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Year-Round Fool

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Distinctly Catholic

Last Friday was April 1st, and I saw a reference to an article by Richard Goldstone in which he amended his infamous report on the war in Gaza in 2008-2009. At first I thought it was an April Fool's Day joke, but I thought to put a note on my to-do list to check out the article when I returned from an errand. The article is Mr. Goldstone's admission of error and recanting of the central claims of his report so there is an April Fool's quality to it after all, but alas, this is no laughing matter.

Where to begin? You will recall that the central charge the Goldstone Report leveled against the government of Israel was that it intentionally targeted civilians in Gaza. Oops. Now, Goldstone admits, "civilians were not intentionally targeted as a matter of policy." He contends that the reason for this misunderstanding was that his investigation had found circumstances for which they had no better explanation than the existence of such a policy. This despite the fact that Israel, which is a democracy with a free press, a parliamentary opposition, and all the accoutrements of a modern society in which governments can be held accountable, has said it has no such policy and, in fact, has decried the Hamas policy of intentionally placing its munitions' dumps and military barracks in and around buildings with high concentrations of civilians. It is Hamas that wants the civilian casualties, not the Israelis.

Further on, Goldstone writes, "Some have suggested that it was absurd to expect Hamas, an organization that has a policy to destroy the state of Israel, to investigate what we said were serious war crimes. It was my hope, even if unrealistic, that Hamas would do so, especially if Israel conducted its own investigations. At minimum I hoped that in the face of a clear finding that its members were committing serious war crimes, Hamas would curtail its attacks. Sadly, that has not been the case." Whence this hope? And, which hope was more foolish, the belief that Hamas would investigate war crimes that it considers part of its essential strategy or the hope that such an "investigation" would lead Hamas to stop the intentional targeting of civilians?

To be clear, we know that many people voted for Hamas because they wanted an end to the corruption of the ruling Fatah movement. We know that Hamas leaders have not evidenced the corruption that Yassir Arafat and his cronies turned into an enterprise. But, we also know that the leadership of Hamas that is so committed to ending corruption is also committed to ending the existence of Israel. Goldstone is one of those Westerners who just can't bring himself to believe that there are evil people in the world, hell-bent on committing evil, but there are and making nice to them will not permit us to wish their evil away.

Alas, poor Mr. Goldstone is not only naive about Hamas. He is naive about the United Nations. He writes: "The purpose of the Goldstone Report was never to prove a foregone conclusion against Israel." Really? Was he unaware that two of the three people who joined him as drafters of the report, Hila Jilanu and Christine Chinkin had condemned Israel *before* they were selected for Goldstone's committee? That is the sort of thing you would want to know if impartiality was important to you.

Ah, but the Goldstone Report was approved by the UN Human Rights Council on a vote of 25-6, so there must have been something to it, yes? Of course, the UN Human Rights Council includes such stalwart defenders of human rights as Russia, China and Libya. It has even been criticized by the U.N. Secretary-General for its excessive focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

So, the Goldstone Report, ridiculous on its face, is now admitted by its own author to be ridiculous. Those who find themselves reflexively rooting against Israel need to ask themselves: When they first read the Goldstone Report, were they suspicious of its findings? Did they not think it odd that it reached such similar conclusions about the intentions of two so different regimes, the one, a modern, secular liberal democracy and the other a radical, Islamicist, thugocracy? Mr. Goldstone may not be the only one with some 'splaining to do.

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