

**REPORT ON THE EVENTS OF THE
03/04/19 PARLIAMENTARY
MEETING ON GAZA:
PRO-ISRAEL ADVOCACY ATTEMPTS TO DISTORT
THE NARRATIVE ON THE GREAT MARCH OF RETURN**



The Situation in Gaza: Hamas, The UNHRC, and What's at Stake for the UK

- Friends of Israel Initiative is a group of former political leaders, including a range of former cabinet ministers from countries around the world, that attempt to use their networks in politics to try and influence the narrative on Israel.
- On Wednesday the 3rd of April 2019, the Friends of Israel Initiative hosted a seminar entitled 'The Situation in Gaza: Hamas, the UNHRC, and What's at Stake for the UK' at the UK Parliament. The seminar was chaired by Baroness Deech and heard from two speakers – Natasha Hausdorff of UK Lawyers for Israel and Col. Richard Kemp of the High Level Military Group.
- Natasha Hausdorff: *'Hamas and other internationally designated terrorist organisations have for over a year now conducted military style operations along Israel's border under the cover of thousands [half a million] of civilians'*.
- *'The UN report is predicated on the fundamental misrepresentation that the protests along the border are predominately civilian in nature'*.
- Col. Richard Kemp: *'What the IDF did was to save the lives of innocent civilians on the Gaza border. [Hamas] is the only army in history that has used a strategy that is intended to have their own population killed'*.

Pro-Israel advocacy organisations, in their categorisation of the Great March of Return protests, have attempted to create the impression that Palestinians who participated in the Great March of Return protests were combatants and were actively engaged in combat with the Israeli Defence Forces before being fatally shot and injured. Such categorisations have tried to rationalise violence by the IDF towards Palestinians as a response, and wrongly implies that Palestinian actions warranted Israel using maximum force. The dissemination of this narrative, which is markedly contrary to UN and other reporting on the Great March of Return protests, is incredibly dangerous and has the capacity to mislead parliamentarians and statesmen across Europe and beyond. One such advocacy event intended to push the Israeli narrative on the Great March of Return took place in the UK Parliament this week.

On Wednesday the 3rd of April 2019, the Friends of Israel Initiative hosted a seminar entitled 'The Situation in Gaza: Hamas, the UNHRC, and What's at Stake for the UK' at the UK Parliament. The seminar was chaired by Baroness Deech and heard from two speakers – Natasha Hausdorff of UK Lawyers for Israel and Col. Richard Kemp of the High Level Military

Group. The talk was specifically designed to discuss the situation in Gaza in light of the UN Commission of Inquiry's report into the actions taken by the IDF against protestors participating in the Great March of Return. In a statement issued by the Chair of the Commission, Santiago Canton, he stated that actions taken by the IDF 'may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, and must be immediately investigated by Israel'.

Contrary to UN assertions of liability, Natasha Hausdorff of UK Lawyers for Israel, began her segment by noting that ' Hamas and other internationally designated terrorist organisations have for over a year now conducted military style operations along Israel's border under the cover of thousands [half a million] of civilians'. She notes that such protestors were armed with 'wire cutters, explosives, guns, and machetes' and operated with the expressed objective of overcoming 'Israeli security defences and [slaughtering] Israeli civilians'. Given this, Ms. Hausdorff alleges a disconnect between the facts of what happened during the Great March of Return demonstrations and the UN Commission of Inquiry's report into what happened during the year-long protests. To this end, Ms. Hausdorff notes that there are three specific areas of concern with the report: 1) the essential misassumption it makes in regard to the nature of the protests; 2) the fundamental misapplication of international law by the Commission; and, 3) the false conclusions of the report and how such conclusions are dangerous.

In regard to the first area of concern, Ms. Hausdorff alleges that the report is predicated on the fundamental misrepresentation that the protests along the border are predominately civilian in nature. Her basis for making this claim is twofold: a) the assertion that the Commission of Inquiry has conceded that individuals were seen 'cutting the fence with tools' in an attempt to 'cut through the fence'; and, b) that the report acknowledges the ongoing armed conflict between Israel and Hamas but distorts the true nature of the security threat between Hamas and Israel. Given the latter, Ms. Hausdorff asserts that the failure to represent the protests accurately has legal implications insofar as the report frames the protests as a policing issue and thereby makes assumptions of the law enforcement powers that can be used on this basis. According to Ms. Hausdorff, the protests need to be more accurately framed as part of the ongoing conflict between Hamas and Israel in order to explain the actions the IDF took in response to the protests. According to Ms. Hausdorff, the report's refusal to frame the protests in this way raises a salient issue – that is, that 'the report is the most recent example of the UNHRC's institutionalised discrimination against Israel and allows Hamas to cause Palestinian casualties in the process of trying to kill Israelis'.

Following Ms. Hausdorff's segment, Col. Richard Kemp of the High Level Military Group (HLMG) offered a **criticism** of the UN Commission of Inquiry's report from a military standpoint. He noted that the HLMG's unanimous view is that 'the standard set by the IDF

to be effective against the enemy while mitigating civilian casualties could not be achieved by most of their armies – it was too high a standard to expect most of the armies in the world to achieve’. To this end, Col. Kemp referenced his experiences on the frontline of Israel’s border with Gaza to express the idea - echoed by Ms. Hausdorff - that Hamas were in control of the protests and that the IDF acted exemplary given the circumstances they were in. He also noted that the IDF, in trying to quell a violent protests occurring outside their territorial jurisdiction, were operating in incredibly difficult circumstances that ‘explain why death had to be occurred and wounding had to be occurred on the Palestinian population’.

What is more, Col. Kemp noted that the IDF has taken considerable steps to avoid the use of lethal force and ‘the only solution will be found when the wall will be built with Gaza’. Prior to this solution, Col. Kemp noted that the IDF had to kill Palestinians in order to prevent the breach of the border fence and the massacre of Israelis by thousands of armed Hamas affiliates and operatives. Here, he notes:

‘Had the IDF not stopped them from breaking through the fence, what would have happened? The IDF would not have allowed those people to get into those villages . . . it would not have happened . . . the only way they would have stopped them is shooting them in large numbers and without a doubt that would have been legitimate activity as is the way they were shot on the Gaza border . . . what the IDF did was to save the lives of innocent civilians on the Gaza border. [Hamas] is the only army in history that has used a strategy that is intended to have their own population killed’.

EuroPal Forum regards this information with the highest degree of concern. We strongly condemn the present attempts by pro-Israeli advocacy organisations to manipulate the narrative on the Great March of Return, a movement that was deemed a ‘large-scale civilian protest’ by the independent UN report. 189 Palestinians were killed during the period covered by the 9-month period report, 183 of which were killed by live ammunition. This figure includes children, people with disabilities and medical personal. Moreover, the report finds that 35 children were killed during the demonstrations (32 by live ammunition). 60% of these children were killed with gunshots to the head, including a 14-year old girl who was standing 100m from the fence.

We regard the present misrepresentation of the Great March of Return protests as an instance of military combat undertaken by Palestinian combatants as an attempt to justify the IDF’s brutal and strategic use of violence. This misrepresentation is in direct disaccord with paragraph 32. of the independent UN report, which states that ‘the demonstrations were civilian in nature, had clearly stated political aims and, despite some acts of significant violence, did not constitute combat or a military campaign.’

During the period covered by the report, the independent commission of inquiry found that 6,106 people had been wounded by Israeli snipers, who were shooting at Palestinian protesters with live ammunition. By the end of 2018, 1,022 of these people have had to undergo amputations (including 20 children).

A recent report published by the World Health Organisation on the 31st March 2019 found that 'since the start of the demonstrations in Gaza in 2018, a total of 277 people have been killed (52 children) and 31,214 injured. 6,846 people suffered from gunshot wounds, of which 6,196 (91%) presented limb wounds'.

EuroPal Forum views the present justification of the grave loss of life and brutal use of violence by Israeli security forces as an attempt to contribute to the pervasive crisis of Israeli accountability. It should be noted that Israel has refused to cooperate with commission investigations and has not allowed the victims to be visited. Israel has rejected all conclusions of the independent UN enquiry and has stated that the actions of the IDF were taken in legitimate self-defence.