



REJOINDER TO RECTENWALD ON SUPPOSED ISRAELI WAR CRIMES

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Abstract

In the view of Rectenwald (2024), in its 2023-2024 war against Hamas, Israel is guilty of “war crimes” and I am guilty of supporting this uncivilized behavior of that country. In so doing I am besmirching the good name of libertarianism, with which I have long been associated. The present paper is my attempt to refute these charges of that author. Specifically, Rectenwald maintains that I make unjustified demands for evidence, that I have improperly renounced by anarcho-capitalist philosophy, and that I have more than just several times contradicted myself. My claim against him involves the argument that he gives insufficient weight to sectarianism and completely avoids the fact that Hamas uses Gazan civilians as shields. Further, I refute his claim that the IDF targets innocent civilians. Rectenwald defends DiLorenzo’s critique of my analysis of the Israel-Hamas war, and I take issue with the analysis of the latter scholar. Rectenwald is particularly exercised that the IDF can accurately estimate the number of civilians who are likely to be killed in an attack; I show the irrelevance of this criticism. We engage in a “war of words” over the statements of the leaders of the two warring parties. We also take issue with each other over US funding of Israel and its abrupt cessation; over shape shifting and silver linings.

Keywords: Israel, Hamas, genocide, war crimes

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It is important to demonstrate the fallacies of Rectenwald (2024).¹ If so eminent a scholar as he can be so wrong on Israel’s conduct in its war with

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Hamas, there is little hope that those with more modest intellectual accomplishments can be brought around to entertaining a correct view on this matter. On the other hand, if this former New York University professor can be refuted, then the probability of the latter occurring is thereby markedly increased, so important a public figure is

¹ All my references to this author, unless otherwise mentioned, will be to this one essay of his, Rectenwald (2024)



he. That is precisely the purpose of the present paper: to do just that.

Our author starts off on the wrong foot. He maintains that “Block makes impetuous demands for evidence...” That is more than passing curiosity. Can a “demand for evidence” in a contentious issue² ever been “impetuous?” Hardly. Evidence, along with logic is the be all and end all of science, social science, history, philosophy, and other such callings.

Rectenwald next maintains that “In the case of Israel, the erstwhile anarcho-capitalist³ abandons his anarcho-capitalist perspective and principles, contradicts himself repeatedly...”

There is a little story that must be told at this point. Murray N. Rothbard is/was my mentor, my guru, my friend, my guide, my inspiration in all matters of economics and libertarian political philosophy. In Rothbard (1967) he strongly inveighed against “sectarianism.” This is the fallacy that infected many libertarian anarchists. Since from this perspective all governments violate the non-aggression principle of libertarianism, they are all illicit and all condemned. Rothbard had none of this. He emphasized the point that, yes, all states are evil, but some are much more so than others. In other words, it is sectarian to say, as would the anarchist libertarian who Rothbard (1967) is criticizing: “ Hamas is evil, Israel is evil,” and leave matters there. If one wants to take seriously Rothbard’s rejection of sectarianism, as I do, then he cannot do so as an anarcho-capitalist. He must do so under the aegis of some other version of libertarianism.

I have chosen the classical-liberal perspective of this philosophy as the jumping off point in an attempt to be responsive to the clarion call of Rothbard’s, as exemplified in the title of my book Block and Futerman (2021). Thus, I concede to Rectenwald: I am indeed “contradicting myself.”

² If the Israeli-Hamas war is not a contentious issue, there is no such thing as a contentious issue. There is probably more hatred, more disparagement, more cancellation, even more divorces over this issue than any other, even including abortion. I cannot believe other than that Rectenwald would agree with me in this claim.

³ That is, moi. Rectenwald is indeed correct in this contention. I do indeed support the anarcho-capitalist

Ordinarily, in virtually all my writings, speeches, interviews, I articulate the anarcho-capitalist point of view. However, when it comes to issues as to which criminal government entity is worse than the other, I do not say, as a sectarian, “a pox on both your houses.” Instead, I put on my classical liberal libertarian hat and ask which is worse than the other.⁴

He denies that he “suffer[s] from ‘Israel Derangement Syndrome...’” I shall demonstrate below that he is indeed infected with this intellectual malady. Rectenwald is not merely an intelligent man. He is a world class scholar. His ethics are beyond reproach. Yet, he takes the side of that terrorist organization, Hamas, vis a vis the Israeli government which, to be sure, is not perfect, far from it, but in this case is fighting an entirely defensive war. How, else, then, to account for his erroneous analysis other than by resort to this syndrome?

Rectenwald puts the case against Israel, and me by extension, very powerfully:

“... if someone firebombs my apartment and I know what neighborhood they live in but not their exact address, I would not be justified in firebombing their entire neighborhood in response. In fact, I would not even be justified in bombing their home. The only justifiable use of force would be to prevent them from bombing my apartment and/or to bring them, and only them, to justice.” The implication here, of course, is that Israel has gone far beyond limiting itself to pursuing, capturing, punishing, those individual Hamas members who were specifically responsible for the carnage of October 7, 2023.

This illustrious commentator reckons in the absence of shield theory (Block, 2010, 2011A, 2019). Consider the following. Jones has a knife and has attached to himself two-year-old son placed in front of him in a baby hold-all. Jones runs

version of libertarianism. For example, see Block, 2007, 2011B, 2021; Block and Fleischer, 2010; Block and Futerman, 2020-2021; Futerman and Block, 2019

⁴ Contrary to Rectenwald, I do so not only in the Israel-Hamas context, but, also, regarding any other dispute between two governments as in the case of Russia and Ukraine: Block, 2022A, 2022B, 2022C

at Smith, with blood in his eye, yelling he is going to kill the latter, who has a gun. Smith cannot run away; Jones is faster than him. Smith has his back to the wall in any case. However, this would be victim has a gun. If Smith does not shoot Jones, he will himself be killed. And here is the crucial point: the only way Smith can shoot Jones is through the body of Jones' totally innocent son. Jones represents Hamas, Smith, Israel. A knife is deadly, but a gun is even more powerful. Hamas can indeed strike murderous blows against Israel, but Israel is stronger than Hamas.

So, what should Smith (Israel) do? If he does nothing, he will be committing suicide; Jones (Hamas) will murder him. To save his own life, he must kill Jones, in self-defense. But if he does any such thing, Jones' two-year-old baby son will also be killed, and there can be no doubt that this toddler is the paradigm case of an innocent person.

Let us consider the case where Smith kills the two Joneses. We need not worry too much about the adult Jones; he is killed in the act of murder. Even an Israel hater such as Rectenwald will, presumably, acquiesce in this notion. But what about Jones Junior? He is collateral damage. Who is responsible for his unjustified death? Rectenwald says Smith is the guilty party. He is imposing "collective punishment" in Rectenwald's view, on baby Jones.⁵ And in a sense, a superficially correct sense, which is why this author is so confused on the matter, my debating partner is correct! After all, it is the bullet emanating from the gun of Smith that pierces the body of the Jones baby. But even a moment's reflection should convince any fair-minded commentator that the entire blame rests with father, Jones. No, he did not directly shoot his son, but he is solely responsible for his death regardless of that fact. And yes, Smith shot and killed baby Jones, and, yet he is in no way responsible for his death.

How many babies may Jones use as a shield? If he has two, three or perhaps even four such young children strapped to himself when he charges at

Smith, the same analysis holds. How about 20,000, or 200,000, or two million, the approximate population of Gaza? Would Smith, Israel that is, be entitled to shoot them all? Of course not. It is inconceivable that any one man could physically control so many people, most of whom of course were not babies, but rather adult shields. What is the correct number? To what extent may Smith (Israel) properly engage in the killing of civilians in self-defense?

We have here a continuum problem (Block and Barnett, 2008), and there is no one correct answer. However roughly and approximately, the mathematics of the situation fully incline in favor of Israeli practice. For, how many Hamas fighters are there? Estimates vary, but we may safely estimate the figure at in the neighborhood of 100,000. Are these terrorists, all together, more than sufficient to terrorize the entire population? Of course they are. The proof is in the pudding: they have, at least to the date of the present writing⁶, succeeded in staying in power in the face of the devastation and mass killing that has so far afflicted that unhappy corner of the world.

This quote from a former Prime Minister of Israel is very pertinent. Stated Golda Meir: "When peace comes, we will perhaps in time be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons, but it will be harder for us to forgive them for having forced us to kill their sons. Peace will come when the Arabs will love their children more than they hate us."⁷ I really should not do this, but that quote is so pertinent, so apropos, so profound, that for the sake of Rectenwald, and in the hope that he reads it carefully, I will repeat it right here once again: "When peace comes we will perhaps in time be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons, but it will be harder for us to forgive them for having forced us to kill their sons. Peace will come when the Arabs will love their children more than they hate us."

So much for Rectenwald's opposition to "firebombing their entire neighborhood." He completely misconstrues what is going on in the Middle East. In his case, innocent people are

⁵ According to the good professor: "The NAP excludes the initiation of force and the collective punishment of those not involved in the original aggression." That is true enough.

⁶ August 2024

⁷ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/664790-when-peace-comes-we-will-perhaps-in-time-be-able>

being killed alright, but it is solely the fault of the bombers, for there are no shields in place. He never so much as even contemplates such a situation. That is not at all the case in Israel, where Hamas places rocket launchers in schools, Mosques, hospitals, playgrounds, residential areas, and then complains, bitterly, when the IDF defends itself in the only way it can. It first sends leaflets, warning of incipient attacks, urging civilians to vacate the area. Hamas forbids such migration, and garners world support when Israel kills the Jones baby; that is the children and other innocent civilians in Gaza.

This former NYU professor then states as follows: "Block's response to DiLorenzo is that he never endorsed any such war crimes or the targeting of civilians, or admitted that any targeting has happened: 'Where did I ever say or write that the Israeli government intentionally targeted civilians?' But this was not DiLorenzo's point at all. DiLorenzo's point is that the IDF *does* target civilians—women and children—and that in supporting and cheerleading Israel's onslaught in Gaza, whether based on ignorance or not, Block thereby sanctions and encourages such targeting. In supporting Israel's onslaught in Gaza, Block endorses war crimes."

With the Jones - Smith case in mind, we are now in a position to put paid to this claim. First, the IDF does not "target civilians." Au contraire, it does everything humanly possible, perhaps more than any other military in the entire history of warfare, to avoid this. Does that mean it will not bomb a building with a rocket launcher in it, after it has warned civilians of its intention and thus knowingly inflicts collateral damage? No, it does not refrain from such acts. Does this mean that in the mind of the IDF, no innocents will perish as a result of these actions? No, again. But, contrary to Rectenwald, this does not mean that the Israeli military "targets" civilians. Instead, it is shooting Jones' baby in self-defense. In Rectenwald's view, if a bank robber came to alleviate this organization of its funds, and had a baby strapped to him, the bank guards would be legally and morally obligated not to forcibly stop him if the only way they could do so would be to mow down both.

Thus, the bank guards would be at the mercy of the bank robbers. This is highly problematic.

This scholar is by no means finished with his critique. He next avers:

"DiLorenzo has raised Block's ire by stating: 'He [Block] is no longer an unpaid senior fellow at the Mises Institute not because he is 'pro-Israel,' as some uninformed or dishonest commentators have asserted. It is because the Mises Institute cannot be associated with such a well-known, prolific, public advocate of the intentional targeting and killing of Palestinian women, children, and babies.'"

"Block accuses DiLorenzo of intellectual dishonesty and insists that he never wrote or said such a thing. He never advocated targeting and killing Palestinian women, children, and babies. But again, the point is not that Block has stated that he supports the targeting and killing of Palestinian women, children, and babies but rather that he is either unaware of such targeting, is in denial about it, or dismisses the reality of the same. Likewise, his support of the onslaught on Gaza amounts to such advocacy."

DiLorenzo is a world class Austrian economist and historian who relies on facts and logic. He ought to know better than this. There is a world of difference between statement A: "Israel bombed a residential area of Gaza" and statement B: "Israel purposefully targeted civilians who occupied that residential area." A is a statement of objective fact. We can all see the rubble that is now Gaza. No one can deny A. But B is an entirely different matter. It calls for an intention of the IDF, something not obviously apparent from the mere objective act depicted in A. There could have been many other motives underlying this act for all that DiLorenzo, Rectenwald or anyone else for that matter mentioned. For example, C: "The IDF bombed the residential area in spite of the fact that it knew there were civilians ensconced there." Or D: "The IDF bombed the residential area as an act of self-defense since Hamas had placed rocket launchers therein, which were murdering innocent civilians." Rectenwald is not an economist, so, perhaps, he can be excused for not taking cognizance of this economic⁸ distinction. It is more difficult to do so in the case of DiLorenzo.

⁸ But also a matter of common sense

Our esteemed scholar makes this charge: "Certainly, the evidence of our senses, as seen in endless photographs and videos, confirms that the IDF indiscriminately slaughters civilians." Yes, we have all seen the rubble that is now Gaza, which followed the unwarranted, depraved and vicious attack launched against Israel on October 7, 2023. This is objective. This is undeniable. But "indiscriminate" is entirely a different matter. It does not at all logically follow from the fact that many buildings were destroyed, and many lives lost that the IDF acted in an indiscriminate manner. As for "slaughter" that properly describes what had occurred on that day of infamy October 7, 2023, not in regard to Israel's defensive response.

Rectenwald appears particularly exercised at the fact that "... the [Israeli] army significantly expand[ed] its bombing of targets that are not distinctly military in nature. These include private residences as well as public buildings, infrastructure, and high-rise blocks ..."

But this is precisely where Hamas has placed its military weaponry. If these areas are ruled off limits because there are shields located there, that baby Joneses may be found in the vicinity, Israel might as well surrender in its war against Hamas. Is that what Rectenwald wishes? It is difficult to avoid this conclusion.

Something else that sticks in Rectenwald's craw is the claim that the IDF full well knows "... the number of civilians who are likely to be killed in an attack on a particular target. This number is calculated and known in advance to the army's intelligence units, who also know shortly before carrying out an attack roughly how many civilians are certain to be killed."

The proper answer to this is "so bloody what." The Israel military has done all that any civilized army could do to minimize civilian deaths. It does not at all want to kill baby Jones. It sends out leaflets before attacks to reduce the probability of that occurring. It appreciates the fact that Hamas will prevent these innocents from leaving these areas. Yet, in self-defense it must terminate the missile launchings from these places. How else can it do so apart from bombing them? The fact that it can accurately estimate the harm to the baby Jones shields is entirely irrelevant to these

considerations, Rectenwald to the contrary notwithstanding.

Our author is upset that the IDF was "... *not interested in killing [Hamas] operatives only* when they were in a military building or engaged in a military activity..." Rather, these terrorists were targeted at times when they were using their families as shields. Rectenwald does not at all incorporate the lesson learned from the Jones Smith example. He completely ignores this reality. He maintains that these terrorists should be safe from IDF targeting when they are surrounded by baby Joneses. For him, it is morally required that the IDF should attempt to bring to justice these terrorists only when they are actively engaged in their terroristic activities. This means that murderers and rapists can only be arrested when they are in the midst of conducting their foul deeds. They cannot be arrested when "innocently" sitting at a restaurant or night club. One can only wonder, in dismay, at this position of Rectenwald's.

Our learned author is aghast at the charge that "... more children were killed in the Gaza Strip in just over four months than were killed in four years in all other conflicts around the world, combined."

Stipulate, arguendo, that this and these other charges are true. All this means is that there were many, many baby Joneses in Gaza who were used as shields. Who is responsible for their deaths? Those who directly killed them by pulling triggers, or releasing bombs aimed at terrorists (Israel), or those who set up these innocent children as buffers, in positions such that the only way, the only way, that Israel could defend itself would be by killing them (Hamas)? Rectenwald blames Israel. No fair-minded commentator would do any such thing.

Next, Rectenwald marshals a series of intemperate remarks made by Israeli officials and asserts: "Expressed intent is a valid indicator of genocidal goals." Many of these statements were made in the immediate aftermath of the atrocities of October 7, 2023. Some were made even more recently, while Hamas still holds Israeli hostages, some of whom who have already perished under captivity. What do you expect when people are devastated by the next worst calamity to have ever overtaken the Jewish people? Sweetness and light?

But actions speak louder than words. The word “leaflet” appears nowhere in his essay; he does not seem cognizant of the fact that the Israeli *actions* are an attempt to minimize civilian deaths the very opposite of genocide; that if there is any purposeful slaughter of civilians, it is due to Hamas behavior. This is clear in their attack on the peaceful concert goes on that evil day.

However, if words are so important to Rectenwald, let him consider the most important document of these despicable human beings. The Hamas covenant invokes this injunction: “The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight Jews and kill them. Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees will cry out: ‘O Muslim, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him.’”⁹

These were not off the cuff angry remarks, made amidst tears. They appeared in the very covenant of these people. This document is akin for them to the US Constitution for Americans or to the bible for religious people.

The next critique offered by Rectenwald is as follows:

“As for the US’s funding and arming of Israel, Block at first suggests that Israel’s war on Gaza is none of the US’s business. Citing DiLorenzo, he writes:

“[Block] complain[s] ... bitterly about the Biden administration’s pause in sending more bombs to Israel to be dropped on the Gazan population, calling it ‘treachery.’ He therefore is fully in favor of using the US government’s powers of legalized theft (aka taxation) to pay for more bombs for Israel’...

“First of all [writes Block], I oppose all US foreign aid to any and all countries and this certainly includes Israel.

“Yet only a few paragraphs later, Block contradicts himself by arguing that since the US has promised Israel foreign aid, it should deliver on said promise: Third, it is even more egregious to stop the foreign aid that had been promised to a recipient country such as Israel. Yes, it is true, from an anarcho-

capitalist point of view that all such government contracts are invalid upon their face. However, from the classical liberal perspective from which I often write about Israel, they are valid, and the US is derelict in this regard (emphasis mine).

“So, Block argues that since the US has promised to extort its taxpayers to send arms and military aid to Israel, it should follow through with said extortion and send the aid and arms. That’s the equivalent of saying that a thief who’s promised to give a third party stolen goods should follow through with his theft to make good on his promise to the intended recipient of the stolen goods.”

Not so fast. The US government should not exist at all, based on my anarcho-capitalist point of view. Since it exists, it should not be sending foreign aid to anyone. However, right now, the US transfers far more money to all Arab countries put together than to Israel alone, although to be sure, that nation receives more foreign aid¹⁰ than any other single country. Given that the US will continue to send massive amount of foreign aid to all the Arab countries, it would be unfair, unjust, to cut out such largesse to Israel, alone. It is even more egregious to stop this aid to Israel that has already been promised to that country right in the middle of a war, a just war, that Israel is now conducting. In other words, the situation is more complicated than that contemplated by this critic of mine. If the US shut off all financial and other transfers of funds to Israel, and as well to all other countries in the Middle East, that would be perfectly acceptable. But to do so with its most important ally in the region, and to no one else, that is a different matter, one beyond the ken of Rectenwald’s.

It is one thing to support stopping all US aid to Israel. That is a no brainer for libertarians; all must agree. It is quite another to favor abruptly pulling the rug out from under that country’s feet by stopping promised aid while continuing to support Israel’s enemies. That is an entirely different matter.

Let us make this point from a different perspective. All libertarians must agree to the privatization of

⁹ <https://irp.fas.org/world/para/docs/880818a.htm>

¹⁰ I feel I should apologize to Peter Bauer whenever I use this phrase. See on this Bauer, 1954, 1972, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1987; Bauer and Yamey, 1957

the bus service. This is a micro-libertarian issue, not one of macro-libertarianism.¹¹ But how shall the privatization actually take place? Suppose there is a public bus on the route from one city in Alaska to another. It is now right in the middle of the two, 300 miles away from both. The temperature is 60 degrees below zero. All passengers have paid for their tickets. Suddenly, the bus driver halts, is picked up by a government helicopter and leaves all the passengers to die in the freezing temperature. Must libertarians acquiesce in this type of privatization? Of course not. Consider another example. It is another foundational principle of the freedom philosophy that all hospitals should be privatized. A man is now unconscious, lying on the operating table; his heart has just been removed from him, and he is now in the process of receiving a replacement. Suddenly privatization takes place; all the doctors and nurses immediately leave the operating room, and this patient dies. Must libertarians support this type of privatization? Of course not. But Rectenwald would be logically obligated to do so based upon these comments of his.

He would have to opine something along these lines: "... since the US has promised to extort its taxpayers to run buses and hospitals, it should follow through with said extortion and continue to do so. That's the equivalent of saying that a thief who's promised to give a third party stolen goods should follow through with his theft to make good on his promise to the intended recipient of the stolen goods."

The point is, just because a cessation of government operations is justified, is more than justified, it does not logically follow, as per this author, that any and all methods of so doing are warranted.¹² Privatization is one thing. It is entirely justified. Immediate privatization is quite another matter. A sophisticated libertarian must be cautious in supporting it. Similarly, ending foreign aid is one thing. It is entirely justified. Immediate cessation of government-to-government transfers of aid is quite another matter. A sophisticated libertarian must be cautious in supporting it.

Rectenwald is a libertarian. But caution is not his middle name.

Rectenwald avers of me: "He has previously stated that he opposes all foreign aid, yet he does not reject foreign aid where Israel is concerned. Hello?"

Let it be said, loud and clear, as a libertarian, I oppose all foreign aid. But that does not imply that all precipitous withdrawals are defensible, whether regarding buses, hospitals, or Israel.

Rectenwald continues his negative appraisal of my perspective:

"In the carve-out exception he makes for Israel, it is telling that Block changes his stripes from anarcho-capitalism, under which taxation is theft, to classical liberalism, under which it is not considered theft. Why, when it comes to Israel, does Walter Block change from an anarcho-capitalist to a classical liberal? This shapeshifting is a convenient excuse for making an exception for Israel..."

Why do I engage in this "shape shifting?" It is due to my appreciation of Rothbard (1967) who inveighs against "sectarianism," as mentioned above. Thus, there is nothing untoward here. I am a staunch anarcho-capitalist, opposed to all governments, per se. However, when comparing states and state-like entities, such as Israel and Hamas, unless I am content to condemn them both, I must approach this issue from a different libertarian perspective. I have chosen classical liberalism as a vantage point from which to do this.

Whereupon my critic takes issue with the fact that "Block suggests that the Biden administration's refusal (albeit temporarily) to send bombs to Israel defeats the administration's stated purpose for the refusal—to save Gazan lives. This is the case, Block argues, because the bombs that were withheld are precision bombs and would kill less civilians. Here, I merely point to the evidence cited above, which makes clear that the IDF is not concerned with sparing the lives of non-

¹¹ See McMaken (2024). For a response, Block (2024A)

¹² Why is it that the Biden Administration ceased its support for Israel? Was it due to libertarian considerations which reject foreign aid? Not a bit of it.

Rather, it was because the IDF was not following US orders which undermined its effectiveness in pursuing the Hamas terrorists.

combatants, regardless of the types of bombs being guided by AI systems.”

This “logic” goes way over my head. Yes, precision munitions will allow more Gazan civilian lives to be saved. The US refuses to continue to send them. If the IDF wishes to defend its country with inferior weaponry, more civilians will perish. This proves that the Israeli military “is not concerned with sparing the lives of non-combatants”? Under what logical system can this even come close to being true? Maybe logic operates differently at NYU. Rectenwald seems to saying that since the Israeli military can no longer have this precision armament, if they were really “concerned with sparing the lives of non-combatants” they would altogether cease operations against Hamas, that is, commit national suicide. A rational person can only react with dismay at this illogic.

Whereupon Rectenwald launches upon the following:

“Then, our anarcho-capitalist-turned-classical-liberal-in-the-case-of-Israel-only makes a stunning reversal. Withholding said aid and arms to Israel is beneficial after all: However, I must concede, there is indeed one benefit that flows from this backstabbing cessation of armaments: the US will further solidify its reputation for international unreliability. This is all to the good since on net balance and here I expect my opponent will agree with me, the interference of the US in world affairs has been a detriment to peace and prosperity, and thus its limitation will

be positive...

“Let’s get this straight. Withholding aid and arms to Israel is bad because of the reasons Block has just given: 1) it would harm Israel; 2) it represents a double standard (because DiLorenzo and, I suppose, other commentators, didn’t mention cutting all foreign aid); 3) the US promised the aid and arms; 4) Israel is a US client state, and the US has a bad reputation for reneging on its promises with respect to its client states, reputational damage that will only be exacerbated by refusing Israel aid and arms; and 5) cutting said aid and arms will end up endangering more Gazan lives.

“But, but, but ... withholding of said aid and arms is nevertheless beneficial — because it will solidify the reputation of the US as an unreliable international partner. Here, Block transparently contradicts point number 4.

“Then, Block stunningly admits: ‘the interference of the US in world affairs has been a detriment to peace and prosperity, and thus its limitation will be positive.’”

Evidently, this author has never heard of the concept of “silver lining.” What, pray tell, is that? For his edification, it stems from the statement: “Every cloud has a silver lining.” For example, it is raining outside, and this will ruin our plans for a picnic. However, it has been hot around here lately, and at least the rain will cool things down. Or, I hate to clean up my apartment; it is a pain in the neck. But in so doing I found my wristwatch, which I thought I had lost. The cooler weather, and the timepiece are the silver-linings, benefit which stem from an otherwise unsatisfactory situation. Or more pertinent to the case at hand, US foreign policy has been an utter disaster for many, many years.¹³ The latest failure has been it sticking a knife in the back of Israel (Block, 2024B) by suddenly, precipitously, abruptly, stopping shipments of promised precision military aid. But at least there is some benefit, some silver lining, in this sorry state of affairs: the US reputation for reliability in foreign affairs will be further besmirched, and this country will be even less trusted than before, and thus less able to ruin things in future. This seems like a perfectly coherent claim. It might even be false. But Rectenwald perceives a logical contradiction in it. I just cannot for the life of me understand how an intelligent person, an accomplished scholar such as he, can draw that conclusion.

This author ends his essay by bemoaning “... the deaths of over 35,000 people, the displacement of 2.3 million people, and the hundreds of thousands facing starvation...” involved in the present war of Israel against Hamas. I join him in this regret. Fervently so. Among the missing is possibly a modern-day Mozart. Or Einstein. Or the person who would have cured cancer 20 years earlier than when it would be actually alleviated thus

¹³ Let us stipulate, arguendo, that this is true

saving not millions but billions of further precious lives.

But which organization started this war? Which is responsible for this carnage? Obviously, Hamas. And we precisely set the date at which this occurred: October 7, 2023. Had they not done so, the present carnage would not be occurring. Rectenwald is busily attacking Israel for defending itself, and me for justifying the role that Israel and

the IDF have played. He should be ashamed of himself.

Nevertheless, I am grateful to him for this irrational, tendentious, evil, malignant essay of his. Without it, I could not have written this reply, and further made the case on behalf of the only almost fully civilized country in the Middle East and its present entirely justified war.

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