

Concessions Will Not Defeat Terrorism

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Articles & Testimony

Americans and Europeans fighting the global war against al-Qaida can learn a vital lesson from Israel's two-front war against Hezbollah and Hamas: Moderation doesn't moderate the terrorists.

Radical Islamist groups bent on the destruction of Israel have targeted Israeli civilians for nearly 20 years. Throughout that time, Israel has borne the brunt of intense international pressure to redress the terrorists' grievances by ceding enough territory to allow for a sovereign Palestinian state and withdrawing Israeli troops from southern Lebanon.

The equation was simple. Israel could reduce terrorism by changing its policies. In its pursuit of peace, Israel played this game, agreeing to establish the Palestinian Authority in 1993, withdraw from southern Lebanon in 2000, and cede Gaza to full Palestinian control in 2005.

It didn't work. Not only did efforts to redress the grievances of Palestinian and Lebanese radicals fail to dissuade either from using terrorist tactics, Israel's strategic position vis-à-vis both Hamas and Hezbollah has deteriorated. Those groups are now part of the system—running the government in Gaza and holding two ministerial portfolios in Beirut. They have wielded this authority without giving up a frightening terrorist arsenal that includes, for the first time, the use by a sub-state actor of a long-range missile.

Unfortunately, the negative consequences of appeasing terrorists are not registering in the American and European arenas. The United States and Europe are faced with an Islamist terrorist group that, like Hamas and Hezbollah, has a list of so-called grievances that must be satisfied in exchange for a cessation of attacks. Al-Qaida's demands are comprehensive, amounting to a complete U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East and the ultimate Islamization—by force if necessary—of secular democratic societies all over the world.

But, even while faced with a group determined to destroy the free nations of North America and Europe, many Americans and Europeans continue to look inward to explain Islamic radicalism and believe that their governments' policies are the most important motivator for terrorism.

Two-thirds of people surveyed in a July 2005 Guardian poll think that the United Kingdom's participation in the 2003 Iraq invasion played an important role in radicalizing the bombers who attacked the London Underground last summer, even though the bombers were British citizens of Pakistani origin, had never visited Iraq and had no known personal connections there. More than 60 percent of those surveyed hold Prime Minister Tony Blair at least partially responsible for the attacks.

Following the 2004 Madrid bombings, European media almost unanimously reported that the attacks were retaliation for Spain's participation in the Iraq war. Spain's withdrawal of troops from Iraq following the victory of the Socialist Party just days after the attack was universally hailed in radical Islamist chat rooms as a victory for al-Qaida.

And now, in the United States, a growing number of politicians and scholars are advocating that policies al-Qaida supporters oppose, such as America's presence in Iraq or alliance with Israel, should be changed because they

allegedly fuel terrorism.

But the Israeli example should demonstrate that Islamist terrorism is not caused wholly or even mostly by the target nation's policies. Certain actions may stoke the flames of radicalism, but the true cause of terrorism is a flourishing ideology that preaches Muslim supremacy, justifies attacks on civilians, denies the rights of women and non-Muslims and seeks to impose itself in the Middle East and beyond.

Policy concessions to terrorists inspired by this ideology do not reduce violence. On the contrary, such concessions embolden the terrorists, endow them with legitimacy in the eyes of their sympathizers, and provide them with a propaganda victory that helps them recruit the next generation of radicals. Concessions simultaneously weaken a state's position vis-à-vis the terrorists and undermine the international human rights framework by acknowledging attacks on civilians as a legitimate and effective tool of diplomacy.

Free nations cannot defeat terrorism by ceding territory, redeploying troops, abandoning allies or compromising their strategic interests. Rather than thinking the United States and Europe can change terrorists' behavior by altering their own, governments should focus on weakening the radical Islamist ideology that rejects the very principles of liberty and democracy.

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