THE SKEPTIC ARENA.COM

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Apparently, Stated Intent Is Magic

by P.Z. Myers (Professor of Biology)

*Sam Harris weighs in on the destruction going on in Gaza. He proceeds very, very carefully, explaining that the situation in Israel is complicated, they’re a largely secular state with a historical justification for their establishment, people with a history of oppression should have a safe haven, wars in any cause all cause casualties, yadda yadda yadda. And I agree emphatically with that. The people of Israel have a secular right to autonomous existence; they have a unique history of persecution (becoming increasingly less unique, unfortunately) and it is morally right to correct an injustice; every war is an evil that has unintended consequences, which is why we should be reluctant to enter them, and only engage when absolutely necessary (and I will also concede that the calculus for determining that is murky). But all that is just a prelude to his justification for Israel’s actions: it’s because their enemies are evil, and deserve it. Somehow, I’m not surprised at that.*

Now PZ quotes Harris:

*"Needless to say, in defending its territory as a Jewish state, the Israeli government and Israelis themselves have had to do terrible things. They have, as they are now, fought wars against the Palestinians that have caused massive losses of innocent life. More civilians have been killed in Gaza in the last few weeks than militants. That’s not a surprise because Gaza is one of the most densely populated places on Earth. Occupying it, fighting wars in it, is guaranteed to get woman and children and other noncombatants killed. And there’s probably little question over the course of fighting multiple wars that the Israelis have done things that amount to war crimes. They have been brutalized by this process—that is, made brutal by it. But that is largely the due to the character of their enemies."*

PZ continues:

*Strangely, he never seems to question the necessity of fighting a war to keep a people oppressed,*

PZ, question - why would Israel fight wars that cost huge amounts of money and many lives, just for the purpose of keeping a people oppressed? What are you claiming is Israel's motive for doing so? Sadistic pleasure? Plunder? The enjoyment derived from playing with new toys like the Iron Dome?

What advantage does Israel gain by keeping a people oppressed?

*or considers the possibility that Palestinians see themselves as victims of the Israeli state, ghettoized and kept in a perpetual condition of essential serfdom…*

PZ, isn't it amazing how a tiny little place like Gaza, with fewer people than the city of Houston, could afford to pay a leader like Arafat over a billion dollars?

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasser_Arafat>

I wonder where those impoverished people came up with so much money?

With his $400,000-a-year salary, it would take the American president 3,250 years to reach Arafat's net worth - provided that you didn't deduct any taxes, and none of the money was spent on things like ... food.

And if the money mostly came from foreign sources, why do you think Arafat stashed it in foreign bank accounts, helping to keep his people, many of whom would die for him, in a ghettoized and perpetual state of serfdom?

I wonder how many schools and hospitals a billion dollars could build in a place where prices are so cheap?

*and that even that tiny bit of land that they do hold is constantly threatened by settlers and politicians eager to annex the place by one means or another.*

PZ, you left out the biggest threat of all: violent ideologues who gain power over the people, and then sacrifice the lives and well-being of those people, in order to promote their ideology.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas>

Perhaps submitting to the control of violent thugs like Hamas, an internationally recognized terror organization, wasn't the best choice that Palestinians have made recently? But it may be understandable in light of the tactics used by Hamas, as demonstrated when they used violence to wrest control of Gaza from the Fatah. Perhaps that is why journalists report that the people in Gaza are afraid to even speak to them about Hamas?

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/07/25/war-weary-gazans-lash-out-at-hamas-over-refusal-cease-fire/>

*There is no consideration of alternatives, that maybe war is not the best solution to an extremely complicated (as he knows!) social problem.*

PZ, armed retaliation was not chosen because it was the best solution. Had you followed the news reports somewhat more closely, you might have noticed that the Israelis endured hundreds of rocket attacks before resorting to war.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_Palestinian\_rocket\_attacks\_on\_Israel,\_2014](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Palestinian_rocket_attacks_on_Israel%2C_2014)

If Obama had allowed an American city to be attacked relentlessly and his only defense of that city was continued negotiation, he would have been impeached - and rightly so.

Or to put this in terms you can understand PZ, how long do you think Obama should negotiate if the city being fired upon was ... your hometown of Morris, Minnesota?

Funny isn't it PZ, how your tune changes when you are the one trying to hide your kids from incoming rockets.

*But to admit that they are committing war crimes, but that it is all the enemy’s fault, is simply disgraceful.*

PZ, I don't think anyone is saying that it is "all" the fault of the Palestinians. It is obvious that both sides can point to valid grievances. But even when you have a valid grievance, you are going to have a hard time justifying why your grievance grants you the right to attack and kill innocent civilians; and I am referring to the missile and mortar attacks on civilians by Hamas - not the retaliatory strikes by Israel.

If anyone should feel disgraced, it is the one who criticizes the response of the victim while ignoring the initiation of violence by the other side. As a strong feminist supporter, that is something you should not have to be told, PZ.

*I must emphasize that this is NOT A DEFENSE OF HAMAS.*

Well PZ, you could have fooled me.

*As Harris points out, their goals are indefensible and despicable.*

Now PZ quotes Harris:

*"The truth is that there is an obvious, undeniable, and hugely consequential moral difference between Israel and her (sic) enemies. The Israelis are surrounded by people who have explicitly genocidal intentions towards them. The charter of Hamas is explicitly genocidal. It looks forward to a time, based on Koranic prophesy, when the earth itself will cry out for Jewish blood, where the trees and the stones will say “O Muslim, there’s a Jew hiding behind me. Come and kill him.” This is a political document. We are talking about a government that was voted into power by a majority of the Palestinians."*

PZ continues:

*That is an evil statement, and I condemn it whole-heartedly. But condemning one side does not mean I endorse the other — it is possible to see that there is a lot of indefensible and despicable activity on both sides. Also, I’m not saying “a pox upon both houses” — I don’t think the evil Jews deserve to die, any more than I think all those evil Palestinians deserve it. There needs to be a solution to a complicated hatred between both sides, and the simple solution of war until one side is broken does not resolve it.*

PZ, everyone on the planet has already figured that out. No place on Earth has seen more attempts by more peacemakers to find a diplomatic solution, than Israel. Nobel prizes have even been awarded to those who brought temporary peace.

But there is one side that simply does not want peace and they even spelled it out for you in their own charter. You call their document evil - yet you choose to dismiss it; this despite the fact that their actions prove that they take their charter quite literally.

*Short of genocide (do I need to argue against that?), it only exacerbates the issues. Does anyone really believe blowing up houses, killing terrorists (and incurring lots of collateral damage), building giant walls, and imposing more and more restrictions on the lives of Palestinians, will actually accommodate themselves to Israeli rule?*

PZ, well stated ... from the Hamas point of view.

You could have asked "does anyone really believe that firing mortars at malls, sending suicide bombers onto buses full of civilians, or firing missiles into civilian areas in Israel from within hospitals, mosques, and schools, will actually encourage anyone to seek peace?"

But you didn't PZ ... you didn't.

Earlier you claimed that you were not defending Hamas, but by ignoring the atrocities I just listed, you have implicitly defended them.

*Elie Wiesel, in Legends of Our Time, wrote this:*

Now PZ quotes Wiesel:

*"Every Jew, somewhere in his being, should set apart a zone of hate — healthy, virile hate — for what the German personifies and for what persists in the German."*

PZ continues:

*Should we use that to argue against the legitimacy of Israel?*

PZ, that was a very clumsy attempt at creating a Straw Man. Can you name anyone who has suggested that? Are you claiming that Harris did?

*It’s an example of emphatic hatred directed at a whole people (even though he walks it back in a footnote — he’s decrying racism, not all Germans — and he also visited Germany and felt no desire to kill everyone he met.)*

*Persecution tends to do that to people, to feed the fires of hatred. It’s not an excuse, but when you kill and torture and oppress, normal human beings tend not to reply with love and forgiveness.*

*Then Harris trots out the most stupid argument ever.*

Now PZ quotes Harris:

*"Whatever terrible things the Israelis have done, it is also true to say that they have used more restraint in their fighting against the Palestinians than we—the Americans, or Western Europeans—have used in any of our wars. They have endured more worldwide public scrutiny than any other society has ever had to while defending itself against aggressors. The Israelis simply are held to a different standard. And the condemnation leveled at them by the rest of the world is completely out of proportion to what they have actually done."*

PZ continues:

*I’ve been hearing a lot of this sort of thing, and it’s nonsense. With American gun laws, I could buy an assault rifle, modify it to be fully automatic, get a couple of extra large clips, and march into the local Catholic church and gun down the entire congregation (NO, I would never do such a thing). We have that power. So if I get a rifle and shoot just one Catholic as they were walking down the street (also never going to do that), could I use the excuse that I was exercising commendable restraint? If I did kill 10 innocent people, could I then claim that I was being judged by a different standard, because I could have parked a truck full of fertilizer explosive outside the building and killed hundreds and destroyed the whole church, just like Tim McVeigh?*

PZ, that was one of the worst false equivalencies I have ever seen. In your desperate attempt to misrepresent Harris' position you tried to equate the military struggle between two groups of people with mass murderers. What's next? The Hitler card?

*No. I judge by a consistent moral standard, rather than the relative one Harris is using.*

PZ, how do you figure you are using a consistent moral standard when you apply different standards of conduct to each side in the conflict? Would you have waited weeks to criticize Israel if they had been the ones who first starting firing missiles at civilians?

No need to answer PZ, we already know the answer to that one.

*Killing people is not a good thing, whether it’s one or a thousand or six million, and the existence of one gigantic moral atrocity, like the Holocaust or the Indian genocide, does not suddenly diminish the significance of numerically smaller crimes. It’s horror all the way around.*

PZ, you are attempting to classify all atrocities as equal. That is provably false. Pointing out the fact that all atrocities are horrible does not grant small ones the same degree of horror, as much larger ones.

*There is also a kind of moral blindness at work here.*

PZ, we agree on that. We just disagree as to whether it is Harris or you who is wearing the blindfold.

*He says the condemnation is out of proportion to what they’ve actually done…so what exactly have they done? Harris comes right out and tells us.*

Now PZ quotes Harris:

*"But there is no way to look at the images coming out Gaza—especially of infants and toddlers riddled by shrapnel—and think that this is anything other than a monstrous evil. Insofar as the Israelis are the agents of this evil, it seems impossible to support them. And there is no question that the Palestinians have suffered terribly for decades under the occupation. This is where most critics of Israel appear to be stuck. They see these images, and they blame Israel for killing and maiming babies. They see the occupation, and they blame Israel for making Gaza a prison camp. I would argue that this is a kind of moral illusion, borne of a failure to look at the actual causes of this conflict, as well as of a failure to understand the intentions of the people on either side of it."*

PZ begins his reply by quoting part of Harris' quote:

*“The Palestinians have suffered terribly for decades under the occupation”.*

*Stop right there. What do you mean, we critics are “stuck”? Isn’t that a terrible, awful fact of Middle East history that is being blithely glossed over?*

PZ, if you want to see the best example of "blithely glossing over," go back to that list I gave you, of Palestinian atrocities that you have blithely glossed over.

*Of course it is. Sam Harris apparently does not think it’s that big a deal that the Palestinians are suffering under an occupation,*

PZ, then you are ignoring Harris' very clear statements to the contrary.

*and for someone who wants to claim we have to look at the big picture to see the causes of the conflict, he doesn’t seem to see how that could have led to the hatred expressed by Hamas.*

PZ, what did Harris say that led you to that assertion?

And I would add that, yet again, you seem to be the one who is only looking at this from one side. Once again you sympathize with Hamas' hatred yet mention nothing about reasons for Israel's hatred.

*Again, not to excuse it…*

PZ, you keep trying to cover your bases by denying that you are doing ... exactly what you are doing.

Inserting disclaimers does not nullify what follows the disclaimer. Every time you point your finger of blame only in one direction, Israel, excusing Hamas is exactly what you *are* doing.

*but if you want to address it, you can’t simply call the Palestinians evil bad guys and offer no solutions other than shooting them.*

PZ, whom are you claiming is suggesting that? Harris? If not Harris, then whom?

PZ - links please.

*Both sides have deep antecedents and a thousand justifications. See the Elie Wiesel quote above. Many of the Palestinians hate the Israelis, no small wonder. You don’t fix it by shooting their cousin, or dropping a bomb on the local schoolhouse.*

PZ, you just excused Palestinian hate when you said "no small wonder." Yet, as we have seen with every statement you have made: Israel is ignored.

*But all that matters to Harris is intent.*

PZ again quotes Harris:

*"And this gets to the heart of the moral difference between Israel and her (sic) enemies. And this is something I discussed in The End of Faith. To see this moral difference, you have to ask what each side would do if they had the power to do it.*

*What would the Jews do to the Palestinians if they could do anything they wanted? Well, we know the answer to that question, because they can do more or less anything they want. The Israeli army could kill everyone in Gaza tomorrow. So what does that mean? Well, it means that, when they drop a bomb on a beach and kill four Palestinian children, as happened last week, this is almost certainly an accident. They’re not targeting children. They could target as many children as they want. Every time a Palestinian child dies, Israel edges ever closer to becoming an international pariah. So the Israelis take great pains not to kill children and other noncombatants."*

Now PZ replies:

*Whoa. So the reason we know that Israel would not commit genocide if they could do anything they wanted is because right now they have total power and can do anything they want, and they aren’t committing genocide. But that’s not true! Israel’s military power is strongly dependent on foreign support — maintaining good relations with the United States is a major constraint (well, maybe not that constraining, because so far it looks like Congress rolls over and does whatever Israel asks). Further, in his cautious prelude, Harris emphasized that Israel has a complex society with a very strong secular component — there are Jewish elements who resist the idea of wholesale murder, too. Right now, Israel has external and internal constraints, so it’s silly to argue that they don’t.*

*Israel has elected a government that is aggressively militant. If that government were released from all restraints, I suspect that they’d push for an even more thorough campaign of extermination. But that’s speculation about intent — I’m more interested in the actual evidence.*

PZ, but you just did speculate about moral intent and you made it clear to everyone that you believe that they would act like monsters and embark upon a campaign of thorough extermination. So my question is: when you formed this opinion about the Israelis being murdering monsters - what evidence did you use to come to that conclusion?

PZ, also - thanks for exposing your true feelings to the audience so that even those who are kind of slow on the uptake can see the bias, glowing like a neon sign, that is the motivation for this disgraceful hack job.

*I look at the casualties, and there sure seem to be a lot of dead Palestinians for an enemy that takes “great pains not to kill children and other noncombatants”.*

PZ, define "a lot."

Oh that's right, according to what you said earlier, since they are both horrible, there is no difference between a holocaust and a single death, so obviously a lot can be anything you need it to be.

*And then there’s the distribution of the deaths.*

Now PZ quotes CNN:

*"The United Nations estimates that more than 70% of the Palestinians killed were civilians, including 226 youths and 117 women. More than 150 were members of armed groups, the United Nations says."*

PZ, when the media focuses on women and children, as if their lives are more valuable, that is an obvious Appeal to Emotion. Is that why you are quoting it?

PZ continues:

*UNICEF said Monday that about two-thirds of the children killed were 12 years old or younger.*

Thanks for the answer, PZ. I'll take that as a "yes."

*We’re supposed to believe in reason and evidence.*

PZ, yet your attack on Harris has featured neither. It's been laced with logical fallacies, misrepresentations, and is dripping with bias.

*When I see a thousand dead bodies, many of them children, and city blocks reduced to rubble, I tend not to accept the claim that that was reasonable restraint.*

PZ, you've already made it clear that in your mind all atrocities are equal. That irrational, and easily disprovable position, is the one that you are relying on, in an attempt to persuade readers to dismiss the reasonable restraint claims.

*Likewise, when Hamas launches rockets into Jewish suburbs, I tend not to accept that they are acting under reasonable restraint.*

PZ, thanks for adding that in, at the end of your essay. But no one ever said Hamas was acting under reasonable restraint so your statement is pointless.

Oh I see: the point was to show the audience how fair you are ... nice try.

*We get another of those hypocritical arguments used by IDF apologists.*

Now PZ quotes Harris one last time:

*"The truth is that everything you need to know about the moral imbalance between Israel and her (sic) enemies can be understood on the topic of human shields. Who uses human shields? Well, Hamas certainly does. They shoot their rockets from residential neighborhoods, from beside schools, and hospitals, and mosques. Muslims in other recent conflicts, in Iraq and elsewhere, have also used human shields. They have laid their rifles on the shoulders of their own children and shot from behind their bodies."*

PZ continues:

*OK. So we should excuse the deaths of all the civilians caused by the Israeli military because they are a regrettable and unavoidable consequence of fighting in an urban area with a high civilian population density.*

PZ, if you build any more Straw Man arguments you'll be able to open up your own cornfield. Harris didn't say their deaths should be excused; he was pointing to those most responsible for those deaths.

PZ, do you believe that Hamas leaders didn't know that if they fired enough missiles into Israel, that eventually Israel would retaliate? Of course they knew ... why else would they keep firing them?

Do you think they didn't know about Israel's iron dome that would render most of their missiles impotent? Of course they knew; especially after the first few blew up.

Do you think Hamas didn't know that many innocent Palestinians would be killed when Israel finally retaliated?

PZ, how could they *not* know?

Hamas' leaders knew those people would have difficulty escaping the bombs. They knew that missiles would strike civilian targets because they fired their own rockets from areas next to schools, hospitals, and mosques.

So what did these Hamas "leaders" choose to do ...

knowing all of that?

Well, we know what they chose to do: they chose to sacrifice the lives of their own people because they weren't happy with their political situation. They were willing to allow their own people to die in return for the international indignation that would result from the tragedy ... that they started.

Unlike most of the armies throughout history who fought bravely against overwhelming odds, the mighty warriors of Gaza fight behind the robes of women and the bodies of their own children.

Yeah PZ, you *are* defending Hamas; and the more you protest that you aren't, the more you remind me of Richard Nixon protesting "I am not a crook."

His denials didn't work either.

*But we have to blame the Palestinians for fighting in their homes in an urban area with a high civilian population density — they should have found some nice open fields somewhere and deployed an army that could be met by the Israeli army, I guess.*

PZ, that was the choice made by countless courageous armies in the past. That choice would have spared their women and children. Obviously, Hamas chose to sacrifice them instead.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thermopolae>

*And please, please stop characterizing specific groups with specific issues and causes with global Islamism. I despise that religion myself, but that does not mean you can simply lump Palestinians under the thumb of Israel with Muslims in Iraq or unsourced claims that Muslims use their own children as shields, or complaining about ISIS when talking about the events in Gaza.*

PZ, you can choose to ignore global Islamism and pretend there is no connection, but many of us can see the connections, and we are trying to do something about it. If that bothers you, then at least get out of the way.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas#Islamization\_efforts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas%23Islamization_efforts)

*Let’s start by recognizing that Palestinians have legitimate grievances, as Harris tacitly acknowledges,*

PZ, tacitly? Your first Harris quote included this paragraph:

*"the Israeli government and Israelis themselves have had to do terrible things. They have, as they are now, fought wars against the Palestinians that have caused massive losses of innocent life."*

PZ, there is nothing tacit about that paragraph. That only adds another log to the bonfire of evidence that this vile rant of yours is nothing more than a poorly thought-out personal attack, devoid of any logical counterarguments.

*and not ignoring them under the umbrella of simply declaring them wicked and deserving of all that they get.*

PZ, yet another Straw Man argument? It is truly sad to see what a great warrior like yourself has been reduced to. I don't even recognize you anymore. If this is an example of what you plan to produce from this point on, the world would be better off if you could be coaxed into taking up a new hobby ... like knitting.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

Exotic bound states comprising more than 3 quarks

have been confirmed

For a long time, physicists were only able to reliably verify 2 different classes of hadrons: volatile mesons comprising one quark and one antiquark; and baryons consisting of three quarks.

Protons and neutrons, which make up atomic nuclei, are examples of baryons. Physicists have searched in vain for exotic bound states comprising more than 3 quarks. Experiments have now shown that, in fact, such complex particles do exist in nature.

Only recently, have researchers found strong indications for extremely short-lived, exotic particles comprising 4 quarks, called "tetraquarks." Tetraquarks are comprised of 2, quark/anti-quark pairs. The transient intermediate state (called "resonance") exists for a time span so short, that light can only travel the distance of the diameter of a small atomic nucleus.

Now scientists report the discovery of an equally short-lived particle, the dibaryon. Whether all six quarks of the dibaryon form a single compact entity or a "hadronic molecule," has yet to be determined.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

PZ Myers (no biography - previously quoted)

“Common sense – so rare it’s a god damn superpower.”