



“Disproportionate” Criticism: Israel Will Not Back Down, and Europe Owes Its Thanks

By Joshua Muravchik

Europe unwisely and wrongly accuses Israel of using disproportionate force against Hamas and Hezbollah; Israel has a right to defend itself against attacks and to try to destroy its attackers. Indeed, a failure to do so would only encourage and strengthen the worldwide jihadist movement to which Europe is especially prone.

No sooner had Israel raised its hand in self-defense when Finland, speaking as the rotating president of the European Union, denounced it for “the disproportionate use of force.” This position, echoed by France, Spain, the United Nations, and others, is wrong legally, morally, and strategically.

From a legal standpoint, Israel is the victim of multiple unprovoked aggressions. It withdrew entirely from Lebanon in 2000 and from Gaza in 2005. (Both of these occupations had come about as acts of self-defense: the former against rocket fire from Lebanon in 1982, and the latter against a war of annihilation declared by Egypt in 1967.) From the time of its withdrawal from Gaza, not a single day had passed without rockets being fired into Israel. Now from the north as well as the south, Israel finds hundreds of rockets being fired across its border. Even if these were aimed at military installations, it would be a clear-cut act of war. To make it worse, these rockets are aimed randomly at cities and other civilian population centers, making them not only acts of war but war crimes.

In the face of this criminal aggression, Israel has an absolute right to defend itself by making war against those who are attacking it. In the south,

this means fighting against the Palestinian Authority. In the north, it means fighting Lebanon. Of course, Israel has not been attacked by the army of Lebanon but rather by the militia of Hezbollah. Israel’s counterattacks are focusing on Hezbollah installations but are also aimed at Lebanon itself. This is tragic, but it may be inescapable. And it is certainly lawful: it is a well established principal of international law that a state is responsible for any armed attacks that originate from its territory. The government in Beirut must rein in Hezbollah. If it is too weak to do so, it has every right to request international assistance in this task. Indeed, it has an obligation to do so.

Hypocritical Europe

From a moral standpoint, what possible standing can the EU have to tell Israel that its response to aggression is “disproportionate”? Israel’s goal is not vengeance; instead, Israel wishes to bring a halt to the unprovoked acts of aggression. This is completely justified morally: the amount of force that Israel is entitled to use is whatever is required to defend itself successfully.

Before it can legitimately make the accusation that it made against Israel, the EU must explain its standards of “proportionality.” Is the EU prepared to help Israel defend itself against Hamas

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and Hezbollah? The idea is laughable. Will it protect the Israelis the way it protected the Bosnians in the 1990s? Does the EU have a military strategy to recommend to Israel that the EU would deem to be “proportionate” and that would put an end to the Palestinian and Lebanese aggressions against Israel? If so, we have not heard a word about it—not from the Finns, and not even from France’s president, Jacques Chirac, a man who always has plenty to say. In the absence of any such solution, European complaints about the measures Israel is taking amount to contemptible hypocrisy. If the missiles that are falling on Sderot, Ashkelon, Nahriya, Safed, Tiberius, and Haifa were falling on Strasbourg, Nancy, Lille, Dijon, and Paris, would Chirac’s concern be to respond only in “proportion”?

While the EU position is obtuse both legally and morally, from a strategic perspective it is shortsighted and self-defeating. Like Israel and America and India, Europe is threatened by a rising tide of violent Islamist extremism. After the attacks in London and Madrid, this should hardly need stating.

The Destructive Vision of Jihadism

Hamas and Hezbollah are not nationalist forces. Fatah is the nationalist party in Palestine. The coalition led by Sunni leader Saad Hariri and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt represents Lebanese nationalism. Hamas and Hezbollah, in contrast, see themselves as part of a global movement of jihad. Hamas is, in fact, the Palestinian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt, with affiliates across the Muslim world. (Although the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt renounced violence in order to survive fierce government repression, it supports violence and terrorism in other places.) Hezbollah was founded by Iran. These groups take pride in being the brothers and comrades-in-arms of the terrorists who attacked New York and Washington, London and Madrid, Beslan, Bombay, and Bali. They celebrated when those atrocities happened.

Their goal is not to change Israeli policies; it is to eliminate Israel entirely, as they and their Iranian patrons say quite openly. But even this is not the main goal, but only a first step. As they also say quite openly, they are aiming to establish a new caliphate that will recreate what they view as the golden age of Islam. And

they want this caliphate to rule over all of the lands of the Muslim empires of the past—from Morocco and Spain in the west to the Philippines in the east, taking in the southern half of Europe, the northern half of Africa, and most of Asia.

This is spelled out in the charter of Hamas, which says: “The Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas] believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf [an unalienable religious endowment] consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgment Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: it, or any part of it, should not be given up . . . This is the law governing the land of Palestine in the Islamic Sharia and the same goes for any land the Moslems have conquered by force, because during the times of [Islamic] conquests, the Moslems consecrated these lands to Moslem generations until the Day of Judgement.”

Even this is not the final goal, which, as again the radical Islamists state openly, is the spread of Islamic sovereignty over the entire world. Islamic texts divide the entire world into “the world of Islam” and the “world of conflict.” Only when Islam reigns everywhere will the conflict cease. Of course, the large majority of Muslims in the world do not want conflict, and they interpret this in a way that eliminates the implications of constant strife and hostility to nonbelievers. But the jihadists believe that they must take the sword to Jews and Christians and apostates and other nonbelievers until all bow before their god.

Some months ago, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran drew a lot of publicity when he said that Israel should be wiped off the map. In the same speech, he also said the same thing about the United States. Much less attention was paid to this because people did not take it seriously. He really might try to destroy Israel, but it seemed far-fetched that he would try to destroy the United States. Whether he will or not, that is the goal that he and his fellow jihadists dream of.

Those who believe that the Islamists are motivated by poverty or suffering or injustices committed against them by Israel or the West should pay more attention to Pakistan and Iraq, where Sunni Islamists commit mass murder against Shiites and bomb their mosques. Even those who practice a different strain of Islam are not considered to be true Muslims and are therefore legitimate targets. These fanatics draw their strength not from

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defeats and grievances but from the sense of success and power. In particular, the movement of radical Islam gained its momentum from the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, in which fighters from many countries participated. They like to say: “With the help of Allah, we defeated one superpower, now we can defeat the other.” (Never mind that it was, in fact, mostly the native Afghan nationalists, not foreign Islamists, who defeated the Soviets, and they were able to do it thanks to U.S. weapons, especially anti-aircraft missiles. Never mind, too, that they did not actually defeat the Red Army, but that it was withdrawn by Soviet rulers who had become demoralized by resistance within their empire, especially in Poland. Solidarity and the Polish Catholic Church did far more than the Islamists to bring about the defeat of that superpower.)

Jihadists from around the world have flocked to Iraq to fight America and its allies. They believe they will win and drive the “infidels” from “Mesopotamia,” the name they use to emphasize that they have no regard for modern national identities. If they succeed in Iraq, they say they will use it as a base from which to conquer the rest of the lands surrounding the Persian (or Arab) Gulf, a jumping off point for further conquests.

The Islamists’ optimism has been fueled by the exploits of Hezbollah and Hamas. Whereas Israel had once seemed to be an invincible regional superpower, Hezbollah fighters succeeded in forcing it into an ignominious flight from Lebanon, leaving behind equipment and abandoned allies. Then Hamas drove Israel from Gaza. The evacuation of Gaza was not a flight; the Israelis saw it as unilaterally defining their own borders.

But as Hamas saw it, suicide bombings had made the continuing occupation too costly for Israel. Most Palestinians thought Hamas was right and rewarded it with their votes.

The Hamas and Hezbollah attacks that triggered the current crisis show how self-assured they have become. If Israel fails to deal them crippling blows—or is prevented from doing so—then the Middle East will grow much more tumultuous. The Arab moderates, who have advocated peace with Israel, will look cowardly and foolish. The jihadists will be strengthened in every country. None will dare make peace with Israel, and the states that already have made peace will wiggle away from it.

The tumult will not be confined to the Middle East. The jihadist movement is global, even more so than the Communist movement in its heyday, when triumphs of Russian Communists inspired triumphs by their “comrades” in places as distant as China and Cuba. The feats of Hamas and Hezbollah will make young, impressionable Muslims turn to the path of jihad in many corners of the world. Few places will be more vulnerable to the effects of this than Europe, with its rapidly growing Muslim population—many of whom are alienated from Western society.

To denounce Israel for using “disproportionate” force is tantamount to telling Israel to accept its role as the victim. In this way the EU hopes to propitiate the Islamists, just as Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier offered up Czechoslovakia to Hitler. As before, this craven gesture would lead to disaster for Europe. Israel, however, is not Czechoslovakia, and it will ignore the EU. For that, Europeans owe it thanks.