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**Heller: Israel Must Defend Itself.**

*Heller stands strong with Israel in latest provocation from Hamas*

**(Washington, D.C.) –** Today, U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) spoke on the Senate floor in steadfast support of Israel’s right to defend itself against terrorism caused by Hamas, including the eradication of underground tunnels used by the terrorist organization to kidnap Israeli citizens:



[Click here to watch video.](http://youtu.be/GxnKJGDH32E)

**REMARKS AS PREPARED:**

Mr./Madam President, last week the Washington Post ran an opinion piece titled “Moral clarity in Gaza.” The thesis of the article states that Israel is not interested in cross border violence. Rather, the goal of the current military action is to establish peace. I believe the writer correctly suggests that Israel has been left with no choice but to act in order to defend herself from the terrorist organization Hamas.

The piece also made the important conclusion that Hamas wants to provoke Israel into a fight. This group is willing to sacrifice their own people in order to win international support and ultimately, undermine Israel’s legitimacy and right to self-defense.

Mr. President, there is no question regarding Israel’s legitimacy, nor is there any question regarding Israel’s right to defend themselves. The international community has affirmed this principle. Further, this body affirmed Israel’s right to defend herself when the Senate recently passed Senator Graham’s resolution on this matter.

As a cosponsor, I believe this resolution speaks in clear terms: The Senate stands with Israel’s right to defend itself and it demands that Hamas immediately stop attacking Israel.

While the Senate has made its position on this issue clear, Israel has been forced to take matters into their own hands.

As we speak, the Israeli Defense Forces are engaged in “Operation Protective Edge” working to identify and destroy the infrastructure that Hamas has used to execute attacks and move artillery underneath Gaza City.

Recent reports have stated that IDF has destroyed more than 20 tunnels and identified many more as ground troops moving from building to building. They are utilizing air, ground and sea to strike designated targets and provide support as IDF works its way through Gaza City.

The fighting will likely continue and more casualties on both sides will increase until either a cease fire can be negotiated or Israel believes the tunnel system has been successfully negated.

I believe that Israel has been left no choice but to defend herself. Israel has faced a barrage of rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip and, according to Secretary of State Kerry, Hamas has attempted to sedate and kidnap Israelis through the network of tunnels used to stage cross-border raids.

Prime Minister Netanyahu cannot tolerate rocket attacks and kidnappings aimed at Israelis. Their right to self-defense is without question. But through the process, innocent Palestinians are being killed. This tragic loss of innocent life must not go unnoticed.

We must acknowledge Hamas’ role in risking the lives of their own through their actions.

Hamas stores and launches rockets from heavily populated areas. They do this because they know it will draw return fire from Israel and, even if some Palestinians are killed, the coverage aired worldwide will be favorable to Hamas and therefore worth the loss.

Hamas is sacrificing its own to win a media war against Israel. In contrast, in the lead up to military action, Israel dropped thousands of leaflets explaining to Palestinians where they could go to be safe.

There is no clearer picture of right versus wrong than Israel fighting to protect its citizens against a terrorist operation operating underground and using Palestinians they live with as human shields.

Hamas is a terrorist organization willing to let women and children die if there is a possibility it advances international sympathy for them and underscores Israel in any way.

The footage of innocent Palestinians dying in Gaza is tragic but the blame is not at the foot of Israel. It is on Hamas.

Over the next weeks and months, the military action in Gaza may escalate. If a cease fire is not negotiated, the United States cannot turn our back on Israel. We must continue to stand with them and allow them to eradicate this terrorist threat and shut down these underground tunnels.

It is their right as a nation and the United States must stand with them.

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