

Truth about Gaza: US, Jerusalem's roles in the crisis

The knee-jerk reaction in the White House and Israel to the recent violence in Gaza is to blame Hamas and be done with it. The radical Hamas organization that controls Gaza drove thousands of Palestinians toward the fence, the argument goes, so it is wholly to blame for the 62 killed by Israeli snipers, the bulk of them Hamas members.



TRUDY RUBIN

But this PR blame game obscures the bigger picture.

Two million Gazans, imprisoned in a tiny strip of land with a collapsed economy, see no political and economic future. They are trapped between a reckless Hamas, a feckless Palestinian leadership in the West Bank, and an Israeli government that ignores them except for military action. Add to that a blinkered White House that pours fuel on dry tinder.

Rather than face facts — and address Gaza's economic ills — Jerusalem and Washington promote convenient myths that absolve themselves from responsibility. If both governments continue down that blind path, the violence in Gaza

will explode again with huge costs to Israel as well.

The myths go as follows: First, Israel ended its occupation of Gaza when it withdrew its troops and Jewish settlers from the 8-by-45-kilometer strip in 2005. So Jerusalem has no more responsibility for the strip's internal affairs. Especially since, myth two, the Palestinians chose Hamas in 2005 legislative elections because its charter envisions the end of Israel and endorses violent resistance; ergo, they caused their own misery.

In reality, Israel has retained control of Gaza's border, air space, and sea coast, except for one outlet into a remote area of Egypt. Therefore Israel entirely controls Gazan

imports and exports, its coastal fishing, along with its supply of electricity. It also controls all movement in and out of Gaza. Since Hamas took control, Israel has mostly bottled up Gaza's population while border closures strangle its industry and agriculture.

As for the 2006 elections, which the Bush administration urged on a reluctant Palestinian leadership, polls showed that the main reasons a plurality of Palestinians voted for Hamas were not its ideology. Rather, they were frustrated that the then-ruling Fatah party was corrupt and hadn't delivered a promised two-state diplomatic solution.

Moreover, in 2007, the Bush administration encouraged Fatah to retake control of Gaza by force, but Fatah lost the battle to Hamas. Therefore, Washington shares the blame for Hamas' total control of the strip.

But the most pernicious myth, number three, posits that Palestinians are sole authors of their economic misery. The prime example given is the case of greenhouses

turned over by Israeli settlers when they quit Gaza in 2005 — they demolished half of the greenhouses and stripped the rest before leaving. The remaining greenhouses were refurbished with \$14 million by Jewish American donors, but were supposedly destroyed by Palestinians immediately upon the settlers' exit.

Yes, there was looting, but the Palestinian Authority quickly refurbished the greenhouses, which were soon brimming with crops of sweet peppers, tomatoes, and herbs worth \$20 million. The Palestinians' then-Finance Minister Salam Fayyad even gave Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice a gift of peppers on her birthday in mid-November 2005, and the greenhouses exported 8 metric tons of them in mid-December.

What actually destroyed the greenhouse initiative were Israel's restrictions on Gazan exports at the Karni border crossing. You can read about this in the memoir of Australian Jewish businessman James Wolfensohn, a former World

Bank head and special envoy for Gaza disengagement, who contributed \$500,000 to the greenhouse project.

"In early December (2005)," he wrote, "the much-awaited first harvest began ... but their success relied on the Karni crossing ... which was closed more often than not."

"Everything was rotting. ... If you went to the border and saw tomatoes and fruit just being dumped on the side of the road, you would have to say that if you were a Palestinian farmer you'd be pretty upset."

Fastforward to now. For more than a dozen years, border crossings have opened only sporadically. Industry and agriculture in Gaza has collapsed. Unemployment of 15- to 29-year-olds is 60 percent. Electricity is sporadic (Gazans can't pay), water polluted, medicines scarce.

To make matters worse, the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, which still pays many salaries in Gaza, cut back the money when an effort at reconciliation with Hamas failed.

Yes, Hamas is a threat and has in the past lobbed rockets and built

tunnels into Israel. But that doesn't obviate one blinding fact, which the Israeli military has warned about, over and over: Deteriorating economic conditions in Gaza raise the risk of uncontrollable flare-ups — especially when hope dies.

There have been many suggestions for rejuvenating Gaza's economy, including various proposals for a port — but Jerusalem hasn't pursued them, choosing to focus purely on military action. The Trump White House hasn't challenged that thinking.

James Wolfensohn put it best in a 2007 interview: "Just pretending that 1.4 (now 2) million people can live in a sort of prison is not a solution at all."

In other words, it's time to abandon the Gaza myths and focus on hard facts.

Trudy Rubin is a columnist and editorial-board member for the Philadelphia Inquirer. — Ed.

(Tribune Content Agency)

Furor over Trump's 'animals' remark misses the point

By Ramesh Ponnuru

One of the oddities of our political moment is how frequently we are asked to tease out the layers of meaning of remarks by President Donald Trump as though he had chosen them with the care of a good poet. The latest controversy — although by the time this appears it may have been overtaken by another one — concerns the president's comment, "These aren't people. They're animals."

The New York Times and USA Today were among the media outlets that suggested that Trump had referred to illegal immigrants as a class. His defenders, who on this occasion include some people who are not knee-jerk supporters of his, say it's important to look at the context.

A sheriff had been complaining to Trump about the difficulty of deporting members of MS-13, the criminal gang, before he made the remark. So, Trump's defenders say, he meant to describe MS-13 members, not illegal immigrants, as animals. As the controversy continued, Trump himself said that's what he meant.

Media outlets that presented Trump's remark without mentioning the MS-13 lead-in did their audience, and Trump, a disservice. They could have provided more useful context by noting that the sheriff was specifically referring to members of the gang who were not charged or convicted of serious crimes.

The MS-13 explanation led to a secondary complaint: Some of Trump's critics insisted that it was wrong to refer even to vicious criminals as though they were not human beings. That criticism seems off base.

The critics are right that even the worst of us have a certain dignity that attaches to our common humanity — a dignity that no act, however vile, can forfeit. That's why we can hold people morally accountable for their freely chosen wrongful acts, as we could not if gang members committing rapes and murders were the equivalent of tigers feasting on a gazelle.

Some of us would go so far as to say that human beings, even mass murderers, remain children of God. But it is also true that people can act bestially, and can be faulted for it. Often when people call other people animals, that's what they mean.

They don't mean that you would be justified in taking them to a slaughterhouse and then eating their flesh. Labeling people vermin or insects, on the other hand, has

Condemning violent criminals for acting like animals is certainly defensible. But all this context requires a context of its own, which is Trump's general approach to immigration and crime.

historically tended to mean that they should be killed en masse.

Condemning violent criminals for acting like animals is certainly defensible. But all this context requires a context of its own, which is Trump's general approach to immigration and crime. He frequently links the two. His administration regularly sends out alerts about crimes committed by illegal immigrants, and it created a government agency designed to publicize those crimes.

In December, Trump said, "The Democrats are really looking at something that is very dangerous for our country. ... They want to have illegal immigrants pouring into our country, bringing with them crime, tremendous amounts of crime. We don't want to have that. We want to have a great, beautiful crime-free country."

Whether illegal immigration increases violent crime rates at all is not clear from the data, and several studies say otherwise. But we know enough to reject Trump's portrait of a tide of such crime. We went through decades of illegal immigration that coincided with a falling crime rate. We also know that Trump's policies have moved away from a focus on crime. Criminals are a smaller percentage of immigration arrestees under Trump than they were under President Barack Obama.

Trump blurs the lines between criminal and non-criminal illegal immigrants in a way that is demagogic and designed to increase hostility. That's part of what has been wrong with his immigration platform from the very beginning, and it's more troubling than his use of the word "animal."

Ramesh Ponnuru is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist. — Ed.

(Bloomberg)



@Ramireztoons

A tale of two peace processes: Korea and Cyprus

By Colin Irwin and Seongwon Yoon

All peace processes are different, different peoples, histories, places, time lines and how they got in the mess they are in and how to get out of it. This is true of Cyprus and Korea but there are also some similarities and if we focus and those there may be some peace making lessons each side can learn from the other.

Both Korea and Cyprus are "frozen conflicts." Korea since the armistice in 1953 and Cyprus since the Turkish invasion in 1974. Although not all conservatives are intransigent, in general, the conservative politicians in both Cyprus and Korea have made the process of peace negotiations much more protracted.

Both Cyprus and Korea are separated North and South by the Green Line in Cyprus and DMZ in Korea. The South in both Cyprus and Korea is economically well-developed while the North is less so and this results in the southern populations in both Cyprus and Korea being very skeptical about the prospects of reunification as that process may create as many problems as it solves. Also, neither country can make peace all by themselves.

Cyprus requires the agreement of its guarantor states, the UK, Greece and Turkey, while China and the US participated in the armistice agreement for Korea and they, in turn, will have to play a crucial role in ending the Korean War.

Liberal Greek Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, who had supported the failed 2004 UN Annan Plan, was elected in the South of Cyprus in 2013. In 2014, a UN Joint Declaration for renewed peace negotiations was signed and a liberal Turkish Cypriot, Mustafa Akinci, was elected president in the North in 2015. Similarly, liberal or

progressive leaders took office in both Korea: President Moon Jae-in in the South; and in the North, Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un looks to be heading the opposite way compared to his father, Kim Jong-il, which resulted in the signing of the Panmunjeom Declaration on April 27 this year.

But the agreement signed in Cyprus in 2013 has not resulted in a settlement of the Cyprus problem. The conflict there remains frozen. Korea's future prospects for peace may well be decided at the upcoming US-North Korea summit in Singapore on June 12. Hopefully they will be more successful than the failed UN, Cyprus, UK, Greek and Turkey summit at Crans-Montana in Switzerland last year. But on this critical point there are some very significant differences between the two summits and the preparations made to help achieve a positive outcome.

In Cyprus, the leaders shunned a program of confidence-building measures, while the Koreans have given their Cypriot counterparts a "master class" in CBMs, public diplomacy and personal statesmanship that has shifted South Korean public opinion in ways that Greek Cypriots can only dream of.

Significantly Clause 7 of the UN Joint Declaration signed by the Cypriots in 2014 only requires that: "The sides will seek to create a positive atmosphere to ensure the talks succeed. They commit to avoiding blame games or other negative public comments on the negotiations. They also commit to efforts to implement confidence building measures that will provide a dynamic impetus to the prospect for a united Cyprus." No CBMs are specified here and no penalties for noncompliance included. It was only an aspiration of negotiation not a condition.

However, the Panmunjeom Declaration signed by the Koreans

listed a number of specific CBMs and publicly, at the signing, more CBMs were announced and have been, or are in the process of being implemented. Notably, Pyongyang's participation in the Winter Olympics under a unified flag and promise to shut down its nuclear test site and to suspend nuclear and missile tests before the summit.

Seoul removed propaganda loudspeakers across the DMZ right after the summit. Then, Pyongyang shifted its clocks to align with the time in the South. In addition, North Korea's dismantlement of its nuclear test site (May), the DMZ Peace Train Music Festival (June), the reunion of separated families (August), and President Moon's visit to Pyongyang in the fall of 2018, etc. are all in the pipeline.

Most importantly, and it was this that so dramatically shifted South Korean public opinion, the day of pageantry, symbolism and expressions of public friendship and good will between the two leaders resulted in a shift of 50 percentage points, from 14.7 percent before the summit to 64.7 percent after the summit, believing denuclearization and peace was possible.

Greek Cypriot President Anastasiades may not be able to get quite such a dramatic result in the South of Cyprus but less than half the Korean shift in public opinion is all he needs to get a peace "package" through a referendum. Both he and Akinci were given an opportunity to do this at the opening of the Greek Church, in the Turkish Cypriot occupied ancient city of Famagusta, on the Easter leading up to the failed summit in Crans-Montana. Again, this year the same opportunity was there but the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders did not take it to demonstrate that peace on their island was possible and their future would be better for it.

Peace processes are generally best known for the agreements, declarations and treaties signed and made. But this tale of two peace processes underlines the importance of CBMs both symbolic and substantial. With this point in mind, given the Cyprus experience, the authors developed a peace poll to test Korean CBMs in Korea in the hope that some of them would be put into practice. Happily, events have overtaken these efforts with the Koreans implementing CBMs at a pace and with great effect that was not anticipated.

This questionnaire was written to complement a similar program of work undertaken in Cyprus. Regrettably those suggestions remain undone and the Cyprus peace process remains frozen. The Greek Turkish Forum has recommended the Cypriots implement these CBMs but they are painfully slow to do so and would do well to look to the Koreans for inspiration.

With all these points in mind, perhaps the time has come for the UN Security Council and Guarantor States to require the Cypriots to implement a significant program of CBMs before they sponsor another round of negotiations and summit? As for Korea, they should keep doing what they are doing so well. Implementation of any agreements made in Singapore on June 12 will not be easy and CBMs will continue to have an important role to play in their peace process for months and years to come.

Colin Irwin is a senior research fellow in the Department of Politics at the University of Liverpool, England. He can be reached at colin.irwin@liverpool.ac.uk. Seongwon Yoon is a teaching associate in the Department of Politics at the University of Sheffield, England. He can be reached at s.yoon@sheffield.ac.uk. — Ed.

The views expressed in the contributed and syndicated articles on Pages 14 and 15 do not necessarily reflect those of The Korea Herald or its editorial staff. — Ed.

To our contributors

Articles and letters intended for publication on the opinion page should be sent by email to opinion@heraldcorp.com and contain the writer's full name, phone number, occupation and address. Articles are subject to editing and are expected to observe our word count limit. Submissions to "A Reader's View" and "Letters to the Editor" must not exceed 500 words. — Ed.