

Congressman Lungren Offers Perspective on the Israeli-Hamas Conflict in the Gaza Strip

The following is a transcript of Congressman Dan Lungren's remarks regarding the Israeli-Hamas conflict in the Gaza Strip.

The loss of life which is occurring currently in Gaza and Israel is a terrible tragedy. We should understand how this tragedy occurred and who is responsible for it.

Hamas broke the cease-fire that existed between the Palestinians in Gaza and Israel when they decided to launch rockets into the sovereign nation of Israel. This marked a departure from a brief period of time in which there was this cease-fire which seemed to present some opportunity for hope in resolving the terrible differences that exist between those living in Gaza and those in Israel.

Let's be clear about this. My wife and I were in Israel three years ago during the very week when the Israeli government turned over the responsibility for governance of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. Subsequent to that, Hamas took over, and Hamas has since been engaged in a series of attacks on Israel. These attacks are not for the purpose of bringing them to the negotiating table. They are not for the purpose of somehow trying to resolve the differences that may exist there. But rather, the attacks continue for the expressed purpose of attempting to eradicate the state of Israel and to ensure that there is no state of Israel.

This is unacceptable.

Every sovereign nation, including Israel, has the right to defend itself. One has only to ask oneself what would happen here in the United States if we were attacked by one of our neighbors along our borders. Even though that sounds incredible, imagine if Mexico or Canada started to launch rockets and missiles into the United States, aimed not at military targets, but aimed at civilian populations for the sheer purpose of attempting to cause terror among the population of the United States, to cause destruction of property and death of innocent civilians. We would not have to deliberate for long before responding. We would probably not only respond in kind, but also make sure that we took out those who were attempting to launch such attacks as well as those who supported them, while destroying any such infrastructure facilitating those attacks.

That is essentially what Israel is doing. They have a right to self defense. And we should never, ever forget it.

Again, I recall three years ago being in Israel when the decision was made to turn the responsibility for governance over to the Palestinian Authority. It was a controversial decision within the population of Israel. Ariel Sharon, in one of his last acts as Prime Minister, okayed this.

I recall meeting with him with other members of Congress in what was probably the last meeting Ariel Sharon held with a congressional delegation, shortly after he had been condemned by some in the Knesset for taking this step. Sharon was told that he was basically putting Israel in danger. His response was that he thought it was worth the risk, if it could lead to peace. Unfortunately, this effort at peace by the Israeli government and by the Israel people has had a response by those who rule in Gaza – that is, Hamas – that has been anything but peaceful.

That is the unfortunate tragedy that is unfolding. A step toward peace, a good faith effort to attempt to move beyond war and conflict, has been received, not as such an effort, but rather as an invitation to engage in even more violence.

We should all remember who is responsible for this latest round of tragedy and violence in that very volatile part of the world. It is not the Israeli government or the Israeli people. It is, in fact, Hamas. And Hamas should be held accountable for this.

It is my hope and my prayer that somehow this conflict will be resolved. That in the end Hamas will no longer be able to launch such attacks upon the people of Israel. That the peace-loving Palestinians in Gaza and other areas, such as the West Bank, will decide that Hamas is, in fact, not their leadership. And that they will turn toward peaceful means and negotiations so that they can move forward in bettering their own people and improving their living standards, giving them the opportunity to seek what we all seek: a peaceful life for ourselves and our children.