

Judith Ferster

We are here today to express outrage at what is happening to the people of Gaza. We stand with them because we know that as U.S. taxpayers we are complicit in their suffering because the U.S. government gives Israel at least \$3.15 billion in military aid, which Israel is obliged to spend here in the American arms industry. Every F16 fighter jet, Apache helicopter, and tear gas canister says “made in U.S.A.” We acknowledge our part.

I ask that we also express concern for Israelis because some are under rocket fire and Hamas rockets are getting better, so like the Gazans, they are feeling the corrosive effects of fear. Unlike Gazans, they have bomb shelters and a missile defense system, but fear destroys wellbeing.

Another reason we should be concerned for Israelis is that a percentage of them are behaving badly, in public and on social media, expressing hate for Palestinians in violent and sexualized terms. To be fair, the anonymity of the Internet allows Americans to rant and vent, too, but as a Jew I find the Israeli versions deeply troubling.

I think they freely indulge this primitive nationalism because of the lopsided balance of power between Israel and Palestine. In the occupation, we’re seeing a real life version of the famous Stanford prison experiment. In 1971, psychology professor Philip Zimbardo recruited some students and asked a few to play the role of prison guards and the rest to play the roles of prisoners. The make-believe guards got so brutal and the supposed prisoners got so traumatized that he had to call off the experiment after 6 days.

Only 6 days.

The siege of Gaza is 9 years old. The occupation has been going on for 47 years. The mix of asymmetrical power and Zionist ideology is a poisonous brew.

It’s time to call off those experiments, too.

Some fundamentalist Israelis go beyond throwing disgusting language and images of ethnic hate toward Palestinians, their Semitic cousins, and throw not only violent language but also real projectiles at their Jewish Israeli siblings who are protesting the attack on Gaza. [Note that at about the time of our rally on 7/19, Israeli members of the Triangle community were involved in a protest in Haifa that was attacked by large well-organized right-wing groups yelling, “Death to Arabs.”]

This is the good news--that there are Israeli Jews protesting the attack on Gaza. Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa have all seen Jewish demonstrations against it.

The bad news is that they are not numerous enough to elect a government willing to make peace. Instead we have an Israeli government that with American help has not only the world’s 4th most powerful army but one of the world’s best megaphones to broadcast its own story. Do we hear much in mainstream media about the right to resist occupation? No. All we hear, from our President and myriad commentators, is about Israel’s right to defend itself.

But if we look at it carefully, the Israeli story about its need for self-defense has some major holes in it.

Israel says that Hamas kidnapped and killed 3 teenagers on the West Bank but the probable perpetrators were members of the Qawasmeh clan near Hebron, only loosely affiliated with Hamas, not carrying out Hamas policy and more stupid than Hamas. Why go after civilians and kill them instantly without getting something for them? To me, that doesn’t sound like Hamas, which kidnapped IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, held him for 5 years, and won the release of 1,027 prisoners in return for his freedom.

Israel knew the boys were dead almost immediately—they heard shots and the kidnapers’ satisfied comments on the phone of one of the boys, but suppressed the news, lied to the boys’ parents, and took the opportunity to go on an invasive search, sometimes house to house leaving a trail of overturned furniture and

jumbled cabinets as if the victims or the perpetrators were stowed in a kitchen somewhere. They re-arrested many of the people who had been released from prison in exchange for Gilad Shalit. Was this their motive for lying to the world?

In the past, Hamas has had a large patrol to stop the extremist militants from sending rockets to southern Israel (<http://aimeproject.blogspot.com/search?q=patrol+>), but with the rough search and Israel's shelling and bombing, Hamas sent rockets, which have improved so that they are more dangerous to a great percentage of Israeli territory, not just southern Israel but the major cities, and even the Ben Gurion airport.

According to mainstream news, Egypt brokered a ceasefire that Hamas refused to sign, so rockets kept flying and Israel launched a ground war. In reality, nothing was "brokered" because no one talked to Hamas. It had demands that could have been subject to negotiation.

According to Noura Erekat of George Mason University, "Within two days of Israel's aerial assault on the population of the Gaza Strip, Hamas announced five conditions for a ceasefire: 1) stop the airstrikes; 2) observe terms of 2012 ceasefire; 3) release the Palestinians who were released during the Shalit prisoner exchange but recently re-arrested; 4) lift the siege; and 5) don't interfere with the Palestinian unity government..."

But no one was talking to Hamas and in fact the current Egyptian government, which has no love for Muslim-Brotherhood-inspired Hamas, was barely part of the ceasefire "agreement." It was written by Israel with no consultation, which offers a pretty good reason that Hamas would not sign it. Unilateral action has been Israel's way before—in 2005, it pulled out of Gaza with no consultation, thus getting its own terms. It kept control of the bank, the airspace, the taxes Gaza receives for the goods it exports, Gaza's ability to export at all and import raw materials for manufacture, and thus kept Gaza under hamstrung and impoverished. No wonder Israel prefers to act alone.

So although Israel insists on its right to self-defense—and nations do have the duty to protect their citizens—that framing of the story leaves out inconvenient truths. If you take those truths into account, it appears that Israel's response to the kidnapping and murder of the three boys by the members of the Qawasmeh clan has been to provoke Hamas in order to be able to justify attacking it. As Rashid Khalidi of Columbia University says, Israel wants to weaken Hamas and destroy the unity government between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. That way it can go on saying it can't make peace with the Palestinians because it has no partner that represents all them. It wants to appear to be forced to maintain the occupation. This is Israel's game with the international community.

We don't want to play anymore. When we express our outrage at what is happening to the people of Gaza, we are also saying that we want to stop giving military aid to Israel. There is a way to make peace and we need to tell our government, "Just say 'No' to arms for Israel." We are not likely to succeed any time soon. Every congressional district has jobs in arms factories to be stoked with orders from abroad. Much of foreign aid is a jobs program but Americans of conscience must talk to their government.

And Israel must talk to Hamas. I do not think that Hamas believes it could destroy Israel militarily, or that it wants to provoke Israel into razing Gaza. Which is why why it has tried to restrain extremists.

The occupation of the West Bank and the siege of Gaza are bad for Israelis. Stoking the military industrial industrial complex is bad for Americans. When we speak for the suffering people of Gaza, we speak for all of us.