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[Nathan Schneider](#)

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Who Carries the Burden of Peace?

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"y Hamas launch missiles not peace?" complained the Israeli Consulate in New York during a December 30th press conference held on the microblogging site [Twitter](#). Meanwhile, during that fourth day of Israeli air strikes against the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian death toll passed 350. Many around the world, shocked by the flagrant disproportionality of Israeli bombs, have been searching for a way to ask, "y don't u?"

The international reaction has been long on frustration but short on alternatives. After all, Hamas did violate an agreed-upon cease fire by lobbing rockets over the border, however ineffectively compared to Israel's American-supplied F-16s. And Israel has tried to reign in its own ferocity by calling Gazans' cell phones in the [advance of an attack](#) and by trading its cluster bombs for brand-new GBU-39s, designed to [reduce collateral damage](#).

However grateful for any such care, conventional wisdom holds the sneaking suspicion that Israel is bound by some unalterable law of the jungle to unleash its might, as in Lebanon in 2006; it is doing what powerful states are supposed to do. In the face of it, we can only hope that the Gazans will choose to pursue their cause with peace and not missiles, lest their dangerous neighbor grow angry.

The history of the 20th century has seen the discovery of nonviolent action as the weapon *par excellence* of the weak. In Gandhi's India, King's Jim Crow South, the Danish resistance to the Nazis, communist Poland, and countless other times and places, strong-willed people brought powerful regimes to their knees without the help of deadly weapons. Their stories are epics of courage and self-sacrifice.

Palestinians, too, have seen their share of nonviolent heroism, most recently with the Free Gaza Movement, whose boat carrying doctors and activists was attacked on December 30th while trying to break the Israeli blockade. If all these others can win their rights peacefully, people rightfully ask, what right have Gazans to use rockets? Fewer ask the same thing about Israel and its F-16s.

This may be because the century of world wars and nuclear superpowers offered few models of nonviolent action for governments to measure themselves against. Even Gandhi once concluded, "The State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form." For those of us who really would like to see peace rather than missiles, in Gaza and elsewhere, it is time to create examples in the new century of powerful states, not just movements with no other option, choosing nonviolent methods against the temptation to use violent ones. If nonviolence could work against Axis Powers, as it did in Denmark, it can against the Axis of Evil, too.

Making this choice will take no less bravery and sacrifice than we applaud in our troops deployed abroad, to say nothing of strategic imagination. If the poorest victims of oppression can do great things nonviolently, a superpower should be able to accomplish things even greater. The success of peace-building strategies during the surge in Iraq, compared to the shock and awe of before, suggests that these are not pipe dreams.

Breaking away from the cycle of violence demands a deeper understanding of what violence is in the first place. Yes, the Gazan rockets are violent. But so was the blockade imposed on the Strip by Israel and Egypt, blessed by the largest supplier of aid to both countries, the United States. Just as the perpetrators of violence spread far and wide, nonviolent solutions deserve a committed international effort.

Rather than leaving it to the smallest, least powerful, and longest-suffering side of the conflict to assert its rights nonviolently, the powerful can dampen the blasts of Hamas's rockets with mercy. Israel and its backers need to make the real sacrifices necessary to offer the Palestinian people a solution worthy of their dignity. It will not come cheap, but no cost is dearer than more war.

While President-elect Obama keeps quiet on the attacks in Gaza, pundits are mining his past utterances for clues. "If somebody was sending rockets into my house, where my two daughters sleep at night," he said in a southern Israeli town in July, "I'm going to do everything in my power to stop that. And I would expect Israelis to do the same thing." This has by and large been taken as an endorsement of Israel's onslaught. Let us hope that when Obama takes office this month we learn that, in his mind, power can mean something better than bombing raids.

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