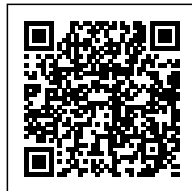




OPINION: IS IT OK TO RESCUE HOSTAGES? - RICH LOWRY

Posted on June 15, 2024 by Rich Lowry



Israel pulled off a hostage rescue that deserves to go down in the annals of extraordinarily daring, highly successful military operations, yet it is being condemned for it.

The secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council denounced the "heinous and terrorist crime that targeted defenseless innocents with brutality," while Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon have decried Israel's alleged criminal tactics. U.N. special rapporteurs have weighed in with typically fulsome denunciations of the Jewish state.

The media coverage in the U.S. has taken a skeptical or negative tone, emphasizing the civilian casualties.

According to the laughably unreliable Gaza Health Ministry, the operations killed 274 Palestinian civilians. It stands to reason, then, that it was almost certainly fewer than that. The Israel Defense Forces says the toll was less than 100.

While everyone would prefer that every military operation were completely antiseptic, that's not how the world works.

The Israel forces weren't in the Nuseirat refugee camp because they wanted to conquer it or despoil it. They came on a mission so basic to human nature that it's been a part of conflicts since time memorial, and until now has been universally regarded as a righteous one -- recovering one's own from captivity by the enemy.

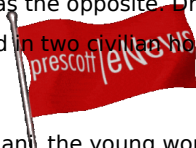
Decent societies aren't just tireless in seeking the return of their countrymen, but even of the bodies of the fallen. The most moving scene in "The Iliad" is Priam petitioning the Greek champion Achilles to return the body of his fallen son Hector.

The moral equation in Gaza is not complicated. One side wants to free non-combatants from their nightmarish imprisonment to live again at home with their families as they please. The other side grabbed innocent people in a bloodthirsty pogrom, has hideously abused them and refuses to release them.

The sensible and very easy way to avoid exposing your civilian population to potential harm during hostage rescues is not to take hostages in the first place, and, failing that, not to secrete hostages among civilians. The final fail-safe is not to violently resist hostage rescues, creating a massive battle in a heavily populated area.

Needless to say, Hamas hasn't honored these rules, or any other norm of civilized society.

It's not as though the Israeli raid was indiscriminate; it was the opposite. Dressed in disguise in broad daylight, special forces targeted two apartment buildings where four hostages were being held in two civilian homes. The element of surprise was essential, since the hostages likely would have been killed with any warning.



The forces smoothly extracted one hostage -- Noa Argamani, the young woman infamously kidnapped on the back of a motorbike from the Israel music festival on Oct. 7 -- from one building. The team that rescued three male hostages from the other building came under heavy fire.

Once Israel forces encountered military resistance in dire circumstances, what were they supposed to do? Give the hostages back? Surrender? Apologize and ask to come back at some other time?

The Israeli military used the force necessary to get their operators and the hostages out alive, as any other country would have done (one commando was killed in the raid).

In a society in its right mind, this contemporary equivalent of the Entebbe raid would one day be made into a movie about the ingenuity and bravery of those men who pulled off a near-miracle, getting out four innocents held by terrorists. The deaths of the civilians in the Nuseirat refugee camp are tragic, but so were the estimated 50,000 French civilians killed by Allied bombing in World War II. Confronting evil sometimes comes with terrible downsides.

Either out of profound moral confusion, enmity toward Israel, self-loathing of the West, or all of the above, many people since Oct. 7 have confused victim with victimizer, hostage-rescuers with hostage-takers, and the forces of civilization with the forces of barbarism.

If Israel can't even bring home its own, the world is truly upside down, just the way Hamas wants it.

(Rich Lowry is on Twitter @RichLowry)

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