

opinion

PALESTINIANS WANT TO LIVE IN PEACE



ZEINAB SCHWEN

Zeinab Schwen is a Symmes Township resident.

As I helplessly watch the unrestrained Israeli military assaults on Gaza and the heart-wrenching images of dead and mangled bodies of Palestinian children, of grieving parents, destroyed homes, bombed U.N. schools and hospitals, I wonder how my own government could veto the U.N. Security Council's call for an immediate and unconditional humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza. The death toll crossed the appalling benchmark of 1,300, most of whom are civilians, in addition to more than 6,000 injured with minimal medical care available to help them due to the excessive and unrelenting assault.

I have family there, and they don't know where to go to be safe. Every day they hear of neighbors' homes getting bombed, of entire families being killed. They see mutilated bodies in the streets. Their water and electricity is cut, and food is hard to find. There are no shelters, no safe haven, and the borders are closed. They are trapped, waiting and worrying, with no way to protect their children or themselves.

There is no justification for the Israeli policy of collective punishment – it's a clear violation of humanitarian and international law. There is no justification for Israel killing thousands of innocent Gazans and destroying their homes and infrastructure. There's no excuse for killing four children playing on a Gazan beach, nor for killing families seeking shelter in a U.N. school with impunity. Israel continues to deny its role in those horrific incidents,



Palestinian children wounded in Israeli shelling are treated Friday in a hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. AP

always blaming Hamas.

I will not defend Hamas or its tactics, nor do I condone killing innocent Israeli citizens. In my book, every life is equally valuable, and every human being deserves to live in peace. I am just tired of listening to the never-ending mantra that Israel has the right to defend itself. Israel is not the only country that has that right. Palestinians, like all human beings, have the right to defend themselves. That right should never be the exclusive right of one over the other.

Israel fails to see that ending the siege of Gaza and allowing Palestinian self-rule is directly linked to the safety of Israel. Does Israel truly believe that it can protect its citizens by building walls and brutally controlling, punishing and subjugating an entire people? Do they really think that Palestinians who have watched their children and families killed brutally and their homes and cities destroyed will quietly sit back and accept the occupation and the prison they live in?

It is time for Israel to understand

that long-term peace can only be attained when Israel ends its occupation and blockade of the Palestinian territories, and when Palestinians are truly free to rule themselves in dignity. Being free means having open borders, the freedom to travel, their own airport, and control over their beaches and resources.

Palestinians want nothing more than to live in peace and want nothing more than to be busy building their businesses and educating their children – if only they are allowed to do so. ■

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The fight in Gaza via Jewish eyes



**SHEP
ENGLANDER
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Shep Englander is CEO of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati and Suzette Fisher is president.

For members of Cincinnati's Jewish community, the recent fighting between Israel and Hamas has been very painful. Because many of us have family and friends living in Israel, this is not just a news story, but a personal story. We want to share with our friends and neighbors how this conflict looks through our eyes.

One might assume that this fighting is about the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. It's not. Israel, the United States and the Palestinian Authority all agree on the goal of a two-state solution to be reached by peaceful negotiations. While progress has been slow, there has been general calm, security and cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

However, the fighting is in Gaza, which is not ruled by the Palestinian Authority, but by Hamas. Hamas is designated as a terrorist group by many countries, including the United States, and even Jordan and Egypt. Hamas' main sponsor is Iran, and its publicly stated mission is to destroy Israel.

In 2007, Hamas seized control of Gaza from the Palestinian Authority in a bloody coup, and has terrorized Israel and the people of Gaza since. Three weeks ago, Hamas intensified its indiscriminate firing of rockets at



Rockets are fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel on July 19. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Israel's civilian areas, with more than 2,900 rockets fired since July 8. Even the Palestinian Authority called this "a crime against humanity."

After terrorists burst into Israel through Hamas' illegal tunnels earlier this month, Israel saw no way to protect its people except to send ground forces into Gaza to eliminate these tunnels and rockets. Since then, Israel has discovered 32 concrete-lined tunnels (costing \$3 million each)

that lead into Israeli residential areas.

Israel has tried to minimize civilian casualties by warning Gazan civilians prior to its strikes. Cynically, Hamas uses civilians as "human shields" by hiding its rockets, weapons and tunnels inside schools, homes, hospitals and mosques. This creates an impossible situation for Israel; there is no way to protect Israelis and eliminate Hamas' weapons without a horrible price – the taking of many

Gazan lives. Hamas then callously exploits Gazan deaths in its media war against Israel.

Israel would have lost many more of its own civilians but for the new "Iron Dome" missile defense system, which uses advanced Israeli technology, and was developed in partnership with the U.S. Hamas continues firing these rockets in order to unravel the fabric of Israeli civilian life by causing continual panic and trauma. Since the Iron Dome cannot be guaranteed 100 percent effective, 70 percent of Israeli Jews and Arabs (nearly 6 million people) have been terrorized by Hamas' rockets. Children and families have 30 seconds to reach a bomb shelter. Imagine what America would do if 70 percent of our country – 250 million Americans – were under continual threat of rocket fire.

We all wish that Israel could negotiate real peace with Hamas. However, Hamas' charter specifically rejects negotiating peace with Israel: "There is no solution to the Palestinian problem, except by *jihād* (armed struggle)." So, sadly, there can never be long-term peace or progress in Gaza until Gaza once again has a government that believes in peaceful coexistence.

As long as Hamas continues to attack Israeli civilians, Israel has the right and the responsibility to defend them. We greatly appreciate that all of our members of Congress have publicly supported Israel's right to defend her people.

In the meantime, we hope and pray that our friends and neighbors can understand the terrible situation in which Hamas puts Israel and its own people, and that you will help us share this understanding. ■

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Barricades were a stupid idea

After reading "Shop owner: Barricades didn't stop prostitutes" (Aug. 1) I had to weigh in on the issue. As a 10-year resident of Over-the-Rhine, north of Liberty (NoLi), near Findlay Market, I have a plethora of stories that illustrate what life was, is, and is becoming in this part of town.

What I can say for certain is the barricades along McMicken Avenue to curb prostitution were a stupid idea that only succeeded in bringing my street back to the days when male and female prostitutes roamed the area with impunity, flashing their genitalia, gathering on corners and catcalling potential johns, and even taking clients to some nearby bushes. My street now is back to being a popular drop off spot for the prostitutes after their transactions.

Since the barricades, there has been more criminal activity in the alleyways on two sides of my building, a six-unit condo. I am not a cop, but for the life of me, where are the police when these obvious crimes are taking place, not only in the early morning hours, but in broad daylight?

It seems to me that the prostitutes have no fear or respect for the Cincinnati police. In my decade in OTR, I can say with certainty that the Ham-

ilton County Sheriff's Office did a much better job patrolling OTR and curbing prostitution. Bring back the sheriff's deputies and watch what happens.

Bill Stone, Over-the-Rhine

VA put workers in no-win position

If the question really is "Why did VA workers alter records?" (July 29), I'll offer this as a possible answer:

We as a nation are at an all-time high level of dysfunctional bureaucracy in every level of our society, from home life to privately owned businesses, all the way up to and including state, local and national governments.

Edicts and demands are issued that flow down the chain of command – with no framework of functionality accompanying them.

Those at the top tell those at the bottom what they want and when they want it. Sadly, there is no system in place designed to help these demands see the light of day. Everyone in the chain of command is disconnected from those above and below them. Yet they demand that those around them deliver the goods as requested.

This pop-culture form of dysfunction leaves those on the front lines in a no-win situation. They are given no back-up, assistance or tools, yet are

told there will be no excuse for them not getting done the task assigned to them. The solution to this endorsed form of insanity is simple. Those who have no one upon whom to shirk their duties make up solutions to the problems that have been dumped in their laps.

George Corneliussen, Montgomery

An era of vanishing personal responsibility

The following quotes come from The Enquirer story "Were VA workers ordered to cook books?" (July 30):

"The additional local results ... show that 21 percent of Cincinnati VA employees who were surveyed said managers told them to change desired appointment dates."

"Local VA officials stressed that the audit doesn't prove 'deliberate deception, fraud or malfeasance.'"

The VA official quoted must be the new Lois Lerner. It is sad to note that we now live in an era of vanishing personal responsibility.

Rick D. Ellison, Milford

Do you really think GOP would OK Civil Rights Act?

The writer of "History inconvenient if it doesn't match your agenda" (July 30) seems to have his own agenda when he pooh-poohs the Urban League's claim that today's House of

Representatives could not pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The fact that the House and Senate Republicans overwhelmingly passed the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts illustrates the very point the Urban League was trying to make.

Does the writer seriously believe that today's Republicans would overwhelmingly pass those Acts?

Kenneth Leonhardt, Eastgate

Quote is proof of need for education upgrade

"That sucker is a problem." Thank you, Rep. Bill Batchelder (R-Medina), for that incisive and elegantly phrased analysis ("House bill targets schools standards" July 29). His words are prima facie evidence of the need to upgrade Ohio's educational standards, such that the next generation is adequately prepared for careers in business, education, health, the arts – or even future state legislators who we must fervently hope will not embarrass themselves in such an unfortunate manner.

If Rep. Batchelder speaks on behalf of Common Core opponents in Columbus, then maybe it's time to elect some legislators who have the courage to move forward in a spirit of progress toward educational excellence to replace the current crop of naysayers.

Katie Whelan, Amberley Village ■