

What guarantee do we have that once taxpayer-funded reconstruction is complete, anything will be different in Gaza?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



On May 22, Secretary of State Antony Blinken appeared on ABC's "This Week," where he reiterated the Administration's intention to continue to provide the Jewish state with the military wherewithal to defend itself. This was clearly meant as a slapdown to Senator Bernie Sanders and other anti-Israel Democrats, including the ever-present Squad, who are trying to block a \$735 million arms sale to Israel. But if the Administration also insists on spearheading, as Joe Biden has insisted, the reconstruction of Gaza, it will soon discover that Israel's ability to defend itself will require a much

tighter control over that “reconstruction.” Blinken’s remarks are reported on here: “US Committed to Continue Giving Israel ‘Means to Defend Itself,’ Says Blinken Ahead of Middle East Visit,” by Sharon Wrobel, [Here](#) is Yoram Ettinger on this issue:

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken keeps advising Israel to retreat from the mountain ridges of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), lest it lose its Jewish majority.

Secretary Blinken is wrong, relying on highly inflated, erroneous Palestinian Authority numbers, ignoring the dramatic Westernization of Arab demography and overlooking the unprecedented Jewish demographic tailwind in Israel, as documented by the following data.

- *The number of Israeli Jewish births in 2020 (134,866) was 68 percent higher than in 1995 (80,400), while the number of Israeli Arab births in 2020 was 16 percent higher (42,435) than 1995 (36,500), as reported by the March 2021 Monthly Bulletin of Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics.*
- *In 2020, Jewish births were 76 percent of total births, compared to 69 percent in 1995.*
- *The fertility rate (number of births per woman) of Israeli secular Jewish women has trended upward during the last 25 years...*
- *Israeli Jewish women—who are second only to the women of Iceland in joining the job market—are unique in experiencing a rising fertility rate despite expanded urbanization, increased education, a higher standard of living, rising integration into the job market and a rising marriage age, while these phenomena have lowered the fertility rate in all other countries.*
- *In 1969, Israel’s Arab fertility rate was six births higher than the Jewish rate. In 2015, both fertility rates were at 3.13 births per woman, reflecting the dramatic Westernization of Israel’s Arab population,*

triggered by the enhanced social status of women, a rising marriage age, expanded participation of women in the job market and shorter reproductive time. In 2019, the Jewish fertility rate was 3.09 (and 3.27 with an Israeli-born Jewish father), while the Arab fertility rate declined to 2.98.

- Half a million overseas residents, who have been away for over a year, are included in the Palestinian population census, in violation of internationally accepted rules, which stipulate only a de facto count. It was 325,000 in the first Palestinian census of 1997, as documented by the Head of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, and increased to 400,000 in 2004, as documented by the Palestinian Election Commission.*
- 350,000 eastern Jerusalem Arabs who possess Israeli ID cards are double-counted. They are included in the Israeli census, and also in the Palestinian census.*
- Over 100,000 Arabs from Gaza and (mostly) from Judea and Samaria who married Israeli Arabs and received Israeli ID cards are also counted by both Israel and the P.A.*

The double-counting of 450,000 Arabs in east Jerusalem and Gaza, and the estimated 500,000 Palestinian Arabs who are living overseas, as emigrants, and were wrongly included in the Palestinian census, means an overcounting of 950,000 Arabs. The demographic threat that Blinken assumes exists has been greatly exaggerated.

“If we can’t find a way to help Palestinians live with more dignity and with more hope, the cycle’s likely to repeat itself, and that is in no one’s interest,” Blinken cautioned.

The Palestinian attacks on Israel – misdescribed by Blinken as a “cycle of violence,” for that suggests there is equivalent blame on both sides, when every one of the four Israel-Hamas

wars was started by Hamas – will not decrease until the Islam-prompted inculcation of hate for Israelis, and for Jews, is greatly diminished. Biden has not hinted at how that education in murderous hate will be addressed. Will the American government, for example, insist that in exchange for reconstruction aid, that the Gaza schoolbooks must first be revised to eliminate their antisemitic passages? Such revisions have been promised so many times before, and never carried out; will withholding aid to Gaza do the trick this time? Will those Palestinian children's television shows, that show sweet-faced Arab children singing songs about killing Jews, while with their little knives they pantomime stabbing movements, be made to change their programming, or even be forced off the air? Surely an end to this inculcated hate, found both in Palestinian schoolbooks and on Palestinian television programs, is something the Americans, and other suppliers of reconstruction aid to Gaza, have a right to demand before such aid is transferred.

The Secretary of State is scheduled to travel to the Middle East in coming days to meet with Israeli, Palestinian, and regional leaders. The visit comes after Israel and the Hamas militant group agreed to a bilateral and unconditional ceasefire, which took effect on Friday following 11 days of clashes. During the operation Guardian of the Walls, which started on May 10, about 4,340 rockets were fired by Hamas from the Gaza Strip toward Israel, with 640 of them falling within Gaza. In response, Israel has struck a total of 1,600 military targets, including 340 rocket launchers and destroyed more than 60 miles of underground terror tunnels in the Gaza Strip, which were used for the transfer of rockets and movement of operatives from one area to another.

Asked about new arms sales to Israel, Blinken reaffirmed the country's right to defend itself and confirmed America's commitment to give "Israel the means to defend itself, especially when it comes to these indiscriminate rocket

attacks against civilians. Any country would respond to that."

Biden and Blinken have both reiterated, during the 11-day war, that "Israel has a right to defend itself," and have ignored the leftwing Democrats trying to halt the latest planned arms sale to the Jewish state. This is welcome, but we'll have to see whether, as that "progressive" pressure grows, they will still be able to withstand the anti-Israel brigade, both in Congress, and in the Executive Branch as well.

At the same time, any arms sale is going to be done in full consultation with Congress. And we want to make sure that that process works effectively," he added.

Blinken's comments come as Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) on Thursday proposed legislation to halt the sale of \$735 million in arms to Israel following the latest cycle of hostilities and violence in Gaza. Sanders' initiative followed a similar resolution introduced by Democrats in the US House of Representatives.

Blinken emphasized the immediate need to deal with the "grave humanitarian situation in Gaza."

That "grave humanitarian situation" reflects, in part, the choices Hamas made. Instead of using previous aid to the Strip to increase food production, or to stockpile medicines, or to build more hospitals, Hamas chose to spend billions on its military, including the largely home-grown production of 14,000 rockets (one -third of which it has just used up in the 11-day war), and on its 250-mile "metro" – the elaborate, and expensive, tunnel network that was used by Hamas to move both fighters and weapons underground throughout the Strip, so that they would remain undetected by Israel. Now 62 miles of those tunnels have been destroyed by Israel.

Hamas failed to invest in upgrading its electric grid; instead it has continued to rely for almost all of its electricity on Israel, and naturally blames Israel for any break in the supply of electricity. Apparently Israelis have a moral duty to supply electricity round-the-clock to the very group, Hamas, that has sworn to destroy them. Counting on the country which you plan to eliminate to keep supplying you with electricity shows that, despite its rhetoric, Hamas knows it can count on Israel to behave decently.

Hamas has also failed to spend money on increasing its water supply, by building desalinization and waste water recycling plants, again preferring to spend money on its military. Gaza receives three billion gallons of water annually from Israel, a startling fact which, of course, is almost never mentioned in the Western media and needs to be more widely known.

Blinken failed to mention the massive corruption in Hamas, that has deprived the Palestinians in Gaza of so much of the foreign aid that was sent in the past to ameliorate their condition. Just two leaders of Hamas, Khaled Meshaal and Mousa Abu Marzouk, have each managed to amass fortunes of at least \$2.5 billion. Why doesn't Blinken, or Josep Borrell of the EU (who has just deplored publicly the spending of EU money on rebuilding Gaza yet again) demand that Hamas must force its two most corrupt and richest leaders to disgorge what they stole, amounting to \$5 billion, which would be more than sufficient to pay for the reconstruction of Gaza?

“Then reconstruction, rebuilding what’s been lost, and, critically, engaging both sides in trying to start to make real improvements in the lives of people so that Israelis and Palestinians can live with equal measures of security, of peace, and of dignity,” he said. “It’s vitally important that Palestinians feel hope and have opportunity and can live in security, just as it is for Israelis. And there should be equal measures. So ultimately, I think that that hope, that security, that dignity can – will be found in a Palestinian

state."

Blinken needs to be reminded that for sixteen years, the world has had some experience with a Palestinian state. That state is Gaza. How much "hope, security, and dignity" have the inhabitants of the Strip experienced? Gaza is not "occupied." There are no Israelis present; they all left in 2005. Gaza has been continuously ruled since 2006 by the terror group Hamas, that has initiated four wars with Israel. How much "security" have those four wars brought to the people of Gaza? How much "hope" do Gazans have? Billions of dollars in aid has been lavished on the Strip. In recent years Israel has even acted as a fundraiser for the Gazans, sending Mossad head Yossi Cohen to Qatar to persuade the Emir to keep supplying tens of millions of dollars in aid to Gaza. But life remains miserable for the overwhelming majority of Palestinians who are enduring the massively corrupt and brutal reign of Hamas. So much of that foreign aid is either siphoned off by Hamas leaders for themselves, or is spent on the military, expenditures that do not improve one whit the quality of life for Palestinians in Gaza, but do allow Hamas leaders to strut about, and gloat over the threat they claim their rockets pose to Israel.

What guarantees do we have that once the reconstruction is complete, anything will be different in Gaza? Will the international donors be able to monitor how the hundreds of millions, or perhaps even billions, sent to Gaza will be spent? Will they be able to ensure that Hamas leaders do not siphon off much of that aid for themselves, as they have been doing for decades? How do those donors make sure that the money is not spent on replenishing Hamas' supply of weapons, especially those home-made rockets? Can those donors prevent Hamas from rebuilding the 62 miles of the 250-mile tunnel network that the IAF destroyed? Can they ensure that the weapons Hamas hides among civilians will be removed, and placed far from civilian areas? Or, better yet, might those donors insist, as a condition for transferring any

reconstruction aid, that the 10,000 rockets remaining in Hamas' armory must be turned over to an international body – say, U.N. peacekeepers – for removal from Gaza altogether? Without those rockets, the terror group will be unable to start another war, a war where Palestinian civilians in Gaza are placed in maximum peril by Hamas itself. Those are the matters that President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken need to consider, before they again turn on the spigot of American aid. The donors are now in the catbird seat; the people of Gaza are desperate for aid and will not look kindly on Hamas continuing to refuse to meet the donors' demands, (assuming that the donors make demands, such as those discussed just above) and thereby preventing the arrival of that aid. A demilitarization of Gaza would be the best thing that could be accomplished in the Strip, both for Israelis, and for Palestinians in Gaza who have been held hostage by Hamas in four disastrous wars, and have had quite enough.

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