



April 1, 2009

## U.S. involvement has propelled Gaza conflict

By *BRIAN M. NAPOLETANO*  
For the *Journal & Courier*

Israel's latest military assault on the Gaza Strip officially ended with a tentative cease-fire two months ago, although sporadic rocket attacks by Hamas and retaliatory bombing by the Israeli military continue.

The assault is believed to have claimed more than 1,300 Palestinian and 13 Israeli lives, of which at least 700 (more than 50 percent) and three (respectively) belonged to civilians.

According to a March 16 press release, Amnesty International has delivered a letter to the United Nations signed by 16 of the world's most experienced war crimes investigators calling for an investigation into the targeting of civilians by both Hamas and the Israeli military.

While the international community calls for an investigation of war crimes, citizens in the United States should be demanding some accountability from the government that supplied Israel with the illegal white phosphorus artillery, missiles, helicopters, and other weaponry employed against Palestinians. As taxpayers, we have subsidized the destruction of Gaza and the slaughter of more than 700 unarmed men, women and children.

Rhetoric justifying military support for Israel invokes its "right to exist" or claims that Hamas is a rogue terrorist organization hellbent on the destruction of Israel. If the incredible disparity in the number of casualties inflicted is insufficient to belie this claim, perhaps it is at least sufficient to lend some credibility to the alternative that Hamas is a democratically elected party and has been calling for a two-state settlement for 30 years.

Admittedly, Hamas has engaged in terrorism, and factions have called for the reclaiming of Israel. On the other hand, a military campaign that kills more than 700 civilians, a virtual siege of the Gaza Strip that blocks even humanitarian aid, and illegal expansion of settlements that displaces and isolates Palestinian communities could arguably be construed as an act of state terror and an attempt to eliminate the Palestinian populations while expanding Israel's borders.

Most of the violence between Israelis and Palestinians could be resolved if the United States would stop propagating it. This is unlikely, however, as support for Israeli military aggression has been lucrative for domestic contractors such as Raytheon, Hellfire Systems, Lockheed Martin and Boeing, all of which were named in a Feb. 23 report by Amnesty International requesting that the U.S. stop arming Israel with weapons being used on civilians.

Even after the death toll had passed 1,000 for the Palestinians, the U.S. abstained from Security Council Resolution 1860 and the House and Senate passed their own resolutions (supported by Rep. Steve Buyer and Sen. Richard Lugar) restating the government's "vigorous support" for Israel's military campaign and blaming Hamas for Israel's need to act in "self-defense" by killing 1,300 Palestinians.

That no mention is made of Palestinian rights to self-defense is consistent with 30 years of official policy. Contrary to official claims, it is not Hamas but the U.S. government and its "unwavering commitment" to the Israeli military that has been the greatest barrier to peace and a two-state settlement in the region.

Napoletano is a doctoral candidate at Purdue University and a West Lafayette resident. He has volunteered with Amnesty International.

---