



Too quick to Atone

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The speed with which a small group of Israelis gathered on Shabbat morning to protest the tragic deaths of members of a Palestinian family in an explosion on a Gaza beach was impressive.

Without bothering to wait for verification, these worthy citizens, including Dana Olmert, the prime minister's daughter, accepted responsibility on behalf of the IDF, chanting "murderer, murderer" opposite the Tel Aviv residence of IDF Chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. Dan Halutz.

In this way, deliberately or by default, they also provided legitimacy to another round of anti-Israel demonization, accompanied by dramatic images of bereaved Palestinian children. Journalists - and others who might be accused of double standards - were covered. The Israelis were themselves protesting this brutality.

Neophyte Defense Minister Amir Peretz also seemed to accept this view. In a news briefing the night of June 10, Peretz announced an immediate end to Israeli retaliatory shelling into Gaza. This policy had constituted one of the primary countermeasures to the Palestinian missiles and rockets that have rained down on Sderot and other communities in recent months.

In a certain sense, the moral fervor of these Israelis is admirable. They claim to embody the deep Jewish tradition and commitment to morality and human rights. Setting themselves up as moral paragons in the model of the Jewish prophets, they wasted no time in condemning what they were convinced was Israeli culpability.

BUT THERE are other, less admirable reasons behind this rush to judgment, including the psychological pressure to find an easy way out. If this war is indeed Israel's responsibility, all we have to do is change our evil ways and the conflict will end.

This is a naive response to generations of Arab violence and hatred. Instead of the complexities of defense, deterrence, dismantling terrorist groups and difficult negotiations, all that is needed for these secular messianic prophets is for Israel to apologize, withdraw and dismantle its military.

This form of "instant peace" is also patronizing to Palestinians - they are not independent actors, but reduced to responding to Israeli policies. Similarly, their missile attacks and other forms of terror are not given credit as independent acts expressing the goals of a nation.

In this way, 60 years of inflexible, principled and unswerving Arab and Palestinian rejectionism are erased, leaving Israel as the only actor that counts.

Despite their appeal in some quarters, such emotional and ideological dimensions overwhelm any rational or considered responses to these violent events. Sure of the moral high ground, these few hundred Israeli neo-prophet protesters felt no need to wait until investigations produced reliable information, providing a firm basis for moral judgment.

THE TRACK record of the Palestinians in artificially promoting stories of Israeli "atrocities" should have been a warning against a rush to judgement. The widely spread Jenin "massacre" myth during April 2002, and the remaining inherent contradictions and questions regarding evidence (particularly the raw footage from France-2 TV) surrounding the alleged killing by Israel of Mohammed al-Dura in October 2000 are cases in point.

Similarly, video footage of Palestinian fake funerals (in which the body was accidentally dropped, stood up, and ran away), would suggest a more cautious approach to assigning and accepting blame.



In fact, the tragic incident on the beach that Friday afternoon shares many of the hallmarks of such events, including the speed with which New York-based Human Rights Watch supported the Palestinian version in a massive public relations campaign.

The qualifications of HRW's "military expert," Mark Garlasco, have never been examined independently, and his experience in the US is limited. Garlasco was among the authors of HRW's publication, *Razing Rafah*, (October 2004), based on unverifiable Palestinian claims and published to justify the active involvement of HRW in the anti-Israel boycott campaigns following the Durban strategy.

Neither Garlasco nor HRW has produced a report on the origins of Palestinian missiles, again highlighting this group's primary political bias.

In this case, Garlasco again relied on Palestinian sources and claims without questioning their accuracy. Some of the evidence he produced at the Gaza news conference was conveniently found nearby, or provided by what he refers to as the "Palestinian police explosives department."

And there was no mention of the suspicious Palestinian activity to reshape the site of the explosion.

In contrast, the IDF, having learned something (though not enough) from the previous experiences, immediately set up a commission of enquiry and avoided premature statements (notwithstanding the minister of defense's initial comments). The commission produced a detailed and credible preliminary report within a few days (in the case of al-Dura, this took months), showing that the condemnations of Israel were not justified by the available evidence.

We may never know what caused these tragic deaths, but the anti-Israel demonization campaign that resulted has been slowed.

For those who cling to the myth of peace via atonement, even for sins Israel did not commit, these events will not change anything. But for others there is some comfort in the improvement of the IDF's response to such political and media assaults.

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