

If Israel Can Find Evidence That Iran Had a Role in This Attack, It Would Have a Casus Belli the Arab World Would Understand



by Conrad Black

While this attack on Israel was extremely professionally executed and makes a stark contrast with the long era in which the Israeli Defense Forces routinely routed Arab armies, scoring spectacular victories in just a few days, such as in the Six-Day War of 1967, it is a gesture of political weakness by the forces of Islamic extremism.

In this sense, as there has been a good deal of searching to find an accurate strategic precedent in living memory, it best resembles the great North Vietnamese/Vietcong invasion and

uprising in South Vietnam, in April 1972, the month between President Nixon's successful visits to Communist China and the Soviet Union.

This was a desperate effort by the North Vietnamese to prevent the full triangulation of the great power relationship between the United States, the Soviet Union, and China, and specifically the American rapprochement with the USSR, exemplified by the greatest arms control agreement in the history of the world, SALT 1, signed in that visit to Moscow.

Up to that point, North Vietnam was trying not only to conquer the South but to achieve the definitive military defeat of the United States. The South Vietnamese victory in the great battles of April 1972 (with massive American air support but no ground support) and the successful American diplomacy with North Vietnam's two sponsors, China and the USSR, signaled the failure of North Vietnam to defeat the United States.

This had been the dream of Ho Chi Minh (who died in 1969): to achieve the decisive turning point, as he thought, in the victory of international communism in the Cold War. Henceforth, it was clear that the best the North Vietnamese could do was negotiate American withdrawal and a supposed peace and hope that, with the passage of time the Americans would be inhibited from returning with overwhelming air strength to frustrate a subsequent invasion of the South.

This did happen, but only because of the erosion of the executive authority of the Nixon administration in the Watergate affair; if it had had a free political hand to inflict its airpower on the North again as it did in April 1972, (1,000 airstrikes a day, rising to 1200 during Nixon's visit to the USSR), the results of the Vietnam War would probably have been different.

Hamas' attack also bears some resemblance to Egypt's breaching of the Bar Lev line at the beginning of the Yom Kippur war 50

years ago. Israel recovered more quickly, but Egypt is an important power with extensive armed forces and a respected position among the nations of the world. Hamas is a terrorist organization despised by everyone except those who think they can use it successfully, particularly Iran.

This has all the characteristics of a desperate move, incited by Iran, to prevent continuing improvement in relations of Israel and Saudi Arabia, hence its semblance to the last-ditch North Vietnamese effort in 1972 to disrupt American relations with China and the USSR.

So far, the Palestine Liberation Organization, which still rules the West Bank, has not lifted a finger of active support and while Hezbollah has apparently fired some rockets into Israel from Lebanon, but at time of writing there is no indication that it is going to commit itself to this action.

With each hour that passes, as Israel rumbles about its intention to settle accounts with Hamas once and for all, active, trigger-pulling supporters of Hamas become less likely to appear. Israel possesses the ability to administer a bone-crushing defeat on Hamas and there is no reason to doubt that it intends anything less.

If this were coupled to a renewed statement of preparedness for a two-state solution, but one that constituted a solution and not just the traditional Palestinian flimflam of land for peace, in which the peace becomes a cease-fire that is violated after about 48 hours, and none of the other conditions are fulfilled, this would be a powerful double-barreled military and diplomatic response.

If the Middle East is now reduced to mute spectatorship as Hamas is given what almost the whole world must acknowledge, even if tacitly in many cases, to be a well-deserved, comprehensive evisceration, this could yet prove the best possible impetus to Saudi-Israeli conciliation and a genuine

Israeli-Palestine settlement.

There is another international dimension to this crisis that is presumably being considered by the Israeli leadership. Iran has supplied most of the ordnance being delivered against Israel, and it probably provided a good deal of the training that enabled a ragtag faction of terrorists to stage such a crisp, professional military sneak attack against so formidable a military state is Israel.

It is generally believed that the Trump administration provided Israel with what it needs to destroy Iran's underground nuclear military development center. If Israel can find enough of the connection between Hamas' sneak attack and Iran to justify a *casus belli*, the Arab world would be relieved and the world in general would not seriously object, if Israel destroyed Iran's nuclear military capability.

For all its bluster and its incessant meddling in neighboring countries and its almost certainly complicity in the current atrocities being committed by Hamas, Iran would have no clear or effective riposte to such an initiative. The crown prince of Saudi Arabia, in his widely viewed recent interview with Fox News, said that if Iran developed a nuclear weapon Saudi Arabia would have to do so as well.

It is desirable, as many commentators said, that the present conflict between Hamas and Israel not spread around Israel's borders. If, though, in addition to flattening Hamas, Israel were to see fit to denuclearize Iran, this would advance, and not retard, the prospects of durable peace in the Middle East.

Iran is the only significant country now fomenting war and terror in the area. No one has any right to ask Israel to fight the battles of others, but in responding to Iran, its interests would be closely aligned with those of all the other sensible forces in the region and throughout the Islamic world.

All wars are appalling; "hell" as General Sherman famously said. Yet they can also be opportunities. As General MacArthur said in his address to the Congress in 1951: "I know war as few other men now living have known it, and nothing to me is more revolting. Once war has been forced on us, though, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to the swiftest possible victorious conclusion at the minimum possible cost in American and allied lives... In war there is no substitute for victory." A great victory may await Israel now.

Finally, it may be possible to take advantage of the war-time solidarity of Israeli opinion to negotiate and implement a satisfactory compromise in the pending dispute over proposed judicial and statutory changes. The elected officials of Israel's democracy must ultimately be in charge of its public policy, but without emasculating the judiciary, and the judiciary must be made to uphold something less absurdly vague than what it deems to be philosophically reasonable in the Jewish tradition.

The Supreme Court of Israel must become a court of law and cease to be a self-renewing Sanhedrin. The barbarism of Hamas may have provided the conditions in which a resolution of that great problem also is possible. Wars do sometimes produce positive results, but that requires both generalship and statesmanship.

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