

U.S. strategy for Mideast peace misguided

GUEST COLUMNIST

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Like many others, I enter the New Year with shock and horror at the attacks in Gaza. The cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, fragile from the start, was shattered last fall. Some say it was broken when fighters in Gaza fired rockets into Israeli towns the morning of Nov. 5; others say it was the evening before, when the Israeli military entered Central Gaza and commandeered a family's home to stop Palestinian men allegedly digging a tunnel. Israeli air strikes killed six Palestinians that night.

In fact, there was never a genuine truce. Israel has held Gaza in a state of siege since Israeli colonies were removed in 2005. Siege is an act of war. Uninterrupted by last year's cease-fire, this siege has tightened, not lifted. Now, from the passive violence of constantly looming famine, the area has exploded into the active violence of war. Reports indicate 900 dead in Gaza (40 percent women and children) and 13 Israelis killed.

I know the violence of war. I saw U.S. bombing in Vietnam and Cambodia, and carried wounded, while wounded myself, from return rocket attacks. Six years ago my daughter was crushed to death in Gaza under an Israeli bulldozer as she tried to save the lives and home of a Palestinian family.

I know something of the loss felt by my Israeli friend Yitzhak, whose son Arik was captured and murdered by Hamas in 1994, and by my Palestinian friend Bassam whose daughter Abir was shot and killed by Israeli



soldiers as she walked home from school in her West Bank village in 2007.

I cannot, though, know the loss felt by Anwar Khalil Ba'lousha, whose five daughters, asleep in their beds, were killed in Gaza by Israeli bombing on Dec. 28. I haven't the courage to imagine his pain.

Having reversed diplomatic course Thursday and allowed passage of a United Nations resolution for a cease-fire, the U.S. must now work actively to see that it is enforced. Regardless of our ability to change the behavior of leaders in Israel or Palestine, we

must change our own behavior.

The U.S. must make clear that we will not support either side when it uses violence beyond its borders. We must demand that humanitarian aid as well as press and U.N. observers be permitted to enter Gaza without delay – and that hostilities cease so that life-saving commodities can be distributed.

If Israel will not comply, as when it attacked a U.N. relief convoy Thursday, the U.S. should break the siege of Gaza itself to supply food and medical supplies, just as we would for Israel in similar circumstances. The special U.S.-Israeli relationship puts us in a unique position to take that temporary step, while assuring our Israeli friends that no rockets enter Gaza along with aid.

We must make clear that we will protect Israel, but we will no longer protect its occupation of the West Bank or its attack and siege on Gaza. Finally, we must reverse the Bush administration's program to send \$30 billion in military aid to Israel and another \$33 billion to Arab countries, a strategy for peace that is misguided to the point of obscenity.

It's sad to see again, but on an even greater scale, the horror and devastation my daughter witnessed when she wrote from Gaza in 2003: "This has to stop. I think it is a good idea for us all to drop everything and devote our lives to making this stop." Her plea was never more urgent than it is this New Year.

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