NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

How to stop the Middle East craziness in Israel, Palestine, Gaza

Rabbi Michael Lerner | Nov. 19, 2012
Commentary

All the usual suspects are cheering on their respective sides in the latest struggle between Israel and Palestine being fought out at the expense of some Israeli and more Palestinian civilian lives. From the Christian fundamentalists to J Street and the Union of Reform Judaism, we hear the same mantra: "We stand with Israel." And from Palestinian Christians and Muslim extremists in Europe and the United States, we hear the corresponding one-sided denunciations of Israel.

Shame on all the partisans of all sides who together constitute the support system for an ongoing struggle that should have been ended decades ago. Their cynicism knows no bounds.

On the one hand, the Israelis and their predictable ignorance of the cost of their occupation and denial of fundamental democratic and human rights to the Palestinian people. Much of the Israeli media gives little attention to the ongoing violence directed at Palestinians in the form of outright stealing of land from Palestinian farmers; the Israel Defense Forces' suppression of nonviolent demonstrations against the occupation; thousands of Palestinians held without charges; and targeted assassinations now carried out by drones whose daily presence in the skies over Gaza make that area the world's largest outdoor prison. With millions of Palestinians still living in forced exile and the Israeli government extending settlement activities throughout Palestine, the majority of Israelis go about daily life in happy oblivion to the suffering the status quo generates until Palestinians launch their (thankfully mostly ineffective) missiles against hapless citizens in Sderot and other southern Israeli towns. And when Israelis flex their overwhelming military muscles, the leaders of the organized Jewish community in the U.S. jump into line, screaming that Israel's existence is in danger -- a complete fantasy -- and that the U.S. must support its "ally," which, meanwhile, is scheming how to drag the U.S. into a war with Iran.

On the other hand, the Palestinians and their global supporters focus on the overwhelming military power of Israel and its ability, as in the current struggle in Gaza, to murder far more Palestinians than Hamas' rockets can possibly inflict on Israelis. True, but irrelevant. Hamas and the "Palestinians can do no wrong" crowd around the world ignore the suffering of citizens in Sderot who regularly run to shelters to protect themselves from the potential murderous impact of those Hamas-generated missiles. Hamas leaders know full well that this constant, potentially murderous harassment, which pales in comparison to Israel's daily infliction of pain on the Palestinian people, provides the most right-wing elements in the Israeli government with precisely the kind of "proof" it needs that there can be no two-state solution because the Palestinian Authority can't control Hamas, and hence, can't deliver a lasting peace agreement. And that is precisely what Hamas wants: to make the Palestinian Authority irrelevant and to continue the struggle with occasional flare-ups like the one we are seeing now.

The supporters on both sides of this cycle of violence depend on their global champions to insist that the other side must change before peace is possible, and in the meantime, military, financial and political support is needed by their own side. After all, they argue, the other side only believes in power and will never respond to

calls for justice, peace and reconciliation.

Unfortunately, with hundreds of military bases around the world and a militarist worldview dominating political parties in the U.S., U.K, France, and much of the rest of the world, the peacemakers appear to be unrealistic when we call for a new global ethos of nonviolence, reconciliation, repentance and rectification of past injustices. No military victory by any force in the Middle East, and certainly not between Israel and Palestine, will end the ongoing struggle.

It's time for the rest of us who see the irrationality on all sides to insist that the U.S. and Western powers abandon the strategy of domination and power over others as a path for homeland security and recognize that a far more efficient path would be a strategy of generosity. A Global Marshall Plan that dedicates 1 to 2 percent of the Gross Domestic Product of the advanced industrial countries each year for the next 20 to the purpose of ending both domestic and global poverty, hunger, homelessness, inadequate education and inadequate health care would provide the world with a far more effective path to safety and security. Such an approach would create a different global consciousness that would break through the "I'm tougher than you" mentality that pervades the thinking of the war-makers and would eventually permeate the consciousness of those who empower Middle Eastern militarists as well, particularly if Israel, Palestine and Gaza were among the first locations in which the Global Marshall Plan was launched.

Generosity instead of domination may seem unrealistic, but it is far more likely to work than the endless cheering for yet another pyrrhic victory by Israel over its hapless Palestinian civilians and the cynical Hamas leadership that allows this struggle to continue without any other plausible way out. And there are deep elements within the religious traditions of the peoples of the Middle East that could make a strategy of generosity seem plausible once we could reduce the volume of the cheerleaders for victory who dominate the blogosphere and the mass media. Reaffirming the sanctity of human life and the centrality of "loving the stranger," deep religious themes, may be far more realistic than the barrage of pro-war words that have trapped all sides of this struggle.

[Rabbi Michael Lerner is editor of Tikkun Magazine [1] and chair of the interfaith Network of Spiritual Progressives [2], which has developed the details of a global and domestic Marshall Plan. His latest book is *Embracing Israel/Palestine* (North Atlantic Books, 2012).]

The Next Step FORWARD [3]

DONATE NOW [3]

Enjoy this article?
Help support more like it by **donating today!** [3]

Source URL (retrieved on *10/13/2015 - 09:56*): http://ncronline.org/news/peace-justice/how-stop-middle-east-craziness-israel-palestine-gaza

Links:
[1] http://www.tikkun.org/

[2] http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/
[3] http://ncrnews.org/webathon/donate/article-end