GROUNDHOG DAY IN ISRAEL

Irit Sheetrit, 36, a mother of four, was killed Monday night in the Israeli town of Ashdod when a Grad-type rocket struck the bus stop where she had run for cover. Four others were injured in the attack.

Earlier in the day Hani al-Mahdi, 27, was killed, and a dozen others wounded when a Grad rocket struck the construction site in Ashkelon where they were working.

The deaths of Ms. Sheetrit and Mr. al-Mahdi passed largely unnoticed outside of Israel, as had the deaths of dozens of others in preceding months. Outside of Israel, the news media are concerned only that the Israeli response to the attacks might be "disproportionate."

Some 6,000 rockets and mortars have been fired at Israel from Gaza since 2001, most of them since Israel unilaterally withdrew from there in 2005.

Last Saturday (12/27), Israel responded to the latest rocket attacks from Gaza with air strikes on 100 targets. About 300 Hamas terrorists were killed in the strikes. But the attention of the news media was focused on the 50 civilians Hamas claims also were killed.

Since Hamas deliberately locates its military facilities in heavily populated areas (and usually exaggerates the number of civilian casualties) that number is remarkably low. As retired Army LtCol. Ralph Peters noted, these were the most accurate airstrikes in history.

But Israel gets little credit for either its military skill or its remarkable forbearance. Nothing better illustrates the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of so many Western journalists than the ritual condemnation of Israel for the accidental deaths of a few Palestinian civilians, and the near total absence of condemnation of Hamas for its repeated deliberate attacks on Israeli civilians.

"Those who scream 'disproportionate' think -- grotesquely -- that not enough Israelis have been killed," wrote Melanie Phillips in the British magazine The Spectator:

"If anything has been 'disproportionate,' it's been Israel's refusal to take action during the years when its southern citizens have been terrorized by rockets and other missiles raining down on them from Gaza. No other country in the world would have sat on its hands for so long in such circumstances."

"I condemn Israel's disproportionate attack on Hamas because, so far, it has only lasted four days and I would like to see a proportionate response that terrifies Hamas for seven years, the years that have filled Sderot and neighboring towns with nightmares, death, amputations and trauma coming from the rockets and mortars fired from Gaza," wrote New York Jewish Week editor Jonathan Mark.

Liberal journalists fret the Israeli response to the most recent rocket attacks from Gaza will diminish the prospects for a negotiated peace. But Hamas is not interested in talking with Jews. Hamas is interested in killing Jews, which is why Hamas keeps firing rockets into Israel.

The Israelis constantly are advised to trade land for peace. But when they do trade land for peace -- as when they gave up their defensive positions in southern Lebanon in 1978, and when they returned control of Gaza to the Palestinians in 2005 -- the result has been more attacks on Israeli civilians. For terrorists like Hamas, there will be no peace until they have all the land.

The moral myopia of those who paint the victims of Hamas terrorism as aggressors puts Israel in a no-win situation. There can be no diplomatic solution, because Hamas will not negotiate in good faith. And there can be no military solution, because Western leaders react so harshly when Israel retaliates.

"Fighting breaks out as Hamas ends truce," read the headline in a British newspaper Dec. 19. If you Google "Hamas breaks truce," you'll also find stories from June 26, and from June 12 and April 25 of 2007.

There is a groundhog day repetitiveness to this. Hamas agrees to a ceasefire when its supply of rockets grows low. Once the rockets have been replenished, Hamas breaks the ceasefire. Only Western liberals can fail to discern a pattern.

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