

Colonel Richard Kemp, CBE at AIPAC Policy Conference 2010

Transcript

Thank you, Tim for those extremely kind words. I should say, though, any success that I've had, any achievements I've made in my lifetime, in my career have been due entirely to the extremely brave, committed, dedicated and hard British soldiers who I've had the honor to serve alongside.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is also a great honor to have been invited to speak to you here in Washington today. I won't open up with that old church-old cliché about two people divided by a common language. I -- I will, though say how comforting it is to know that in this enormous audience today there is a very strong British contingent led by Richard Benson.

And at least, therefore, there are about 30 people who will understand what I'm saying today. Ladies and gentlemen, the nexus of globalism and violent jihad have brought to this world a phenomenon that is entirely new and that phenomenon is global insurgency. The challenges facing the security forces whose duty it is to fight against this global insurgency war are in many ways much greater than those that have confronted them in any previous conflict. This is especially true of the security forces of the free world, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Israel. In standing together in this fight against global insurgency it is essential that we do not allow the dark forces of the insurgency to divide us as they try to do.

There are those who say, for example, that our forces are placed in greater danger because of the policies of Israel and its fight against its element of the insurgency. I would dismiss that comment. It is essential that we stand together. Israel, speaking from experience, has been of enormous assistance and help to the forces of Great Britain in its own struggles and certainly, when I appealed to Israel for assistance when I went out to Afghanistan and needed expertise in combating the -- the new and terrible threat of suicide bombing that assistance was given very generously and very wisely.

Ladies and gentlemen, the reason that I single out those three countries as representative of the free world is that their actions are scrutinized, analyzed and dissected by a powerful and only present free press. Those countries, like other democracies, are quite rightly governed by moral standards, conventions, human rights laws and democratic accountability, standards that don't constrain the actions of many of the other states who are nevertheless caught up in that same violent struggle. And some of those states, themselves untroubled by any need to observe human rights, whether their own citizens or their enemies were among those that most loudly condemned Israel, the United Nations and Geneva.

As I will explain later in my remarks, some of those states may well, by this type of ill-considered condemnation, make the global insurgency even worse than it already is for themselves as well as for us. The insurgents that Israel, the U.S. and the U.K. face are all different. Hezbollah and Hamas, in Lebanon and in Gaza, Al-Qaeda, Jaish al-Mahdi and a range of other militant groups in Iraq, in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, which is itself a horribly complex interweaving and overlapping tapestry of insurgency. They are different, but they're linked. They are linked, ladies and gentlemen, by the complex network of international jihad and by its transfer of expertise, skills, tactics and technology using the World Wide Web, remote training camps and easy global travel.

They are also linked by the pernicious influence, support and sometimes even the direction of Iran. It was Iran that formed his bylaw back in the '80s and to this day funds and directs it as an instrument of its own foreign policy. Iran has developed Hezbollah into one of the, if not the most deadly terrorist organizations in the world. Hamas receives support also from Iran -- and not just support. Whenever there has been any sign of wavering by Hamas or other anti-Israel groups Iran has moved in to stiffen their resolve, often using Hezbollah to do its dirty work. Similar Iranian support enabled Jaish al-Mahdi to attack and harry the combined military strength of the United States and the United Kingdom in Iraq where they were responsible for numerous American and British casualties.

Iran continues to provide such support to share militias in Iraq today. We know, ladies and gentlemen, that the Al-Qaeda management board, plus at least two of Bin Laden's wives and a son has been based in Iran since 2001 when its members escaped there from Afghanistan. Since their presence was discovered by western intelligence the Tehran regime has consistently protested that this group are confined to their homes and unable to operate, but last week during testimony to the Senate Foreign Affairs committee, General Petraeus, the head of U.S. Central Command revealed that Tehran is letting Al-Qaeda leaders travel freely between Pakistan and Afghanistan, effectively using its territory as a safe haven while permitting them to hold meetings to plan terrorist attacks against American targets.

Taliban leaders have also recently been boasting that they have received significant training and resourcing from Iran in their fight against NATO and the Afghan government, a fact that has now also been confirmed, I understand, by General Petraeus. And of course, we shouldn't forget that Hezbollah's Army, the second largest insurgent group in Afghanistan today has its main basis across the border in Iran. These diverse groups with their different goals and strategies share a common characteristic. They are trained and equipped above all for warfare fought from within the civilian population in conflicts in Lebanon, Iraq and in the towns and villages of Southern Afghanistan, the civilian population, a routinely exploited in deliberate and flagrant violation of international laws and reasonable norms of civilized behavior.

And in Gaza last year, during Operation Cast Lead civilians became a strategic weapon in the hands of Hamas who were deliberately putting their own people's lives on the line, those people that they proclaimed they were in place to protect. They used the noncombatant population of Gaza as human shields, relying on the Israeli military's adherence to international law and its own moral codes to protect them from harm. Hamas, of course deployed suicide attackers, including women and children who were also used to fight, collect intelligence and ferry arms and ammunition between battles. They used schools, private houses and other legally protected public buildings, sometimes deliberately filled with civilians, including women and children as fighting positions.

And despite the international legal protection afforded to religious buildings, as we've heard earlier this morning, they frequently use mosques as weapon stores and strong points. The U.S. and British armies face the same situation every single day in Afghanistan too. The Taliban force boys as young as 14 to throw high explosive grenades at our troops, knowing that they will not return fire against children. Civilians are forced to move in front of Taliban fighters attacking NATO troops in the line of fire to provide a protective shield for them. I read only recently on a jihadist website of an old woman who was used to fire at NATO troops to distract them from Taliban attack. All of this is, of course in flagrant breach of anything we would recognize as international law.

But ladies and gentlemen, it would be an enormous error to believe that jihadist groups ignore the international laws of armed conflict. They certainly do not. They study them with care and they understand them very well. They know that a British, American or Israeli commander and his men are bound by international law and the rules of engagement that flow from it. They then do their utmost to exploit what they view as one of their enemy's main weaknesses. Their very modus operandi is built on the correct assumption that western armies will abide by the rules. So how do civilized armies get around these tactics and prevail against the insurgents, in particular, avoiding killing innocent civilians when that is exactly what the enemy is trying to lure them to do?

And of course, encounter insurgency where winning over the hearts and minds of the people is so critically important it is vital to absolutely minimize civilian deaths. As General Stanley McChrystal, the NATO commander in Afghanistan recognizes in his edicts to avoid civilian deaths at virtually all costs. You have to go even beyond the rules of war, sometimes -- sometimes even putting your own troops' lives at greater risk to do so. The commanders of the Israeli defense forces who planned and implemented Operation Cast Lead also understood this necessity and they themselves took unprecedented measures to minimize civilian casualties.

The Israeli intelligence operation in the run up to Cast Lead was a huge complex and fought with danger. Covert human intelligent sources, predominantly Arabs working for Israel worked tirelessly to allow the idea of the best possible idea of what faced them in the urban areas. Make no mistake, ladies and gentlemen, if captured the penalties for these agents are heavy. Hamas recently reintroduced crucifixion as a method of execution for its

prisoners. Torture is routine. So why did Israel make this effort? Because to fight a pinpoint war on the ground, particularly against an enemy such as Hamas you need the best possible intelligence to deal as effectively as possible with the enemy fighters and their leaders and to make sure the minimum damage is done to the civilian population.

When possible, the IDF gave at least four hours notice to civilians to leave areas targeted for attack, handing -- knowingly handing an advantage to Hamas. As we've heard, attack helicopter pilots had total discretion to abort a strike if there was too great a risk of civilian casualties in the area and many missions that could've taken out Hamas military capability were aborted because of this. During the conflict, the IDF allowed huge amounts of humanitarian aid into Gaza. This sort of task is regarded by any military commander as risky and dangerous at the best of times, to mount such operations, to deliver aid virtually into your enemy's hands and let us not forget that Hamas confiscated significant amounts of that aid for their own military use is, to the military tactician quite unthinkable.

But the IDF courageously were willing to take on those risks. In the latter stages of Cast Lead the IDF unilaterally announced a daily three hour cease fire knowing, of course, that this would give Hamas vital time and space to regroup, reequip and redeploy for future attacks. That added to the danger to their own troops. The Israelis dropped over 900,000 leaflets warning the population of impending attacks, to allow them to leave designated areas. They phoned over 30,000 Palestinian households in Gaza urging them in Arabic to leave homes where Hamas might've stashed weapons or be preparing to fight. Similar messages were passed on Israeli radio broadcasts warning the civilian population of forthcoming operations.

American and British forces operating in Afghanistan today have adopted similar measures, some perhaps borrowed from Israel's experience to reduce civilian casualties while fighting an enemy, but uses similar tactics. At the start of Operation Moshtarak, the major offensive of it is running even today in Afghanistan, our troops and the American troops delivered large numbers of leaflets aimed both at the Taliban and the local people. They held meetings with local leaders to try and enlist their help and they took the unprecedented step of giving warning that the operation was coming to allow those civilians that could to leave the area and to give less committed Taliban fighters a chance to get away without a fight.

Despite Israel's extraordinary measures in Gaza, as we know only too well, a number of innocent civilians were killed and wounded. Every commander knows that no matter how sophisticated your targeting, how high tech your equipment and how careful your planning, the ever present friction and chaos of military operations means there will always be mistakes and of course, there will always be bad soldiers who deliberately or through incompetence go against their orders. Like British and American soldiers, Israel's forces operate under a strict code of conduct and are held accountable for this by the Israeli government.

Ladies and gentlemen, Hamas fighters are of course subject to no such restraint whatsoever. There is no equivalence -- there is no equivalence between Israel soldiers and Hamas' fighters.

Like every army, including other western armies, the IDF is far from perfect, but their work to reduce the risk of civilian casualties in Gaza went well beyond the requirements of the Geneva Convention to an extent that would not even be considered by most other armies around the world, least of all -- -- least of all of some of the countries that have most vocally condemned Israel at the United Nations.

The campaigns fought by Israel, the U.S. and the U.K. as -- as I've explained have several common factors, but there is also a major difference. In many countries around the world, not least of all in Europe, the start point is that Israel is always in the wrong. Ladies and gentlemen, I have met many Israeli soldiers and former Israeli soldiers. These are not war criminals. There is -- -- I recognize virtually no difference between the soldiers of the IDF and the brave British soldiers that I spoke about at the beginning of my remarks.

They're also very brave men and women who have prepared to put their own lives on the line to defend the civilian population and quite often, to make the ultimate sacrifice giving up their lives. The U.S., the U.K. and other NATO countries, even when themselves causing the unintentional deaths, tragic deaths of innocent civilians attract no such automatic condemnation as do the Israelis. Those states, individuals and international groups that unthinkingly

accept or subscribe to this blanket condemnation of Israel risk, perhaps unintentionally -- perhaps unintentionally, worsening the global insurgency that we all face. They enable highly questionable reports, such as Judge Goldstone's U.N. fact-finding report, to be created and then given prominence.

The Goldstone Report depended heavily on testimony from the people of the Gaza Strip, the same people as I've described whose suffering was exploited by Hamas as a strategic weapon; the same people who face horrific punishment from Hamas' thugs if they so much as consider deviating from the Hamas line. Full acceptance of the Goldstone Report, ladies and gentlemen, and its finding and interpretations would effectively make it impossible for states to defend themselves from armed insurgents as long as those insurgents operated from within the civilian population.

In his report, Judge Goldstone strongly criticizes Israeli attacks on Hamas fighters positioned in proximity to civilians or civilian installations, even when they were actively engaged in attacks against the IDF. In reaching this conclusion, Judge Goldstone effectively validates the terrorist tactic of hiding behind and exploiting the civilian population by denying that a state has the right to react. That validation will be noted around the world and will serve to encourage insurgent groups to follow the Hamas and Taliban line by exploiting civilian populations. It may well lead to an increase in civilian casualties during conflicts, yet Goldstone is doubly dangerous.

For all its seemingly forensic indictments of Israel and the Israeli defense forces' conduct of the conflicting Gaza Goldstone himself eventually concluded that -- and I quote, "If this was a court of law there would've been nothing proven." He emphasized that his conclusion, that war crimes had been committed was always intended as conditional. Conditional, indeed. A year on with no shortage of people trying to prove it, I for one, have seen nothing to confirm systematic abuse by the Israelis in Gaza.

Instead, ladies and gentlemen, the evidence that I have seen and the analysis that I have made leads me to continue to believe as I inform the human rights -- the U.N. Human Rights Council that during Operation Cast Lead the Israeli defense forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any army -- other army has done previously in the history of warfare.