**How Goldstone Is Making Peace More Difficult**

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When President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas try to make peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the 600-pound gorilla in the room will be Richard Goldstone. Although he was not invited to the meetings, his presence will be felt. It will send the following message to the Israeli government: If you end your military occupation of the West Bank, and the Palestinians use their new territory to launch rockets and other attacks against Israel, you will not be able to defend yourself without Goldstone and the colleagues condemning you for taking actions in self defense.

This is a realistic threat, as evidenced by what happened after Israel ended its military occupation of the Gaza Strip. Hamas took over by military force and used the newly liberated lands not to build a civil society but to attack Israel. They fired nearly 1,000 rockets at Israeli civilians and made life impossible for nearly a million Israelis living in the south of Israel. After enduring these rockets for years, and futilely seeking help from the international community, the Israelis did what any democracy would do: they defended their civilians against the war crimes being perpetrated by Hamas. But Hamas poses a difficult military target since it deliberately hides its fighters among civilians and fires its rockets from schoolyards, hospitals and mosques. Considering these difficulties, Israel did a commendable job at stopping most of the rockets while minimizing civilian casualties. As Former British Army Colonel Richard Kemp said:

"I don't think there has 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."

Nonetheless, Richard Goldstone issued a blood libel against Israel, accusing its leaders of deliberately setting out to maximize civilian deaths. It also exculpated Hamas from the war crime of using civilians as human shields. The Palestinian Authority -- yes the Palestinian Authority, not Hamas -- filed formal charges against Israel in the International Criminal Court. This, despite the fact that President Abbas and his subordinates urged Israel to be even more aggressive against Hamas in Gaza so that the Palestinian Authority could regain its lawful power. Enemies of Israel throughout the world have used the notorious Goldstone report in an effort to delegitimize the Jewish state.

When I was recently in Israel for a month, I spoke to all of its political and military leaders. The Goldstone report was very much on their minds as they contemplated the possibility of withdrawal from the West Bank. I also discussed the Goldstone report with the Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who acknowledged to me that by demanding that criminal charges be brought against Israel in the International Criminal Court he was simply, "playing a card." Well, if there is to be an end of Israel's occupation of the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority will have to stop playing the delegitimation card. It will have to work together with Israel to prevent a repeat in the West Bank of what happened in Gaza. The recent claim of responsibility by Hamas for the murder of four Israelis in the West Bank does not bode well for the peace process. It demonstrates that the Palestinian Authority has only limited control over Hamas, and that Hamas can play its "violence card" any time it chooses.

For the peace process to have any chance of success, the international community must categorically reject the Goldstone report and what it represents. It must reaffirm Israel's right to defend itself against attacks from territory it cedes to the Palestinians. To its credit, the Obama Administration has rejected the Goldstone report, but it must go even further. It must assure Israel -- publicly and unequivocally -- that it will vigorously defend Israel's right to protect its civilians from rocket attacks, suicide bombings and roadside shootings. Barack Obama put it very well when, as a candidate, he visited the shelled Israeli city of Sderot and made the following statement.

"The first job of any nation state is to protect its citizens...If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I'm going to do everything in my power to stop that. And I would expect Israel to do the same."

That statement must become a firm basis of American policy, if and when Israel leaves the West Bank.

So "thank you" Richard Goldstone for making peace more difficult. There are some who are proposing Goldstone for a Nobel Peace Prize. Were he to win it, he would be in the company of Yasser Arafat, who also won the prize, before he rejected the Clinton/Barak offer which would have created a Palestinian state, with its capital in Jerusalem and with a $35 billion reparation package for the so-called refugees. Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia was more prescient than the Nobel committee when he accused Arafat of committing a crime against peace and warning him that he was rejecting the best offer the Palestinians would ever get. Both Goldstone and Arafat deserve a prize, but it should be awarded by Hamas and Ahmadinejad rather than by the Nobel committee.

Let us hope that the barriers to peace erected by Richard Goldstone and Yasser Arafat can be overcome at the ongoing meetings convened by the Obama Administration. It won't be easy.