

International law supports Israel's strikes on terrorists

Hamas leaders were not neutral civilians; the West should reflect on its hypocrisy when criticising legitimate military action

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When US Navy Seals flew deep into Pakistan to eliminate Osama bin Laden in 2011, the world cheered and President Obama was rightly lauded for defending America, after the worst terror attack on US soil. Few, if any, stopped to ask whether Pakistan had consented, or the strike violated its sovereignty.

Yet when Israel takes out Hamas leaders in Doha, who were responsible for orchestrating the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, [those same Western voices rush to castigate Jerusalem](#). The hypocrisy is absolutely astounding. What was deemed legitimate self-defence by the West for the United States, is suddenly branded “reckless” or “unlawful” when it is the Jewish state.

Just as the attack that took out Bin Laden was just, necessary and entirely lawful under international law, [so too was the Israeli strike against Hamas leaders in Qatar](#).

First, it needs to be underscored that the Hamas terrorists that were targeted, were not “political leaders”. They were terror masterminds, involved in the planning, execution and direction of every facet of the war that Hamas launched on October 7, including the ongoing captivity of hostages.

Those responsible for the October 7 attacks, were not confined to Gaza. They were also directing the war, and the refusal to end it, from the luxury of their five-star hotels in Doha.

That made them [legitimate military targets](#) under international law, including Article 51 of the UN Charter, which enshrines every state's inherent right to self-defence against an armed attack. Under the laws of armed conflict, states must also adhere to the principles of distinction, necessity and proportionality. Israel did precisely that.

Distinction requires that military force be directed only against combatants and military objectives. Hamas's leaders, whether in Gaza or the ones targeted in Doha, are not neutral civilians; they are the architects of terror and the ongoing war. Their luxury suites in Doha functioned not merely as residences, but command centres, making them lawful military targets.

Meanwhile, proportionality prohibits attacks expected to cause excessive civilian harm compared to the concrete military advantage gained. [By striking Hamas leaders with precision](#), Israel removed the masterminds of October 7, while avoiding widespread civilian casualties.

Israel was also left with no alternative. Only early this week, the United States put forward to the most comprehensive proposal to end this war once and for all, and release all the hostages, with President Trump calling on Hamas to accept the plan, cautioning “This is my last warning, there will not be another one!”

Like clockwork, Hamas rejected the deal, refusing to accept any terms that would require them to disarm. It should come therefore as absolutely no surprise that Israel carried out the strike in Doha. Faced with an enemy that refuses to end the war and release the hostages, Israel had no choice but to strike them militarily.

But many in the West have rushed to the defence of Doha. Qatar is no Mother Theresa here. They have continued to play the duplicitous role of both pyromaniac and firefighter, trying to fool the world.

Under the Hague Convention V of 1907, neutral states must not permit belligerents (or terrorists) to use their territory as a base of operations, but Qatar has done precisely the opposite. For years, Doha has perfected a cynical double game. On the one hand, it hosts the largest US military base in the Middle East and postures as an honest mediator in hostage talks. On the other, it grants sanctuary to Hamas leaders, peddles propaganda through Al Jazeera and allows its territory to be used to plan attacks against Israel and the ongoing captivity of the remaining 48 hostages in the dungeons of Gaza.

Its delay tactics in the hostage negotiations have not been about saving lives, but an entirely self-serving attempt to buy leverage and polish its own image in the West. Therefore, by failing to uphold its duties as a supposed neutral party, Qatar has allowed its territory to become complicit in Hamas’s war against Israel.

Critics of Israel argue that operations like the Doha strike undermine international order. However, the opposite is true. What undermines the rule of law is the selective application of its principles: applauding US self-defence while denying it to Israel.

Western governments that once celebrated the killing of bin Laden should reflect on their hypocrisy and direct their outrage not at Israel for striking the masterminds of Oct 7, but at Qatar for providing them safe harbour enabling them to operate from their territory.

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