

Expert Says Israeli Artillery Killed Civilians

After claims by the Israeli army that Israeli artillery fire was not the cause of the June 9 deaths of seven civilian Palestinians who were picnicking on a beach in Gaza, Human Rights Watch, a U.S.-based non-governmental organization, called for an independent investigation. The group said that "Israel should immediately launch an independent, impartial investigation," of the incident, with the inclusion of international experts. It also called on the Palestinian National Authority to allow the investigators onto the scene.

Marc Garlasco, a former battle damage assessment officer for the Pentagon, who is now with Human Rights Watch, was the first independent examiner to visit the site in Gaza last week, reported the *Irish Examiner*.

Garlasco said that after retrieving shrapnel from the car where two children were wounded from the blast, and examining craters on the beach, and photographic evidence of the victims who died, he was "convinced this was from an Israeli shell." Whether the shell was fired from artillery guns offshore, or had been buried in the sand, was not known, he said. There were numerous other offshore strikes that day, one shell landing just 100 meters from where the people were killed.

—Michele Steinberg

Although officially the Bush Administration has not endorsed Olmert's plan, despite the warm welcome given to the Israeli Prime Minister by President Bush, it has yet to be revealed what Dick Cheney thought of the plan after his meeting with Olmert. What is obvious to everyone, is that the Bush Administration will *not* do what is necessary to achieve a regional peace settlement, and so the conflict will continue.

Report: U.S. Policy Leading to Civil War

A new report released on June 13 by the International Crisis Group documents how the policy of cutting off funds to the Hamas-led Palestinian National Authority, implemented by the United States and backed by Israel and the Europeans, is driving the Palestinians into a civil war. The report further charges that instead of endeavoring to promote unity between Fatah and Hamas, in an effort to moderate Hamas's traditional hard-line positions, the United States has appeared to bolster Fatah against Hamas, a clear recipe for civil war.

"The U.S., Israel, and, to a lesser degree the European Union and other actors, are banking on financial pressure

and diplomatic boycott to ensure Hamas's experience in power comes to a rapid, unsuccessful end," the report states. "In so doing they have chosen to bolster one Palestinian faction against the other, thus exacerbating internal strife. However, punitive measures are likely to generate greater solidarity with Hamas, and prompt radicalism rather than pragmatism."

The Crisis Group's senior analyst, Mouin Rabbani, stated: "Taking the lead in defining the international communities' objectives, the U.S. appears intent on ensuring the new government fails. That's a dangerous path: If Hamas feels cheated of its right to govern, it is unlikely to go quietly."

The report was drafted under the direction of the Crisis Group's director for the Middle East, Robert Malley, who served in the Clinton Administration as a senior advisor on the Middle East.

"Starved of resources, confronting an increasingly hostile population, and unable to realize its agenda, Hamas may well fail. But with intra-Palestinian confrontation, heightened Israeli-Palestinian violence, and a collapse in Palestinian institutions, it will be hard to chalk up its failure as anybody's success," Malley warned. "The time now is for pragmatism," he said, "lest all emerge as losers."

Political figures within the region have been working to resolve the conflict among the Palestinians. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak continues to use his good offices to try to bring unity to the various factions. Jordanian King Abdullah, who recently met with President Bush, European leaders, and Prime Minister Olmert, said that Olmert's unilateral "convergence plan" is totally unacceptable. Mubarak and Abdullah have been joined by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, in efforts to break the financial siege against the Palestinian National Authority.

A senior European Middle East expert expressed a similar assessment, telling *EIR* that the United States and Europe are doing nothing to stop the escalating violence, as Palestinian and Israeli extremists move to prevent negotiating an agreement. On the one hand, he said, the Israeli establishment does not want to negotiate with the Palestinians; they want to build their wall and wait for a new Palestinian leadership to emerge. This will never happen, the source said. On the other hand, the leadership of Hamas, especially those living outside the territories, do not want to recognize the state of Israel because non-recognition is their *raison d'être*.

Praising the prisoners' letter, the source said it was a good initiative because it embarrassed both the Israeli and the Hamas extremists, who are, in fact, working along parallel lines. At the same time, he said, it bridged the differences between Fatah and Hamas, in order to open the way for Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Concurring with LaRouche, the source said that the real problem is the Bush Administration's policy and the fact that the Europeans are doing nothing. The only way to end the violence is to get both parties to the negotiating table.