



## Israel Viewpoint

◆ STEPHEN KRAMER Jewish Times Israel Correspondent



### Need to Know

#### Part 2 and Last

Below are some more interesting questions I've recently been asked, with my replies.

**Question:** If the West Bank is going to be part of the two-state solution, how will that work with a patchwork of Arab and Jewish settlements?

**Reply:** Many existing states are patchworks composed of more than one population, such as Belgium and Switzerland. But Arabs won't live in peace with Jews alongside of them. In contrast, 20 percent of Israelis are Arabs, who often reside in their own towns and cities. The "Triangle" region of Israel, north of where I live, consists of more than a dozen Israel-Arab towns, with some Jewish communities sharing the region – a patchwork of Arabs and Jews. The immediate problem for the Palestinians is their

inability to coexist among themselves, as is evident from the violence between Hamas and Fatah.

**Q:** The New York Times has featured the flattening of olive groves and even of whole neighborhoods in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead. The devastation seems vindictive. The same paper has shown damages to Israeli property from rockets on its back pages, but to the average person this damage is trivial compared to the destruction of Gaza. What's the real story?

**R:** I've seen many of these same pictures. Israel's answer to all these accusations should be "Blame Hamas." Their soldiers fight in mufti (civilian clothing) and place themselves behind or among civilians. They store ammo and shoot rifles and rockets from crowded neighborhoods, schools,

mosques, hospitals, and even U.N. buildings. If Israel can't fire back, then the logical conclusion is that the terrorists will always win, because they are untouchable. We took the rocket fire for 8 years (imagine that happening in your community!) and when we finally fought back, we were blamed for the resulting destruction. Each of those 6,000 or more rockets, filled with nuts and bolts for maximum casualties, was fired unaimed into Israel from Gaza, with the object of killing or maiming as many Israelis as possible. Most attacks were during the morning, when children were on the way to, or in, school. The psychological damage alone has been devastating, but there have been many injuries and deaths besides.

Gazan gunmen hide among olive trees and vegetation to ambush our troops. Israel's leaders have finally decided, after numerous ambushes, that it's better to level a home or an area from which we are fired upon, than to send in our troops just to protect civilians. This is not a violation of international war. I'm sure you know our

military dropped leaflets, made mobile and land-line phone calls to Gazan homes, and went out of our way to warn civilians in advance of attacks. And let's not forget the Gazans voted in Hamas and cheered them on enthusiastically. A price must be paid.

Many Israelis believe that our tactics in Operation Cast Lead served the strategy of restoring our deterrence, after we waited so long to react that Hamas concluded that they could continue rocketing us without massive retaliation. Believe me, they'll think twice before chancing this again, as Hezbollah learned during the Second Lebanon War. (Very few rockets have been fired since the end of the war.) Many Israelis and others think that we should have gone farther into Gaza City, to have had even more impact. Why? Because Hamas is rearming and still planning to annihilate us!

**Q:** I'm interested to learn more about your idea of a West Bank confederation. But who

would rule it? If Jordan provides leadership, how would Jews continue to live there? As you point out, Arabs cannot tolerate Jews on land they see as theirs. If Israel retains the West Bank, how could it let all the Palestinians live there?

**We took the rocket fire for 8 years (imagine that happening in your community!) and when we finally fought back, we were blamed for the resulting destruction.**

**R:** A West Bank confederation is an old idea that has lately regained adherents. Jordan's King Abdullah would

provide leadership. The larger Israeli settlements, like ours, would be included in Israel. The Palestinians would have most of the West Bank, plus Jordan. King Abdullah legitimately fears having more Palestinians to rule, since Jordan is currently more than two-thirds Palestinian. But since Abdullah is propped up by America and Israel, maybe he'll "change his mind" about it. The confederation would give the Palestinians 90 percent of the original Mandate for Palestine, since Jordan already comprises 78 percent of the Mandate.) Israel constitutes

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