

# Once And For All!

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**I**N THIS WAR, both sides have the same aim: to put an end to the situation that existed before it started.

Once And For All!

To put an end to the launching of rockets into Israel from the Gaza Strip, Once And For All!

To put an end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip by Israel and Egypt, Once And For All!

So why don't the two sides come together without foreign interference and agree on tit for tat?

They can't because they don't speak to each other. They can kill each other, but they cannot speak with each other. God forbid.

THIS IS NOT a war on terror. The war itself is an act of terror.

Neither side has a strategy other than terrorizing the civilian population of the other side.

The Palestinian fighting organizations in Gaza try to impose their will by launching rockets at Israeli towns and villages, hoping that this will break the morale of the population and compel it to end the blockade that turns the Gaza Strip into an "open-air prison".

The Israeli army is bombing the Gaza Strip population and destroying entire neighborhoods, hoping that the inhabitants (those who survive) will shake off the Hamas leadership.

Both hopes are, of course, stupid. History has shown time and again that terrorizing a population causes it to unite behind its leaders and hate the enemy even more. That is happening now on both sides.

SPEAKING ABOUT the two sides in a war, one can hardly avoid creating the impression of symmetry. But this war is far from symmetric.

Israel has one of the largest and most efficient military machines in the world. Hamas and its local allies amount to a few thousand fighters, if that.

The closest analogy one can find is the mythical story of David and Goliath. But this time we are Goliath, and they David.

The story is generally misunderstood. True, Goliath was a giant and David a small shepherd, but Goliath was armed with old-fashioned weapons—heavy armor, sword and shield—and could hardly move, while David had a new-fangled surprise weapon, the sling, with which he

could kill from a distance.

Hamas hoped to achieve the same with its rockets, whose reach was a surprise. Also with the number and efficiency of their tunnels, which are reaching into Israel. However, this time Goliath too was inventive, and the Iron Dome missile batteries intercepted practically all the rockets that could have harmed population centers, including my neighborhood in Tel Aviv.

By now we know that neither side can compel the other side to capitulate. It's a draw. So why go on killing and destroying?

Ah, there's the rub. We can't talk to each other. We need intermediaries.

A CARTOON in Haaretz this week shows Israel and Hamas fighting, and a bunch of mediators dancing in a circle around them.

They all want to mediate. They are fighting each other because each of them wants to mediate, if possible alone. Egypt, Qatar, the US, the UN, Turkey, Mahmoud Abbas, Tony Blair and several more. Mediators galore. Each wants to gain something from the misery of war.

It's a sorry lot. Most of them pitiful, some of them outright disgusting.

Take Egypt, ruled by a bloodstained military dictator. He is a full-time collaborator with Israel, as was Hosny Mubarak before him, only more efficient. Since Israel controls all the other land and sea borders of the Gaza Strip, the Egyptian border is Gaza's only outlet to the world.

But Egypt, the former leader of the Arab world, is now a subcontractor of Israel, more determined than Israel itself to starve the Gaza Strip and kill Hamas. Egyptian TV is full of "journalists" who curse the Palestinians in the most vulgar terms and grovel before their new Pharaoh. But Egypt now insists on being the sole broker of the cease-fire.

The UN Secretary General is rushing around. He was chosen for his job by the US because he is not outstandingly clever. Now he looks pitiful.

But not more pitiful than John Kerry, a pathetic figure flying hither and thither, trying to convince everyone that the US is still a world power. Gone are the days when Henry Kissinger commanded the leaders of Israel and the Arab countries what to do and what not (especially telling

them not to talk to each other, but only to him.)

What exactly is the role of Mahmoud Abbas? Nominally, he is the president of the Gaza Strip, too. But he gives the impression of trying to mediate between the de facto Gaza government and the world. He is much closer to Tel Aviv than to Gaza.

And so the list goes on. The ridiculous figure of Tony Blair. The European Foreign Ministers trying to get a photo opportunity with their neo-fascist Israeli colleague. Altogether, a disgusting sight.

I want to cry out to my government and to the Hamas leaders: For God's sake, forget about the whole sorry lot, talk to each other!

THE PALESTINIAN fighting capabilities are surprising everyone, especially the Israeli army. Instead of begging for a ceasefire by now, Hamas is refusing until its demands are met, while Binyamin Netanyahu seems eager to stop before sinking even deeper into the Gaza morass – a nightmare for the army.

The last war began with the assassination of the Hamas military commander, Ahmad al-Jaabari. His successor is an old acquaintance, Mohammed Deif, whom Israel has tried to assassinate several times, causing him severe injuries. It now appears that he is far more capable than his predecessor—the web of tunnels, the production of far more effective rockets, the better trained fighters—all this attests to a more competent leader.

(This has happened before. We assassinated a Hizbollah leader, Abbas al-Mussawi, and got the far more talented Hassan Nasrallah.)

In the end, some kind of cease-fire will come into being. It will not be the end Once And For All. It never is.

What will remain?

THE HATRED between the two sides has grown. It will remain.

The hatred of many Israelis for Israel's Arab citizens has grown considerably, and this cannot be repaired for a long time. Israeli democracy has been hard hit. Neo-Fascist groups, once a fringe, are now accepted in the mainstream. Some cabinet ministers and Knesset members are outright fascist.

They are acclaimed now by almost all the world's leaders and repeat parrot-like Netanyahu's most threadbare propaganda slogans. But millions around the world have seen day after day the terrible pictures of devastation and death in the Gaza Strip. These will not be eradicated from their minds by a cease-fire. Israel's already precarious standing in the world will sink even lower.

Inside Israel itself, decent people feel more and more uncomfortable. I have heard many utterances by simple people who suddenly talk about emigration. The choking

atmosphere inside the country, the awful conformism of all our media (with Haaretz a shining exception), the certainty that war will follow war forever—all this is leading young people to dream about a quiet life with their families in Los Angeles or Berlin.

In the Arab world the consequences will be even worse.

For the first time, almost all Arab governments have openly embraced Israel in the fight against Hamas. For young Arabs anywhere, this is an act of shameful humiliation.

The Arab Spring was an uprising against the corrupt, oppressive and shameless Arab elite. The identification with the plight of the forsaken Palestinian people was an important part of this.

What has happened now is, from the point of view of today's young Arabs, worse, much worse. Egyptian generals, Saudi princes, Kuwaiti emirs and their peers throughout the region stand before their younger generation naked and contemptible, while the Hamas fighters look like shining examples. Unfortunately, this reaction may lead to an even more radical Islamism.

WHILE STANDING in an anti-war demonstration in Tel Aviv, I was asked by a nice young man: "OK, assuming that this war is bad, what would you do at 6 o'clock after the war?" (That was the name of a famous World War II Soviet movie.)

Well, to start with I would drive away all the mediators and start to talk directly with fighters of the other side.

I would agree to put an immediate end to the land, sea and air blockade of the Gaza Strip and allow the Gazans to build a decent port and airport. On all routes, effective controls must ensure that no weapons are let in.

I would ask that Hamas, after receiving international guarantees, remove in reasonable stages all rockets and destroy all tunnels under the border.

I would certainly release at once all the Shalit-exchange prisoners who were re-arrested at the start of the present crisis. An obligation undertaken under pressure is still an obligation, and cheating by a government is still ugly.

I would recognize, and call upon the world to recognize, the Palestinian Unity Government and do nothing to impede free Palestinian presidential and parliamentary elections, under international inspection. I would undertake to respect the results, whatever they may be.

I would immediately start honest peace negotiations with the unified Palestinian leadership, on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative. Now that so many Arab governments embrace Israel, there seems to be a unique chance for a peace agreement.

In short, put an end to the war Once And For All.