

## WHAT DOES ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF REALLY MEAN?

Once again, the Associated Press reports (<http://www.newsday.com/news/world/israel-hamas-trade-fire-tough-proposals-1.4244962>), Palestinian civilians are being sacrificed on the altar of retaliation.

In return for Palestinian rocket attacks that have killed three Israeli civilians and wounded dozens more, Israeli airstrikes on Gaza have so far killed 56 civilians and wounded 840, including 225 children. And what does our newly re-elected president say? “We will continue to support Israel’s right to defend itself.”

This is the right claimed by the Israeli government whenever it launches airstrikes which—whatever their targets—end up killing civilians. But just what does Israel’s right to defend itself really mean?

In a just and reasonable world, it could mean simply that Israel has the right to construct what it has already built: an Iron Dome capable of intercepting rocket attacks. Since the dome can thwart rockets launched against populated areas, it has already blocked 260 rockets fired from Gaza, thus proving that without killing a single Palestinian, Israel can defend virtually all of its population. And no one, so far as I know, disputes Israel’s right to its dome.

But in practice, Israel’s right to defend itself means the right to kill an unlimited number of Palestinians for every single Israeli life—whether civilian or military—taken by the Palestinians. In the present conflict, Israel has already killed MORE THAN FIFTY civilians for every single Israeli life lost. And for each new day of conflict, Israel will surely take many more such lives. In the last Gaza war of December 2008-January 2009, when the Palestinians killed thirteen Israelis, Israel killed 1400 Palestinians, most of them civilians. In other words, Israel killed NEARLY ONE HUNDRED PALESTINIANS for every single Israeli it lost.

This ratio is nearly the same as the one adopted by Nazi troops in some of the areas they occupied during World War II. According to R.J. Rummel (<http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/NAZIS.CHAP1.HTM>), the Nazis repaid guerilla attacks in those areas by means of a simple rule: “they would massacre one hundred nearby civilians for every German soldier killed.”

Of course Israel will say, again and again, that it does not target civilians, that it seeks only to kill the Palestinians who dare to attack them. But just what is the

moral difference between deliberately killing civilians and ordering airstrikes that end up killing them—again and again?

Until and unless we can answer this question honestly, how we can go on supporting what Israel means by its right to self-defense?