

Obama's Pandering to Moral Equivalence Between Israel and Hamas Illuminates His Shortcomings as an American Strategist



by Conrad Black

President Obama's pandering to sentiments of moral equivalence between Hamas terrorists, violating a truce and murdering Israeli children and women in the most brutal possible manner, and Israeli soldiers conducting operations designed to destroy Hamas, is the most startling development we have yet had of the former president's shortcomings as an American geopolitical strategist.

It has been a fact of American history since its earliest days as an independent country that recourse to armed combat, if it entailed any significant number of American casualties, had to be justifiable both in terms of the country's national interest and its national ethos as a peace-loving country that never took up arms for morally unjustifiable purposes.

Where the United States was not directly involved, it could only justify assistance to foreign powers engaged in armed combat where it met the dual criteria of supporting the American national interest and according with its national ethos.

In 1940 and 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt concluded that a German victory in Europe including subjugation of Great Britain would create an immense danger to the United States and that in any case, British monarchical and parliamentary democracy was overwhelmingly a preferable system to the racist totalitarian state of Nazi Germany.

Accordingly, while purporting to maintain American neutrality, he extended American territorial waters to 1,800 miles from three miles, ordered the United States Navy to attack on detection any German ship, sold the British 50 destroyers in the middle of the 1940 election campaign, and produced a measure shortly after his election to an unprecedented third term that gave Britain and Canada anything they wished and a repayment plan that accommodated their abilities.

It was a pretty idiosyncratic definition of neutrality, but he carried national opinion with him and was decisive in keeping Britain and Canada in the war until the Axis attacked the Soviet Union and America, creating an invincible Allied coalition. Though the conditions are obviously extremely different, the current Israeli action is in the same category.

America is not directly involved but a friendly democratic state was barbarously attacked and 1,400 civilians were

killed, the per capita equivalent to approximately 45,000 civilians in the United States, brutally murdered in a premeditated violation of a long-standing cease-fire.

The Israeli conclusion that a peaceful resolution of existing problems between Israel and Palestine can only be achieved if Hamas, internationally recognized as a terrorist organization, is exterminated, is entirely reasonable.

Mr. Obama in his unctuous reflections last week acknowledged the invasion of Israel by Hamas was horrible but effectively declared that the Israeli response is both practically and ethically indistinguishable from the initial Hamas assault. Almost every sane and informed adult in America knows this to be false.

This kind of reasoning has been at the heart of Mr. Obama's approach to Middle Eastern questions since he was first inaugurated president in 2009. It permeated his famous address at Cairo on June 4, 2009, in which he attempted to employ his own partly Muslim background to build a bridge to Muslim countries on the altogether commendable basis of reciprocal respect.

In furtherance of this goal he carried diplomatic deferences to unrigorous extremes such as in crediting Muslims for responsibility for the European Renaissance, as well as the conception of navigation, printing, the treatment of disease, and the previously unheard of theory that Morocco was the first foreign government to recognize the United States. (Perhaps, someday he will enlighten us about what Benjamin Franklin was doing as Minister to France during the Revolutionary War.)

A number of his other flattering imputations of dramatic intellectual breakthroughs to Islam are at serious variance with generally accepted history but are quite excusable in the context of his ambitious attempt to placate Muslim opinion and

de-escalate tensions.

The newly inaugurated president was unambiguous in his support of the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state and of a two-state solution in which part of the original Palestine mandate would, as the British promised in 1917 when the Ottoman Turks still ruled the whole area, provide a homeland for the Jewish people without compromising the rights of the Palestinian Arabs.

Mr. Obama was unambiguous in his opposition to terrorism, but didn't quite get around to the point that in the Israeli-Arab conflict, terrorism has been the practice of one side only, and counterterrorism, as practiced by the Israelis, has stopped well short of the indiscriminate and gratuitous violence of terrorism, and has in fact always adhered to a standard that tries always to avoid civilian casualties.

This has always been a weakness in Mr. Obama's approach to these issues: a high-minded, even-handed approach to the conduct of states and movements whose behavior was not remotely morally equivalent. He and his wife and his children sat contentedly for 20 years in the church of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, whose novel interpretation of the September 11, 2001, terrorist suicide attacks on New York and Washington were that they were altogether justified and merely "the chickens coming home to roost."

We overreacted, thought Mr. Obama, and it was time to identify and emphasize our community of perspective with all of Islam except that small minority that clings to violence in its grievances against the Jews and the West.

To Mr. Obama, it is all a series of misunderstandings and it was in that spirit that he effectively greenlighted Iran's development of a deliverable nuclear weapon: if we just turn our swords into plowshares, allow them to approach nuclear parity with us, and quote placatory sections from the sacred

scriptures of all of the Abrahamic religions, we will all lie down together like the lion and the lamb.

Of course, this is unutterable nonsense and is a recipe for suicide. The enemies of the West only resort to terror because they don't have the military strength to threaten us more comprehensively, but if we are overly influenced by people so naïve as to grant them that military equivalence their blackmail will only become more deadly.

It is shocking and inexcusable that Mr. Obama, after eight years as president and eight years as an observant ex-president, should imply that there is the slightest moral equivalence between Hamas acts of brutal terror and Israeli responses with as much humanity as it is possible to retain.

Mr. Obama should have learned from the complete failure of his efforts to induce Pakistan into full cooperation (as Pakistan hid Osama bin Laden and used American assistance to bankroll their Taliban faction in Afghanistan as it killed Americans and allies), that his entire masquerade as a figure of such virtue, power, and irresistible persuasiveness was a wash-out. That he could effect any improvement in Arab-Jewish relations or American-Muslim relations was doomed by precisely the ludicrous fiction of pretended cooperation that had launched it.

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