

BOTH Gaza and Sderot
By Rabbi Arthur Waskow *

There is a Gaza Crisis. It is intimately intertwined with what is felt as a crisis in Sderot and other towns in southern Israel. But much of the response is divided in two: most of the world-wide Jewish community responds chiefly to the fear and suffering in Sderot, while most of the world-wide progressive and peace-oriented community responds chiefly to the suffering of Gaza.

But these isolated responses are both an ethical and a practical mistake. Part of the solution in Gaza/ Sderot is that the world community should bring more pressure to change the approach of the Israeli government toward Gaza, where some civilians have been killed when Israeli forces attack Hamas militants, where many live in or on the edge of malnutrition, and where schools, hospitals, and households are constantly disrupted.

AND part of the solution is to stop the Kassam rockets that have been falling on Sderot and other Israeli towns, sometimes killing people and always inflaming Israeli fear and rage.

Israelis have made clear that stopping the Kassams is crucial. WHAT KIND of pressure could the world community possibly bring THAT WOULD WORK to accomplish this?

More economic embargoes? We already know the USA/ European/ Israeli embargoes don't stop the Kassams. What greater economic pressures could the world community bring to bear?

Military intervention? The Israeli Army when it was actually directly on the ground couldn't stop the Kassams, and it can't now, even as it kills alleged Hamas leaders at will. So what greater military intervention could the world community bring to bear?

There IS one way the world community MIGHT be able to stop the Kassams. That's bringing about a cease-fire between Hamas and Israel. (No rockets against Israel, no assassinations of Hamas militants from the air, no embargoes on food, fuel, etc.) In December 2007 Hamas proposed that, and the Israeli government rejected it (though two Israeli Cabinet members supported it). [For articles on this proposal, see <http://www.shalomctr.org/node/1339>].

So it would seem the only pressure the world community can bring to bear that will make a difference is pressure on the Israeli government to agree to that PLUS continuing pressure on Hamas and the Israeli government to carry it out, once the proposal is accepted.

The trouble is that so far many Israelis have been locked into the notion that only more and more coercion will work, just as many Palestinians have been locked into the notion that only more and more violence will work. NEITHER WORKS.

It will take outsiders to open up other possibilities. That is especially the task of the religiously, ethically, and spiritually rooted communities in America.

The Shalom Center is working on ways of giving this approach some public visibility and clout. We have already been exploring support for a statement reframing the conflict in those terms.

Ideally, it seems a number of religious leaders (whether their organizations could do this or not) should initiate such a statement and open it to support by a broad spectrum of people from all communities.