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Frequently Asked Questions about Operation Protective Edge

Why has Israel engaged in military action in Gaza?

- Israel has offered peace and an independent state to the Palestinians on several occasions, but groups such as Hamas – which is backed by Iran and governs the Gaza Strip – reject Israel's right to exist as part of a sustained effort to harm Israelis and Jews. Since taking control over Gaza, a coastal stretch of land that borders Israel and Egypt, Hamas has fired missiles into Israel and waged terror attacks. In July 2014, Hamas initiated a major terror campaign, firing approximately 4,000 rockets at Israeli civilians. Hamas also built dozens of underground cement tunnels, which reach all the way from Gaza into Israeli towns, with the goal of kidnapping and murdering Israelis.
- Eighty percent of Israelis live under the threat that a rocket could fall on their homes at any time, or that a terrorist could pop out of a hole in the ground to attack their families. Imagine finding yourself among the men, women and children who are afforded just 15 seconds to run to bomb shelters when air raid sirens sound. Elderly and infirm Israelis, including many Holocaust survivors, live in a constant state of fear, going to bed knowing their limited mobility may make shelter elusive. Millions of civilians have fled their homes in southern Israel, fearing for their safety.
- Israelis seek peace with their Palestinian neighbors, but are forced to make difficult decisions to defend themselves from indiscriminate violence such as rocket and missile attacks by Hamas. In order to address these concerns and protect Israeli citizens, Israel launched Operation Protective Edge, which seeks to destroy Hamas' terrorist infrastructure, while minimizing casualties on both sides. Israelis hope that when the terrorists no longer have the ability to attack, peace and security will be restored to the region for both Israelis and Palestinians. Israelis cannot accept a reality where their physical safety and security is constantly threatened by terrorism.

What is Hamas and what is its role in the current conflict?

- Hamas is a Palestinian organization that is classified as a terrorist group by Israel, the United States, the European Union, Egypt, Japan and many other countries. Hamas, which is backed by Iran, has sent suicide bombers into Israeli cafes, markets and nightclubs, and launched tens of thousands of rocket attacks on Israelis over the past several years.
- In 2007, Hamas violently seized control of the Gaza Strip from Fatah, a rival Palestinian faction, which until then was the government in place. The Hamas Charter openly seeks Israel's destruction and clearly states that it intends to "fight the Jews and kill them," in an act of genocide, thus eradicating the State of Israel and its Jewish inhabitants.
- During Operation Protective Edge, Hamas fired thousands of rockets at major Israeli cities and towns, and sent terrorist squads into Israel with the goal of inflicting as many civilian casualties as possible. Hamas has repeatedly opposed, violated, or refused to extend ceasefires brokered by Egypt and others, consistently choosing violence over peace for both peoples.

Why are there so many more Palestinian deaths than Israeli deaths?

- Israelis employ a high-tech missile defense system known as the "Iron Dome," which was developed with critical assistance from the United States in response to these decades-long threats. The Iron Dome shoots down incoming rockets from Gaza mid-air with a 90 percent success rate, which is why there are few Israeli civilian deaths.
- The high number of Palestinian civilian casualties is tragic and directly attributable to the actions of Hamas. Hamas uses Palestinian civilians as human shields by placing rockets, rocket launching pads, weapons caches and tunnel openings in private homes, UN schools, hospitals and mosques. Hamas places them there in order to draw Israel's ire and increase the number of casualties in Gaza, so that they can cynically capitalize on the carnage to advance its propaganda war against Israel. The Israeli Defense Forces have taken tremendous efforts to avoid harming Palestinian civilians. IDF warns civilians in Gaza of impending strikes on Hamas' rocket launching, production, and storage sites, terror tunnel entrances, and other targets as part of efforts to minimize the deaths of Palestinian non-combatants. IDF provides phone calls, text messages, dropped leaflets, and fires warning shots whenever possible.

- Despite these warnings, Hamas instructs Palestinians to ignore these calls, or sometimes prevents them from leaving. Where Israelis show restraint, often calling off airstrikes if Palestinian civilians are at risk, Hamas' ambition is to randomly kill as many Israelis as possible.

Why does Israel impose a naval blockade on Gaza?

- Despite this current conflict, Israel isn't at war with the people of Gaza. Hamas, which has a terrorist stronghold in Gaza, is attempting to wage war on Israel. In 2007, after Hamas seized control of Gaza, both Egypt and Israel sealed their borders due to security risks.
- The only reason why Israel must inspect Gaza-bound shipments is because terrorists rely on these deliveries to smuggle in guns, grenades and other weapons that have been used to kill Israelis - including "dual use" items that have been diverted from humanitarian to military use such as cement and steel to build rockets and tunnels. The naval blockade will be lifted when this threat is removed.
- In spite of the blockade however, Iran has been able to secretly smuggle missiles and arms to Hamas disguised as humanitarian assistance, such as in March 2014, when the Israeli navy seized a shipment of Iranian missiles headed to Gaza. Additionally, materials meant for civilian purposes such as cement and steel, which are intended to build houses, schools and mosques, are instead used by Hamas to build rockets, mortars, and a network of underground smuggling tunnels. In doing so, Hamas chooses to invest in terrorism over the wellbeing of its own people.
- Despite the risk, Israel continues to coordinate hundreds of trucks carrying thousands of tons of medical supplies, humanitarian aid, fuel, food and other goods via the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings to Gaza, which remained open despite recent hostilities. The IDF also opened a field hospital near the Erez crossing to treat wounded Gazans and are working in tandem with the Red Cross.

Why does the United States support Israel's military action?

- The United States, along with many other nations, believes that Israel has a right to defend itself from terrorist attacks which threaten the lives of its citizens. No country in the world would tolerate a terrorist group launching cross-border attacks on its civilians.
- On July 16, President Obama stated, "*Israel has a right to defend itself from rocket attacks that terrorize the Israeli people. There's no country on Earth that can be expected to live under a daily barrage of rockets.*" Regarding Hamas, Secretary of State John Kerry stated, "*I cannot condemn strongly enough the actions of Hamas in so brazenly firing rockets in the face of a goodwill effort to offer a ceasefire... We urge all parties to support this ceasefire. Israel has the right to defend itself.*" In addition, the House and the Senate unanimously passed resolutions reaffirming American support for Israel's right to defend itself and called on Hamas to cease rocket attacks on Israeli civilians.

Is Israel really committed to a peaceful resolution of this conflict?

- Israelis are committed to a peaceful resolution of this conflict and a two-state solution, but Israel cannot move forward toward peace alone. Israel has made peace with their other neighbors in Egypt and Jordan, and has offered the Palestinians their own state on several occasions. The Palestinian leadership has refused to accept these offers.
- Israel has worked hard to de-escalate the conflict with Hamas, agreeing to several different Egypt-brokered ceasefire proposals, which were also supported by the U.S., European Union, Middle East Quartet and the Arab League. Hamas has either rejected each ceasefire, or agreed to a humanitarian pause only to violate it with more rocket fire.
- The majority of Israelis and Palestinians, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, are committed to a two-state solution in which the Jewish State of Israel can live in peace and security alongside a viable, independent Palestinian nation state. Hamas, on the other hand, refuses to accept Israel's right to exist and is committed to a campaign of violence against the Jewish state. In order to achieve peace, Hamas must renounce violence and recognize Israel's right to exist.

What will it take for there to be peace between Israelis and Palestinians?

- Both Israelis and Palestinians deserve peace and security, free from terror and violence. Hamas' extensive network of terror tunnels, used to smuggle weapons into Gaza and to send terrorists into Israel to kidnap and kill civilians, must be dismantled.
- Hamas must be demilitarized in order to ensure that this conflict does not repeat itself. A final peace between Israelis and Gazans, however, will not be possible until this occurs, and both parties can live in safety and security.
- It is important to remember that the only long-term solution to this conflict is a negotiated, two-state solution that will allow Israel to live side-by-side in peace and security alongside an independent nation state of Palestine. Both peoples deserve peace and normalcy, but neither will be possible until Hamas halts its attacks.