

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

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BRAVERY AND HEROISM OF THE ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

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Two people are fighting for a piece of real estate. They have enthroned it as the center of their aspirations for a national home, statehood, sovereignty and independence, and for dedication to the religion and glory of their God—the One and only for both of them. For this purpose, the Israelis and Palestinians are willing to do everything that will bring victory to each over the other. They perform with an unknown degree of bravery and dedication.

The Israelis march undaunted against defenseless and unarmed villages, with no fear or trepidation. They play brave soldiers facing an imaginary enemy. They besiege the village, select a house, order the unarmed visible inhabitants to vacate, and blow up the house or smash it with bulldozers. They do all that in minutes and declare victory over the unseen frightening and most probably non-existent terrorist. If they heard shots in the area or saw the shadow of someone running away or in hiding, they would quickly engage their machine guns, laser directed missiles, and helicopter gun ships to overcome the dangerous image of a terrorist. They may kill three or four civilians in the operation, as if to prove that they have no fear of the enemy. That the civilians may be unarmed, old, young, handicapped, or children can only be a footnote in the history of the battle.

The bravery of the Israelis is more evident against the visible enemy: the hordes of young people armed with stones and slingshots, and cries of Allahu Akbar (God is Greater). The Israelis face this formidable enemy first with tear gas, then with rubber coated bullets, and then with real bullets, all fired from monstrous tanks and armored cars. After suffering a few casualties, the stone throwers retreat and the brave Israelis declare victory. Once in a while the Israelis claim that a stone did hit a tank, but no injuries were suffered. That is not all. The Israelis, fully dedicated to satisfy their hunger for real estate of the Palestinians, they send some vigilantes to find strategic hilltops to build settlements on them. Those brave pioneers go with zeal in search of the right (Arab) hill that controls movement is neighboring towns or villages. Once they find it they come fully equipped to set up temporary lodging, fences, watch stations, and

observation towers for their protection. If Arab owners of the land interfere or create obstacles, the Israeli army will soon be at hand to “protect Israeli citizens”, no questions asked as to why, where, and at what cost. Here the army’s bravery is never in dispute. Their monstrous tanks, armored cars, sophisticated weapons and helicopter gun ships are ready to face the dangerous villages who have no weapons, military training, or organized militias to fight for them. The bravery of the Israeli army and vanguard settlers is demonstrated by the large number of illegal settlements they have sustained, the amount of land they have usurped, and the number of farmers who have been rendered landless and unable to support their families from farming as they did before.

The Israelis bravery has no limits in facing the Palestinian enemy. Their most daunting form of bravery may be illustrated by those who target Arab leaders, traveling on public roads or sitting in their homes or offices, and attack them with laser guided missiles from helicopters flying overhead. Often they kill the target leader and two or three others around him. They also may cause injury, death, and destruction in the neighborhood in the process. The Israeli soldiers go back to their stations proud of their victory against passengers armed with seat belts, office equipment, or coffee sipping paraphernalia. The Israelis leaders lead the nation in acting bravely. After all they alone in the Middle East region have weapons of mass destruction (WMD), with no watchdog or institution to hold them accountable. Even so, the Israelis do not feel safer today than they felt years ago, in spite of all these victories and assumed brave ventures. However, in the meantime they do add more (Arab) real estate to their land bank and settlement program.

Bravery is not the sole domain of the Israelis. The Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular have their own “victories” in the fight against Israeli encroachments on the internationally recognized Palestinian rights. The Arab leaders, on behalf of at least some of their people, face Israel with great speeches, sermons, and declarations of unity with and support of the Palestinians. The Israelis hear their speeches and sermons and start “trembling,” but their super power patron reassures them that there is little to fear. Those speeches and declarations are only for domestic consumption and have no military or economic backing or sustenance. They are no more than hot air from desert countries.

The Palestinian bravery is more pronounced by the behavior of their leaders. Those who preach for “fight until victory” are so brave that they indoctrinate young people into becoming suicide bombers on behalf of the Palestinian cause. The young kill and die, but the leaders go on living and claiming victories against Israeli bus riders, restaurant diners, and any one who happens to be an easy target. The young kill and get killed without knowing how futile the use of suicide bombs has been. The Palestinian leaders are very brave in making decisions that lead to nowhere except to poverty, hopelessness, and ghetto living. The leaders’ bravery is evident: they suffer all those hardships by proxy. The stone throwers get killed or maimed while they themselves are safe in their homes or in the sanctity of diplomatic immunity. The leaders suffer isolation and restricted movements also by proxy. The people cannot travel from one village to another, but the leaders can go from town to town and from one country to another—on behalf of their people. They suffer poverty by proxy. Because of their decisions to use violence, the people lose jobs, lose crops, and lose incomes. They become dependent on charity to survive, while the leaders get paid salaries and collect profits from companies they had established, all in the service of Palestine.

The Palestinian leaders are bravest when they see the land of their people slipping away into the hands of Israel and still declare that victory is imminent, even though they have no weapons, no military training, no unity, organization, or resources. The Palestinian leaders are not idle or lazy or scared. They address letters, with great courage, to world leaders and institutions complaining against Israeli encroachments and aggression, knowing that little will come of it. They even seek aid (charity) from those leaders and institutions to help their people survive. However, much of the aid goes unaccounted for.

The ultimate form of Palestinian bravery is to face the Israelis with the “fermenting demographic bomb”. The Palestinians seem to believe that as their numbers multiply their power against Israel also multiplies, the lack of training, capital, technology, resources or strategic planning notwithstanding.

The Israelis and Palestinians can and should be brave, and act accordingly. The Palestinians can show bravery by admitting that Israel is there to stay, with force if necessary and better without it. They would be brave to proceed to negotiate peace within

that framework. The Israelis can show bravery by admitting that domination of other (less equipped) and the occupation of their land will not bring peace and security. Peace can come only when the Israeli leaders show courage by bringing their soldiers home, putting their tanks, armored cars, and helicopters to rest, and ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

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