

War By Affirmative Action?



by Victor Davis Hanson

Why does Biden play Iranian poker with American and Israeli lives?

Answer? He envisions war sort of like affirmative action, in which the less accomplished belligerent is allowed all sorts of concessions for the sake of equity.

Israeli and American military capability, and particularly their missile defenses, are seen as unfair, almost like high achievers' top SAT scores that are seen as unearned and used to privilege some over others and therefore must be countered or dropped.

Given Iran's and its surrogates' incompetence, the administration, then, must extend the theocracy some

allowances "to level the playing field." Biden believes in an equality of opportunity in war, when an aggressor does its best to attack or indeed destroy a defender, who in turn does its own best to retaliate and achieve victory.

Instead, the Biden administration sees war leading to equality of result as something to be waged "proportionally," especially when the power attacked is stronger and Western while the attacking aggressor is weaker and non-Western. The method, then, is to restrain the western power and give repeated chances for the non-western aggressors to catch up.

As a result, the Biden administration's strategic attitude toward Iran ignores Iranian intent and agendas. So it does not respond fully to its acts of aggression and thereby almost rewards the incompetence of Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis without consideration of their murderous aims.

Americans are thus baffled that Biden has not responded to some 170 or more attacks on U.S. installations in the Middle East by Iranian-backed terrorists in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. But in his calculus, Americans "can take the hit" due to their superior defenses—appeasement that only assures more hits.

Thus, other than a few apparently acceptable wounded or dead, there is no need for disproportionate responses to reestablish deterrence and end such opportunistic attacks. Such calculus in the Biden team's mind would be "over the top," perhaps "unfair," or even "medieval." And yet, it certainly would stop all such aggression quickly and warn aggressors not to touch a single American.

After the successful but mostly demonstrative Israel April 19 retaliatory strike against the Iranian anti-aircraft missile batteries at Isfahan, Biden cautioned Israel "to take the win" and apparently not to rub in the fact of Iranian incompetence, much less stage a follow-up and much greater response.

But what if instead, Biden had warned the Iranians that Israel was not through. Rather, he would tell the Iranians that the restrained Israeli response was a one-off warning and demonstration to Iran that 1) Israel had the ability to strike and destroy the very protective shield of the nuclear installations at nearby Natanz, and thus Natanz itself and plants like it; 2) that unlike the 320 missile/drone Iranian attack on Israel, even Israel's tiny response was entirely successful; 3) and that in any future Iranian-envisioned nuclear attack on Israel, Iran's rockets would likely either fail at launch or in the air (half did so on April, 13), with the remnant having a 99 percent surety of being shot down, while earning a 100 percent surety of a devastating Israel counter-attack with the same sort of weapons that Iran claims it will shortly use.

Would such a warning have been more likely to end the current tit-for-tat, "de-escalatory escalation" than the Biden administration's advice to Israel to "take the win"—in an endless cycle of supposedly managed violence as Iran and its terrorists seek to get it right and respond commensurately?

Similarly, recently, third-party communications with Iran were disclosed about its earlier April 13 attack on Israel. Apparently, the Turkish third-party emissaries claimed that "Iran informed us in advance of what would happen. Possible developments also came up during the meeting with (Secretary of State Antony) Blinken, and they (the U.S.) conveyed to Iran through us that this reaction must be within certain limits."

Translated, that meant that apparently launching over 320 cruise, ballistic missiles and drones were acceptable Iranian responses as long as they did not kill too many Jews?

So what did Joe Biden, Antony Blinken, and Jake Sullivan actually define as damage "within certain limits?" Something like the relatively small number of dead and wounded Americans who have fallen victim to Iranian-backed terrorist attacks

from the Red Sea to Iraq and Jordan?

“Within certain limits” for Iran certainly could not mean the huge number of lethal projectiles Iran sent into Israel that were intended by Iran to kill thousands, but apparently only how many Israelis were killed by them?

So again, what would have been beyond “certain limits” for team Biden? One dead Israeli for each launched rocket, missile, or drone? 320 Jews or so in total? Did Biden and Blinken assume that some 300 or so projectiles would be mostly shot down or blown up, and thus they played poker with Israeli lives and assumed that the attack would probably fail?

But what might have happened had instead Biden transmitted to Iran the following warning:

“Given your record of unleashing terror and death throughout the Middle East, I warn you not to send a single rocket into Israel. If you do, we will ensure that none get through, but we will not ensure that there will be any limits on what will likely be a devastating Israel response to your homeland.”

Would Iran have then sent the 320 missiles?

When Israel went into Gaza to end the medieval violence perpetrated by the Hamas cowardly terrorists, it had already been the target of some 7,000 Hamas rockets aimed at its civilian centers and bases. Did Biden see that failed Hamas effort to kill thousands of additional Jews as a legitimate cause for Israel to go into Gaza and destroy the rocket-launching Hamas?

Or instead, did Biden consider Israel’s unique ability to conduct war—again, sort of like having high SAT scores and a straight A average as proof of unwarranted privilege in admissions—as a disproportionate (and likely “unfair”) advantage over Hamas that thus should be ignored or discounted rather than admired? But had Hamas killed 1,000 Jews with its

7,000 rockets, would Biden have given Israel the green light to respond fully? Or would it have taken only 500 deaths? Or was the magic number 250 killed?

What would have happened had Biden not specified certain restraints on the IDF but instead, on October 21, transmitted the following message to Hamas: "You began this war with inhuman slaughter on October 7 and massive rocket attacks on Israeli cities, and Israel will now end the war with your destruction."

Six months later, would the Middle East now be safer without Hamas?

In mid-October 2023, a failed Islamic jihad rocket hit Gaza's al-Ahli hospital, prompting the blood libel that it was Israelis who supposedly were responsible and had killed hospital patients. An upset Joe Biden was asked about the identification of the perpetrator.

He answered with a joke, but a jest nevertheless quite revealing: "And I'm not suggesting that Hamas deliberately did it either. It's that old thing; gotta learn how to shoot straight." Aside from the embarrassing fact that Biden seemed more wary about wrongly blaming the murderous Hamas for the Islamic Jihad rocket than his ally Israel, did he really mean that the global condemnation of Israel for the act of Islamic jihad—and the predicament it put Biden in—would have simply vanished had only Islamic Jihad shot "straight"?

And further translated, did Biden logically mean—if only the Islamic Jihad rocket had not fallen short on Gazans but instead had reached its intended target of civilians inside Israel, then there would have been no controversies, no melodramas, given the stronger power Israel could more easily have "taken the hit?"

Note that Biden did not really express much anger that Islamic Jihad was shooting rockets to kill Jewish civilians. He was

only lamenting that its incompetence had led to a blood libel, which required embarrassing explanations from Biden himself.

Biden, note, said something somewhat similar about a possible Putin invasion of Ukraine. He had predicted the U.S. response on whether it was a “minor” offensive or not. In other words, the American response was not predicated on the violation of national borders by an aggressor against an independent nation, but how effectively the aggressor attacked.

In the American Left’s vision of contemporary war, the West brings too many advantages in science, technology, and wealth, especially when fighting in the skies and not in the messy suburbs of Mosul, Fallujah, or Gaza City.

The result is disproportionate. Accordingly, it does not matter that Hamas only stopped butchering, raping, and mutilating Israelis at about 1,200 deaths because of an impending IDF arrival or killed few despite 7,000 rocket launches into Israel, when their rocketeers had sought to kill tens of thousands of Israelis.

Instead, by their very failures at the art of war, Iran and its surrogates are constructed as victims, not aggressors, at the moment when either their targets do not suffer too many casualties or their own losses vastly exceed those whom they sought to slaughter.

Third-party managed proportionality, accompanied by the banality of “both sides are at fault,” is not morality but pretentious amorality—as well as a sure prescription for endless war.

Or, in other words, what is unfolding now in the Middle East.

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