

How the West Bank Views Terrorism

By Robert Eisenman

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It is not insignificant that the latest Arab terrorist acts against Israel have all occurred either outside that country or at its airport just prior to admission to the country. These include the Sabena affair, the Lod Airport massacre, the Munich tragedy and the recent attacks on Israeli diplomats. To the careful observer this, of course, says something about the state of affairs within Israel itself and the general attitude of the Arabs under its administration towards terrorism. Inside Israel—either because of the absence of exacerbating Arab propaganda or the efficiency of the Israeli security forces or the normality of conditions—there is almost no terrorism to speak of. Not only is this the case, but there seems to be very little predisposition on the part of a population who has now known and worked with Israelis for upwards of five years to become involved in such practices.

How, then, does the average Arab view terrorism—and in particular, what is the attitude of the average Arab who has newly found himself within the confines of Israeli administration? There exists, to be sure, a long tradition of terrorism in the Arab cultural heritage, not perhaps precisely of the twentieth-century variety, but a kind of terrorism nonetheless. To paraphrase the prophet Muhammad, the progenitor of conscious Muslim modes of behavior in the literate age, the Koran prescribes: "hunt the infidel wherever you will find him, seek him out, kill him." Indeed, the reward for those dying in the prosecution of Holy War (*jihad*) is eternal paradise. For the modern Arab too, the distinction between the world of *harb* and the world of *Islam*, (the world of war and the world of those who have already submitted) though too oft-belabored, is still nonetheless a factor in determining his world outlook. The very word *assassin* emerged from the Western experience during the Crusades and is based on the Arabic root *hashish* ("grass") for the drugs reportedly taken by or fed to the medieval practitioners of assassination. Sirhan Sirhan, with his fantasies and

pseudo-mystical Rosicrucian meanderings, is perhaps the epitome of the classical Arab "assassin" type—something which the American press in its eagerness for self-flagellation failed to come to terms with after Sen. Robert Kennedy's assassination—and perhaps only an Arab, at that point in American history, ignorant of the terrible history of the Kennedy family, would have undertaken so ignominious a deed.

For the fact remains that the average Arab in the territories, living in relatively normal circumstances (and normality is the key to the situation) is not interested in terrorism. Certainly the exploits of his Arab brethren thrill him when they succeed and fill him with shame when they fail, but these sentiments are not those he would express to strangers. The position is much the same as that of a pro-Giants roofer at a football game and the parallelism is even riper than that. Like his Sunday-morning quarterback counterpart, the Arab in the territories does not participate in the game itself. He does not involve himself in terrorism. He does nothing of a physical nature to support it. Israelis are fond of claiming that the excellence of their security services is responsible for the diminution of terrorism on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the last few years but this is hardly the whole story. The Israeli security services, as we have seen, in their lack of adequate preparations for the Lod Airport massacre and the Munich debacle, are not quite perfect.

The tradition of Arab terrorism and what the world sees as Arab cruelty is not strong enough to determine events in the occupied territories and in Israel and the Arab attachment to *kisas* (blood revenge) as the sole expedient in criminal law in cases of bodily injury or murder (which has perhaps determined the moral atmosphere of the whole Southern Mediterranean from Spain to Sicily to Cyprus) is not strong enough to determine the course of Arab reaction to the Israeli presence on the West Bank.

The key to the present situation is the

plain Arab worker, going back and forth daily between Israel and the West Bank in the tens of thousands. It is perhaps too facile to state that he has "never had it so good," but in fact this is true. He is not pillaging. He is not raping. He is not throwing hand grenades or knifing anyone—and certainly there is ample scope for these activities to be indulged in if he were so disposed. One must, consequently, read the Arab barometer in a different way. One cannot judge by what he says, but rather by what he does. If there were really a determined terrorist movement on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip then there would be a situation in Israel the likes of which France confronted in Algeria in the late nineteen fifties and early sixties, or which Britain is confronting in Northern Ireland at the present time. Nothing even remotely resembling these situations exists in the administered areas today. Northern Ireland provides the best example of what a determined revolutionary foe can do if backed by a hinterland of a sympathetic populace (in *Eire*) such as the terrorists have behind them in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The IRA has pinned down and daily occupies a British army of almost forty thousand men. But the difference on the West Bank and even to a large part in the Gaza Strip, is that a sympathetic population necessary to sustain such a guerrilla movement, "the sea" in the Maoist or Guevera sense, "in which the revolutionary fish must swim," is simply no longer present.

The successful assimilation of the Arab worker into the Israeli economic structure is to a large extent responsible for this phenomenon. Sympathy for the terrorists is no doubt present among the upper classes, for obvious reasons, such as loss of class and economic status in the context of the relatively egalitarian Israel society, but then the upper class in Arab society is not a class which is disposed to "dirty its hands" with anything remotely resembling physical activity (though they are very good talkers—which has made life difficult for the

Israeli information effort ever since the Six Day War). Among the lower classes, however, who are silent but very much aware of their benefits under the more progressively oriented Israeli economy, there is none.

The objection may now be raised as to whether I mean to claim that no terrorism whatsoever exists among the Arab lower classes, or that I mean to imply that no lower-class Arabs enlist in Fatah. What about the Arabs in the refugee camps, one might well ask? I certainly do not claim that lower class Arabs are not readily enlisted in the terrorist movements, although there is something to this contention. What I do maintain, however, is that when an Arab lives in normal circumstances he is not interested in and does not participate in or support terrorism. What we mean by 'normal circumstances' is something like what exists in Israel today, where Arabs have the right to a minimum wage, job security, severance pay, vacation pay and all the other benefits that are taken so much for granted in the democratic West. When the Arab has had a taste of these benefits, as he does under the Israeli administration today, he behaves in a totally different manner. Of course *Fatah* is enlisting in the refugee camps outside of Israel's present boundaries, but this is precisely the point. These people are not living in normal circumstances. They have been forced for twenty-five years to live at the height of what can only be called extreme abnormality. It is the forced segregation of these people into camps in the Arab countries that has probably contributed, more than anything else, to the creation of the Palestinian identity out of what was before no more than a collection of villages and an urban elite. It is not surprising therefore that these people are easily enlisted into the terrorist organizations by the relatively affluent al-Fatah, which receives its ample funds from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya and the Communist bloc.

The conditions under which Arabs live their day-to-day life in the Arab world can also by no means be called 'normal.' It is for this reason that one has come to expect the so frequent ebbs and flows of emotion, the accumulation of murderous intent and its gradual dwindling away. Everyone remembers the days of wrath in Cairo preceding the outbreak of the Six Day War, or the fantastic outpouring of emotion at the

death of Nasser, and how quickly these feelings were dissipated.

Israelis are fond of pointing out that 'you cannot trust Arabs.' This may be so while the Arabs, in the Arab countries, have to live in the conditions to which they are presently enured. Israelis still remember what they feel were the monstrous acts that the Arabs, in the past, were capable of perpetrating. The 1948 massacre of the bus-loads of Hadassah Hospital and university personnel on their way up to the Hebrew University and hospital on Mt. Scopus in Jerusalem is one example. One may well conjure up a view of the trapped and broken-down busses on the hillside, sitting helplessly by while swarms of Arabs gathered on the surrounding hills to pepper them for hours with rifle fire. And yet these very same Arabs may, on the following day or several days later, have sat down with a Jew in their own home, and drunk coffee with him (thus creating the obligation on the part of the Arab host to protect his guest) as if nothing had occurred. Even today Israelis meet with many of these very same Arabs in their daily course, or with Arabs whose families must have taken part in this Mt. Scopus massacre and relations go on as if nothing had happened. The point is that these Arabs were, at that time, in a state of extreme excitement whipped up into a state of frenzy and that when Arabs live in normal circumstances they behave just like any other people. The moral then is not that one cannot trust the Arabs, but that one cannot trust them in moments of excitement and the corollary that follows is to get them living under what the world would consider normal circumstances as quickly as possible.

As far as the Israelis are concerned, I believe they must realize that they are not living in what can be called 'normal circumstances' either, and that they will have to upgrade their security measures both for their citizens abroad and at their entrance points in Israel. Yet it is interesting to note that most of these recent terrorist acts *have* taken place abroad or just at the entrance to Israel's gates, by people who do not live in Israel or under its administration, and for the most part, by people who have never set foot in Israel or who have any idea of what Israel is all about.

Now and Then

Sir: The guerrillas crossed the national border of the adjoining land, burned the town and killed 19 citizens before they went back to home base. The leader of the marauders claimed that the invaded territory was really his country and that the boundary line was an artificial border.

A hue and cry went up over the land of the 19 killed and the president of that country sent one of his leading generals off to chase the terrorists and to ferret them out root and branch. There had been a previous series of incidents and bloodshed by the provocateurs and tempers had flared. "Chase them into their own country and burn them out if necessary," were the virtual instructions to the general. But the president of the country harboring the terrorists was not especially cooperative, for he secretly was sympathetic to the guerrillas. So the general and his force of 5,000 men set out to revenge the death of 19 of his compatriots and chased the guerrillas deep into their own land.

The guerrillas in this case were not Arabs, they were Mexicans. The 19 killed were not Israelis, they were Americans. The settlement attacked was not in the Golan Heights but was Columbus, New Mexico. The guerrilla leader was not Yasir Arafat but Francisco (Pancho) Villa. The president of the country mourning the 19 killed was not Golda Meir or Zalman Shazar but Woodrow Wilson. The general chasing the guerrillas back into their native land was not Moshe Dayan but John J. Pershing. The president sympathetic to the guerrillas was not Suleiman Franjeh in Beirut but Venustiano Carranza in Mexico City. The people urging that the "murderers" be caught and ferreted out, even if the borders were crossed and the guerrillas were chased deep into their own land, were not Israelis but Americans. The time was not September, 1972 but March, 1916.

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