



PERSPECTIVES

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How Israel Should Handle Gaza's "Humanitarian Disaster"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In all the years of murderous conflict in Syria and Iraq, neither has experienced a humanitarian disaster in the form of a widespread crisis involving mass hunger and the spread of hunger-related diseases. Yet officials warn that such a crisis could unfold in Gaza. How likely is that prognosis? And if it does occur, what should Israel's policy be?

Senior Israeli military officials are warning of an impending humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and many more officials – Israeli, European, and Palestinian – say the Gaza population will “explode” due to epidemics.

Really?

How come in all the years of the Syrian civil war, amid prolonged and incessant violence over seven years, there has not been a widespread humanitarian crisis in the form of mass hunger and the spread of hunger-related epidemics like typhoid?

How come in the two years of incessant war between ISIS and the allied coalition, the Russian air force, Hezbollah, the Iraqi Shiite militias, and the Iraqi army, during which ISIS ruled over five million people, including Mosul's one million-strong population, there was no evidence of massive hunger and contagious disease?

How likely, then, is such a crisis to befall Gaza?

The most important factor behind real humanitarian crises – the specter of mass hunger and contagious disease – is first and foremost the breakdown of law and order, and violence between warring militias and gangs. This is what

occurred in Darfur, Somalia, and the Central African Republic. In such a situation, the first to leave are the relief agencies. Then local medical staffs evacuate, along with local government officials and anyone professional who can make it out of the bedlam. The destitute are left to fend for themselves. Hospitals, dispensaries, schools, and local government offices are soon abandoned or become scenes of grisly shootouts and reprisals.

Nothing could be farther from such a reality than Gaza. Hamas, which is the main source of this fake news of an imminent humanitarian crisis, rules Gaza with an iron fist. Few developed democracies in the world can boast the low homicide rates prevailing in Gaza. Nor have there been reports of any closings of hospitals, municipalities, schools, universities, colleges, or dispensaries.

Instead, we are shown a photo of a closed room in a Khan Yunis hospital. You can take the same photo in a hospital room in Tel Aviv or New York. We are shown homes in which a Gaza family sits around lit candles. Again, you can take such a photo almost anywhere.

There have been no news items announcing the departure of any foreign relief agencies or the closure of any human rights organizations in the area. Nor is there any evidence that the World Health Organization, which rigorously monitors the world to prevent the outbreak of contagious disease, is seriously looking at Gaza.

And that is for good reason. The WHO knows, as do hundreds of medical personnel in Israeli hospitals who liaise with their colleagues in Gaza, that the hospital system in Gaza is of a high caliber, certainly by the standards of the developing world (which comprises most of humanity). Their hospital staffs have been the beneficiaries of numerous training courses run by international agencies and by Israel.

The well-equipped hospitals can only be the envy of such countries as Sudan and Yemen, and because Gaza comprises such a small area, access to medical care there is excellent. It is little wonder that life expectancy in Gaza, at 73, is four years higher than the world average.

The very same Hamas Internet site, Resala.net, that pronounces the imminent descent of a humanitarian crisis on Gaza features a video of a flourishing vehicle industry there, one in which cars are reassembled from parts of cars totaled in crashes in Israel and the West Bank. (As a public service, the video warns that these cars suffer defects even though reassembled to look brand new.)

How can you have a flourishing used car business in an area facing an impending humanitarian crisis? Certainly the population would be more

inclined to stock up on food than buy used cars? And how is it that another Palestinian media outlet features a photo of Gaza youth surfing Gaza's fine shore? Again, shouldn't they be storing up on food rather than surfing in the face of the coming crisis? The least they should do is go fishing.

Fortunately, there is one sane voice out there: that of Jason Greenblatt, US President Donald Trump's special envoy to the Middle East. Why, he asked, shouldn't Hamas spend the \$100 million it receives from Iran to solve the humanitarian crisis?

The answer is obvious. Hamas wants more trucks entering Gaza to increase tax revenues to pay for its 30,000-strong militia and public security force, and to increase the prospects of smuggling arms for the benefit of its missile stockpiles and tunnel-building efforts.

How Israel should react is equally obvious. You want more humanitarian aid? Let's say, a hundred more trucks of Israeli produce? Give up the despicable trade in bodies of dead Israeli soldiers. Want more aid? Free the two mentally disabled Israelis who found their way into Gaza and are imprisoned by Hamas.

Hamas is interested in paying the salaries of its hard core – the thousands in uniform and the 20,000 officials, mostly teachers. So allow aid for Hamas to tax to pay for the teachers, as long as Hamas begins laying off the terrorists and handing over or destroying their weapons. The principle is clear. The details can be ironed out using the good services of the Egyptians.

But what about the humanitarian situation in Gaza? Here, Israel and the world community should turn to the Gaza population. The people should be encouraged to protest against Hamas's trading of bodies, digging of tunnels, and launching of missiles that only invite massive Israeli reprisals even as Hamas officials and their families flee from harm's way. They should take to the streets rather than to the security fence.

Israel should of course be prepared to address a humanitarian crisis in the unlikely event that one really does unfold. To prevent it, the message to Hamas must be that it has to give up its murderous offensive capabilities. To prevent a humanitarian crisis, Hamas should be left with policing capabilities, because the single most effective tool is the preservation of law and order.

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