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Fascism in America

The Devil Went Down to Georgia

BY PHILIP GIRALDI
AUGUST 19, 2014



Sinclair Lewis once opined that if fascism ever comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross. I was reminded of that comment when a good friend of mine recently wrote a **letter** to her local newspaper in Augusta Georgia decrying the killing of nearly two thousand Palestinian civilians in Gaza, describing the deaths as part of “the systemic erosion of the rule of law in our nation and across the globe” since 9/11. A devout Christian, she concluded how from her perspective “The world, it seems, has lost its moral compass.”

Unlike many letter writers, my friend has the life experience to back up her opinion, having served twenty-seven years as a United States Army lawyer, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. Much of her most recent work has involved the cases of Guantanamo detainees.

It would have been reasonable to assume that my friend's letter would elicit a variety of responses, and one might have expected that there would be at least some agreement that a world in which killing and wars have become the norm is an unwelcome aberration. But it was not so. Out of the more than one hundred **comments** the vast majority were violently and caustically opposed to the principle that Israel and the United States have not exactly been role models for a peaceful world. Many of the comments were both personally insulting and, frequently, highly offensive. Some of the remarks clearly came from military veterans while others had a Christian context.

Regarding the genesis of the recent conflict in Gaza the good folks of Augusta Georgia saw it this way, frequently using the same expressions, suggesting a common source either in the media or through networking with other like-minded individuals:

- “ Hamas started using the rockets and tunnels in violation of rules of war long before Israel reacted.”
- “ ...it was Hamas firing thousands of missiles at Israel from Gaza that triggered the Israeli counter attacks.”
- “ ...doesn't mention a single time the illegality of Hamas launching rockets DAILY against Israel, not just in War! This war is a direct result of Hamas' daily attacks on Isreal (sic) !!!!!”
- “ Hamas would gladly kill, without reservation, every living Jewish soul on the planet. That is their goal, after all.”
- “ Why did Israel move into Gaza? Because they were being attacked with missiles from there.”
- “ Hamas set up rocket caches, tunnels, command and control HQ, and rocket launching sites in and under schools and hospitals 'run' by the UN.”
- “ Israel has been negotiating with terrorist groups that want to destroy them since 1948... Hamas [is] continuing this barbaric, unprovoked assault on Israel...”

Every story of course has a beginning and end. Where one chooses to begin is critical. All of the commenters are wrong because they see a poor beleaguered Israel with missiles raining down without considering what preceded that development. Israel, a regional military superpower, has been occupying Arab land by force of arms since before the foundation of the country in 1948. Even though it has no soldiers permanently stationed in Gaza it occupies the territory by controlling its borders as well as any and all access to it. It periodically attacks “targets” in the strip, killing Palestinian civilians.

The most recent fighting in Gaza was in fact started by Israel, which exploited the pretext of a kidnapping on the West Bank that it knew was not carried out by Hamas to use its armed forces to eliminate that group from power. It made mass arrests and killed some Palestinians on the West Bank before the Gazans responded with a barrage of homemade missiles, a weapon so

ineffective that to this date it has only succeeded in killing one Israeli civilian. Israel has destroyed hundreds of homes in Gaza, devastated its infrastructure, and has killed nearly two thousand civilians who had no place to flee to.

And as for the killing of those thousands of Arab civilians including hundreds of children, how do the good Christians of Augusta Georgia explain it, in their own words:

- “Israel has killed 1,800 people, mostly civilians.’ And if they must, IN ORDER TO SURVIVE...then they should kill 1,000 times that number...”
- “-it’s at war. Israel being stronger militarily, could kill all 4.5 million Palestinians (Gaza and West Bank combined), women and children included and would be entirely justified in doing so... Sounds really good to me.”
- “Normal people would call that self-defense.”
- “As I said, if it’s them or us, then send them on their way. I’ll leave it to [others] to ruminate over what drove them to extinction.”
- “If Israel desired they could turn all of Gaza into a smoking hole in the ground but instead only a small number have been killed...I just saw a video of supposedly dead civilians under white sheets but the camera caught some of them moving around. They were fake dead people!”
- “...always mentioning the ‘women and children’ being killed, but those who know the TRUTH, know that’s on Hamas!! They’re using them as shields!!...with Hamas continuing this barbaric unprovoked assault on Israel, then I say Israel should bomb Gaza back into a large trash dump!!! That clear enough for you?”
- “War is the ultimate expression of shit happens.”
- “Israel efforts have gone far beyond any reasonable [sic] to avoid civilian casualties...”
- “Personally I would want my President to carpet bomb a 500 mile radius of Israel.”
- “It irritates the mess out of them, that Israel and America would actually defend themselves!”
- “If his wife and kids are killed, then that’s because he chose to put them there...this letter to the editor is nothing more than an anti-semite hate piece...it goes well beyond free speech.”
- “...people like this letter writer are the direct cause of many of the casualties...”
- “...we will soon be lost forever because we don’t have the GUTS that Israel has.”
- “We are blessed with tremendous technology and power; by the true God!!”
- “Yes, and it will only get worse until the Anti-Christ arrives on the scene and gains the support of the world promising peace...”

In reality, Israel made only minimal efforts to avoid killing civilians, likewise when it attacked Gaza in 2009, and both the United Nations and many other international bodies maintain that it has committed numerous war crimes. Of course the good people of Augusta Georgia probably

consider the UN and international bodies of any kind to be just one step up from Hamas and other “terrorist” groups so they are not worth listening to.

My friend was also subjected to personal abuse, being accused of sitting in her JAG office for 27 years “drinking coffee and eating donuts,” and:

- “If you had to [sic] many people like this in the military we would have lost WW2...I hope this woman is no longer in our military.”
- “It is sad to see such a person paid by our military.”
- “I view the letter writer as the enemy within. She could be the poster child for the hate America crowd.”
- “How do these people in up [sic] in our military! Scarry [sic]! Answer: Pretty much the same way Major Nidal Hasan did. We don’t vet and screen the way we should.”
- “Attitudes like this are the EXACT reason America’s power and influence are diminishing.”
- “Articles like this almost make me upchuck.”
- “...she [should] seek assistance from a mental health professional very soon.”
- “Fools like this impede our ability to defend ourselves...”
- “She apparently hates this country.”
- “This moron has blood all over her hands.”
- “...hatred for America and America’s God!”
- “...the ranting of a easily duped NPR listening, MSNBC watching myrmidon...”

‘Nuff said for the punishment meted out to someone who dared to express an unpopular viewpoint. The vitriol is astonishing, as is the in-your-face ignorance. What distinguishes this sort of thinking from European style fascism? Not much, though it does have a particularly American flavor of evangelical Christianity.

Fascism is generally linked to ultra-right wing politics or attitudes. A fascist is a totalitarian who supports an all-powerful and centralized state that can do no wrong precisely because it is the government. Fascism views political violence, war, and imperialism as a means to achieve national rejuvenation, and it asserts that stronger nations have the right to expand their territory by displacing weaker nations.

There are common themes that generally surface when one speaks of fascist style states. All fascist regimes have an assertive ultra-nationalism that frequently feeds off a sense of victimhood. This need to assert a frequently mythical notion of national power and greatness, often through war or imperial expansion, generally produces a militarization of society as well as a rewriting of history to support the new agenda. Fascist government frequently evolve into police states to suppress dissent and maintain the regime.

Both Israel and the United States are increasingly characterized as police states where authority trumps liberties. They both claim victimhood from terrorism and have used that as an excuse to maintain aggressive foreign policies that emphasize the use of force as a first option. Both spend far more proportionately on “defense” than other developed countries and both are actively engaged in proxy and shooting wars around the world. Israel exploits its alleged victimhood to occupy Palestinian land and kill Arabs while the United States does the same to justify its continued presence in Afghanistan and its threats to use military force against nations like Iran and Syria.

The attitudes expressed by at least some of the residents of Augusta Georgia suggest that they essentially support a “might makes right” and “you do what you have to do” attitude as it applies both to the United States and Israel. That the policies of both Washington and Tel Aviv have frequently created enemies abroad is apparently immaterial and not worthy of consideration, nor is there much receptiveness to a Christian appeal for peace and understanding. If that assessment is correct, it reflects a dangerous hardlining of attitudes held by Americans vis-à-vis the rest of the world. And if these and similar viewpoints predominate in Georgia or elsewhere then it should be a cause for concern as they are based on ignorance and prejudice rather than on any careful assessment of what America’s real interests might be. The barbaric willingness of several commenters to incinerate 4.5 million Arabs as “self-defense” should be particularly noted. Is such thinking, sometimes possibly expressed as “American exceptionalism,” both racist and a precursor for other amoral values that might be described as “fascist?” Quite possibly.