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# Hamas Operatives Are Not 'Militants.' They Are Jihadists



Palestinian fighters from the armed wing of Hamas take part in a military parade to mark the anniversary of the 2014 war with Israel in the central Gaza Strip, July 19, 2023. (Ibraheem Abu Mustafa/Reuters)

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As the weekend’s atrocities in Israel remind us, jihadists have no interest in peaceful coexistence.

**S**INCE its inception, Israel has been confronting terrorist operations carried out by its hostile neighbors in Muslim-majority countries and territories. The United States has faced similar operations since the 1979 Iranian uprising ushered in a revolutionary Shiite regime. Tehran’s Hezbollah terrorists repeatedly attacked Americans during the 1980s, and it became clear that our homeland was also a target when Sunni terrorists bombed the World Trade Center in 1993 — the start of a campaign that united Shiite and Sunni terrorists, that eventually executed the 9/11 suicide-hijackings, and that led to decades of American military entanglements in Middle East hellscapes.

Those entanglements have been a feature of life in Israel since before the Jewish state was established in 1948.

Our enemies are never defeated. Badly damaged? Sure. Expelled, at least temporarily, from their strongholds and safe havens? Absolutely. But they are never beaten with anything approaching finality. In fact, the outcomes of these engagements are the antithesis of finality. As illustrated by the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the barbarous Hamas attack on Israel over the weekend, Western powers — and I include Israel, though it is situated in the Middle East, because it is a Western-style democracy — emerge not so much defeated as exhausted.

Despite all the atrocities to which the West has been subjected, we underestimate the enemy's determined atrociousness and remain susceptible to surprise attacks. We are well aware that our millenarian enemies place great emphasis on dates of historical significance. Yet our guard seems always down when the need for vigilance is obvious. The 2012 Benghazi massacre happened on the eleventh anniversary of the 9/11 suicide hijackings. The shocking Hamas attack on Saturday occurred on, not only the Sabbath and a holy day in the Jewish calendar, but on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War — given that name because the sneak attack that started it happened on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.

Why do we keep missing the signs? Because in our progressive era, where truth is supplanted by fantasy “narratives,” we have trained ourselves to miss the signs.

A key to victory in World War II was the Allies' determination, after a slow start, to grasp the ideology and practices of German National Socialism and the imperial Japanese religio-ethical creeds of Shinto and Bushido. It was understood that, to be effective, a strategy to defeat enemy aggressors had to account for their animating ideology, which defined their objectives and their rationale for fighting ruthlessly to the bitter end in all its self-destructiveness.

Human nature and the remorseless facts of warfare haven't changed, much as we'd like to imagine we could alter them. In their hubris, progressives always make the mistake of assessing the enemy as if he were imbued with progressive sensibilities. They assume that he's just like us, sharing our Enlightenment principles and our dreams for a better world. They deny that he is an enemy at all — just disgruntled, just stirred to forcible attack over our endless rap sheet of colonialist sins. But in truth (there's that word), the enemy is acting, not reacting. He has his own values, so different from ours that he sees our aims as an affront just because they are *our* aims. His conception of a better world and his vision for achieving it are antithetical to ours.

We mulishly refuse to see this and thus seek accommodation when, like the Nazis and the imperial Japanese of the 1940s, this enemy has no interest in a *modus vivendi*. The only outcome is that one side must be broken and defeated. The side that comprehends this, if the other doesn't or won't, has a significant advantage even if his arsenal is comparatively paltry.

Case in point: Why do we insist on calling Hamas operatives “militants”? They are not militants, they are *jihadists*. Understanding that makes all the difference.

The Western conception of a *militant* is of one affiliated with a military force, whose combat operations are to be judged by the laws and customs of war as developed in Western experience and even codified in international law (a Western construct that is actually more political than legal in nature). Hamas, of course, willfully violates these laws and customs: targeting civilians for mass murder, maiming, hostage-taking, enslavement, rape, and torture. Hamas operatives and their masters are gleeful when we condemn these barbarities as “war crimes.” It signals that we are terrified — which is the point. Their ideology is eschatological. To their core, they see themselves fighting a divinely ordained war by their own scripturally prescribed rules. As long as we’re inveighing about “war crimes,” as if that should mean something to them, they know we’re missing the point, foolishly hoping we can persuade them to mend their ways rather than committing clear-eyed to vanquishing them.

In their incoherence, Western progressives insist that we must not refer to jihadists as *jihadists* because doing so is at once an epithet and an empowerment. An epithet because invocation of *jihadist* is caricatured as anti-Muslim bigotry, now known as “Islamophobia” (the term minted by the Muslim Brotherhood and adopted by Western progressives to suggest that the study of Islamic war doctrine is akin to racism). An empowerment because progressives have labored to redefine *jihad*, which means “struggle” and is a core tenet of classical Islam. Under the airbrushed version, jihad is the personal, internal struggle by which all of us — Muslims and non-Muslims — should strive to become better people. Ergo, this gobbledygook concludes, to refer to terrorists as jihadists appropriates an honorable moral precept, at the expense of the vast majority of decent, peace-loving Muslims.

Though not the main problem, this is self-deceptive revisionism, rooted in the fiction that we are all the same, that our ideals of personal betterment are similar. Yet the classical Islamic conception of the internal struggle that progressives cite is not to become *a better person*; it is to become *a better Muslim* — i.e., more faithful to sharia, Islam’s legal code and societal system, believed to have been decreed by Allah and thus to be immutable (i.e., it doesn’t “evolve” the way progressives believe our mores and “organic” Constitution do).

But let’s get to the core of Western confusion. That involves the true nature of jihad. It is not a personal struggle but a *collective* one, the obligation to wage a holy war to impose the sharia system on the world, and especially to impose it on territory, such as Israel, that Muslims consider to be Islamic. It is not for nothing that the Muslim Brotherhood (of which Hamas is the Palestinian branch) and its echo chambers on American campuses chant, “From the river to the sea!”: By scripture and thus by right, they see all land from the Jordan to the Mediterranean as Islamic, notwithstanding the presence and dominion of Jews in Israel for millennia before Islam existed.

To refer to a terrorist as a jihadist is not an insult. Nor is it an undermining of modernizing Muslims who, because they reject the fundamentalist brand of sharia supremacism, admirably endeavor to refine the concept of jihad into something benign. To refer to terrorists as jihadists is to deal with reality, which is imperative for our security. Jihadists is what they are. The name tells us what they want, why they want it, and the lengths to which they will go to get it. If we want to fight them effectively, we have to understand their aims and methods.

And we have to stop appraising them as if they were just like us Westerners. They’re not.

In 1990, regimes from Muslim-majority countries and territories assembled in Cairo to promulgate the Declaration of Human Rights in Islam. They did this because they do not accept the universality of the Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by Western progressives in 1948 under the auspices of the United Nations.

The Islamic Declaration rejects the Western premise of natural rights as the God-given inheritance of men and women who are equal and free. It asserts, instead, that “all rights and freedoms are subject to the Islamic Shari’ah,” which “is the only source of reference for [their] explanation or clarification.” Though men and women are said by the declaration to be equal in “human dignity,” sharia elucidates their very different rights and obligations and denies them equal protection under the law. The declaration, moreover, is emphatic that “there shall be no crime or punishment except as provided for in Shari’ah.”

The Islamic Declaration is not just a reaffirmation of Islam’s *hudud* penalties that are condemned as cruel and unusual in the West (e.g., brutal corporal punishment, including decapitation and stoning, for such “crimes” as apostasy and homosexuality). It is also an endorsement of the symmetrically brutal jihadist way of war. The Quran and hadiths (collections of the sayings and doings of Mohammed, Islam’s prophet), command jihadists to strike “terror” into the hearts of their enemies — to wage war ferociously and mercilessly. This includes regarding as their enemies all non-Muslims who decline to submit to the dominion of sharia. The distinction between combatants and noncombatants, so central to Western laws of warfare and human rights, is eviscerated in sharia. Those we regard as “civilians” the jihadist sees as loyalists of their non-Muslim enemies who pay taxes that stand up the armed forces arrayed against them. They are fair game for forcible attacks.

Understand: As we witnessed with the weekend’s unspeakable attacks on Israeli civilians — parents killed in front of their children, old women and children taken captive, revelers mowed down indiscriminately, and able-bodied men systematically killed — this includes rape and enslavement. The Quran (in sura 33:50) explicitly approves of jihadists’ using as concubines “those whom thy right hand possesses out of the captives of war whom Allah has assigned to thee.” (This endorsement is repeated in sura 4:23-24, which excludes captives — those “whom your right hands possess” — from the categories of women with whom Muslim men must abstain from sexual relations.) Furthermore, Reliance of the Traveller, a sharia manual endorsed by influential Islamic scholars, instructs: “When a child or a woman is taken captive, they become slaves by the fact of capture, and the woman’s marriage is immediately annulled” — meaning she is available for sex slavery.

In fundamentalist strongholds, such as Gaza, non-Muslims are dehumanized in the education of Muslim children. The idea is not to raise an army of “militants.” The goal of jihad is to terrorize the enemy into surrender and submission; it is not to conduct combat operations limited to strategic military objectives that avoid or at least minimize civilian casualties. That kind of discrimination and proportionality, bedrock principles of Western warfare, is alien to jihad.

Classical sharia is systematically discriminatory against all non-Muslims, but the contempt for Jews is especially intense. As recounted over the weekend, Muslim scripture foretells an end-of-times war between Muslims and Jews. That vision is etched into the Hamas charter, which is unabashedly dedicated to the destruction of the Jewish state. Mohammed and his companions repeatedly warred with Jewish tribes. The

Islamic claim on Israel is scripturally rooted in *al-Isra'*, the “night journey,” in which Allah is said to have arranged the prophet’s transport, on a winged beast, “from the sacred mosque to the farthest mosque” (sura 17) — i.e., from what is now the Kaaba in Mecca to the al-Aqsa Mosque at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Young Muslims are taught, based on hadiths (see, e.g., [Bukhari 3:47:786](#) and [Muslim 26:5430](#)) that Mohammed was poisoned to death by a Jewish woman.

Western progressives would have you believe that the “conflict” between Palestinian “militants” and Israel is a mere territorial “dispute,” arising out of what many progressives limn as the “mistaken” and “illegitimate” 1948 establishment of a Jewish homeland in Mandatory Palestine (the region established post–World War I by a League of Nations mandate). To the contrary, the genesis of unceasing war between jihadists and the Jewish state is not a matter of Western miscalculation in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Israel is the ancient home of the Jews, yet jihadists regard it as sacred Islamic territory from which Jews must be expelled — or extirpated if they won’t either leave or submit to dhimmitude under Muslim rule.

The jihadists of Hamas (backed by the jihadists of Iran and the Hezbollah jihadists under Iran’s command on Israel’s Lebanese border) seek to achieve this objective not by the rules of Western warfare but by the Islamic scriptural command to terrorize their enemies. They are not “militants” playing by Western rules. If you don’t unstintingly refer to them as *jihadists*, you will never understand why and how they fight.

And you will never understand why crushing them, not accommodating them, is the only solution. As the weekend’s atrocities in Israel remind us, jihadists have no interest in peaceful coexistence.

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