

John Kerry Fails to Hold Hamas Accountable

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By **Peter Berkowitz** - October 22, 2014

Rewarding vicious conduct is a sure-fire method of generating more of it. And wrongly blaming an ally for provoking young men and women to join your brutal adversary is an excellent recipe for harming friends and strengthening enemies. Yet in the struggle against Islamic extremism, the Obama administration has adopted both of these profoundly counterproductive tactics.

Early last week, with delegates representing 50 nations and 20 regional and international organizations, and with sizable donations coming from Qatar, the European Union, and the United States, an international donor conference in Cairo pledged a total of \$5.4 billion to reconstruct Gaza in the wake of this summer's 50-day war.

The humanitarian need is certainly great. Israel reports that some 2,000 Palestinians were killed in its Operation Protective Edge, roughly half of whom were civilians. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 10,000 Gazans were injured, hundreds of thousands were displaced, basic urban infrastructure including water and wastewater systems absorbed heavy blows, and, because of wartime neglect, crops and agricultural infrastructure sustained significant damage.

Unfortunately, the extraordinary sum of money the diplomats promised was not conditioned on Hamas agreeing to disarm and end the war of extermination against Israel it declared in its 1988 covenant and which it continues to wage. A foreseeable consequence of the billions that the United States is helping to channel, directly and indirectly, into Hamas's coffers is that the Islamist organization will remilitarize the urban areas of Gaza -- just as it did after Israel's December 2008-January 2009 Operation Cast Lead and its 2012 Operation Pillar of Defense -- and will launch another ruinous war, in defiance of the international laws of war, against Israel.

In that event, Israel will again defend itself while operating within the framework of the international laws of war. Sadly, Gaza's civilian Palestinian residents will again find themselves in the crossfire and pay a heavy price as a result of Israel's legitimate efforts to defend itself from rockets that Hamas launches unlawfully from urban areas and aims unlawfully at civilian targets.

Late last week, the Obama administration took another step in the wrong direction regarding Islamic extremism. In remarks at a White House ceremony honoring the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha, Secretary of State John Kerry blamed the rise of the Islamic State, a savage army

of jihadists who have seized wide swaths of Syria and Iraq and brazenly broadcast beheadings of two American journalists and a British journalist around the world, on the absence of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The State Department is getting accustomed to cleaning up after its secretary, but this is a delicate art. In the process of scolding an unnamed Israeli minister (Naftali Bennet) who criticized Kerry, State Department Deputy Spokesperson Marie Harf quickly asserted that Kerry had said no such thing. Harf admonished critics to pay attention to the context of Kerry's remarks, categorically asserting that "he did not make any linkage between Israel and the growth of ISIL, period." But accepting Harf's challenge -- paying attention to Kerry's context -- makes clear that he did exactly what the State Department spokesperson unequivocally denied he'd done.

Kerry went on to tell those gathered to celebrate the Muslim holiday: "As I went around and met with people in the course of our discussions about the ISIL coalition, the truth is we -- there wasn't a leader I met with in the region who didn't raise with me spontaneously the need to try to get peace between Israel and the Palestinians because it was a cause of recruitment and of street anger and agitation."

Kerry then promptly endorsed the hoary excuse trotted out by Arab rulers to distract attention from the unrest created by their own authoritarian regimes -- that Israeli "humiliation" of Palestinians and denial of their dignity is a principal cause of jihadism in the region.

The real cause of the rise of ISIL is the determination by Sunni Muslim extremists to defeat and destroy Shiite Muslim extremists and their allies in Syria and Iraq. About this Secretary of State Kerry said not a word.

Instead, he reiterated the soothing pabulum that ISIL "is not 'Islamic'" that President Obama uttered in early September at the White House. "The extremism that we see, the radical exploitation of religion which is translated into violence, has no basis in any of the real religions," Kerry declared. "There's nothing Islamic about what ISIL/Daesh stands for or is doing to people."

The refusal to recognize the Islamic inspiration of Islamist violence (which is not to suggest that all Muslims are violent or deny the importance of religious toleration) is one of the reasons Kerry must invoke bogus explanations such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to account for the appeal of jihadism. Meanwhile, the unwillingness to stand tough against Hamas and demand it put down its arms in exchange for the reconstruction of Gaza ensures that Hamas will once more confiscate funds intended for humanitarian purposes to reconstruct its war machine.

The Obama administration's suppression or blurring of the real roots of ISIL and its cooperation in the transfer of no-strings-attached billions to Hamas are connected. They are policies that pander to fashionable progressive opinion. They also lack any basis in history, political science, or theology -- not to mention current events on the ground -- and have been shown by painful and prolonged experience to not work. They will leave the United States, Israel, and the entire civilized world exposed to mounting threats from Islamic extremism.

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