

ON TERROR AND WHY IT WORKS

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Since this a lecture on terror, I suppose we do well to begin by defining the term, Terror. But that is no easy task, ladies & gentlemen; the United Nations has been trying to do so for 40 years and hasn't managed it yet! But I will try:

Terror is when a DEFINABLE GROUP, usually religious or political, perpetrates violence against an INDISCRIMINATE NUMBER of innocent people, civilians, NON-COMBATANTS with the aim of demoralizing a society.

a) a definable group; not a riot, a pogrom, or a mob gone berserk.

b) an indiscriminate number; not a specific assassination,

c) civilian non-combatants; not Japanese kamikaze, nor soldiers in Gaza or in Iraq.

Violence against uniformed soldiers or police is war not terror.

Terror violence certainly has ancient roots but has been a world problem mostly since the end of the Second World War. We have seen the IRA in Belfast and the Basques in Spain, the Tamil Tigers and some groups in South America, and of course the Arabs in Israel.

I am going to talk mostly about the situation between Israel and the Palestinians,

a) partly because it's the subject I know most about, and

b) partly because what happened between Israel and the Palestinians has become the paradigm for the use of terror as a political weapon in other parts of the world.

It is clear that I, as an Israeli, have personal opinions on the rights and wrongs of this situation but I will try not to let them get in the way as I talk mostly about the undeniable political genius of the past half century: Yasser Arafat.

The question I mean to ask in this talk is whether the success of the Palestinian campaign against Israel points to the wider success of Islamic terror against the whole western world.

I'm sure of the first part of my question. The campaign of Arafat against Israel has been a huge political success. I'm not sure about the second point.

What in fact has happened in Israel?

Easiest to start chronologically. 1999 was the last year of peace. It was the first (and last) year in the history of the State of Israel in which no civilians were killed in Israel by terrorists. Then three things happened in the year 2000 to change the equation:

a) Israeli troops withdrew unilaterally from Lebanon at the end of May, 2000. It is not my purpose to consider whether the withdrawal was successful or not, or whether Israel should have been in Lebanon in the first place, etc. My point here is that the entire Arab world—including, of course, the Palestinians—saw this move as a sign of weakness. Hezbollah had forced Israeli withdrawal. This was an enormously important message to the Arab world: despite vast superiority of technology, arms, training, etc., Israel, mighty Israel, could be beaten by a few hundred guerrillas. If Israel could be beaten, so could the West.

b) The second thing that happened in 2000 was that the Camp David Summit fell apart in July. Chairman Arafat rejected a proposal from PM Barak for 97% of the West Bank and Gaza, and the entire Jordan Valley, and full sovereignty of the Temple Mount and shared sovereignty in the rest of Jerusalem. He did not offer a counter proposal, but simply walked out. Again it is not my purpose to consider whether the offer was a good one, or good enough. The point was that the Arabs saw that they could simply defy the West (President Clinton was deeply involved in the process) and get away with it.

c) The third event of 2000 was the visit by Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount on Thursday, September 28th, in the middle of a Likud election primary campaign. We have no need here to discuss whether this visit was legitimate or just a provocation. What we know is that the visit was greeted by mild protests (not surprising; there were a ton of police and soldiers guarding the candidate), that Friday prayers the next day went off more or less normally, and that serious violence—the 2nd intifada, the *el-Aksa intifada*—started the next day, Saturday, which was the eve of Rosh Ha-Shanah, the New Year in the Hebrew calendar.

It is universally agreed by now that that the violence of the 2nd intifada was not spontaneous. It was not a protest against the Sharon visit, nor a protest against the occupation in general, nor about the oppression of the Palestinians; all the stuff we hear from Mrs. Ashrawi.

The political violence that started at the end of September 2000 was planned well in advance—the Palestinians have said as much, publicly—as a political program. Arafat believed (still does) that he can get

more of what he wants by violence than by negotiation. And he has had a lot of experience to support this view.

His people will suffer, all right, although he and his family won't. His own safety is guaranteed by the Americans, and his wife and daughter are living comfortably in Paris in a \$1000-a-day hotel. But in the end he believes that he will win; that is, will make it impossible for Israel to exist in the Middle East. That is and always has been his political program. And violence is the major weapon he has in working towards it.

A 3-Stage Process

1. His first step was to create a Palestinian People. How to do this? By creating himself and his organization, the PLO, as the center of it. And how does one do that? By terror, that is making the world take notice. Thus began the hijacking of airplanes and cruise ships (they dumped an elderly Jewish tourist from his wheel chair to his death off the Achille Laro), the targeting of Israeli diplomats in London and killing American diplomats in Sudan, the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, the incursions, killings and ambushes inside Israel, etc.

That is, by creating the PLO and himself, Arafat, at its head as a force to be reckoned with, to be dealt with—because it was capable of terror violence and willing to use it—the goal was to focus world attention on the Palestinians. And to make itself, the PLO, the center of attention for the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza whose previous loyalties had always been only to family and clan. To make Arafat and the PLO a centralizing force to rally around. To make an “us” and this is who “we” are.

You obviously need a lot of cooperation from the press and television to do this, and he got it (we will get back to that point later.)

To create a Palestinian people was no small accomplishment. The world now accepts the fact that such a people exists despite the fact that no one—apart from a few scholars—ever heard of Palestinians before 1967. (Anyone old enough to remember the '50s and '60s remembers that they were "refugees" back then.) And despite the a complete absence of any of the criteria by which one usually defines a people—no history, no language, no roots, no archaeology, no culture, no food, no heroes, no myths, no poetry, no religion—nothing that is uniquely Palestinian and not, say, Syrian.

In fact, as late as 1948 "Palestinian" meant Jew. The "Palestinian" units of the British Army in WW II were Jewish. And I have here a songbook, "The Singing Palestine," full of Hebrew songs, issued in 1941 by Hadassah! Indeed, most Arab opinion denied the existence of a separate Palestinian people and saw the separation of Palestinian Arabs from the Syrian nation as a Zionist trick to divide and conquer.

2. The second step was a follow up on the first: once you create the fact of a People, then you create the fact of a Land. Palestinian land. Once again the complete absence of any basis in history is irrelevant. There never was a country named Palestine. Never. For a while there were provinces of that name—provinces of the Roman/Byzantine empire and provinces of the Ottoman empire—but never a country.

Still, the fact is that when we say West Bank or Gaza we automatically mean Palestinian Land. And that fact is entirely due to the political genius of Yasser Arafat.

3. The third step follows logically from the first two. Once you have created a People and created a Land then it therefore becomes legitimate to attack Israel because Israel is occupying Palestinian Land, QED. This has been a brilliant political maneuver! And, as usual, the facts don't matter. The fact that the earliest expression of any kind of Palestinian identity can be traced to the 1920s, at most, that the land itself is at best "disputed" because Israel's claim to the Land is older and better than anyone else's, and the fact that the "occupation" is not an occupation at all by any criterion of international law. Facts don't matter. Objections like the ones I have just raised are easily dismissed, like Scrooge crying "Bah, Humbug!" The world has accepted Arafat's Palestinian story. It has now become The Conventional Wisdom.

How come?

How come nearly everybody in the world has bought into this story? Because the Arab states have enthusiastically accepted and promoted it. They have always needed the misery of the Palestinians as a stick with which to beat Israel, both for religious and metaphysical reasons—Islam has a serious problem with minority sovereignties in the Muslim world—and as a means of distracting their own people from their own rotten situation. So the Arab states have consistently worked to ensure that that misery is permanent; that the Palestinian problem does not get resolved. And inasmuch as,

a) a quarter to a third of all the world's oil comes from the Arab states, so their opinion is important. b) western capitalism, deeply involved in the Middle East, needs stability above all; stability of labor, of law and contract, money, banks, courts, transportation (think Suez Canal) etc. Capitalism therefore fears violence and instability above all. Therefore, the threat of violence in the Middle East has always raised western alarms and prompted intervention.

The Americans have bought this Palestine story for these reasons, although reluctantly. Europe has bought it far more enthusiastically.

cally, of course, because the European story is more complicated than the American one. I count 6 problems that plague the Europeans:

1) Fatigue. Europe is exhausted and de-populated after two dreadful wars in the 20th century. Two World Wars killed millions of people and destroyed whole societies. Europe wants quiet, needs quiet, so it can re-populate itself, man its factories, do business, and recover economically.

2) Resentment. Europe has in fact recovered economically. It is by now a huge economic power, soon to overtake the economy of the USA, but an insignificant political power. The Americans can—and do—rule the world. They do what they want and Europe, for all its new wealth, is powerless to change things. They resent their impotence very much. And as Israel is seen (correctly) as a satellite of America, they resent Israel too for the same reasons.

3) Fear of domestic violence. We note the enormous growth of the Muslim population of Europe itself. As the Middle East disintegrates, more and more people are voting with their feet and leaving the Middle East for Europe (and some to the United States & Canada). There are now more than 5 million Muslims in France, a country of 57 million people. They are getting close to being 10% of the population. And Amsterdam and some Scandinavian cities now have a Muslim majority.

Having no other political experience, and being largely of a deprived under-class, these people are often violent. They are beating up Jews in France, bombing synagogues, vandalizing cemeteries, and harassing Zionist and Jewish organizations, functions, meetings, etc. And Europe, afraid of this violence, tries to appease it.

4) Guilt. Much of Europe still suffers great guilt about what they did to the Jews in the Holocaust. But things aren't so bad if you can demonize the Israelis (which means the Jews) which makes it easier to justify having tried to get rid of them back then.

5) Sympathy for the underdog. This is a general liberal reaction in Europe and in America and not a bad thing in and of itself. The only odd part is that 150 million Arabs are the underdogs vis-à-vis 6½ million Jews. And sympathy leads to sin: the moral assumption that being the underdog justifies violence.

6) Theology. This is a little tricky. Note that Europe is institutionally Christian, and largely Catholic at that. The Christian narrative (to use the modern critical term) had a place for the Jews in the grand scheme of things. That is, they sort-of knew what/where/how the Jews were supposed to live after they had rejected the salvation of Jesus Christ. This is a very long subject, but whatever the scenario of post-Gospel Judaism was, Ariel Sharon isn't it!

The Christian world (and the Catholic Church especially) has been profoundly uncomfortable with a vigorous, triumphant, resurgent, even bullying Jewish State. That wasn't supposed to happen according to

the traditional understanding of things, and they still don't know quite how to digest the fact of our existence.

Playing his cards

Arafat has played these cards brilliantly, appealing to every trend in European thinking, and remains a major political figure despite all of his incompetence and failure as leader of his own people. For the fact is that the world does consider him the legitimate elected head of a legitimate people. Because of that 1996 election. He didn't rig that election; just controlled the Election Committee which disqualified 110 candidates he didn't like. So despite the fact that his only opponent was a 76 year old woman, Arafat was elected President of the Palestine National Assembly on 20 January 1996 for a period of 5 years. That term is long since over and no new elections—crooked or otherwise—have ever been held. If he ever was the legitimate of anything, he's not now. But fact is fact: Arafat is President of Palestine. And facts don't have to be fair. Follow the progression:

- a. The legitimization of the Palestinian struggle leads to
- b. the de-legitimization of Israel and Zionism.
- c. The Arabs have shown in Lebanon that the Jews can be beaten.
- d. Extrapolating from the Little Satan to the Big Satan, they showed on 9/11 that the Americans too can be beaten, or at least badly hurt.
- d. Add in militant Islam, now emboldened and on a roll, and the conclusion is that the west and western civilization can also be beaten.

So the genie is out of the bottle.

1. Arafat's political hostility is permanent.
2. Islam's theological hostility is also permanent.
3. Anti-Semitism is spreading all over Europe.
4. Israel is getting clobbered.
5. And the result is an unprecedented political crisis for Israel and the Jews all over Europe.

That's the bad news. It is clear that Europe needs to fight emerging radical Islam hammer and tongs and they are just now waking up to that fact. The good news is that the Americans don't, at least not yet.

Getting to the Americans

To get to the hearts and minds of the Americans, who are after all traditionally pro-Israel, it was necessary to add up the ingredients: add Arafat's political genius to the radical nature of Islam after the Ayatollah Khomeini, then mix in the low level and misery of the Palestinian

people after 10 years of living under Arafat. Out of this mix came the one weapon that would get to the hearts and minds of the Americans too: Suicide Bombers

This was a truly new and frightening phenomenon. Not so much because of the actual damage done; far more people are hurt and killed by disease or civil war or African pogroms. Or for that matter, by traffic accidents. Rather, suicide bombers are frightening because there is no absolute way to stop someone who is determined to kill himself and others around him. And the result is so telegenic!

More to the point, suicide bombing touched liberal, open, decent America very deeply. Because it touched the basic liberal assumption that people are the pretty much the same; that they want to get on with their lives, tend to their families, make a living, live and let live, etc. Which is mostly right, and which most of us believe. It is a comforting and optimistic point of view. But it is not always correct. So that when someone does something so unnatural and bizarre as strapping 10 kg of explosives on his back and blowing himself up in a crowded bus the instinctive reaction of most good people is NOT to curse "that crazy murdering maniac!" but rather, "Gee, he must have been really unhappy to do a thing like that!", or "Only someone in real despair, with real complaints, in real desperation...etc."

The next step, of course, is to ask, "What are his complaints? Why was he so unhappy? Why does he hate us so much? What did WE do to him to make him so desperate?, etc." That is, the victim becomes the perpetrator; it's OUR fault! Which is what the Americans (some Americans) said after 9/11 and some are still saying it.

And, in general, since it's always easier emotionally to talk about other people, that's what most of the liberal word is asking about Israel and its relation to the Palestinians. What did we do to them that drove the Arabs to such extremes? Because we MUST have done something. Because normal people don't blow themselves up in a noonday crowded pizzeria, etc. etc. The argument goes around and around.

The belief that Israel MUST be wrong has taken hold in America too, largely pushed by the television news people watch and the newspapers they read. I don't want to get into a right-wing rant against the media, only to notice that it always works like a wolf pack. One important journalist says something and everybody is soon saying exactly the same thing. The Israel bashing starts high up:

a) by important journalists and agencies who simply do not like Israel, like Reuters and Peter Jennings,

b) by networks like CNN, enamored of Mrs. Ashrawi, whatever nonsense she says so beautifully,

c) by Jewish journalists ambivalent about Israel, like Tom Friedman,

d) by Jewish (and non-Jewish) academics who have always felt the suffering of the 3rd World to be America's (and therefore Israel's) fault,

e) by all of the above pushed by large Muslim groups on campus and important Saudi Arab money for university academic chairs.

One note at this point. The public opinion scenario I have outlined here works in some places but not in others. It works in Western Europe, and somewhat in America, which has inherent counter pressures. But my guess is that it does not/will not work in other less "sensitive" countries. Palestinian suicide bombings might shake Americans and Europeans, as it has shaken the Israelis, but my guess is that Chechnyan suicide bombing will not move the Russians. Nor has Tamil bombing moved the Indians or Sri Lankans, nor has it/will it move the Indonesians and the Filipinos.

That is to say, the use of terror as a political weapon is not guaranteed to work everywhere or in every political situation. But it did/does work in Israel—which I can call one of the more sensitive countries in that it is a democracy which means it has a government sensitive to public opinion.

The result is that Israel is a country split right down the middle over the issue of keeping/leaving some/all of the Territories, and general elections are only a year away.

Meanwhile, in America and Europe, the Egg-heads have joined the Skin-heads

Liberal, academic anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism have emerged even in America. Look at it as global intellectual democratization; American liberal and academic opinion becoming part of Europe. Eggheads joining skin-heads in international intellectual solidarity—against the Jews!

This is a fairly grim scenario, but things change quickly. The biggest agent for change over the past 4-5 years has been Islam itself. Arafat's political and intellectual success against Israel and the rise of anti-Israel/anti-US sentiment in Europe has been pushing Islam—encouraging Islam—to widen the conflict from just anti-Israel (which it always was) to anti-US and anti-West, the best example of this tendency being, of course, Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

All of which brings us to where we are now. Our situation is both discouraging and encouraging, in my opinion. Discouraging because Europe is facing a real war with the millions of Muslims who live there and with Islam in general. They need to control their own populations;

the terror bombing in a train in Madrid—which had nothing to do with Israel or the Jews—is clearly only a first step. They need to suppress their own anti-Semitism. European governments need to fight to preserve their own secular and democratic societies in the face of an influx of religious and anti-democratic immigrants.

As an aside, I have read that the reason the European Union expanded its constituency to 29 countries is because they wanted to add a big pool of cheap Eastern European labor to do the work so they don't have to admit any more Arabs!

The consoling part is that the Europeans, and even influential Americans like Peter Jennings and Tom Friedman are starting to understand what we have been saying for years; THAT IT'S NOT ABOUT US! It's not about Israel and what we are accused of doing to the Palestinians

I think European and even liberal/ intellectual/ anti-Israel America are finally catching on. They are beginning to see that terror *per se* isn't the enemy. It is only a tool, a means. Militant Islam is the enemy, and Israel is not responsible for Islam's campaign against the West. In the last analysis, the present world situation is about desperately sick and dysfunctional Muslim Arab societies which radical Islam is exploiting. And Israel—not for the first time—is fighting the fight of the entire civilized world.

And thus, ladies and gentlemen, we come to a final paradox. Arafat, who more or less started the whole process and brought it to such a (politically) successful conclusion is now becoming irrelevant. Because the Israel/Palestine dispute itself is becoming a side show. The world is preoccupied with larger concerns, e.g. Iraq and Iran. Arafat will die soon and will become a historical footnote: he was important in his day. Just as he got near to total success against Israel, the stage got wider and the world got bored with Arafat/the Palestinians/ the Jews/ Israel and all that.

That is encouraging news, As the world loses interest in the Israel/Arab dispute there will be more space for the parties to deal with each other. And I think that the passing of Arafat will create a situation in which a resolution of the Israel/Palestinian conflict can be allowed to happen. Let us hope we're right and end on that cheerful note. ■