

Tunnel Vision

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By Robbie Friedmann

For many who argue that force alone will not solve complex political issues, the argument serves as a guise against using force under any circumstances. An Israeli operation in Gaza aimed at exposing and destroying an intricate system of weapons and drug smuggling tunnels has been successful. The cost to Israeli soldiers has been high but an important victory has been that Palestinians are now turning against the tunnel-lords who are correctly seen as the cause for the Israeli raids ("Palestinians Turn on Tunnel Men Drawing Israeli Raids," Nidal al-Mughrabi, Reuters, 6 Jun 2004).

Israel and the United States are constantly being criticized and vilified for their defensive actions against terrorism - Israel in the Palestinian territories and the U.S. in Iraq. Yet the positive outcome of the attacks is relegated to "non-news" and is rarely reported. These could be stories on the rebuilding of Iraq, the improved level of safety in Israel, some Palestinian rejection of terrorism or them being fed up with Yasser Arafat ("[The Rest of the Story: Media coverage omits the positive outcome of IDF anti-terror efforts](#)," HonestReporting Communique, 3 June 2004).

This does not mean the Palestinians have relinquished violence and their support of it. Far from it. A Hamas leader (again) declared that terror will continue even after Israel disengages from Gaza (" Hamas: Attacks against Israel Will Continue after Gaza Pullout," The Associated Press and DPA, 12 June 2004). The message they are sending is "do not do it too close to home" because they understand the Israelis will not tolerate incessant terror attacks forever. In short, force may indeed not solve complicated political problems but it is helpful - say, essential - as an equalizer against persistent terror. This is particularly important when the Palestinians use any possible means to manipulate the media including intimidation and force thus preventing people of other parts of the world from gaining a genuine understanding of the region ("[Telling the Truth About the Palestinians: A briefing by Khaled Abu Toameh](#)," The Middle East Forum, 27 April 2004).

Therefore, the relative lull in pyrotechnical terror attacks is clearly due to improved security efforts and not to any tactical or strategic decisions by the terror organization to cease operations. Just examine recent figures of thwarted terror attempts ("Five Suicide Bombings Thwarted," Margot Dudkevitch, *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 June 2004). Had the fear of terror disruption not been real the U.S. would not have gone into the effort of securing the G-8 at a cost of some \$40 million and more than 20,000 officers. In foresight and hindsight a very worthwhile and successful effort.

And similar successes against international terror networks have also recently foiled grand-scale attacks in Jordan, England, Europe and the U.S. ("[Terror Suspects Reportedly Discussed Chemical Attack in U.S.](#)," Aidan Lewis, Associated Press, 10 June 2004). Yet if three years ago (shortly after they committed the 9-11 atrocity) terrorists were looking at Somalia and Iraq as hiding places and new bases for operation ("[Al-Qaeda's Search for New Sanctuary: Somalia, Iraq](#)

[most likely bases for bin Laden terrorists](#)," WorldNetDaily.com, 28 November 2001), it appears that today they have found sanctuary in the heart of European cities ("Europe: the New Terrorist Sanctuary?" Roman Kupchinsky, Radio Free Europe, 7 June 2004, Volume 4, Number 14).

They take advantage of the urban ghettos of Arab-Muslim immigrants and feed on their discontent to gain harbor and support. Thus they are able to blend with the local population under the protection of their hosts. This has already created dilemmas that free societies have to deal with, such as limits on freedom of religion and the need to deport agitators. The problem is that as a cell is exposed there are three times as many who will take the place of the individuals caught. Contrast this with a European mindset of inaction and "suddenly" Europe emerges as a dangerous source of terror threat: "The fact that a threat is not visible does not mean that it has vanished. All the post-mortem inquiries after 11 September, both in the United States and in Europe, show that a group bent on committing a high casualty attack might plan it for a year or more. If the attackers feel reasonably safe in their sanctuary they will concentrate on preparing their next operation. If, however, they see that they are being hounded, they will seek different sanctuaries and continue with their plans."

And if the terror cells do not constitute enough of a threat, the Iranian nuclear arms preparations gives worry even to the U.N. that Iran is readying itself to have and use nuclear weapons ("U.N. Sees Signs of Massive Iran Nuke Plans-Diplomats," Reuters, Louis Charbonneau, 10 June 2004). The U.S. ambassador to Vienna added his concern about Iranian denials of their efforts: "I did not hear anything that corrected (what the IAEA wrote in its report)...although I did hear an effort to try to explain it away. Many states, including the United States, believe Iran is trying to hide a program they don't want brought to light."

Without a doubt it is only a matter of (relatively short) time before these threats become a reality, and few positive voices heard from Arab-Muslim corners are far from offering reassurance. Some Saudis are expressing concern over their culture of death - promoted by dominant clerics and even leaders - that deteriorates them to an abyss. So parents expressed their displeasure with what is taught in public schools ("[Educators and Parents Protest Against 'The Culture of Death' Taught In Saudi Schools](#)," MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Saudi Arabia/Reform Project, 11 June 2004, No. 730) and a prominent Saudi diplomat articulates what the West wants to hear: prodding Saudis (in English) to stop blaming others for their predicament ("Stop Blaming Others," Youssef M. Ibrahim, *Washington Times*, 10 June 2004). At risk to his own life an Egyptian satirist can even mock Arab leadership for missing opportunities and wreaking havoc on their societies ("[Satirist Ali Salem to Arab League: There's Light at the End of the Tunnel](#)," MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Egypt/Reform Project, 8 June 2004, No. 728).

But the sources of problems are not (yet) impressed. The Saudis simply continue to fool the world. The generation that is responsible for the emergence of Al-Qaeda has plans to destroy the current regime and rule the rest of the world ("[Saudi Arabia Has Not Stopped the Deceit](#)," Israel-News Today, 3 June 2004). And those sentiments are not the realm of a few fanatical extremists. About half the Saudis support what bin Laden stands for ("Poll of Saudis Shows Wide Support for bin Laden's Views," Henry Schuster, CNN, 9 June 2004).

And the Saudi leadership? It continues to reinforce the "blaming the others" mentality, seeing Israel as responsible for the terror attacks inside Saudi Arabia ("[Saudi Officials Reinforce Crown](#)

[Prince Abdullah's Accusation that Zionists Are Behind Terror Attacks in Saudi Arabia,](#) MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Saudi Arabia/Arab Anti-Semitism Documentation Project, 3 June 2004, No. 726). Saudi princes continue to insist on the canard that "Zionism is behind al-Qaeda," that "these acts are being supported by extreme Zionism" (this does not mean the Saudis approve of "moderate Zionism") or add the "softer" version that "the Jewish Lobby takes advantage of terrorism to damage U.S. - Saudi ties."

Probably because "Jews are behind this," Muslims were spared when terrorists killed the "infidels" in a number of recent attacks in Saudi Arabia ("[The Only Good Infidel is a Dead Infidel! Jihadists murder in cold blood an employee of the most persistent Western voice advocating appeasement with them. Has the world finally learned its lesson?](#)" Zev Chafets, Jewish World Review, 10 June 2004). The duplicity of the Saudis is evident in how they try to tactically cope with a specific terror incident but not with what causes it, as was illustrated when they let the terrorists get away at the most recent attack ("[The Saudis Fight Terror, but Not Those Who Wage It,](#)" Neil MacFarquhar, *New York Times*, 6 June 2004).

As a tribute to former U.S. President Ronald Reagan it is likely that had he learned about Arab leaders expressing "rage" at the recent Western declarations (repeated to the G-8 last week) intending to democratize/reform their societies, he would have said "here we go again" ("[Arab Leaders' Outrage at G8 Plans for Future of Middle East,](#)" Fraser Nelson, *The Scotsman*, 8 June 2004). He might have even added "those who come from an evil empire should tear it down."

He would not have said it merely to substitute one enemy for another. Moral clarity is also supported by facts on the ground. The remnants of what the Soviet Union once stood for are now reflected in the not-so-strange-anymore amalgam that has brought together Islamists with an assorted band of communists and extreme Leftists in Europe ("Eye of the Storm: The black-red Alliance," Amir Taheri, *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 June 2004): "Europe's hard Left sees Muslims as the new under-class in the continent...The idea of an alliance with Islamists has even seduced the more traditional French Communist Party...The Islamists, for their part, are attracted to the European hard Left because of its professed hatred of the United States and Israel."

Actually, the "complex political problem" of the Middle East and the Arab-Muslim world can be simplified into two inter-related terms of reference: non-negotiable conflict and zero-sum game. A fairly astute observation about who the enemy is, and what strategy is needed to defeat it, would have been embraced by former President Reagan and is apparently embraced by President George W. Bush. It is offered by a Middle East Scholar and his key points are worth highlighting ("Anti-Extremist Strategy Needed in the Mideast," Barry Rubin, *Jerusalem Post*, 7 June 2004): "1: Patience, 2: Steadfastness, 3: Fighting back by using everything from force to maintaining one's normal life, 4: Containing extremism by denying it victories, 5: Encourage alternative forces in the Arab and Islamic world and 6: Tell the truth. Lies must be combated and struggle waged on the intellectual battlefield to combat the 'useful idiots' (Lenin's term) and fellow travelers who echo the radicals' propaganda. The battle against radical Arab nationalism and jihadist Islamism involves the willingness to fight for one's rights, to sustain that battle over a long time, to avoid appeasement and to win possible allies. None of this is glamorous. But history will show that this is what the current era is all about."

So at one end, Palestinians dig deep tunnels to smuggle arms and drugs. Rather than a fight for freedom, this signifies terror and corruption. At another end, an Egyptian satirist blames the Arab-Muslim leadership for having a tunnel-vision and missing real opportunities for peace and bringing relief to their own people. Symbolically, Saddam Hussein was also found in a small hole/tunnel. Thus it appears the sources of trouble are indeed in a tunnel and when we see the light in the end of it we do not recognize that it is the terror locomotive coming at us. The question again is not whether we recognize who the enemy is or whether we will win. The question is how quickly will we recognize this and how effectively and efficiently will the free world minimize the cost in human lives. There is no reason to lose 50 million again as in World War II. But if we do not act decisively along the principles suggested above, the cost and devastation might be much higher.