

Terrorism: A License to Kill

October 27, 2002

By Robbie Friedmann

The latest anti-Israel terror-of-the-day was a suicide bomber who blew himself up today killing at least 2 people at a gas station near Ariel and injuring scores of others. This followed the bus bombing last week that killed more than a dozen and injured about 80 people as well as many attempts that were foiled on a daily basis (Jerusalem Post, 10-27-2002).

And the terror directed against Israel is supplemented by the globalization of terror elsewhere. Interestingly enough, all targets are those that provide convenient "addresses" for Islamic terrorists (the French tanker, the Bali resort), for those who support them for political or national objectives (the Chechens), for those who appear to be sympathetic to or are inspired by them (the Washington, DC snipers, the LAX shooter), and for those who imitate them (Helsinki). It is NOT (yet) directed at Muslim or Arab targets.

The Chechen seizure of the Moscow theater ended up in a costly rescue operation that claimed the lives of at least 90 of the hostages. But not before the terrorists killed hostages and threatened to kill more of the 700 they captured. Killing hostages is apparently "sanctioned" by religious interpretations ([Pro-Chechen Islamist Website: Islamic Religious Interpretation Permits Killing of Prisoners](#), MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Jihad & Terrorism Studies, October 27, 2002, No. 434). Nothing perhaps is more indicative of the perverse sense of the need for justification of a human action as an ideology (that leads to the action) or a rationalization (that explains it afterward). Killing hostages occupies in the mind of the terrorist one of the steps in the ladder to heaven along with murdering innocent and un-expecting citizens as well as killing oneself in the process - if it helps bring them closer to 72 eagerly awaiting and never tiring virgins.

Interestingly, reports from Israel claim that the Russian special forces were trained by Israel's Anti-Terror Unit - Yamam (Russian special forces learned from Israel's Yossi Melman, Ha'aretz, October 27, 2002). The report also claims (found only in the Hebrew version of Ha'aretz) that the pattern of the Chechen terrorist operation follows closely after that of the 9-11 atrocity in planning and execution. Here too, the operatives did not know each other and until the last minute did not know the full nature of the target and operation. They apparently had local sympathizers who have aided and abetted them. Yet, despite the similarity in the modus operandi there is a difference in that the Moscow attack resembled the terror incidents of the '70s when and where specific demands accompanied the attack. In this case, the Chechens demanded Russian withdrawal hoping to bring to the forefront a cause that has rarely received public attention after the West has given the Russians a green light ([The Chechens' Holy War: How Global Is It?](#) Serge Schmemmann, The New York Times October 27, 2002).

The Jerusalem Post Editorial stresses a commonality between the various terrorist attacks the world over and suggests the lessons is that: "Islamist-inspired terror is a threat to civilization as we know it, and it must be fought without exception or compromise" (Moscow on the Hudson,

The Jerusalem Post, Oct. 26, 2002). But then the editorial goes beyond the specific acts of terror and the rescue operation and addresses the French and Russian attempts to curb any American action in Iraq suggesting that "What France and Russia are doing now is, at best, buying Iraq's despot time, and at worst, saving his regime." A departure point of political interests (namely, what would the Russians and the French gain if they prevent an attack on Iraq) helps us understand that in the same manner that terrorists operate in a cold and calculated fashion, so do national entities. And nowhere is it more evident than in the current upheaval in the Middle East and in activities related to the "causes" espoused by those who deny the right to anyone else to even have a cause.

Indeed, the Palestinians seem to have immersed themselves in such a culture of violence that it is almost unimaginable how they would be able to develop a substitute peaceful narrative to even if they ever achieve their aims (not just of having a Palestinian state but of completely eradicating Israel). Being manipulated for years by various Arab states and by Iran the Palestinians are hoping that a US attack on Iraq will lead to an international conference which in turn will benefit them (Iraq First: Arafat thinks that another Gulf War will lead to an international conference Ehud Ya'ari, The Jerusalem Report, November 4, 2002).

Ironically, this is a win-win for the Palestinians: if the war is averted, they will benefit from the "grace" and support of Saddam Hussein (with whom they sided in 1991), if it is carried out they will benefit from the fruits of an international conference. Either way, terror as a strategy pays off well for them and yet there is still wonder as to how to provide adequate disincentives for them to cease terrorism and violence. Why should they? The internal debate in Israel is seemed to shape up around an understanding that following a massive US victory in Iraq, the Palestinians will be politically far more disadvantaged than they currently are. For the Palestinians who claimed for years that the road to peace in the Middle East will have to go through Jerusalem (namely that the Palestinian "problem" has to be solved first - and with their understanding that they will get Jerusalem), Ya'ari suggests "To paraphrase one of Arafat's own old homilies, one could say that from now on, the road to an agreement passes through Baghdad."

But to those who think that it will end in Bagdad they better take a hard look at what has been brewing in the Arab world since World War II. The level of anti-Semitic and anti-American rhetoric has reached such cultural depths that are not likely to be extricated short of a serious root-canal work, full heart transplant, brain surgery, and complete change of blood type. These metaphors may be harsh but interestingly there are some Arabs who are themselves calling for this change ([Kuwaiti Columnist Urges Reexamination of Education in Arab and Muslim Countries](#) MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Reform in the Arab and Muslim World, October 23, 2002, No. 433). By reexamining Arab-Muslim education, religion and culture "The reshaping of one's perception of our religion and culture by reexamining the educational curriculum, the media, and religious discourse which is mainly [found] in Friday sermons, is first and foremost for us, we the Muslims, and not for the West or the East. We will continue to carry our Arab and Islamic characteristics, but we also want to live harmoniously and peacefully with ourselves and with the peoples of the world." The mere fact that such voices are even heard is positive but the challenge may be too difficult to overcome.

The problem is that anti-Jewish, anti-Israeli and anti-American sentiments have been

institutionalized in the Arab world over generations with increasing dosages without offering any acceptable substitutes in sight. In Syria the most "popular book" is the "Matzah of Zion" authored by no other than the intellectual-on-duty, the Syrian Minister of Defense ([Al-Hayat Highlights Large Popularity of Syrian Defense Minister's Blood Libel Book at Syrian International Book Fair](#) MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Syria/Arab Antisemitism, October 22, 2002, No. 432).

This book is a rehash of the 1840 Damascus blood libel and apparently it wets the Syrian appetite enough to be so "popular" (or so the official Syrian report goes). The Egyptians on the other hand resort to one of the "originals" - the infamous "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," planning to produce a 30-segment TV series. So what the Syrians will be reading, tens of millions of Egyptians (and many other millions Arabs who watch Egyptian TV and movie productions) will be saturated with TV "factual" attribution of vile traits to Jews and Israelis for "stealing Palestine" (Egyptian TV plans to air series based on anti-Semitic book Salah Nasrawi, Associated Press, Boston Globe, 10/24/2002). This cultural poisoning of the mind is dangerous not only for Israel but for the Arab societies as well as it sinks them into deeper traps which will only make it far more difficult to get out of and hence they pose a danger to the rest of the world

And while poisoning the masses, Arab professional propagandists relentlessly continue the public relations campaign and are able to reap success on various fronts including Western and Jewish pacifists (How the Arabs effectively use Jewish pacifists as tools in their new war of extermination against Israel Michael Anbar, Israel Hasbara Committee, October 7, 2002). And the tactic has also been rather successful in exploiting principles of balance and fairness in Western (and Israeli) media to help confuse the terms of reference western audiences use vis-a-vis the perpetrators, the understanding of the conflict and in attribution of intent (Trojan horses and Trojan colts Michael Anbar, israelinsider, October 13, 2002): "The vehement objection of the Arab states in the region to a regime change in Iraq, advocated by President Bush, is well understood - a democratic Iraq would be just as threatening to their regimes as democratic Israel. So they launch a propaganda campaign against the existence of Israel and against the potential democratization of Iraq. A major aspect of that campaign is an intensive but subtle psychological assault to confuse and demoralize the American public. Our problem is how to recognize, expose and muzzle the Trojan horses that are in our backyard."

As indications are persistently evident that the attack on Iraq is imminent - for the last few weeks we even hear of specific dates such as the end of November, now the "latest" journalistic prediction states that the US will "be ready" for an attack in just about 8 weeks (A Matter Of Weeks Jim Hoagland, The Washington Post, October 25, 2002). "The tip-off that the Defense Department is moving into its final phase of planning and preparation comes from a decision to begin military training of Iraqi exile forces and dissidents who can be spirited out of Iraq. The limited training will take six to eight weeks to complete, military planners say." There are many other tip offs such as the heightened level of preparedness of the Israeli Home Front for an Iraqi attack. Short of Hussein willingly disintegrating - a highly unlikely scenario - any version of action on Iraq whether clandestine, or full scale is rather likely.

Israel and the US represent everything the Arabs and Muslims despise and reject (if this seems an unwarranted generalization one then needs to wait for different positions espoused by their

political leaders, clergy, and press in Arabic and Farsi - and a far lower support rate in opinion polls - those are not yet available) and flippantly they projected Bush's "axis-of-evil" unto him and Sharon. But this vilification and violence is not limited to those quarters. The Europeans add their own version to it. As Joseph Joffe suggests (The axis of envy The Jerusalem Post, Oct. 26, 2002) "Anti-Israelism and anti-Americanism travel together. In the Arab Middle East, the link is standard fare, but a more interesting case in point is Europe."

There are several reasons for it but mostly it is the obvious contradiction between European views and those in Israel and the US. While there are elements of post-nationalism in Israel as well as in the US, "Israel will remain a threatened polity, and the US the world's number one, for the rest of this century." Therefore, what will determine the outcome are the "stark and incontrovertible facts of power and position in the international arena."

But the international arena is a blurred concept because international causes are fought now not in a battlefield but in the streets of any given home-front (and those are now anywhere in the world). Therefore it is helpful to examine the reaction of "interested parties" to the Washington sniper to learn from it about what the future may hold.

The Atlanta paper carried in interview with local Muslims who expressed "concern" that the "killers tar their image" (Islam connection shakes Muslims Saeed Ahmed, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, October 26, 2002). The reporter interviewed several members of the Muslim community who were quoted as being concerned about their image. The reporter then states that "Although officials haven't said whether religious beliefs played a role in the attacks, some Muslims fear that message has seeped into the American consciousness. The recent terrorist attacks in Indonesia, Kuwait and other countries where Americans were killed have strengthened the belief that Islam fosters terrorism, some said."

While one could be sympathetic to unwarranted stereotyping and false attribution of intent and even action to a large group of people based on the action of extremists from within that group, the fact remains that none of those interviewed has condemned the action and since 9-11 we are yet to see an unconditional condemnation of terrorist acts when committed by Arabs/Muslims. The Egyptians were not willing to accept the fact that the Egyptian pilot committed suicide when downing EGYPTAIR 990 - on October 31, 1999. And it is still a rather likely scenario that it was a terrorist murder by suicide. Most importantly, whatever technology is employed in the war against terrorism, the first signs of success will be when the Muslim community in Europe and the US turns en-mass against the perpetrators, condemns them (unconditionally) and such statements are saliently evident in community after community and are repeatedly made by the clergy and secular leadership. Only then will there be a chance that similar voices will be heard in the Middle East as well.

As long as Arab American and European apologists (and their sympathizers) continue to "understand" the terrorists, and express "concern" about their own image, the situation will prove to get even worse. If such condemnations do not come (and fairly soon - as it is already more than a year late), Americans will have no choice but to help have the prophecy of the "tarred-image" be self-fulfilled as after all the facts on the ground show who the perpetrators are and who their sympathizers are. All we need is to do something about it.