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It's not Israel's fault it has a strong, well-run army

By [Yoel Marcus](#)

I feel sorry for the people of Gaza, but I feel even sorrier for the civilian population of southern Israel, which has been bombarded by rockets for the last eight years.

I feel sorry for the kids who wet their beds at night. I feel sorry for the Color Red sirens that send our citizens on a mad dash for shelters, if there are any, in the hopes of finding cover within 15 seconds. I feel sorry about the homes that have been damaged, the cities that have been drained of their citizens and the schools hit by rockets that were miraculously empty at the time.

In the beginning, nobody took Qassams seriously. Israel's second president, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, used to say that Israel won the battle for Safed in 1948 thanks to might and miracle: The might came from reading Psalms and the miracle was that the Davidka homemade mortar worked. During the War of Independence, the Davidka was the equivalent of a Qassam. But over time, this primitive rocket has morphed into a long-range missile.

So we need to be thankful for the decision to launch Operation Cast Lead, if only because the offensive has exposed the strength of these babies and pulled the wraps off the huge arsenal of rockets they have over there in Gaza, capable of reaching Be'er Sheva. If Israel had not acted now, we would have woken up one morning to find missiles in Tel Aviv, special delivery from Iran via the Philadelphi tunnels.

Operation Cast Lead is not a reprisal raid but a defensive war meant to clip Hamas' wings before it surprises us with a Palestinian version of the Yom Kippur War. It's not our fault we have a strong, well-run army and state-of-the-art weaponry. What did Hamas think? That we were going to sit around twiddling our thumbs forever?

I read the columns of my colleague Gideon Levy and I could scream. In the days of the intifadas and the Israel Defense Forces' operations in the territories, I saw his empathy for the bitter lot of Palestinians as a kind of armchair compassion. But his weeping and wailing over the deaths of children in Gaza while we are fighting a defensive war over the security of our country has really crossed the line, if you ask me.

It is not our soldiers who are aiming their guns at Palestinian children, but the leaders of Hamas who are using them as human shields and decoys, while they hide away in safe houses prepared in advance. I am not accusing my colleague of shedding crocodile tears, God forbid. In his case, the tears are totally sincere.

Killing children is a matter of politics. Some of the countries now denouncing us have shed many liters of innocent blood. Where was public opinion, now lashing out against us after 17 days of warfare, over the past eight years, when cities and towns in southern Israel were being shelled and as rockets continued to

rain on Israel as a "prize" for evacuating Gush Katif?

Operation Cast Lead is one of the most justified of Israel's wars, to use Ariel Sharon's turn of phrase. The military objective, as we have said, is to stop the rocket fire and block the smuggling routes, while carving out a political accord that will nail down the military achievements.

At the moment, diplomatic efforts to end the war have not been very successful. Eighteen days into the fighting, we are seeing a certain impatience at home. Some are demanding that Israel declare a unilateral, unconditional 48-hour cease-fire. If no agreement is reached within this time, the battle will continue.

The international community is pressuring Israel to halt the operation, which is par for the course: The world always sides with the underdog. But there is no reason for pressure at home to end the war before its political objectives are achieved and the south gets some peace and quiet.

The operation is being run very wisely, with everything possible being done to spare the lives of our soldiers and expose Hamas' missile capacity. In the hope that Hamas will say stop, or maybe out of fear that Israel's arm will be twisted by outside parties, there has been a great deal of talk about a third phase - going deep into the Gaza Strip, into the heart of Palestinian cities.

The smartest move now is not to give in to the bleeding hearts who have lost their nerve, but to do what is best and most sensible from a military standpoint, which is not to destroy Gaza and not to turn this war into a body count.

In any case, the Hamas regime has lost its trappings. It has been exposed as an empty vessel in the eyes of the people who voted it into power. Its leaders are hiding, leaving the Palestinians in the lurch. One day they will pay for it, I'm sure.

As for us, we have no objective reason to put pressure on the government right now. Despite the defense minister's cold feet, strong nerves are the army's ABCs, ensuring that every step is calculated with care and no irreversible mistakes are made as the reservists enter the Gaza Strip.

This article can also be read online: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1054926.html>
