So what's good about "Munich?"

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By Robbie Friedmann

For those not involved in the Mideast conflict, with time on their hands to sit through this long movie, this is yet another Spielberg epic where E.T. is a young committed citizen of planet Tera who fights the forces of darkness and then his internal voice tells him to "call home." The fact that the hero gets tired at the end and realizes that those forces are not so dark or that he may be as dark as they are, fits into the modern Hollywood psychobabble, adding a twist of "deep introspection." Aha, but it is "inspired by real event!" So for those who "know" a little more about the Mideast, the movie offers a simplistic account of Israelis attacked and murdered, Israelis fight back, they kill the enemy, complete the mission, and then give rest to the weary. Neither of these scenarios is necessarily negative (except for the victims and families of the Munich atrocity). Not great, not Golden Globe or Oscar material, not having a great value, but not negative.

Yet, in a perverse way, "Munich" has performed an unintentional service for Israel and the Jewish people. Purporting to be "inspired" by real events, he ended up proving that some of our very own cause us no less damage than our external enemy. The winds that blew from the Passion of Christ have barely subsided, and Spielberg brings us (with the help of Israel-negating Kushner) a concoction that Time Magazine considers "brilliant." The Passion of Christ scared us because we thought it would reawaken anti-Semitic sentiments (which we have endured for almost 2000 years). "Munich" should scare us because it constructs a false reality and helps shape a distorted view not just of Israel but also of how the free world should defend itself against terrorism.

"Munich" forces us to have an internal look at the mirror, as Israelis and Jews (but also as citizens of the free world), and realize this is not just about a metaphoric E.T. who wants to go home (to where he will be a "better person"). Rather, in a departure from popular science fiction and from attempts to provide docudrama, Spielberg/Kushner provide an impossible tortuous framework. Pretending to provide context and background to the "real events" the movie does not deliver on several accounts. Other than the terrorist massacre in Munich, and the reported accounts of Mossad hit teams, nothing in the movie is authentic nor is it credible. This movie (and yes, this is "only a movie") is bad for numerous reasons.

First, it is based on George Jonas' book Vengeance which he defends as "solid research" as does his (former) wife Barbara Amiel who "cannot stress too highly the care and effort that went into this book as well as George Jonas's lifelong commitment to the values clearly expressed in 'Vengeance' that are now all but reversed in the film." The book may have been thoroughly researched but the results still persistently indicate that at best he fell prey to a con man's story. Another movie, "The Sword of Gideon" (1986) was also based on the book and it is far better without having to rely on Spielberg's pyrotechnics. A new documentary, "Bayonet," is to be released shortly and it should provide a far greater element of credibility to what really happened.

Second, not only the book's credibility is questionable; the film's cinematic credibility is questionable on at least two counts: authenticity and accuracy. In a screening to former Mossad officials in Israel last week, a consensus emerged from the panel following the movie that "There is nothing about Israel in this movie." To anyone even slightly familiar with Israeli military service and security forces, the movie has totally missed on protocol, uniform, social interaction, customs, and way of life. These errors are interesting considering the painstaking efforts at accuracy of films trying to be obsessively true to the historic period or the culture they depict. Negligence was seen here, not adherence to facts.

Major General Hoffi, a former commander of Israel's Northern Command and later head of the Mossad, welcomes "Avner" in full military uniform... as head of Mossad. The head of Mossad is a civilian who does not wear military uniform. But even worse, a bad actor plays him laughing moronically at "Avner" telling him he will not get any rewards for what he has done for his country. Not only highly unconvincing as a scene - it is repulsive. Serious and committed professionals do not behave this way (bad actors do). Israelis appear as amateurs, bumbling fools, and loose cannons. This is not how any serious security service operates.

However, admittedly, these "trivial" items may bother only Israelis and they number only about 6 million (oh that number again) while the rest of the viewing audience [for whom this movie is intended, is in the hundreds of million (from whom the $60 mil. estimated cost of the movie needs to be recouped with profit). So this may not detract from the gist of the movie among those who are not familiar with such protocol or sentiment. But the biggest weakness of the movie lies in two universal moral fallacies.

The first moral fallacy is strongly embedded in Western tradition. Namely, the movie presents a false equivalence between victim and perpetrator. Spielberg/Kushner get out of their way to show a sacred "balance" that gives an equal footing to terrorists and those who fight them. If they would carry this ad-absurdum, then they would have equated the allied forces in WWII with the Nazis whom they fought. Or, more grounded in everyday life: They would have suggested that a police officer who kills a criminal who threatens the officer's life (or that of a citizen) is not different from the criminal. This concept was bastardized in the movie when a statement Golda Meir made about killing ("We can forgive the Arabs for killing our children but we cannot forgive them for forcing our children to kill their children.") was "re-processed" to appear as: "Israel, like every civilization, may find its necessary to negotiate compromises with its own values." What comprises in Jewish values? The one that suggests killing first the enemy who intends to kill you? The Hollywood duo has departed from the tradition of "good guy - bad guy." For them everyone is equal. This gives unwarranted legitimacy to terrorists and criminals. Now, between those two there is certainly equivalence.

The second moral fallacy is the biggest weakness of this movie. While potentially appealing to some idealists (religious or otherwise) and to anyone who abhors violence, the ending message is that ALL violence is obscene and futile (yet it implies that the violence of the defender is wrong). Moreover, violence begets violence. Devoid of context, the film could have said that fighting Nazis is futile and obscene and "might" beget more violence. The idea that fighting terrorism is futile is a luxury that the beautiful souls of the world can afford in Hollywood movies or newspaper columns. The fact of the matter is that they are quick to condemn the

defender but not the perpetrator. Thus they do not really offer anything to have the terrorists stop their asinine atrocity at will. Carrying it just a bit further means we should dismantle the justice system since trying offenders in court - not to mention punishing them - is futile and obscene. After all, they continue to rape and kill so we should do nothing against them.

In an era where the terrorist threats against the civilian front is at a scope unprecedented in history, Spielberg might have wanted to explore the delicate balances of the human soul but what he achieved is a complete formula for untenable self-destruction of a viable free civilization.