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How the UN legitimizes terrorists

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If anyone wonders why the UN has rendered itself worse than irrelevant in the Arab-Israeli conflict, all he or she need do is read UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's July 20 statement. Annan goes to great pains to suggest equal fault and moral equivalence between the rockets of Hezbollah and Hamas that specifically target innocent civilians and the self-defense efforts by Israel, which tries desperately, though not always successfully, to avoid causing civilian casualties. In his statement, Annan never condemns, or even mentions, terrorism, which is a root cause and precipitator of the conflict.

Even Annan was forced to acknowledge that "Hezbollah's provocative attack on July 12 was the trigger of this particular crisis"; that Hezbollah is "deliberate[ly] targeting ... Israeli population centers with hundreds of indiscriminate weapons"; and that Israel has the "right to defend itself under Article 51 of the UN charter." But he doesn't stop there. He goes out of his way to insist on equating Hezbollah's terrorists with Israeli military response, which he labels "disproportionate" and "collective punishment." He condemns both Hezbollah and Israel. He also criticizes Israel for its efforts at preventing Qassam rocket attacks against its civilian populations, noting that the Hamas rockets have produced no "casualties in the past month." (This, of course, is not for lack of trying.) He ignores Hamas' long history of terrorism against innocent civilians.

Annan then calls for an "immediate cessation of indiscriminate and disproportionate violence" on both sides, again suggesting a moral equivalence. Among the most immoral positions anyone can take is to suggest a moral equivalence between morally different actions.

Part of the goal of organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas is to gain moral legitimacy for their terrorist tactics by having them equated with the conventional military tactics used by democratic regimes. Only the morally obtuse--or perverse--cannot recognize the difference between a terrorist group that targets civilian population centers with anti-personnel weapons designed to maximize civilian casualties and a democracy that seeks to prevent terrorism by employing smart bombs designed to minimize civilian casualties.

Annan knows better than to suggest a moral equivalence. He is fully aware of the tactic employed by terrorists of launching their rockets from, and hiding behind, civilian shields, so as to make democracies have to kill some civilians to get at the terrorists.

But Annan heads an organization that is so anti-Israel that as the late Abba Eban, the early Israeli ambassador to the UN, once put it: "If Algeria proposed a resolution that the Earth was flat and that Israel has flattened it, it would pass by a vote of 120 to 3, with 27 abstentions."

Many such resolutions have been passed by the General Assembly, including the notorious one equating the Jewish national liberation movement with "racism." Other one-sided resolutions have been passed by the General Assembly legitimating terrorism. Only the U.S. veto--which does not operate in the UN General Assembly--has prevented one-sided resolutions by the Security Council.

If a space alien from a distant planet were to land at the UN, he would come away with the impression that Israel is not only the sole offender in the Middle East, but the worst offender in the entire world. He would single out Israel for condemnation and exclude it from membership on many UN bodies, on which Syria, Lebanon and Iran serve in positions of honor.

Annan himself has a long history of one-sided condemnations of Israel. In March 2004, Annan "strongly condemned" Israel's targeted killing of Sheik Ahmad Yassin, the terrorist leader of Hamas, without condemning Yassin for his murderous actions or his organization for the murder of Jewish civilians. In December 2003, Annan "strongly condemned" Israel's assault on a Palestinian refugee camp where two gunmen were thought to be hiding. And in 2005, he issued the most tepid of statements -- expressing "dismay" -- at threats by Iran's president to "eliminate" Israel, a member nation of the UN. The list goes on and on.

And even worse than the one-sided condemnations that ignore Hezbollah and Hamas are the numerous statements that perversely suggest moral equivalence.

The UN peacekeepers on the Lebanese border have turned out to be collaborators with Hezbollah, videotaping the Hezbollah kidnapping of three Israeli soldiers in 2000 and then refusing to release the video--which could have helped in the rescue--on the grounds that it might compromise their "neutrality."

This is a real test for the UN. If it cannot--or will not--distinguish between terrorists who target civilians and a democracy that seeks to stop the terrorism while minimizing civilian casualties, it has become part of the problem, rather than part of the solution.

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