

# Gaza: A Different Perspective

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Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb

January 12, 2009

Watching the news these days is not an easy task, especially if you switch between Arab channels like Al Jazeera on one hand, and Western channels like Fox on the other. The war on Gaza is portrayed so differently that one sometimes might wonder if these diverse narratives are actually dealing with the same conflict. On one channel, you see images of children slaughtered by Israeli troops and missiles; the other repeats, ad nauseam, the statements issued by the Israeli spokespeople about Israel's right to defend itself. The most deceiving thing about coverage on both sides, however, is the idea that the more pictures one sees, the more he or she understands what's going on. I believe that the outrageous pictures transmitted are capturing our attention and feelings, yet are preventing us from thinking, analyzing and understanding what is really happening. This war on Gaza, and the sensational, 24-hour media coverage it is getting, has created a storm in the public sphere in order to hide the real intentions of the parties involved. The most important thing, I believe, is not what we are told and shown, but what this war is trying to hide.

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- 1) The two-state solution is the intended victim of the war on Gaza.

Although Israel is aiming at destroying Hamas's military capabilities (as primitive as they are), I believe that Israel's real intention is to polish Hamas's political image. This may seem an outlandish contradiction, but let's look at what has been happening. While Israel can't tolerate rockets falling into its territory, it is in its long-term strategic interest to have Hamas control the Gaza Strip. Why? For a simple reason: if Hamas controls Gaza and Fatah controls the West Bank, then the two-state solution is over. Gaza and the West Bank will become two distinct entities governed by two different Palestinian parties with two different regional alignments. And Israel is off the hook. The "Two-State Solution" that the Palestinian negotiators were wishfully thinking to have almost achieved in their negotiations with Israel, and what President Bush had promised to deliver by the end of 2008 and didn't, is what was really targeted in this war and totally destroyed. President Obama will find new realities and challenges on the ground to deal with. A new chapter of managing the conflict will start in the Middle East.

- 2) Regional power struggles continue to be played out in Palestine.

The war on Gaza, although purely an Israeli decision, was also triggered also by some regional powers who were backing Hamas. Again we see the same old story played out, of regional wars being fought on Palestinian land, using Palestinian groups and war lords as proxies for different political interests. Without a new regional arrangement, there will be no stability in Palestine or in the region at large.

- 3) Gaza is the new poster-child for justifying humanitarian aid.

Gaza will now be marketed on a much wider scale as a severe humanitarian crisis. Disempowering aid, handouts and food supplies will start flowing into Gaza like never before. Yet Gaza's problem is, fundamentally, a political one. What the people in Gaza really need is for the occupation to end, for the population to be able to live freely, to export and import, to fish and grow flowers. What Gaza really needs is self-empowerment, a new vision, and the power of a spirit that overcomes the liturgies of death and insists on having life that is worth living; even if outside forces deny them that. Some might ask: Is this the time for such words? People are struggling for mere survival, and you try to talk about things that might be interesting, but not crucial. I disagree. I still remember the days in 2002 when we experienced in Bethlehem the same kind of bombardment with the same F-16s and Apache helicopters (though on a smaller scale and for a much shorter period), when we saw our city that had just been renovated for the millennium celebrations damaged and destroyed. I know how children in Gaza are now being traumatized, how families are scared to death, not knowing who's next. And yet it was at that time that we wrote: "We will never give up on our town and on the wellness of our community. We will continue to build and rebuild, to train and educate, to empower and to create life in the midst of death. We will continue to call for justice and reconciliation in the midst of rising hate, revenge and retaliation." This was as true then as it is now.