

Israel, in the Counterattack on Hamas, Would Value American Military Assistance, But the Yanks Are in No Position To Press Their Strategic Advice



Israelis celebrate Jerusalem Day in front of the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem's Old City, May 18, 2023. AP/Mahmoud Illean

by Conrad Black

As the world awaits Israel's counterattack on Hamas, the distressing and contemptible noises of relativism as well as the more vehement strains of antisemitism, some of them

reeking of hints of a “final solution,” are being heard.

These sentiments oozed out slowly and almost imperceptibly, in the immediate aftermath of the invasion and massacres and seizures of hostages perpetrated by Hamas. Within a week, though, we find them defiantly bannered and shrieked on campuses, in front of synagogues and Israeli consulates, and in slightly muted form, in the left-wing press.

The arguments are familiar. The Jews have been in the territory of what is now Israel, apart from the infamous captivity of many of them for a time in Egypt and in Babylon (Iraq), in the ancient times of Moses and Nebuchadnezzar, since thousands of years before the arrival there of the Arabs. Yet the authors of the recent Hamas atrocities in Israel claim the right to expel all Jews and kill those who stubbornly resist and assert their claim to remain where they have been for 5,700 years.

It must be said, and is generally recognized, that, comparative latecomers though they are, the Arabs have some right to be there. This awkward situation was recognized when the area was still governed by the decaying Ottoman Empire. In 1917, the British promised, in the Balfour Declaration, that, when liberated, the area would provide a “homeland for the Jewish people,” without compromising the rights of the Palestinian Arabs.

The effort to square this circle has gone on ever since then. As all the world knows, the unimaginable genocidal atrocities inflicted upon the European Jews during World War II created a consensus among the Great Powers that the Jews deserved a homeland, and Israel possesses a singular legitimacy as it was not just recognized by but was specifically created by the community of the world’s nations, including the unanimous Great Powers: the United States, USSR, United Kingdom, China, and France.

The inability of what is now a small minority of Arabs, supplied and manipulated by the ancient enemy of the Arab world, Persia (Iran), even after it committed such appalling horrors as it did in southern Israel on October 7 and following days, while it fully justifies the determination of Israel and its friends to respond decisively, should not distract us from the extraordinary, if slow, progress that has been achieved in a hundred years.

Israel is one of the most successful states in the world, and one of the motives for the appalling assault on Israel last week was the well-justified Iranian fear of an imminent comprehensive settlement between Israel and the Arab powers, in particular Saudi Arabia, the wealthy and influential birthplace of Islam.

Hamas's invasion of Israel was an act of desperation and not of strength, and it demonstrates the accuracy of Prime Minister Golda Meir's famous remark that "If the Arabs disarmed there would be peace; if Israel disarmed, there would be a massacre."

The official position of the more civilized Arab spokespeople at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel was to acknowledge the terrible things been done to the Jewish people in Europe but that they had not been inflicted by the Arabs and that the Arabs should not be called upon to forfeit the territory for a Jewish state.

It was, though, undeniable at that time that the Jews were also a Middle Eastern people and the senior continuous people in the Middle East except for the Egyptians, who by this time made no claim to the land of Israel.

That Arab argument was further diluted by the obsequious attendance upon Hitler of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and his association of an important element of local Arab opinion with the Nazi German genocide policy against the Jews. Prime

Minister Netanyahu, son of a towering historian, was not mistaken in making the connection last week between the Nazi ambition to exterminate the Jewish people and the morally indistinguishable assault of Hamas.

There is no question that the best course for Israel now is a shattering blow of vengeance against Hamas. The leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, famously acknowledged in August 2006 that if Nasrallah had known how ferocious and prolonged Israel's response would be to a minor attack involving only a few prisoners and casualties, he would not have attacked.

Even as their numbers and strength have declined, the Arab organizations that still favor the killing or expulsion from the region of all Jews have only been deterred, and only temporarily deterred, by extremely severe responses to provocations.

There is no reason to doubt, and every reason to believe, that Israel will show as much consideration as it can for the civil population, it being understood that after its sub-humanly barbarous assault on Israel, the Hamas' strategy now is to recede into the population of Gaza and try to escape Israeli detection.

Apart from killing anyone who attacks or resists them, Israel may have to detain and interrogate huge numbers of Gazans as they seize and destroy all arms and fortifications and tunnels and hide-outs in all of Gaza. If necessary, something like the Battle of Algiers can be replicated. Israel can do mortal damage to Hamas, even if it cannot entirely exterminate it. Unlike the French in Algeria, though, Israel seems not to have an ambition to remain in Gaza.

There has been too much international fussing over what Israel plans for Gaza politically: it can stick to its policy of a total blockade until hostages are released and it can then maintain a policy of control of all points of access to Gaza

to prevent another arms build-up. The Biden administration has been commendably resolute, but has started to express concern about what the ultimate administration of Gaza will be.

In these matters, the United States should reflect upon its historic role in the region and proceed with some humility. President Obama apologized for Winston Churchill and Dwight D. Eisenhower playing a role in the removal of the leftist Iranian politician Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953. That, though, was one of the most intelligent strategic initiatives either country has taken in the Middle East since World War II.

Instead of apologizing for it, Mr. Obama should have apologized for America pulling out on the financing of the Aswan dam in Egypt, deserting the UK, France, and Israel completely over the Suez affair in 1956, (which the British certainly mishandled, but they were close allies), and for the role the Carter administration played in the removal of the Shah of Iran.

President Nixon and Henry Kissinger deserve great credit for their diplomacy following the Yom Kippur war of 50 years ago, and Mr. Carter also deserves great credit for his role in the Camp David agreement. President George H.W. Bush and his close associates managed the Gulf War superbly, though they may have ended it prematurely, and President Trump deserves praise for the Abraham Accords and for withdrawing from the Iran nuclear agreement.

I don't think anyone now defends the disastrous Iraq war, which has delivered principal influence over that country to Iran, and the Obama-Biden policy, from the championship of the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt to the terrible mismanagement of relations with Saudi Arabia and the insane placations of the ayatollahs, has been a monumental fiasco. Israel would value American military assistance, but at this point has no need of American strategic advice.

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