewish Israelis. Regrettably, we have failed to do so, with one notable exception — the second premiership of Yitzhak Rabin (1992-95), when the government mounted a formidable endeavour to address the inequality of the Israeli Arabs.

Socio-economic grievances aside, the Israeli Arabs are torn apart by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, where, in the words of Israeli-Arab politician Abed al-Aziz Zoabi, “My country is at war with my people.” Their recent violent protests against the war sparked counterattacks and racist remarks by right-wing Jewish Israelis, which drove some people to rush to the conclusion that Israel had lost its liberal compass.

Not so fast. Again, Israel’s conduct should be judged on the same level as that of other democracies during wartime. Have we hurriedly passed a dubious “Patriot Act” restricting civil liberties? Have we put our Israeli-Arab citizens in concentration camps, like the Americans did to their citizens of Japanese origin during the Second World War?

Above all, according to recent opinion polls, with all the rhetoric about secession, 77 per cent of the Arabs in Israel consider themselves to be Israelis (more, I believe, than the 49 per cent of Quebecers who want to remain Canadian, as one poll from 2013 showed). It’s up to us Israelis — and the news about the demise of our liberalism is exaggerated — to embrace them and to coerce our government to do so as well.

There is no other democracy that faces such challenges, both externally and internally, and still keeps its democratic nature. Except that we don’t get credit for that. It reminds me of the joke about Bill Clinton’s visit to Israel. During a boat cruise in the Sea of Galilee, Hillary’s hat falls into the water. Bill steps out of the boat and walks on water to retrieve it. The press, in hot pursuit in another boat, concurs: Clinton can’t swim.