

IN THE MIDDLE (or just the beginning?) OF THE NEXT WAR

The ides of November. This is supposed to be **Day 2**. First came the RPG that went through a jeep on patrol; 4 soldiers badly hurt. Then came the assassination of Ahmed Jabari, head of the military wing of Hamas. (Good riddance to him.) Then Hamas and the various splinter groups let fly with a 2-day hail of rockets and missiles; more than 200 so far (more than 800 in 2012 alone). Including one big one that went as far as open spaces near Tel Aviv. There are already 3 Israelis killed and several wounded.

The Iron Dome defense system is a spectacular success. The only such system in the world; it figures out where the incoming missile is headed, leaves it alone if it's going to a patch of empty land, but shoots it down if it's headed for a populated area. Amazing! More than 100 interceptions of incoming missiles have been recorded. Problem is that each Iron Dome missile costs between \$30,000 and \$50,000—I have seen various sums— (the Americans are paying a lot of that), and a success rate of 85% is still not 100%. But there is nothing remotely as good as Iron Dome in the whole world. Can't make them fast enough.

Offensively, the Israel air force is blasting Hamas targets. They say with great success, but there are thousands of missiles and bunkers and launching sites hidden, buried, and stockpiled all over the Gaza Strip. The government has authorized the calling up of 75,000 reservists and the army is bringing ground forces to the border.

All this looks really familiar. This looks like a place we have been to many times before, most recently at Hanukkah, 2008, with Cast Lead. This looks like we are about to go to war against the Arabs again. Good job I'm not working in the coming weeks.

Nothing's happening here in Jerusalem, nor do we expect anything. The Holy City isn't likely to be a target; there's got to be SOME advantage to living in all this holiness!

- But Yoel, No. 2 son, living in Tel Aviv, called in to say that they just spent 15 minutes in the building's shelter because the sirens rang in Tel Aviv too¹. And that we should be mentally prepared to have him and his pregnant wife and little boy as house company for a while pretty soon.
- And Itamar, No. 1 grandson, in the army near Hebron, probably can't get out this weekend as planned. So I am instructed by his parents to stay in touch with him and see if he needs vital supplies, refreshment, Cokes, snacks, or whatever, which I will pop down and bring him.
- And I got a text message over my cell phone (that's rare; I don't do texting) from the Tour Guides Association saying not to go into Bethlehem (it's illegal anyhow) Friday because there will be a big demonstration there.
- And—like always when war threatens—the television is on all the time. That's a problem for us; I need to listen to the Hebrew while Paula is dependent on the English (that is, foreign) channels. Fox News is doing the most coverage here.

All of sudden, other things seem less important. Odd how life changes.

Day 3. Friday. We're getting blasé and bored. The Arabs keep sending rockets and we keep shooting them down. Yawn! So we turn on the news every now and then and find ex-generals, journalists and political figures analyzing this way and that way. A lot of talk; not always very interesting. Until 4:30 in the afternoon. The sun was going down, Shabbat was coming, we were setting the table (and bracing ourselves!) in preparation for an onslaught of children and grandchildren for a big Shabbat meal. And all of a sudden there are sirens in our neighborhood: **צבע אדום - Color Red!** That's our emergency warning code; head for shelter!! Well, so much for my confident predictions about holiness.

That was a very great surprise indeed. We haven't heard the sound of sirens since Saddam Hussein in 1990. Turns out a missile did fall in the area of the Etzion Bloc—15-18 km away, halfway between Jerusalem and Hebron—but the "Red Alert" people obviously had no idea where the thing was headed because they sounded the sirens as far east as Ma'aleh Adummim and as far north as Shilo in Samaria.

¹ They never tell you where rockets land. That information would be too helpful to the enemy. But it was in an open space near the city. That was a BIG Iranian Fajr-5 missile; we all wonder how many of them they have left after our Air Force went in.

Turns out (next day) that this may have been an accomplishment for Hamas: they still had a missile we hadn't destroyed. And it wasn't an Iranian Fajr-5 either, but what they call M-75. That's Palestinian made. And it can get to Jerusalem². Didn't do anybody any damage, but it was a big shock to the Christian world. Europe doesn't care much about Tel Aviv, even less about Sderot and Kiryat Malakhi (which they can't even pronounce), and not very much about the Jews either. But Jerusalem is special, and an attack against it is an attack against Christianity. So they have got their knickers in a twist and this is bad news politically for Hamas. Not that it'll matter for more than the next half hour.

Day 4. Even terrorists have to sleep, I suppose. So Friday night was dead quiet. When I put the earphones on my radio at 6 AM Saturday, I heard that they had woken up, and that they were sending everything but the kitchen sink across the border at us. I was wondering how much damage the air force had in fact done to them; there were more than 200 sorties Friday night. Israel WASN'T sleeping. In fact, the air force upped the ante a bit: they destroyed Government House and the main police station in Gaza City. Apparently we have not yet done enough damage, however, and Hamas has plenty more rockets. Even big Iranian Fajr-5 ones, four of which headed to Tel Aviv late this afternoon.

Iron Dome is truly amazing all the more so because we have only 4 batteries of them!³ Nothing hit the ground in Tel Aviv. One or two missiles did get through, in Ashdod and elsewhere; 85% success is great, but it's not 100%. There are no injuries among us; nothing's happening here in Jerusalem, nor in Caesarea where the kids went for a picnic on the beach. One here would not know there's a war if you didn't turn on the radio or the television.

So now what? Maybe it's now a war of attrition: we just have to slug it out till one side or the other runs out of ammunition, missiles, artillery shells, mortars, rockets, fighters, fuel, food, or motivation.

Day 5. When I turned on the radio at 6 this morning it was pretty clear that this "war" was grinding to an end. Not a single rocket had been fired from Gaza all night. They're out of steam, said I to myself. But it turned out I was wrong. Slowly the motor warmed up and by the end of the day more than a hundred rockets had been blasted off against us. Including two to Tel Aviv, which got shot down.

Well done, again, Iron Dome!

Spare a thought also for Israel military intelligence. These guys know where the tunnels, bunkers & launch sites are, where Hamas and Islamic Jihad villains live, where they work, where they hang out, where their wives and children live, what kind of car they drive, when they're in it and when not. They know the guy on the motorcycle from 500 feet in the air. And they are bumping off the Hamas leaders, one by one; most recently the director of the entire missile program. And good for them! So far we have avoided the political ones. My guess is this hands-off-the-political-level policy will change if things don't get better.

But in the end a little bit of doubt is creeping in tonight. How is it that Hamas keeps firing rockets, even the big Fajr-5s, when the air force has done more than a thousand sorties against everything they know about in Gaza. And the navy has joined in with bombardment from the sea. But still there's no sign of stopping these missiles, and Hamas is already seeing its steadfast continuance of fire as a sign of their victory over us!

Conclusion: send in the tanks. When push comes to shove, the only way to destroy Hamas and Islamic Jihad is by boots on the ground. From the time when Rome fought Hannibal, Napoleon fought Wellington, the Americans fought the Viet Cong, and in every battle we've fought since 1948, the infantry alone has decided things (or failed to).

But nobody wants that; it's long, expensive, and messy, will kill Israeli soldiers and a lot of innocent Arab women and children, and get the Europeans into their usual anti-Semitic funk, and screw up Abu Mazen & the PA, and Morsi of Egypt, etc. And drag in Iran and Lebanon and Syria and Turkey -- a proper war here will screw up the world. It's complicated. (So what else is new?). I am less optimistic today than I was yesterday.

Day 6. When I put on the radio, just before 6 AM, the news was like yesterday's. No rockets last night and the air force kept attacking sites. Within the hour the situation changed; alerts were being sounded in Ashkelon, Ashdod, etc. But they were coming with less frequency all day. Maybe they really are running out of steam.

² Tel Aviv is 70 km away, which the Fajr can do. Jerusalem is 80 km from Gaza as the crow flies. The Fajr can't make that. But the M-75 (they say) can.

³ We got a 5th battery today, rushed through production two months ahead of schedule.

Everybody was talking about a “diplomatic solution” now. That makes us really uncomfortable: it means the world out there (especially America) will compel us to agree to some cease-fire, and then we have quiet for a few months or a year, and then it starts all over again. If there IS an answer, that’s for sure not it.

Europe was getting smarmy, as usual. France 24 led its morning news broadcasts with the headline “Another 10 Palestinians killed by Israel air attacks in Gaza.” That obnoxious headline was followed by the assertion that “The Israeli assault on Gaza continues for the 6th consecutive day. The Palestinians are firing rockets into Israel in retaliation for the Israeli onslaught.” Well now we know; It’s our aggression against the Palestinians (just in case you were wondering). The BBC was mostly ok, actually, and France 24 moderated its headlines during the course of the day.

By the end of the day, Hamas was still sending rockets, but “only” 110 of them. Which is 40% of what they sent on previous days. So perhaps they really are getting worn out. Hope so.

Day 7. Pretty much like day 6, and 5-4-3, etc. The Arabs are blasting away, with everything from big Fajr-5 missiles to small mortars, in waves and waves of shelling the Western Negev and Ashkelon and Ashdod. More than 140 a day. Half are ignored by Iron Dome, as they are calculated to fall in empty places. Others are intercepted by Iron Dome, (amazing!), and a few still fall anyhow. Our air force and navy are pounding targets in Gaza—1450 sorties so far according to the Spokesman—and have destroyed somewhere between 30% and 50% of the estimated rocket potential of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip.⁴ Casualty figures are given as about 140 Arabs killed and over a thousand wounded. Israeli casualties are 5 dead: 3 people in Kiryat Malakhi last Thursday, one soldier and one Bedouin worker today.

The casualty figures are good for Hamas. They get propaganda points by showing destruction, dead bodies (especially children), injured and miserable, etc. Gets them sympathy in Europe. And the discrepancy in casualty figures is also a great propaganda point: we (Hamas) have so many casualties as contrasted to so few of the Israelis. Shows how awful they (that is, we) are. The answer is something they don’t want to publicize: there are no air raid shelters at all in Gaza!

SOMEONE NEEDS TO LOOK INTO THE FACT THAT GAZA WAS GIVEN TO ARAFAT IN 1993, AND TAKEN OVER BY HAMAS IN 2007. HOW COME IN ALL THOSE 19 YEARS THEY NEVER BUILT ONE SINGLE AIR RAID SHELTER FOR THEIR POOR MISERABLE POPULATION?!

Anyhow, nobody was talking about the fighting today. We actually quite forgot about it, and downtown Jerusalem was filled with locals and tourists enjoying the balmy weather. But we did have a big surprise in the afternoon: another siren here too. 3 minutes taking shelter in the hall corridor—can’t be too careful—and something fell with a boom near the Etzion Bloc, 15 km away.

The day, in fact was all about diplomacy. We greeted the French Foreign Minister, the German Foreign Minister, the Secretary General of the United Nations and even Hillary Clinton (who came out of the deep freeze where she has been hiding since Benghazi) come to visit us, and then to Cairo, and then to Ramallah, and then back to us, etc., while the local media was frantically making up the details of a supposed cease-fire. Which never happened.

Day 8. Nothing new happened on the front. The Reserves are still sitting on the border waiting to either go in to Gaza or fold tents and go home. The diplomats are zooming in and out and back and forth. The rockets are still flying, Iron Dome is still shooting almost all of the dangerous ones down. People are obeying instructions (rare for Israelis!) and staying in the security rooms; a six-story building in Rishon le-Zion got hit with a large rocket, right through the roof. But the people inside the top floor apartment were inside their fortified room and emerged unscathed even though the whole floor around them had been demolished.

The game changed in mid-afternoon. Someone, as yet unidentified, threw (or left) a bomb inside a bus in Tel Aviv. It was a small device, and there were barely 20 people on the bus, so nobody got killed. But 2 are badly wounded and a dozen others lightly so. We stayed glued to the television for a while; that brought back really bad memories.

And now, at the end of the day, comes the Cease-fire. From 9 PM (I’m writing at this moment) it’s supposed to stay quiet. So, ASSUMING THE THING WORKS (which it won’t) who get what?

1. Israel gets quiet on the border for a while. Maybe. Netanyahu and the government wanted to destroy Hamas, but were persuaded that Hamas in Gaza is better than any other alternative on the horizon.

⁴ That many still left!? They apparently have *thousands* of them!

2. Morsi of Egypt gets recognized as the chief arbiter and dominant player in the area. Big step up for him. He has to keep terrorists out of the Sinai, prevent smuggling tunnels into Gaza, and lean on his people to behave. He won't manage any of these above-mentioned tasks. Still, it's a big international recognition of his central role (rather than that of Iran, for example) in the matter of Israel and the Palestinians.
3. Israel said it would never negotiate with a terrorist organization, and they did not in fact negotiate with Hamas, but rather with the Egyptians acting as Hamas' patrons. Hamas gets legitimacy as a government; that's a big victory for them, as is standing up to an Israeli pounding. They won.
4. Abu Mazen and the Palestinian Authority get screwed. Hamas is recognized as the de facto government of Gaza and the PA is essentially irrelevant.
5. The people of Gaza get screwed even worse. They now have to live in a country which is demolished, flattened, ruined; a heap of rubbish. Nonetheless, they are dancing in the streets celebrating "victory!"
6. The people of the south get to lick their wounds, re-open schools and businesses and re-build their lives. Knowing everything they do is temporary.
7. Hillary gets to go back into hiding so they don't ask her about Benghazi, Obama gets to be a friend of Israel, and Bibi gets re-elected.

So there we are. I write all this immediately and instinctively without listening to the commentators, the talking heads, the BBC, Fox News, France 24 or even Israel television. This is what I see. I don't believe any of this cease-fire will last. Or at least not for long.

First of all, because Hamas can't control the people of Gaza and the Islamic Jihad and the other religious crazies. It couldn't even if it wanted to, which it doesn't.

Second because Egypt can't control itself (it can't even feed itself), nor control Sinai, and certainly not Hamas. So all the guarantees are meaningless. The problem is too much for them to handle. Especially with Iran just over the horizon stirring the pot and providing fuel for the flames.

Third, because the problem is un-solvable. There is no possibility of compromise between Israel and the Arabs, or even a permanent cease-fire, so long as one side simply does not recognize the legitimacy of the existence of the other. Israel is a theological and metaphysical problem for the Muslim world. This war is zero-sum: it cannot end unless one side absolutely wins and the other absolutely loses.

What are the odds on that happening? Not great. Not with Turkey on one hand and Iran on the other fanning the flames. And America holding everybody (including us) back so we agree to a cease-fire because the Americans insist on it. Which means we lose.

And I, for one, miss you, Marcus Porcius Cato, Censoris, Sapiens, Priscus. Noble, wise and ancient censor. Well indeed you understood the realities of politics and war. Which is why you ended every speech with the same motto: *Carthago delenda est* - Carthage must be destroyed.