

6Jan09

Email to Richard Cohen in response to "A Conflict Hamas Caused"

<http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/05/AR2009010502343.html?hpid=opinionsbox1>

Dear Sir,

I just read your piece "A Conflict Hamas Caused" and am distressed that you are so dismissive of the Palestinians' reason for fighting, "For the Palestinians, it is a fierce fight for Arab justice, for Arab pride, for Arab myth -- for ancestral houses and orange groves that few living have ever seen."

You were right back in 2006 when you wrote, "that Israel itself is a mistake." The dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948 who, with their descendants, make up most of the population of Gaza is an issue that has yet to be resolved and drives the current conflict. Denying it only prolongs the bloodshed.

Jewish groups have been relatively successful recovering art works stolen by the Nazis and bank accounts stolen by the Swiss, yet Israel and the US want to believe that the Palestinians have no interest in returning to their houses and land.

If Israel refuses to honor UN Resolution 194, it needs to ensure that Palestinian "kids can swim in a lake" wherever they are now. Instead of bombing infrastructure, it should have spent the last 60 years building it so the Palestinians can replace what they have lost, something they cannot do in the refugee camps of Gaza, the West Bank or indeed Lebanon.

Having run Gaza as the world's largest prison, Israel pulled out the guards and closed the doors leaving the population to rot. After decades of occupation followed by economic deprivation, of course the inmates are angry. The US insisted on elections in the Palestinian territories and the residents chose Hamas because they were the ones offering resistance and indeed revenge. Fatah is corrupt and the negotiations it tried through the Oslo process only resulted in more settlement activity on Palestinian land.

Hamas is fundamentally a resistance organization and until we recognize that, however horrific their methods, we will make no progress. Look at the death tolls on both sides (the Post helpfully published a graph on Sunday) and you can see that the Palestinians are suffering far, far more than the Israelis. I often hear about Israel's "right to defend itself" but in the US, I rarely hear about the right of the Palestinians to defend themselves. Are they not human too?

Last year you visited Sderot in Israel. When the current fighting is over, I urge you to visit Gaza and see for yourself what life is like for the Palestinians. Ask yourself if you could live that life and not get angry.

Respectfully,

Peter #####

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<http://www.sweetandsour.org/timeforjustice/index.php?fuseAction=injustice>