The Terrorist as Space-Cadet

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By Robbie Friedmann

Some observations on the complexities of terror: Inbound and outbound U.S. flights serve food with plastic knives (as if these cannot be used as weapons); yet flights into and out of Israel use complete silverware sets not plasticware (as if Israel is not a prime target for terrorism). Israeli standup comics (who actually sit down - like cashiers in supermarkets) tell morbid jokes about gas masks and use a provocative gas mask ad campaign to boost enrollment in a top art college with the slogan "you dared - you'll enroll." Israel is facing parliamentary elections next week and interestingly enough terrorism and the economy are NOT salient campaign issues. Attention there focuses on political corruption and a party that wishes to legalize drugs (perhaps to legitimize political hallucinations or a sought-after escapism). And Israel is not concerned exclusively with the war against terror: A week ago a dangerous contract killer escaped a detention cell prompting thousands of police officers and volunteers to pursue him. For four days roadblocks that usually look for terrorists made life miserable for northern Israeli drivers turning a 20 minute trip into a three hour nightmare. And the good news? Israel had its first astronaut on board the Columbia Space Shuttle and Israelis have something real (and rare) to be proud of.

In a paradoxical way, the Israeli astronaut is the one with his feet solidly on the ground while the terrorists are the space cadets as the reality they attempt to create is (threatening and dangerous but) too far removed from what civilized life should be about and what acceptable societal norms allow. The genocidal activities against Israel continue to be seen by most as an internal Israeli problem unrelated to their own fight against terrorism ("Is a war on Jews a war on democracy?" Diana West, Jewish World Review Jan. 13, 2003). Indeed, some question this unexplainable blindness ("Kill Jews, get your own country," Jackie Mason & Raoul Felder, Jewish World Review Jan. 6, 2003).

Others review the roots of Arab antisemitism. The fervor of modern Arab and Muslim antisemitism is rooted in 1500 years of conflict between Islam and Judaism and while it is true that Jews under Islam have "relatively" enjoyed a better faith when compared to what they experienced under European Christianity, the emphasis is on "relative." Indeed, a scholar opines that "neither should one exaggerate, by accepting the romantic 19th century view of the Jews' Golden Age under Islam, a myth developed as an accusation against Christian Europe. Jews, however, were never treated equally under Moslem rule" ("Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism," Dr. Meir Litvak, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, No. 5, 2 February 2003).

It is therefore illuminating to realize that the first known ban against Arab/Muslim antisemitism occurred in no other country than Germany ("Germany Bans Islamic Organization; Cites Spreading of Anti-Semitic Propaganda," Fox News, Wednesday, January 15, 2003).

Thus, if terrorism is seen as an international problem - separate from the one occurring against Israel - it is mainly because of business interests in the Arab/Muslim world which is conducive to having "no interest" in another front flaring up in a region that is already seething with war plans

against Iraq. Yet these activities are more than related. Hamas brazenly celebrates and supports Iraq (as do most Palestinians) and called on Iraq to "establish a suicide army that would accept all Jihad warriors, so as to halt the impending attack on the country" ("Hamas Spokesman: Iraq Must Establish a Suicide Army," MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Jihad and Terrorism Studies/Iraq/Palestinian, January 9, 2003, No. 457).

It seems that its appetite is far more global than merely showing brethren love for Iraq. It also threatens the US that if it attacks Iraq "all American targets will be open targets for every Muslim, Arab or Palestinian" (Hamas threatens Americans during pro-Iraq demonstrations," World Tribune.com, Middle East Newsline, January 20, 2003). And the facts on the ground indicate that these are not mere threats. Terrorist cells are being exposed in England, Germany, Italy, and Spain and it is only a matter of time before some of them will be successful.

In previous e-Letters mention was made of NYTimes' Thomas Friedman not so much because of the content of his writings but because his soap box became very influential to an extent that it is no longer clear when he is reporting, when he is expressing opinions, and when is he "helping" shape policy. He is so influential that he serves as a voice (or a stooge?) to world leaders and he is seen as the speaker of truth by many of his colleagues in the media as if he is really so authoritative that his conjectures seem as fact. Yet Friedman is like a great performer who is on a lucrative engagement on the best stage in the big city and his audience is taken by his costume, voice, and lyrics. But there is more than a slight imperfection when the lyrics sound convincing but the music is out of key or vice versa.

For example, Friedman lauds the Egyptian presidential advisor who chastised the Arab/Muslim world for resorting to antisemitism. Yet, as indicated in [my article] *Yet Another Year of the Terrorists*, this (alone and out of context) is not particularly a cause for celebration. Friedman has purposefully ignored the concluding part of the advisor's article (perhaps because he agrees with it) in which his "advice" to Israel would result in her demise ("After the Storm," Thomas L. Friedman, The New York Times, January 8, 2003).

And that is the sophisticated game in the Middle East that Friedman is yet to understand. On one hand the advisor is "graciously" attacking the usage of antisemitism (which in all likelihood he was part of as all such campaigns are government-orchestrated and government controlled) and makes us so "grateful" to him so he is seen as someone who is doing the world an exceptional favor. Yet he artfully and deceptively deflected attention from the substance of his remarks which is no less devastating even if less vitriolic. Thus he was able to kill two birds with one shot: Appear as an Arab rational voice against Arab antisemitism, yet continue to advocate the destruction of Israel and not deviate from the agenda of those he so eloquently "criticized."

It is long overdue but a courageous colleague took on Friedman in a thorough job exposing him for his shallow and incomplete presentation of the regional realities ("Fighting Tom Friedman," Caroline Glick, The Jerusalem Post, Jan. 17, 2003): "Beginning with Friedman's overt call for the US to appease the Arab world at Israel's expense, and continuing both at the London summit where that call was advanced and with the international embrace of Cairo's diplomatic deception, we saw this week both the ideological underpinnings and the first fruits of the renewed drive to sacrifice Israel's security for the Arab world's self-respect."

And the problem is that the "Friedman School" is a modern "Madrassa" for limited thinking couched in deceptive and false reasoning. Read for example an op-ed piece that legitimizes terrorism because of the faulty fixation on the "settlements" and the "occupation" as the "cause" of terrorism ("Unless pullout happens, bombings will continue," Hope Keller, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 01/20/03).

Indeed, as the Jerusalem Post editorial suggests, it is time to move away from these hollow accusations and focus on the real causes of the conflict ("Same as it ever was," Jan. 19, 2003): "Imagine for a moment that the United States were to focus on Arab rejectionism, the real obstacle to peace. It would insist that Egypt and Jordan return their ambassadors to Israel, that Arab leaders enter face-to-face talks with Israeli leaders, that the "right of return" to Israel be renounced, and that a "warm peace" be sketched out for the day after permanent borders are drawn. US policy should be restructured along these lines not just for Israel's sake, but for America's. Appeasing Arab rejectionism of Israel is the same as appeasing countries that harbor terrorism. Bush clearly understands that the latter just invites more terrorism, but he has not yet shown understanding that the former mistake is cut from the same cloth. Until Bush more fully integrates his thinking on the Arab-Israeli conflict into the wider war, he is facing the same enemy with contradictory strategies: moral clarity on the one hand and appeasement on the other."

There must be a new generation around whose understanding of history is highly correlated with their life-span in this world but not a moment beforehand. As if there is no history beyond the here and now. One might get the impression that terrorism never happened prior to 1967, that when bombings occur it is actually the victim's fault, or that rhetoric and action on the part of too many terror groups and supporting countries clearly is not indicative of their efforts to destroy Israel. Keller at least lived in Israel for a longer period than Friedman's short glob-trotting assignments but she has been distanced enough from reality and history to "enable" her to offer such fallacies.

Such reasoning as Friedman's and Keller's is problematic because it defies logic, common sense, and yes, adherence to truth. It also does not provide a reasonable alternative. As Thomas Sowell suggests ("Dangers ahead -- from the left," Townhall.com, January 3, 2003) this thought pattern emerges from disagreeing with success which is what the U.S. represents so well. That is why the "wrath" of the Arab street is directed against the U.S. But so is the misdirected rhetoric and ill-placed ideology of the left: "Gross mis-readings of events grow out of the left's preoccupation with being morally one-up on their fellow Americans." Except that this is not limited to the U.S. Such rhetoric is prevalent in Europe and in Israel as well.

Take author John LeCarre's characterization of the U.S. Administration as a "junta" ("Bush junta browbeats its way to war," The Atlanta Journal-Constitution: 01/26/03) and it becomes obvious how self-serving and shallow his arguments are. Richard Cohen responds ("Rant vs. Bush, war short on substance," The Atlanta Journal-Constitution: 01/26/03) that it is not only empty rhetoric but it does not offer any alternative: "As with the period before World War II, a certain segment of the left has simply stopped thinking. It cherishes peace so much it has substituted wishful thinking for hard analysis: What's to be done? How do we deal with "poor mad little

North Korea" with its poor mad little nuclear weapons and its medium-range ballistic missiles? And what do we do with Iraq?" In short, other than a hate Bush/America speech, LeCarre has offered not even a thriller to his readers.

An even more comprehensive review of why Israel and the U.S. are so hated and not only by their enemies is offered by Victor Davis Hanson's in-depth analysis ("'Bomb Texas:' The psychological roots of anti-Americanism," The Wall Street Journal, January 13, 2003): "Eschewing any reference to truths of this kind, adherents of postmodernist relativism assess morality instead by the sole criterion of power: Those without it deserve the ethical high ground by virtue of their very status as underdogs; those with it, at least if they are Westerners, and especially if they are Americans, are ipso facto oppressors. Israel could give over the entire West Bank, suffer 10,000 dead from suicide bombers, and apologize formally for its existence, and it would still be despised by American and European intellectuals for being what it is--Western, prosperous, confident, and successful amid a sea of abject self-induced failure."

The irony is that the internal criticism is wrong. It is wrong when it is aimed against the administration and the government. But so is the external criticism. The demonstrations last weekend illustrated this point. In a well-coordinated action "anti-war" demonstrations took place in Washington D.C. and in many cities around the world directed against the U.S. by Americans and externally by Europeans, Palestinians and anyone else who joined the bash ("You call this Funny?" Bret Stephens, The Jerusalem Post, Jan. 2, 2003).

This does not mean that democracies should not have expressions against the government or that free speech ought to be curbed. When interviewers questioned the organizers of the DC demonstration (a communist alliance) the response from participants was a dodging "this is red-baiting" and it appears that name calling is all they have left (pun intended) in their ideological arsenal.

They are wrong because they themselves do not believe in their rhetoric but they are conveniently captivated by it. The movie stars do not sign contacts the way they criticize their own society and will not work for no pay. The professors who preach for science and truth resort to a practice of ideology and myth-building and are first to criticize anyone who finds fault with their position. They act powerfully when it is their fate at stake but feel guilty when they can "negotiate" on behalf of someone else they define as "oppressed." The fact remains that passivity has its limits and historically the world has paid dearly for aggression that was not answered in time. WWII is the best example but there are many others on a smaller but not less vital scale. The current "anti-war" movement had it succeeded like this in 1938-39 would have resulted in absolute Nazi domination over the world. That is why continued passivity against terror these days will result in more loss and greater disadvantage than fighting and crushing it. The Israeli example of wanting to fight terrorism - yet prevented from adequate response - should serve as a role model for itself and for the rest of the free world ("Israeli restraint makes terrorism more likely," Jeff Jacoby, Boston Globe, 1/9/2003).

Indeed, what kind of an alternative are the "anti-war" proponents suggesting: surrender? Voluntary suicide?

Perhaps so, given that major international organizations like the United Nations actively support terrorism under the guise of "refugee support" that is not offered equally to all refugees ("Insane Asylum Policy: The U.N. nurtures terrorists and lets real refugees fend for themselves." Claudia Rosett, The Wall Street Journal, January 8, 2003): "...the U.N. practice of lavishing more than a quarter of a billion bucks a year on special, long-term care for the Palestinians, darlings of every despot in the Middle East, while abandoning utterly a large group of refugees who are far hungrier, more dispossessed and mortally in need of urgent help: the North Koreans. It's a contrast all the more bizarre when one considers that many of the U.N.-supported Palestinians have turned their refugee camps into bomb factories, while the hundreds of thousands of North Korean refugees, almost all hiding in China and ignored by the U.N., are not in the habit of blowing up anybody. They are simply fleeing the murderous regime of Kim Jong Il, under whose rule more than a million people have starved to death, and in whose shrouded prison camps scores of prisoners, possibly hundreds, die daily."

In the U.S. at least, it appears that the courts - thus far - have agreed with the administration's balance between liberty and security when the appeal's court decided to support the administration's detention of an American-born al-Qaida member ("Another Ashcroft Victory: Yaser, that's my enemy," Wall Street Journal, January 9, 2003).

So as the situation with Iraq awaits further developments is it any surprise that Collin Powell offers on one hand the stick of "go alone" policy on Iraq ("Powell Says U.S. Ready for Solo War on Iraq," By Reuters, The New York Times, January 26, 2003) and on the other the carrot of a Palestinian state ("Powell says future Palestine must be 'real state,' not diced' up by settlements," the Associated Press, The Jerusalem Post, Jan. 26, 2003).

One remains bewildered at this politically-driven inconsistency and faulty political understanding of realities and future dangers. Would Powell come out supporting ANY of Bin-Laden's demands because he used terrorism? Yet, there is no end to mollifying Palestinian demands and hence rewarding terrorism. This is one of the key worries for the "after-Iraq" scenario, and the U.S. - even more so than Israel - should realize that such an inconsistency may backfire at its own policies.