

Tragedy in Space - Terror on Earth

February 1, 2003

By Robbie Friedmann

NOTE: *Just before completing this e-Letter came the horribly shocking news of the Columbia space shuttle disastrous disintegration upon return to earth ("Space Shuttle Disintegrates; Seven Astronauts Killed," Fox News, Saturday, February 01, 2003). This is a human, national, international, and scientific tragedy and loss of a universal magnitude. Nothing symbolizes the common sentiments Israelis and Americans share as the launching of an Israeli astronaut with the American crew and the loss of this crew in this disaster. Add to this the presence of an India-born American astronaut and you have a symbolic manifestation of a common international fate. Reports from India, Israel, and the U.S., indicate a deep sense of shock and grief. For Israel the successful launch of astronaut Ramon was the best news Israel had in the last 28 months, which makes his loss so much heavier to bear. In all likelihood it is only a matter of time before the Palestinians and other Arabs will display their traditional jubilation over this loss. Here is the rest of the e-Letter:*

Two important things happened on the same day last week. On Tuesday, Israel - the only democracy in the Middle East - conducted vibrant elections that resulted in Prime Minister Sharon substantially increasing his party's number of parliamentary seats from 18 to 38 and with Labor and the Meretz leftist party losing their power, thus sending a resounding message that "no chimerical 'process' will bring durable peace between Israelis and Palestinians until terrorism and its sponsors on the Palestinian side are defeated" ("Israel Chooses Sharon," Editorial, Wall St. Europe, Jan. 31, 2003).

Yet, the results were also interpreted with the expected negative twist ("Sharon, Likud win big in Israel: Hard-line parties gain strength in parliament," Larry Kaplow - Cox International Correspondent, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, January 29, 2003): "Sharon now will begin haggling with smaller parties to form a government that could take an even harder line against the Palestinians. A more hawkish Israeli government could seriously damage American efforts to build support for a war in Iraq among Arab leaders already reluctant to cooperate with a nation strongly aligned with Israel." The uninitiated reader might think that it is Israel and not Iraq that is the problem in the Middle East. Or, hopefully, the reader might ask why is it that we are trying to enhance democracy so much but tend to ignore them at points of "inconvenience."

Also on Tuesday, President Bush delivered the [State of the Union Address](#) which was very well received around the nation as "Simple. Moral. Persuasive" (see "State of the Union snippets: Excerpts from editorials throughout the nation" Orlando Sentinel, Posted January 30, 2003). Even more, an influential editorial complimented President Bush for offering a "big-picture" agenda ("A Large Presidency: Bush isn't overreaching, he's taking on the big problems of our day," The Wall Street Journal, January 30, 2003).

One of the more atrocious reactions against President Bush came from Nelson Mandela who attacked the U.S. as "one power with a president who has no foresight, who cannot think properly, is now wanting to plunge the world into a holocaust" ("Mandela: U.S. wants

holocaust," CNN, January 30, 2003). And that was not the worse part of his speech. With all the sympathy to Mandela's imprisonment and leadership stature, he has been cozy enough with Arafat and Iraq to feel licensed to be so preachy, offensive, and irresponsible; yet also so wrong that one commentator (Tony Snow on Fox News) equated him with Al Sharpton.

And a day later former President Carter lambasted President Bush with the same illogical reasoning ("Carter blasts rush to war Bush, Blair warn Saddam not to play for time," Bob Deans, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2/1/03): "Even if the Bush administration presents compelling evidence at the United Nations next week that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction, Carter said, "this will not indicate any real or proximate threat by Iraq to the United States or to our allies." So even if the evidence is found it is not enough for Carter to go to war against Iraq. One would then ask what would constitute sufficient cause for Carter. His posturing is becoming increasingly irresponsible and damaging.

These two developments are related because while they seem to be worlds apart (which they are) there are many common threads between the Israeli and American predicaments. For one, Collin Powell addressing the National Conference of World Affairs Councils of America (January 31, 2003) mentioned terrorism around the world but the closest he came to terrorism in or against Israel was the mention of the Mombasa attack but not a word about 28 months of the terror onslaught against Israel. This is rather important given that Israel is the declared candidate not only for terror attacks but for complete annihilation. And lately the U.S. and the West are joining Israel in this dubious honor.

That is why it is important to examine the "peaceful" state-like declarations of the terrorists. The draft of the new Palestinian Authority constitution leaves little to the imagination as to the nature, character, and aspirations of a future Palestinian state ("The New PA Constitution Excerpts of the Draft," Itamar Marcus, Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin, January 22, 2003). Like the Palestinian National Covenant which was never abolished, or re-formulated, this "constitution" does not auger well for peace in the Middle East as long as Israel is there. The mere call for "full sovereignty and territorial continuity" means not only a (contiguous Palestinian) state in the West Bank and Gaza but also splitting Israel before fully eliminating her. Or else how would they achieve "territorial continuity? Is this the Palestinian state that Secretary Powell has in mind as a reward for terror?

After all, Palestinians have been masters of deception of the terms of reference they have used in the conflict, including the term "Palestinian..." ("'Palestine' for Dummies," David D. Perlmutter, Jewish World Review, Jan. 23, 2003) and have artfully manipulated the media in their favor ("Why are the Palestinian Arabs winning the media war?" Chuck Chriss, JIA 1-27-2003). They are continually successful in "selling" the notion that "Palestinian desperation gave birth to suicide bombers, or that swelling Palestinian frustrations explain their actions" ("'Palestine' touches bottom," Bret Stephens, The Jerusalem Post, January 16, 2003), yet even a cursory examination reveals how unsound such arguments are except for serving as crucial elements in the technique of the big lie.

Increasingly objections are voiced against the concept of Palestinian "deservedness" of a country. In addition to Perlmutter and Stephens, the latest consistent voice against a Palestinian state is

Joseph Farah who argues that the notion of (Israeli) "occupation" is a faulty one to justify Palestinian statehood (["Revisiting the Six-Day War,"](#) WorldNetDaily.com January 23, 2003).

Deception is not always immediately apparent. Sometimes it is misleading because we may be using selective observations to screen out the positive elements we are after, yet we ignore in the process the real message that stands behind the deceptive positions as the recent statement by the Egyptian presidential advisor Osama Albaz illustrates: he came out against Arab antisemitism and this was such an encouraging stand that the substance of his remarks which aimed at abolishing Israel was ignored. Two more cases in point: First, the Malaysian Prime Minister argued for the need for the Muslim world to pursue a campaign of knowledge acquisition (["Malaysian Prime Minister on the Need for the Muslim World to Pursue Knowledge to Catch Up with the West,"](#) MEMRI, Special Dispatch- Reform in the Arab and Muslim World, January 24, 2003, No. 460).

This may sound good to unsuspecting western ears. When the PM states that "The Status of the Muslim World is at the Lowest Ebb," that "Muslim Students Hardly Ever Achieve Excellence," that "The Muslim World of Today is Hopelessly Weak and Backward," that "We Must Also Banish the Idea that the Only Knowledge that We Need to Acquire is that of Islam," that "We Must Not Allow Ourselves to be Again Sidetracked by Skewed Interpretations of Islam," that "The Discovery of New Frontiers of Knowledge Must Not be Left to Others," and that "It May Take a Decade or a Century to Catch Up with the West," it all sounds reasonable, eliciting sympathy and understanding, and even acceptance. However, the value of knowledge (culture, science) that is held so high in the West is not pursued for its own sake by the PM. Rather it is to be used to compete with the West in order to return Islam to its "glory days." In short, it may sound like a benign hegemony but it is the aspiration for control nonetheless.

The second case is a Saudi "welcome" of Lieberman's candidacy for president (["Saudi Columnist Welcomes Joseph Lieberman's Candidacy,"](#) MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Saudi Arabia/ U.S. and the Middle East, January 26, 2003, No. 461). This almost sounds like the man-bite-dog story. A Saudi welcoming a Jewish presidential candidate in the U.S.? Absolutely; but for the wrong reasons. It suggests that his candidacy is not supported by Jews because: "The Jews Will be Blamed for Everything," "He Must Prove His Americanism over His Jewishness," "Good for Ambitions of Non-Christian Minorities in the U.S.," and "Could Ignite Antisemitic Trends in the U.S." In short, it will be good for the Saudis and the Arabs if it is bad for the U.S. and Jews. Lieberman is not welcomed because he is a good or promising candidate but because his candidacy would bring a hoped-for damage to Jews, to the U.S., and to Israel.

The Arab-Muslim world is not made of the same yarn yet the dominant positions as articulated by key leaders are indicative of various levels of tension with and intolerance of the west. It could be "healthy competition" as in the case of the Malaysian PM or the far more rejectionist position of "democracy as the enemy of Islam" coming from Iran (["Khamenei's Paper's Response to the Liberal Protest in Iran: 'Those Who Spread Slogans of Reform, Liberty, Democracy, and Human Rights... Are Fighting Islam,'"](#) MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Iran/Reform, January 30, 2003, No. 463).

As Oriana Fallaci warned in a recent interview ("The Rage of Oriana Fallaci," George Gurley, The New York Observer, January 24, 2003): "...from Afghanistan to Sudan, from Palestine to

Pakistan, from Malaysia to Iran, from Egypt to Iraq, from Algeria to Senegal, from Syria to Kenya, from Libya to Chad, from Lebanon to Morocco, from Indonesia to Yemen, from Saudi Arabia to Somalia, the hate for the West swells like a fire fed by the wind." She maintains that "The West...is under assault and doesn't realize it."

As if to prove Oriana Fallaci's point, a leading Iranian (government) editor preaches for the launching of homicidal operations against the U.S. (["Editor of Iranian Conservative Government Daily Attacks President Bush and Calls on Muslim Youth to Launch Martyrdom Operations Against the U.S.,"](#) MEMRI, Special Alert - Iran/Jihad and Terrorism Studies, January 23, 2003, No. 6).

But it is not coming only from Muslim leaders. A Christian Palestinian leader also encourages homicidal operation, this time to "defend Iraq" and one remains wondering if nationality and religion are not mixed in the mind of Arabs whether Christian or Muslim (["Palestinian Christian Leader in Praise of Martyrdom Operations and the Formation of a Muslim and Christian Human Shield to Defend Iraq,"](#) MEMRI, Special Dispatch - PA/Jihad and Terrorism Studies, January 23, 2003, No. 459).

And for those who distinguished between the "moderate" PLO and the "more" radical Hamas, here comes an interview with the head of the PLO's "political bureau" who not only continues to support genocidal attacks, and suggests to use the oil weapon against Europe, he also openly states that there is NO difference between the PLO and Hamas (["Farouq Al-Qaddoumi: In Support of "Resistance Attacks" Inside Israel and Pressuring Europe with Oil Hikes; "We \[Fatah\] Were Never Different from Hamas." Special Dispatch - PA/ Jihad and Terrorism Studies, January 28, 2003, No. 462\).](#) Little wonder then that Israelis feel that they are at the core of the global terrorism movement ("Spy chief sees Israel in crosshairs of global Terrorism," Special to World Tribune.com, Tuesday, January 21, 2003).

Experts have recognized the threat and some are pointing to internal European troubles that had been brushed under the carpet for too many years. The absence of attacks thus far against Europe are not due to lack of trying. The Europeans have thwarted several attempts across the continent and in Britain in the last several weeks (["The Qaeda Vipers in Europe's Bosom,"](#) Jonathan Stevenson, The New York Times, February 1, 2003). Evidently Europe has a tough and lengthy battle ahead of it not just to protect itself but also to change the conditions under which radical Islam thrives. Assuming that Europe adopts a proactive stand in this regard, even the most optimistic proponents agree that it will take generations, not weeks, to make a difference. And even that is at best a speculation.

Thomas Friedman, the influential columnist who keeps missing the point is at it again. He first explains "why liberals under-appreciate the value of removing Saddam Hussein" (["Thinking About Iraq \(I\),"](#) New York Times, January 22, 2002) and does a fairly good job at that when he states that "What threatens Western societies today are not the deterrables, like Saddam, but the undeterrables the boys who did 9/11, who hate us more than they love life. It's these human missiles of mass destruction that could really destroy our open society." The problems begin when he advocates the impossible, the democratization of the Arab world based on the faulty assumption that Arabs desire it or are ready for it. Arab history of 1400 years has not given any indication that they either aspire for democracy or are capable of handling it.

He then visits the conservative position ("[Thinking About Iraq \(II\)](#)," The New York Times, January 16, 2003) and despite his advocacy for a major regime change he seems to be "satisfied" with a "small little war" to oust Saddam and agrees - falling captive to his own rhetoric - that while the war will be a shock it will be a "shock therapy." And in the third piece ("[Thinking About Iraq \(3\)](#)," The New York Times, January 29, 2003).

After accepting the desirability and legitimacy of a war on Iraq (while acknowledging some risks) he comes up with a policy of "benign ouster" (in a form of a memo from an "pro-American Arab leader" to Bush) where Saddam "should be given" the option of voluntary exile - if the "right deal if offered" him so that war could still be averted. The misrepresentation of the Arab position and capabilities notwithstanding, Friedman has ignored the fact that various missions (Arab and European) have been feverishly accumulating frequent flyer miles to Baghdad trying to convince Saddam to do exactly that - with no results. Friedman must assume that Saddam is only waiting to be offered a deal as he is all packed and ready to go...

And in fact, the international scene has been changing dramatically. With the U.N. inspectors' report the German and French short-sighted isolationist position has not only weakened ("Nos Amis the French: It isn't America that's showing contempt for the U.N.," Editorial, The Wall Street Journal, January 24, 2003) but it was accompanied with a declaration by eight European countries in support for the U.S. and complaints from others who were not asked to join but wanted to ("Eight leaders rally 'new' Europe to America's side," Philip Webster, The London Times, January 30, 2003).

The challenges for the U.S. are growing internally and externally alike. The establishment of the Department of Homeland Security is a step in the right direction and so is the increasing cooperation between the various intelligence and security services. But the porous borders, the ease with which entry to the U.S. is possible from Canada under the nose of I.N.S. officers, or the criminal act of I.N.S. officials who are reported to have shredded tens of thousands of documents to "reduce" their case load ("[I.N.S. Shredder Ended Work Backlog, U.S. Says](#)," John M. Broder, The New York Times, January, 30, 2003) further exacerbates an already difficult situation. With some suggestions that the U.S. needs to be more security concerned than concerned about civil rights these challenges are only growing exponentially ("The Enemy Within," Daniel Pipes, New York Post, January 24, 2003).

There is never a good time for a space tragedy the magnitude of what happened to Columbia today. But the combination of the timing on the eve of the war against Iraq and the composition of the crew members has added an element of symbolism one could not have planned even in the best thrillers or dramas. There was a sense of unity between the U.S., India, and Israel in space with implications not going unnoticed here on earth: These are three countries under serious existential and cultural threat by radicals who wish them all ill and worse. For the U.S. it means a careful examination and reassessment of its technological capabilities and procedures; for India it means the pain of losing a native daughter who was first in space as an American citizen; for Israel it was the loss of an air force hero who in his very person epitomized the emergence of Jews from the ashes of the holocaust becoming part and parcel of advanced technology and space leadership. It also signified yet another devastating blow of an unprecedented magnitude to this very hope as it became added news to the daily terror reality against Israel.

While painfully shocking, it is important to understand that after time is allowed for grief and sadness to settle, things will be put back in perspective: the space efforts will continue, future success will come in place of this disaster and the human spirit shall prevail and win. Indeed, as difficult and painful as this tragedy is we have some consolation in the fact that the crew did what it was trained to do and loved doing and that they would not want anything less than have the space efforts stopped. Some questioned today whether it was terrorism that caused the shuttle disaster but it is so unlikely that it could virtually be ruled out. Yet, on earth, terrorism is as solid as anything humankind has ever produced. In absolute contradistinction to the constructive spirit that is in the forefront of the space ventures, terrorism is a destructive force that endangers our way of life and our very lives. Whether the threat is from Iraq, Bin Laden, Arafat, or their - too many - supporters, it cannot be allowed to be ever victorious. In this unholy competition between good and evil only one outcome is acceptable and a copy of the formula for it is not available at the Carter Presidential Center, Tom Friedman columns, Nelson Mandela speeches, Hollywood actors' anti-war commercials, or the Nobel Peace Prize Committee.