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## Bush's Last War Crime

**George Bush's rubber stamp alliance with Israeli military savagery against Gaza adds to the list of criminal-level disasters he has involved the United States during his eight-year regime. Will Barack Obama be a peacemaker? Asks Robert Dreyfuss.**

The Israeli invasion of Gaza, launched Saturday, might very well be George W. Bush's last and final war crime. For eight years, Bush has coupled unparalleled ignorance of the Middle East with supreme arrogance. It is precisely that deadly combination of ignorance and arrogance that is on display now, as a politically motivated Israeli invasion of Gaza unfolds with the full support of the Bush administration.

In his weekly radio address, delivered as Israeli tanks and armor rumbled into the Gaza Strip, Bush declared: "This recent outburst of violence was instigated by Hamas -- a Palestinian terrorist group supported by Iran and Syria that calls for Israel's destruction. ... Another one-way ceasefire that leads to rocket attacks on Israel is not acceptable. And promises from Hamas will not suffice -- there must be monitoring mechanisms in place to help ensure that smuggling of weapons to terrorist groups in Gaza comes to an end. I urge all parties to pressure Hamas to turn away from terror."

A more sweeping endorsement of Israel's action is hard to imagine. Writing in the Washington Post, columnist Jim Hoagland, a reliable, neoconservative-allied scribbler, describes it this way: "He did not just give Israel a green light to inflict as much damage as possible on Hamas once that radical movement foolishly renounced a six-month-old truce. Bush knocked down the traffic light post and waved the Israelis through the intersection."

Personally, I find Hamas despicable. It is a right-wing Islamist group with open terrorist inclinations, motivated by a fanciful notion that it can defeat Israel with its pinprick attacks. I've also written extensively in my book, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam*, how Israel created Hamas systematically and deliberately during the 1970s and 1980s, building up the Muslim Brotherhood and Ahmed Yassin's proto-Hamas movement as a counterweight to Fatah.

But Israel could easily have absorbed the rockets launched by Hamas, nearly all of which crash harmlessly in remote areas, if it had truly sought to work out an accommodation with the

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Palestinians. Most important, Israel could have endorsed and supported efforts by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and others to create a lasting accord between Hamas and Fatah. Instead, Israel did the opposite, meeting each of Hamas' acts of violence with far greater violence of its own.

The outcome of Israel's action is likely to be to strengthen, not weaken, Hamas. It will also have the following collateral effects:

- It will undermine the moderate wing of the Palestinian movement, perhaps fatally.
- It will weaken the government of Egypt, boosting the power of the radical-right Muslim Brotherhood there, to the point where Egypt's regime could collapse, with incalculable consequences.
- It will boost radicalism across the region, especially its Islamist variant, in Lebanon and Iraq in particular, and help Iran gain traction among otherwise unreceptive Arab populations.

Hamas is unlikely to seek a deal now. Having watched Israel blunder into Lebanon two years ago, in a futile effort to eradicate Hizbullah, only to see that movement emerge victorious and take control of part of Lebanon's own government, Hamas is not going to sue for peace. In that, they may be wrong, since Gaza is not Lebanon. In Gaza, Hamas has no access to resupply its armaments, and the territory on which it operates is extremely limited. So it is going to suffer severe military losses and vast casualties against the lethal Israeli Defense Forces.

Israel's objectives aren't clear. Israeli hawks, including Bibi Netanyahu -- appearing Sunday on CNN's Late Edition -- insist that Israel cannot stop its action until Hamas is utterly defeated, whatever that means. In the New York Times, two top Israeli leaders are quoted to the effect that Israel's objective is regime change and the elimination of Hamas. Foreign Minister Livni put it this way: "There is no doubt that as long as Hamas controls Gaza, it is a problem for Israel, a problem for the Palestinians and a problem for the entire region."

And Haim Ramon, the vice premier, said: "What I think we need to do is to reach a situation in which we do not allow Hamas to govern. That is the most important thing."

But in trying to eliminate Hamas, Israel will revive Hamas, which has been losing popularity dramatically until the current explosion. With Barack Obama maintaining his sphinx-like silence, it's the Bush-Cheney-Rice administration that remains in charge. They clearly have no intention of intervening, unless Israel gets into trouble and requests help.

And I am yet to be convinced that the next US president will change things: So far, at least, Barack Obama has given no indication that he'd do anything different. I'd like to think he would. Some of his advisers, before the election, told me that they thought Obama would talk to Hamas. Let's hope so.

**Robert Dreyfuss** is a contributing editor of *The Nation* magazine, and the author of *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (Metropolitan).

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