

August 10, 2014

Before we return to the latest disasters, foreign and domestic, that have overcome our hapless clueless feckless government, we'll spend time today on the success Israel has had in its campaign against Hamas.

Gabriel Schoenfeld compares Israel's careful forays into Gaza with the Allied bombing of Germany and Japan.

Condemnation of Israel for its conduct of Operation Protective Edge in Gaza continues unabated. The chief accusation, heard time and again, is that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have either been cavalier about civilian casualties or are intentionally inflicting them. Israel and its defenders, for their part, have been at pains to point out the great lengths the IDF has gone to avoid injuring civilians, while at the same time noting the innumerable ways in which Hamas has violated the laws of war.

The debate over these matters has been almost as intense as the fighting itself. All too often, historical and moral perspective have been lost in the rhetorical smoke. No nation can survive with hundreds of rockets raining on its cities day after day while its borders are simultaneously penetrated by armed fighters seeking to spirit out hostages via underground tunnels. Once again, Israel has found itself waging a war for its survival. In such a war, the question becomes: What is forbidden and what is permitted?

As is well known but bears restating, the campaign Israel has been conducting to suppress Hamas rocket fire and destroy its tunnel network employs precision guided munitions. The attacks from land, air, and sea are designed to destroy Hamas's command and control facilities and those structures in or from which it has been manufacturing, storing, or firing its huge arsenal of rockets. Before the IDF attacks any buildings where civilians are known to be living or congregating, it issues numerous alerts by dropping leaflets, making telephone calls and sending text messages, and firing warning shots.

In a conflict in which its adversary employs innocent women and children as human shields and fires offensive weapons from or near hospitals, schools, and U.N. shelters, Israel's effort to reduce civilian casualties has clearly not succeeded in every case. But the effort itself, if not unique in the annals of warfare, is certainly far from the norm. Notably, it stands in the starkest possible contrast to the way Great Britain and the United States conducted their own war for survival. ...

... This brings us back to Hamas. Its illegal use of Israeli uniforms in combat is but one of many practices that reveal the group to be not a government or a governing party, but a terrorist organization. Indeed, its fighters fall into the same category of "unlawful enemy combatants" that applies to al Qaeda. In fighting such an adversary, one is allowed to take off certain gloves, as the United States has been doing in Afghanistan under both Presidents Bush and Obama. Our forces there have routinely used a variety of tactics to kill our enemies that entail the inadvertent but extensive loss of civilian life.

All this is overlooked by the wolf pack that constitutes Israel's critics. So too is the ocean of civilian blood flowing in Syria and Iraq at the hands of Islamic butchers of various religio-ideological stripes, about which Israel's critics are thunderously silent. President Obama fully participates in the hypocrisy by publicly chastising Israel for causing civilian deaths when such

deaths have occurred with regularity as a consequence of the drone strikes carried out in Afghanistan and elsewhere at his own orders, and for which the United States has on frequent occasion felt compelled to apologize. ...

Evelyn Gordon reports on just one of the ways Hamas has created a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

There has been a lot of talk lately about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. What has gone curiously unmentioned by all the great humanitarians from the UN and “human rights” groups, however, is the degree to which this crisis was deliberately fomented by Hamas: Aside from starting the war to begin with, Hamas has done its level best to deprive Gazans of everything from food to medical care to housing, despite Israel’s best efforts to provide them.

Take, for instance, the widely reported shortages of medicines and various other essentials. Many of these products are imported, and since Egypt has largely closed its border, Gaza has only one conduit for these vital imports: the Kerem Shalom crossing into Israel. Thus if Gaza’s Hamas government had any concern whatsoever for its citizens, ensuring that this crossing was kept open and could function at maximum efficiency would be a top priority.

Instead, Hamas and other terrorist groups subjected Kerem Shalom to relentless rocket and mortar fire throughout the 29-day conflict, thereby ensuring that the job of getting cargo through was constantly interrupted as crossing workers raced for cover. Hamas also launched at least three tunnel attacks near Kerem Shalom, each of which shut the crossing down for hours. ...

Seth Mandel on what we now know about Hamas' tactics.

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With no deal reached for a permanent truce between Israel and Hamas, the terrorist organization in Gaza wasted no time in renewing its attacks on Israel today. And it’s worth wondering if the atrocious media coverage of the war, which abided by Hamas’s threats and only showed what Hamas wanted the world to see, will be any different for this round of fighting. After all, as Israeli ground troops left Gaza and journalists went with them, reporters began to admit: we now know.

We now know, that is, that Hamas was firing rockets from civilian areas and among neighborhoods where journalists were staying. That meant they were getting a twofer: reporters wouldn’t expose their war crimes and they would draw return fire from Israel that would endanger foreign journalists and Palestinian civilians. As we know from the Tet Offensive, if you can spook the reporters you can get your sky-is-falling coverage made to order. ...

Victor Davis Hanson makes the case for Israel coming out of this war stronger than before.

In postmodern wars, we are told, there is no victory, no defeat, no aggressors, no defenders, just a tragedy of conflicting agendas. But in such a mindless and amoral landscape, Israel in fact is on its way to emerging in a far better position after the Gaza war than before.

Analysts of the current fighting in Gaza have assured us that even if Israel weakens Hamas, such a short-term victory will hardly lead to long-term strategic success — but they don't define "long-term." In this line of thinking, supposedly in a few weeks Israel will only find itself more isolated than ever. It will grow even more unpopular in Europe and will perhaps, for the first time, lose its patron, America — while gaining an enraged host of Arab and Islamic enemies. Meanwhile, Hamas will gain stature, rebuild, and slowly wear Israel down.

But if we compare the Gaza war with Israel's past wars, that pessimistic scenario hardly rings true. Unlike in the existential wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973, Israel faces no coalition of powerful conventional enemies. Syria's military is wrecked. Iraq is devouring itself. Egypt is bankrupt and in no mood for war. Its military government is more worried about Hamas than about Israel. Jordan has no wish to attack Israel. The Gulf States are likewise more afraid of the axis of Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood than of Israel — a change of mentality that has no historical precedent. In short, never since the birth of the Jewish state have the traditional enemies surrounding Israel been in such military and political disarray. Never have powerful Arab states quietly hoped that Israel would destroy an Islamist terrorist organization that they fear more than they fear the Jewish state. ...

Craig Pirrong at Streetwise Professor posts on Putin's pique over the West's sanctions.

In retaliation for US and EU sanctions, Russia is banning the importation of large categories of food products from each: food imports from the US are pretty much banned altogether.

These sanctions are aimed at an industry that is politically powerful far beyond its numbers. Chicken farmers in the US will squawk at the loss of about 1 percent of their revenues, and European dairy producers will bellow in anger. But the economic impact on the affected countries will be trivial. The US exports about \$300 million in chicken to Russia (down substantially from a few years ago), which is essentially rounding error in US GDP. European net food exports to Russia are about 12 billion euros, or less than .1 percent of the EU's 13 trillion Euro economy.

The impact on Russia's people will be substantially greater. Russia imports about 35 percent of its food, about half of that from Europe and the US. Higher value, non-staples are disproportionately affected. This will lead to an appreciable increase in the cost of food, which represents a very large fraction of Russian household budgets. Whereas US consumers spend about 6.5 percent of their total expenditures on food, in Russia the figure is about 32 percent. A rise in food prices hits hard. A 10 percent increase, which is not unrealistic, cuts Russian living standards about 3 percent.

Putin ordered the government to find ways to increase food production, because, you know, that ukases always work as the Tsar intends. Russian food output will no doubt rise in response to higher prices, but in the short run the elasticity of supply is likely to be very low, especially for

vegetables and dairy. Anyways, this increased output will only mitigate the price increases. If Russian firms/farms could produce more at current prices, they'd be doing so.

I predict that since increased Russian domestic production will have little effect on prices, Putin will soon resort to the tried-and-true nostrum of price controls, just like Russia did when food price inflation spiked in 2007. This will lead to lines and empty shelves, so Russians can party like it's 1989: to those nostalgic for the USSR, be careful what you ask for. I note that Russia also adopted price controls, to disastrous effect, in WWI. Putin is idealizing Russia's role in that war of late, and employs WWI reenactors to lead subversion campaigns in Ukraine, so maybe he'll think it's a great idea to reenact the price controls too. ...

Weekly Standard

War Crimes in Gaza?

By any historical standard, Israel's air attacks were a model of restraint.

by Gabriel Schoenfeld

Condemnation of Israel for its conduct of Operation Protective Edge in Gaza continues unabated. The chief accusation, heard time and again, is that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have either been cavalier about civilian casualties or are intentionally inflicting them. Israel and its defenders, for their part, have been at pains to point out the great lengths the IDF has gone to avoid injuring civilians, while at the same time noting the innumerable ways in which Hamas has violated the laws of war.

The debate over these matters has been almost as intense as the fighting itself. All too often, historical and moral perspective have been lost in the rhetorical smoke. No nation can survive with hundreds of rockets raining on its cities day after day while its borders are simultaneously penetrated by armed fighters seeking to spirit out hostages via underground tunnels. Once again, Israel has found itself waging a war for its survival. In such a war, the question becomes: What is forbidden and what is permitted?

As is well known but bears restating, the campaign Israel has been conducting to suppress Hamas rocket fire and destroy its tunnel network employs precision guided munitions. The attacks from land, air, and sea are designed to destroy Hamas's command and control facilities and those structures in or from which it has been manufacturing, storing, or firing its huge arsenal of rockets. Before the IDF attacks any buildings where civilians are known to be living or congregating, it issues numerous alerts by dropping leaflets, making telephone calls and sending text messages, and firing warning shots.

In a conflict in which its adversary employs innocent women and children as human shields and fires offensive weapons from or near hospitals, schools, and U.N. shelters, Israel's effort to reduce civilian casualties has clearly not succeeded in every case. But the effort itself, if not unique in the annals of warfare, is certainly far from the norm. Notably, it stands in the starkest possible contrast to the way Great Britain and the United States conducted their own war for survival.

The Germans in World War II may have initiated the carpet bombing of civilian centers, but it did not take long for the Allies to respond in kind. Days after the German bombing of Rotterdam, Winston Churchill's war cabinet settled on the initiation of "unrestricted air warfare," openly casting aside concern for civilian life so long as military objectives would be realized. What followed over the next years, as is well known, was the destruction of more than half of Germany's urban centers.

What is less well known, but has been meticulously chronicled by the historian Richard Overy in *The Bombers and the Bombed*, is exactly how methodical—even scientific—that bombing campaign became. To calibrate how best to wreak destruction, the British air ministry devised a measure of the ratio between bomb weight and expected deaths among German workers, i.e., civilians. The unit of measurement it selected was based upon the casualties inflicted by Germany in the November 14, 1940, bombing of the English city of Coventry. The scale went from "1 Coventry" upward, with an attack of "5 Coventries" expected to yield approximately 28,000 German deaths. In the spring of 1942, Churchill's scientific adviser, Lord Cherwell, produced his famous calculation that 10,000 Royal Air Force bombers would be sufficient to "dehouse" one-third of Germany's urban populace.

A new military-scientific subdiscipline emerged: "incendiarism." It is "axiomatic," explained the report of one British defense research division, "that fire will always be the optimum agent for the complete destruction of buildings, factories, etc." Overy recounts how experts from the National Fire Protection Association in the United States traveled to London to provide advice on how best to achieve "large-scale fire destruction." As the war progressed, considerable effort was devoted to making certain that targeted cities would be consumed by firestorms of the kind that sucked the oxygen out of the air and killed by the tens of thousands.

A unit in the British air ministry systematically considered the relevant factors for fostering the "essential draught conditions": the dimensions of beams in the average house in northwest Germany, the materials used in constructing rooftops, the design of staircases, the thickness of floors. The happy conclusion it reached: "a German house will burn well." Observing Churchill read aloud a memorandum setting forth the possibility of "round-the-clock bombing" of Germany, an American general was later to recollect: He "rolled the words off his tongue like they were tasty morsels."



Cologne 1945



Tokyo 1945

Churchill today is remembered, rightly, as one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century. Israel has never for a moment even contemplated employing the kinds of tactics that, however much we recoil from them today, the British titan utilized to ensure his country's survival. Similar draconian tactics were employed by the United States under Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman in the war against Japan and were repeated in the saturation bombing of the Korean and Vietnam wars, both conflicts far from our shores where our own survival was not at stake. Yet instead of reducing all of Gaza to rubble, Israel has chosen to fight door-to-door and tunnel-to-tunnel, and to suffer heavy casualties of its own.

Obviously striking in this connection is the contrast between Israel and Hamas, which has engaged in a wide variety of war crimes that, beyond those previously mentioned, include aiming rockets at civilian targets, using Red Crescent ambulances to ferry fighters, and carrying out attacks during a U.N.-sponsored truce. Particularly noteworthy among its assortment of violations is the use of Israeli uniforms by Hamas fighters as they carry out attacks.

According to the Hague Convention of 1907, it is "especially forbidden" to "kill or wound treacherously." Treachery comes in a variety of forms, and one of them is to "make improper use of . . . the military insignia and uniform of the enemy." Yet this is precisely what Hamas has repeatedly done. Once again, practices during World War II are instructive.

As Germany's military position was collapsing in December 1944, Adolf Hitler set in motion Operation Greif (Griffin), aimed at capturing one or more of the bridges traversing the Meuse River. He put in charge Otto Skorzeny, the enterprising SS officer who had rescued Mussolini from Italian captivity. The Führer insisted to Skorzeny that special units be employed composed of English-speaking soldiers wearing captured British and U.S. Army uniforms. They were to cause mayhem behind enemy lines by issuing false orders, changing road signs, and other forms of military mischief.

But by this juncture Hitler's military genius was insufficient to save the day, and Operation Greif—along with the Battle of the Bulge, of which it was a part—came to grief. Some two dozen of Skorzeny's fighters were captured. Skorzeny himself was also apprehended. In 1947 he was put on trial in Dachau for a number of crimes, including that of treacherously making use of American uniforms. Skorzeny acknowledged ordering his soldiers to wear the uniforms. But he asserted that so long as enemy uniforms were not worn during combat, their use as a ruse was not illegal under international law. The court agreed. As there was no evidence showing that he or his forces had used a uniform while firing weapons in actual combat as opposed to deception operations, he was acquitted of the charge. But 18 of his fighters who were caught in the field wearing American uniforms were not so fortunate. They were executed on the spot in full accordance with military law regarding the treatment of spies.

This brings us back to Hamas. Its illegal use of Israeli uniforms in combat is but one of many practices that reveal the group to be not a government or a governing party, but a terrorist organization. Indeed, its fighters fall into the same category of "unlawful enemy combatants" that applies to al Qaeda. In fighting such an adversary, one is allowed to take off certain gloves, as the United States has been doing in Afghanistan under both Presidents Bush and Obama. Our forces there have routinely used a variety of tactics to kill our enemies that entail the inadvertent but extensive loss of civilian life.

All this is overlooked by the wolf pack that constitutes Israel's critics. So too is the ocean of civilian blood flowing in Syria and Iraq at the hands of Islamic butchers of various religio-

ideological stripes, about which Israel's critics are thunderously silent. President Obama fully participates in the hypocrisy by publicly chastising Israel for causing civilian deaths when such deaths have occurred with regularity as a consequence of the drone strikes carried out in Afghanistan and elsewhere at his own orders, and for which the United States has on frequent occasion felt compelled to apologize.

The chorus of condemnation of Israel will no doubt continue. Its sources are to be found not in facts and fairness, but in a brew of convenience, fear, and hatred. Yet by the yardstick of history, Israel has conducted itself with astonishing restraint. In the war for survival that it is waging, it would be fully justified in taking off the gloves. If the IDF had wanted to suppress all Hamas rocket fire and destroy the Gaza tunnel system without losing a single one of its soldiers, it had well within its possession the means to do so. It has chosen not to employ such ferocious means. That is not the way the Jewish state fights. It is a bitter irony that Israel's restraint has not earned it a respite from savage criticism even as it has saved the lives of countless Palestinian civilians while also costing the lives of many dozens of its own soldiers.

Gabriel Schoenfeld, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, is the author, most recently, of A Bad Day on the Romney Campaign: An Insider's Account.

Contentions

[How Hamas Deliberately Created a Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza](#)

by Evelyn Gordon

There has been a lot of talk lately about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. What has gone curiously unmentioned by all the great humanitarians from the UN and "human rights" groups, however, is the degree to which this crisis was deliberately fomented by Hamas: Aside from starting the war to begin with, Hamas has done its level best to deprive Gazans of everything from food to medical care to housing, despite Israel's best efforts to provide them.

Take, for instance, the widely reported shortages of medicines and various other essentials. Many of these products are imported, and since Egypt has largely closed its border, Gaza has only one conduit for these vital imports: the Kerem Shalom crossing into Israel. Thus if Gaza's Hamas government had any concern whatsoever for its citizens, ensuring that this crossing was kept open and could function at maximum efficiency would be a top priority.

Instead, Hamas and other terrorist groups [subjected](#) Kerem Shalom to relentless rocket and mortar fire throughout the 29-day conflict, thereby ensuring that the job of getting cargo through was constantly interrupted as crossing workers raced for cover. Hamas also launched at least three tunnel attacks near Kerem Shalom, each of which shut the crossing down for hours.

Despite this, Israeli staffers risked their lives to keep the crossing open and [managed](#) to send through 1,491 truckloads of food, 220 truckloads of other humanitarian supplies, and 106 truckloads of medical supplies. But the numbers would certainly have been higher had the nonstop attacks not kept disrupting operations. On August 1, for instance, a shipment comprising 91 truckloads of aid had to be [aborted](#) on when Hamas violated a humanitarian cease-fire by launching a massive attack near Kerem Shalom.

Then there's the shortage of medical care, as Gaza's hospitals were reportedly overwhelmed by the influx of Palestinian casualties. To relieve this pressure, Israel allowed some Palestinians into Israel for treatment and also set up a field hospital on the Gaza border. But throughout the war, the field hospital stood almost empty—which Israel says is because Hamas deliberately kept Palestinians from using it.

Many pundits dismiss this claim, insisting there were simply no Palestinians who wanted to go there. That, however, is highly implausible. Gazans routinely seek treatment in Israel because it offers better medical care than Gaza does; as one Gazan [said](#) in 2012, "It is obvious that people come to Israel for medical treatment, regardless of the political conflict." Even Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh sends his family to Israel for treatment; over the past two years, Israel has treated both his [granddaughter](#) and his sister's [husband](#). So while some Palestinians undoubtedly objected to accepting help from the enemy, it's hard to believe there weren't also Palestinians who simply wanted the best possible care for their loved ones, and would gladly have accepted it from Israel had they not feared retaliation from a group with no qualms about [shooting](#) dissenters.

It's also worth noting that "humanitarian" organizations in Gaza actively contributed to this particular problem. UNRWA and the Red Cross did [refer](#) a few patients to the Israeli field hospital. But you have to wonder why they opted to refer most patients to Gaza's Shifa Hospital and then [make videos](#) about how difficult conditions there were instead of easing the burden on Shifa by referring more patients to the Israeli hospital.

Then, of course, there's the dire electricity shortage—also courtesy in part of Hamas, which [destroyed](#) two power lines carrying electricity from Israel to Gaza and subsequently prevented their repair by shelling the area nonstop.

Finally, there's the massive destruction of houses in Gaza, which has left thousands of families homeless. That, too, was largely courtesy of Hamas: It booby-trapped houses and other civilian buildings, like a UNRWA [clinic](#), on a massive scale and also used such buildings to store rockets and explosives.

Sometimes, it blew up these buildings itself in an effort to kill Israeli soldiers. Other times, the buildings blew up when relatively light Israeli ammunition like mortar shells—which aren't powerful enough to destroy a building on their own—caused the booby traps or stored rockets to detonate. As Prof. Gregory Rose aptly [noted](#), Hamas effectively turned all of Gaza into one big suicide bomb. In one neighborhood, for instance, 19 out of 28 houses were [either](#) booby-trapped, storing rockets, or concealing a tunnel entrance, thereby ensuring their destruction.

Now, the organization is gleefully watching the world blame Israel for the humanitarian crisis Hamas itself created. And that gives it every incentive to repeat these tactics in the future.

Contentions

[We Now Know: Gaza Edition](#)

Seth Mandel

The fog of war often means the first draft of history makes the greatest impact but needs to be corrected by later drafts. After the Cold War was over, historian John Lewis Gaddis called his

[updated book](#) on the conflict “We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History.” More famous is Kinglsey Amis’s [suggestion](#) that Robert Conquest call his new edition of *The Great Terror* “I Told You So, You F—ing Fools.” Yet now we have a rare opportunity in Gaza to apply what we now know to additional fighting in a war thought to be over.

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We now know, that is, that Hamas was firing rockets from civilian areas and among neighborhoods where journalists were staying. That meant they were getting a twofer: reporters wouldn’t expose their war crimes *and* they would draw return fire from Israel that would endanger foreign journalists and Palestinian civilians. As we know from the Tet Offensive, if you can spook the reporters you can get your sky-is-falling coverage made to order.

The political world was transfixed earlier this week by a New Delhi Television (NDTV) visual report on Hamas firing from outside the reporters’ hotel. This was a broadcast that American and other Western media didn’t have—in fact, major Western media spent the war explaining why you could follow their coverage for weeks of war reporting and not see a single Hamas fighter. The NDTV correspondent has [written about](#) the experience of filming the dramatic rocket launching:

There is an important detail about that spot which I mention in our video report which may not have fully registered – this was the exact location from where a rocket was fired five days prior. It happened around midnight, so it was impossible to film. Panic ensued. The Israel Defence Force (IDF) sent a warning to two hotels across the road to evacuate; within minutes they were empty. Those in our building slept in a safe room on the ground floor. And so that spot was seared in our memory.

So when we saw the tent on the same location with two men (later three) moving in and out, working on something inside which they seemed to be burying into the ground, it wasn’t hard to conclude what this was. When they started running wires out of the tent, the final steps before covering the earth with a spade, moving some shrubbery on top and then slinking away, it was even clearer.

We had all of it on tape, but wrestled with the dilemma of what to do with it. Two considerations weighed on our mind. One, the fear which hobbles the reporting such material: fear of reprisals from Hamas against us and those who worked with us, fear of inviting an Israeli response on the spot (these have been known to miss). Two, we needed to be 100 % sure that this was a rocket launch site. So we did nothing, setting off on our assignment for the day, mulling over the material in our possession.

The concern over Hamas reprisals is real and legitimate. There has been some pushback against the criticism of reporters in Gaza for not showing an accurate picture of the war. Much of that pushback is misplaced. The argument is not that journalists are wimps for not risking their lives to fill out the narrative for the public at home, but that the media have been using the inaccurate reporting without adding the appropriate context.

It's understandable, I suppose, why they don't add that context. In practice what they are doing is abiding by Hamas's rules, which require them to basically broadcast a steady stream of Hamas propaganda footage. Adding the context—explaining that they are just showing the folks at home what Hamas wants them to see—would be admitting their own lack of credibility.

We will also see—as Evelyn [points out](#) this morning—that the statistics used by international organizations, human-rights groups, and UN monitors are completely unreliable. That means the accusations against Israel are generally bunk as well. We now know. And we'll know more. But now that we see the war might not be over after all, everyone should keep that in mind.

National Review

[A Stronger Israel?](#)

Elite opinion believes Israel will lose “long-term” whatever happens in the next weeks. Not necessarily.

by Victor Davis Hanson

In postmodern wars, we are told, there is no victory, no defeat, no aggressors, no defenders, just a tragedy of conflicting agendas. But in such a mindless and amoral landscape, Israel in fact is on its way to emerging in a far better position after the Gaza war than before.

Analysts of the current fighting in Gaza have assured us that even if Israel weakens Hamas, such a short-term victory will hardly lead to long-term strategic success — but they don't define “long-term.” In this line of thinking, supposedly in a few weeks Israel will only find itself more isolated than ever. It will grow even more unpopular in Europe and will perhaps, for the first time, lose its patron, America — while gaining an enraged host of Arab and Islamic enemies. Meanwhile, Hamas will gain stature, rebuild, and slowly wear Israel down.

But if we compare the Gaza war with Israel's past wars, that pessimistic scenario hardly rings true. Unlike in the existential wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973, Israel faces no coalition of powerful conventional enemies. Syria's military is wrecked. Iraq is devouring itself. Egypt is bankrupt and in no mood for war. Its military government is more worried about Hamas than about Israel. Jordan has no wish to attack Israel. The Gulf States are likewise more afraid of the axis of Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood than of Israel — a change of mentality that has no historical precedent. In short, never since the birth of the Jewish state have the traditional enemies surrounding Israel been in such military and political disarray. Never have powerful Arab states quietly hoped that Israel would destroy an Islamist terrorist organization that they fear more than they fear the Jewish state.

But is not asymmetrical warfare the true threat to Israel? The West, after all, has had little success in achieving long-term victories over terrorist groups and insurgents — remember Afghanistan and Iraq. How can tiny Israel find security against enemies who seem to gain political clout and legitimacy as they incur ever greater losses, especially when there is only a set number of casualties that an affluent, Western Israel can afford, before public support for the war collapses? How can the Israelis fight a war that the world media portray as genocide against the innocents?

In fact, most of these suppositions are simplistic. The U.S., for example, defeated assorted Islamic insurgents in what was largely an optional war in Iraq; a small token peacekeeping force might have kept Nouri al-Maliki from hounding Sunni politicians, and otherwise kept the peace. Israel's recent counterinsurgency wars have rendered both the Palestinians on the West Bank and pro-Iranian Hezbollah militants in Lebanon less, not more, dangerous. Hamas, not Israel, would not wish to repeat the last three weeks.

Oddly, Hezbollah, an erstwhile ally of Hamas, has been largely quiet during the Gaza war. Why, when the use of its vast missile arsenal, in conjunction with Hamas's rocketry, might in theory have overwhelmed Israel's missile defenses? The answer is probably the huge amount of damage suffered by Hezbollah in the 2006 war in Lebanon, and its inability to protect its remaining assets from yet another overwhelming Israeli air response. Had Hamas's rockets hit their targets, perhaps Hezbollah would have joined in. But for now, 2014 looks to them a lot like 2006.

In the current asymmetrical war, Israel has found a method of inflicting as much damage on Hamas as it finds politically and strategically useful without suffering intolerable losses. And because the war is seen as existential — aiming rockets at a civilian population will do that — Israeli public opinion will largely support the effort to retaliate.

As long as Israel does not seek to reoccupy Gaza, it can inflict enough damage on the Hamas leadership, and on both the tunnels and the missile stockpiles, to win four or five years of quiet. In the Middle East, that sort of calm qualifies as victory. And the more the world sees of the elaborate tunnels and vast missile arsenals that an impoverished Hamas had built with other people's money, and the more these military assets proved entirely futile in actual war, the more Hamas appears not just foolish but incompetent, if not ridiculous, as well.

After all the acrimony dies down, Gazans will understand that there was a correlation between blown-up houses, on the one hand, and, on the other, tunnel entrances, weapon depots, and the habitat of the Hamas leadership. Even the Hamas totalitarians will not be able to keep that fact hidden. As the rubble is cleared away, too many Gazans will ask of their Hamas leaders whether the supposedly brilliant strategy of asymmetrical warfare was worth it. Hamas's intended war — blanketing Israel with thousands of rockets that would send video clips around the world of hundreds of thousands of Jews trembling in fear in shelters — failed in its first hours. The air campaign was about as successful as the tunnel war, which was supposed to allow hit teams to enter Israel to kidnap and kill, with gruesome videos posted all over the Internet. Both strategies largely failed almost upon implementation.

In terms of domestic politics, Israel has rarely been more united — akin to the United States right after 9/11. The Israeli Left and Right agree that no modern Western state can exist under periodic clouds of rockets and missiles. Similarly, the attrition of Hamas only plays into the hands of the Palestinian Authority, which understandably stayed out of the war and did not incite the West Bank to stage simultaneous attacks. Like it or not, after the Gaza war, Israel will be dealing in the near future with Palestinians who do not always think preemptive rocket and tunnel attacks work to their own strategic advantage.

In terms of economics, Israel is no longer subject to carbon-fuel blackmail. It will soon become a major exporter of natural gas, and political realities will reflect that commercial importance. If one cynically believes that much of the global tilt to the Palestinians began as an aftershock from the 1973 oil embargoes, then Israeli exports may soon be reflected in more favorable politics.

Is Israel politically isolated? It certainly seems that way, if one looks at the response to the Gaza war among Western journalists, academics, politicians, and popular culture. But public opinion in the United States remains staunchly pro-Israel in spite of the American elite culture's romance with Hamas and the Palestinians. Moreover, the Democratic party is facing its own increasing existential crisis, as its establishment pro-Israel donors and politicians are appalled by the increasingly anti-Israel tones of its ever more radical base. After the Gaza war, some major Democratic supporters of Israel will quietly make the necessary adjustments, in recognition that both their party and the Obama administration seem to prefer Hamas to democratic Israel. The upcoming 2014 midterm election does not favor candidates who are anti-Israel, but rather pro-Israeli conservatives. After 2016 there is unlikely to be a president who shares the incoherent views of Barack Obama on the Middle East. Fairly or not, it appears that the administration is trying to hide its pro-Hamas sympathies and is doing so unprofessionally and ineptly.

Europe, of course, remains mostly hostile to Israel, a hatred that predates the Gaza war. But the current demonstrations of virulent anti-Semitic hatred do not reflect well on the European Union. At present, it appears that European nations either cannot or will not confront their own fascistic Islamic radicals, which leaves open the question of whether the Islamist message of the streets resonates with Europeans. The European hostility to Israel does not stem just from events on the ground in Gaza, but is more a reflection of Europe's inability to deal with its 20th-century past. Demonization, the more virulent the better, of Israelis seems to ease guilt over the Holocaust — as if to imply that, while the genocide was regrettable, there was something innately savage in Jewish culture, now manifested in Gaza, that might understandably have incited past generations of more radical Europeans. Otherwise, Europeans simply mask with trendy ideology the more materialistic assessment that demography, oil, and the fear of terrorism weigh in favor of allying with the Palestinians. Either way, European anti-Semitism is a bankrupt ideology, one that manifests itself in sympathy for an undemocratic, misogynistic, homophobic, and religiously intolerant Hamas, along with selective unconcern with the many occupations, refugees, divided cities, and walled borders that exist in the wide world outside the Middle East.

The U.N. will emerge after the war in an even sorrier state. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has offered mostly platitudes and buffooneries. Certainly, he would never take his own advice if North Korea were to move in the manner of Hamas. Hamas's use of U.N. facilities to hide arsenals could not have occurred without U.N. complicity. What little credibility the U.N. had in the Middle East before the war is mostly shredded.

Iran is watching the war, and its surrogate is not doing well. There is no particular reason why an Israeli anti-missile system could not knock down an Iranian missile. Nor is Hezbollah as fiery in deed as in word these days. The message to Iran is that Israel will fight back in whatever way it finds appropriate against its enemy of the moment.

Gaza is a military and political minefield. But if Israel continues on its present course, it will emerge far better off than Hamas and better off than it was before Hamas began its missile barrage. And in the Middle East, that is about as close to victory as one gets. The future for Israel is not bleak, just as it is not bleak for any nation that chooses to defend itself from savage enemies that seek its destruction.

Streetwise Professor

The Great Patriotic Diet

by Craig Pirrong

In retaliation for US and EU sanctions, Russia is banning the importation of large categories of food products from each: food imports from the US are pretty much banned altogether.

These sanctions are aimed at an industry that is politically powerful far beyond its numbers. Chicken farmers in the US will squawk at the loss of about 1 percent of their revenues, and European dairy producers will bellow in anger. But the economic impact on the affected countries will be trivial. The US exports about \$300 million in chicken to Russia (down substantially from a few years ago), which is essentially rounding error in US GDP. European net food exports to Russia are about 12 billion euros, or less than .1 percent of the EU's 13 trillion Euro economy.

The impact on Russia's people will be substantially greater. Russia imports about 35 percent of its food, about half of that from Europe and the US. Higher value, non-staples are disproportionately affected. This will lead to an appreciable increase in the cost of food, which represents a very large fraction of Russian household budgets. Whereas US consumers spend about 6.5 percent of their total expenditures on food, in Russia the figure is about 32 percent. A rise in food prices hits hard. A 10 percent increase, which is not unrealistic, cuts Russian living standards about 3 percent.

Putin ordered the government to find ways to increase food production, because, you know, that *ukases* always work as the Tsar intends. Russian food output will no doubt rise in response to higher prices, but in the short run the elasticity of supply is likely to be very low, especially for vegetables and dairy. Anyways, this increased output will only mitigate the price increases. If Russian firms/farms could produce more at current prices, they'd be doing so.

I predict that since increased Russian domestic production will have little effect on prices, Putin will soon resort to the tried-and-true nostrum of price controls, [just like Russia did when food price inflation spiked in 2007](#). This will lead to lines and empty shelves, so Russians can party like it's 1989: to those nostalgic for the USSR, be careful what you ask for. I note that Russia also adopted price controls, to disastrous effect, in WWI. [Putin is idealizing Russia's role in that war of late](#), and employs WWI reenactors to lead subversion campaigns in Ukraine, so maybe he'll think it's a great idea to reenact the price controls too.

Some have suggested that the higher food prices (or shortages that result from attempts to control prices) will dent Putin's popularity. However, it is sufficiently high (approaching 90 percent) that it can take a few dents. Moreover, you know that there will be a propaganda campaign to stymie any discontent. No doubt this campaign will blame the west, and the US in particular, proclaiming that the import ban is necessary to show that Russia cannot be dictated to by its enemies: Russian attitudes towards the west have hardened substantially post-Crimea, and such a message will resonate.

The campaign is likely to idealize Russian capacity for sacrifice, particularly for the Motherland. There will be allusions to the Great Patriotic War, when Russians sacrificed to battle evil invaders from the west who were intent on subjugating Russia.

Putin will call for the Great Patriotic Diet, in other words. And sad to say, this will probably work.

No matter how successful the propaganda campaign is, the import ban will be just another burden on the already sputtering Russian economy. It was sputtering before Crimea and sanctions, but the post-Crimea sanctions have made it wheeze all that much more.

[One symptom of this is the government's announcement that it was diverting contributions to private pension plans in 2015 to plug holes in the state pension system](#): it had already done so for 2014. One state official took to Facebook to decry the move. He was promptly fired.

Oil prices have bailed out Putin before, but oil prices have weakened a bit lately, so that is putting additional pressure on Russia, and particularly on the budget. One of Putin's old gambits is to stir up trouble in the ME to keep up oil prices. Maybe he'll try that now, but it's hard to imagine how much more trouble there can be there (the place is in chaos from Libya to Israel/Gaza to Syria to Iraq).

There is widespread speculation on what Putin will do next in Ukraine. The Ukrainian army is slowly but surely grinding down the Russian proxies in Donbas, pushing them into pockets in Donetsk and Lugansk, where they will be cut off from supplies and reinforcements if the circles are closed. Thus, the reasoning goes, Putin has a choice between humiliating defeat there, or going all in with an invasion.

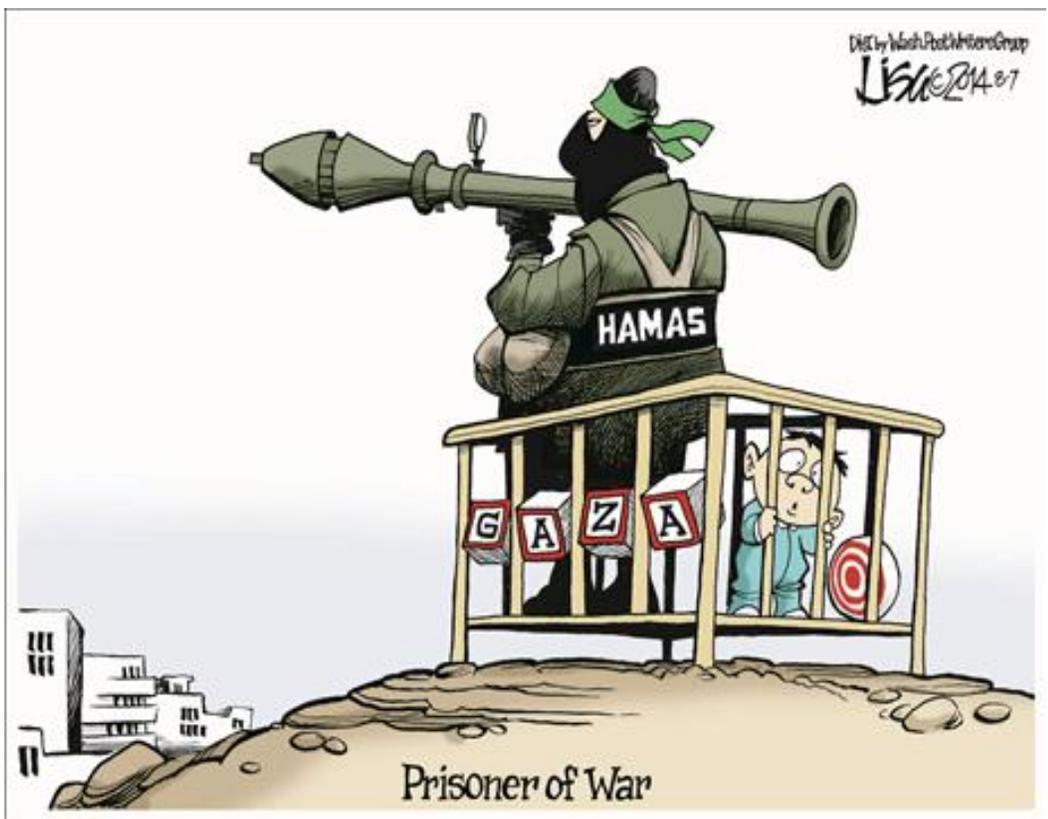
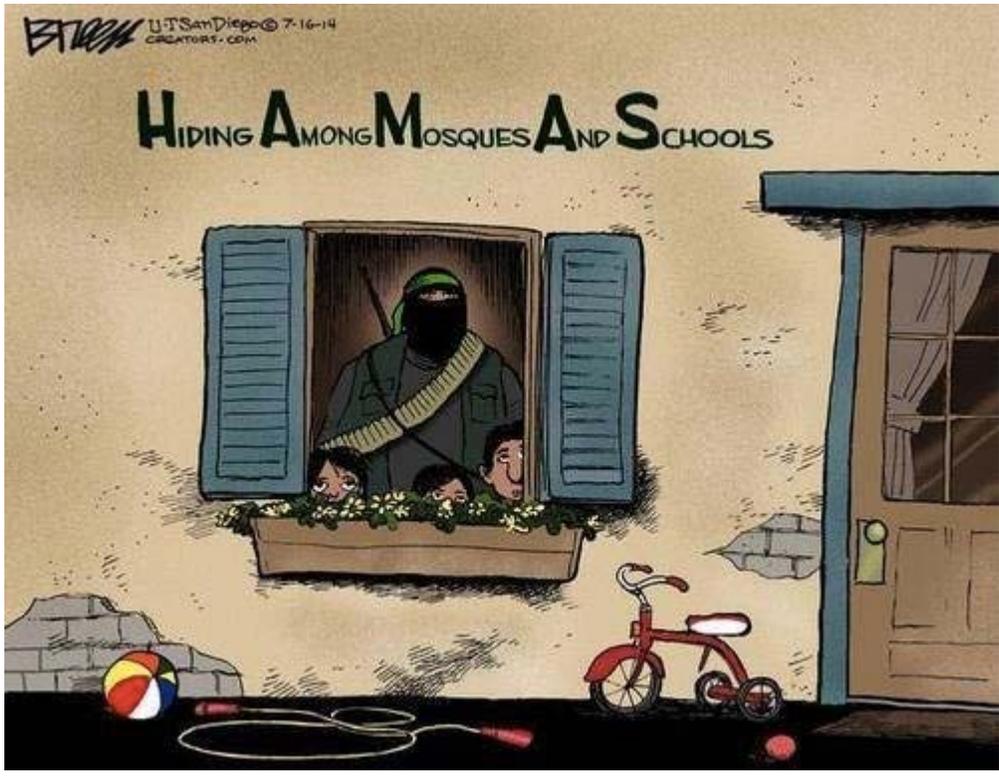
I have my doubts that he will invade. The troops massed at the border, 20,000 or so, are probably sufficient to deal with the still shambolic Ukrainian forces in Donbas, but logistical difficulties would make a further penetration difficult, and an occupation would likely turn into the [Donbas Ulcer](#). Further, an outright invasion would likely trigger truly punitive sanctions.

In short, although outright defeat of his proxies would be humiliating, an invasion of Ukraine, even if capped by a victory in Donbas, would be a disaster that could not be justified on any cost-benefit basis. Pace Pyrrhus: "One more such victory, and we shall be undone." Or *pace* Dryden: "Even victors by victories are undone."

But humiliation and invasion are not the only two alternatives open to Putin. He could attempt to turn Donbas into a bleeding ulcer for *Ukraine*, by mounting a guerrilla campaign/low intensity insurgency, dressed up as a people's revolt against the oppressive fascists. This will be sufficient to maintain a (frozen) conflict that would distract Ukraine, impede the formation of a stable state and government, make it unacceptable as a candidate for Nato, and cause the EU to treat it at arms length. Such a campaign would exploit Putin's best military asset, *spetsnaz* units, that specialize at this kind of warfare. It would be less provocative to the west: if the US and EU can largely acquiesce to what Putin is doing in Donbas now, it would put up with a low intensity guerrilla campaign

Meaning that the standoff between the west and Russia is likely to persist for some time.
Meaning further that Russians better get used to the Great Patriotic Diet, because they'll be on it for a while.

Update. It's rather amusing that Medvedev made the announcement of the food import ban. If it turns out to be unpopular despite the likely propaganda campaign, it will be blamed on sorry old Medvedev. That's his job: scapegoat in waiting.



Hamas announced a ceasefire after one of the virgins sent a selfie...



doctors' strike

