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## More Like This Please

Posted By [Michael J. Totten](#) On February 23, 2010 @ 8:47 AM In [Contentions](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)

I can understand why Dubai authorities aren't happy about the killing of Hamas senior military commander Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, presumably by Israeli Mossad agents, in one of the city-state's hotel rooms last month. More than most countries in the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates has stayed out of the Arab-Israeli conflict and would rather it not wash up on the beach.

Even as European Union officials perfunctorily squawk about the use of forged passports by the assassins, few others have grounds to complain. Al-Mabhouh was a terrorist commander on a mission to acquire Iranian weapons for use against civilians. He was a combatant. Unlike his victims, he was fair game. He would have been fair game for even an air strike if he were in Gaza. As he was, instead, in Dubai, he was taken out quietly without even alerting, let alone harming, any of the civilians around him.

If only Israel could fight all its battles this way. It would be the cleanest and least-deadly war in the history of warfare. Even some of Israel's harshest critics should understand that.

"The Goldstone Report," [Alan Dershowitz wrote](#) <sup>[1]</sup> in the *Jerusalem Post*, "suggests that Israel cannot lawfully fight Hamas rockets by wholesale air attacks. Richard Goldstone, in his interviews, has suggested that Israel should protect itself from these unlawful attacks by more proportionate measures, such as commando raids and targeted killing of terrorists engaged in the firing of rockets. Well, there could be no better example of a proportionate and focused attack on a combatant deeply involved in the rocket attacks on Israel than the killing of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh."

Hamas and Hezbollah use civilians as human shields. Hezbollah uses an entire country as a vast human shield. Some critics, for various reasons, are more interested in lambasting Israel than the terrorist organizations it's fighting. That's easy when you live in New York or Brussels. People in the Middle East have to live with (or die because of) what happens. How Middle Easterners fight wars isn't political or academic to me. I've never been inside Gaza, but I once lived in Lebanon, I travel there regularly, and there's a real chance I'll be there when the next war pops off. I'd rather not be used as a human shield if that's OK with those who give Hamas and Hezbollah a pass. And I'd much rather read about Hezbollah leaders getting whacked by mysterious assassins with forged passports than dive into a Beirut bomb shelter during Israeli air raids.

But I'm not particularly concerned about my own skin here. Nobody forces me to travel to war zones. I don't have to visit the Middle East ever again if I don't want to. Every trip I've ever taken has been voluntary, and I can leave whenever I've had enough.

A lot of people I care about live in Lebanon, and some of them *can't* leave. They never volunteered to be used as human shields by Hezbollah, and in fact had their neighborhood — my old neighborhood — shot up and blown up by Hezbollah gunmen recently. Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah doesn't consult them or their elected officials on his foreign policy and would sooner shoot them than be relieved of his ability to declare war unilaterally or on the orders of Tehran.

It's unlikely that Israel can avert the next war by assassinating its enemy's leadership, but it's always better to take out a high-level target in person whenever possible than with a blockbuster bomb from a distance. I can't help but wonder if those griping about the recent hit in Dubai — assuming the Mossad actually did it — care less about the lives of real human beings than the latest excuse to bash Israel. If the Arab-Israeli conflict will continue — and it will continue — civilians on both sides should prefer combatants be taken off the board quietly while everyone else goes about their daily business in peace.

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[1] Alan Dershowitz wrote: [http://cgis.jpost.com/Blogs/dershowitz/entry/if\\_israel\\_killed\\_mahmoud\\_al](http://cgis.jpost.com/Blogs/dershowitz/entry/if_israel_killed_mahmoud_al)