

OPINION/EDITORIAL

Preliminary Lessons from Palestinian-Israeli Violence

By Kenneth W. Stein

On May 8, 2002, a Palestinian suicide bombing at a recreational hall in Rishon LeTzion killed more than 15 Israelis and wounded dozens more. In the context of the previous months of violence, with continued American diplomatic efforts to create a cease-fire and the vague portents for a renewed diplomatic process, among many others, what eight lessons may be offered?

Lesson 1: No amount of Israeli military action will prevent suicide bombers from killing Israelis. While Israel's Operation Defensive Shield dealt the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure a severe blow, Palestinian armed struggle and steadfastness against Israeli existence can not be extinguished by force. Arab sides in the Arab-Israeli conflict will not easily concede Israel's right to exist simply because the Jewish state is militarily victorious; they will accept Israel because they need to do so, not because they want to do so. Guided by militant-clad commitments to liberate all of Palestine from Israeli hands, groups such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Al-Aqsa brigades do not care how much suffering the broader Palestinian population sustains from Israeli reprisal actions. Israel won a battle but not the war. Inevitably, there will be more such battles. At least in the intermediate term, more pain and casualties among Palestinians and Israelis can be expected.

Lesson 2: Geographic locations and targets of attack chosen by Palestinian terrorist groups before, during, and after Israel's effort to root out the West Bank

terrorist infrastructures affirm a dual goal: kill preferably young Jews and generate fear in the minds of every Israeli when they go into a public space. A strain of Palestinian anti-Semitism is alive; it can not be cloaked in a mantle of opposing Zionism, Israel, or Jewish settlements. Some European and Arab politicians and leaders of public opinion who unreservedly support Arafat's longevity as head of the Palestinian Authority do so because he is their ideological client; together, they (c)overly advocate anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli sentiment.

Lesson 3: By encouraging a climate of permissiveness that allowed armed struggle to accompany intermittent diplomatic forays over the last nine years, Arafat reaffirmed the premise that promises to change a stated goal — forsake armed struggle per the emendation of the PLO Charter in 1998 — does not automatically change a deeply held prevailing antithesis in one's head or heart. Chances are slim that the quintessential autocrat, Yasser Arafat, will step away from his tight hold on the Palestinian Arab national movement; it is unlikely that he will retain only the movement's symbol and assign instead day-to-day operations (negotiations, appointments, and bureaucratic decisions) to colleagues no less imbued with Palestinian national aspirations.

Lesson 4: Israeli public opinion remains overwhelmingly supportive of Prime Minister Sharon and the need to use force against Palestinian terror. Though still believing a Palestinian state is the

only viable way to avoid absorption of three million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, Israelis — not just Sharon — put the blame for Israeli deaths squarely on Ararat's shoulders. Since the Israeli public possesses no confidence in Arafat, a Palestinian-Israeli agreement is virtually impossible to reach as long as he controls and directs Palestinian national aspirations.

Lesson 5: Israeli intelligence and capacity to root out terrorists was proven effective but insufficient. The extent of Palestinian weapons stock-piled and their capacity to organize was severely under-estimated by Israeli estimates. Israel needs its domestic police infrastructure bolstered to a level of numbers, training, and wherewithal that matches the IDF.

Lesson 6: While the Bush Administration went from diplomatic aloof to engagement in the Arab-Israel theater, it recognizes its own restraints: it can not force Arab states or Arafat to curtail a permissive culture of hatred against Israel, and it can not dictate to Israel how it should defend itself or what to do about the settlements. To cope appropriately with those constraints, Washington insists on a multi-lateral approach to move from conflict to diplomatic phase. Washington's preferred method is to build a coalition of interested and capable sources (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, EU, Russia, UN, etc.) to implement a cease-fire, urge Israeli withdrawal, manage a diplomatic process, wind down the vitriolic language, support an outcome that removes Israeli anxiety, and establish polit-

ical dignity for the Palestinian people in a contiguous state.

Lesson 7: Sympathy for Israel is presently greater and deeper among American Jews and non-Jews alike than any time since October 1973. A confluence of factors has created this reality. This 19-month war of attrition was fought against civilians in urban areas, malls, public places, not by armies on borders. The context of September 11 puts Americans in an identical mode with Israelis; Arab terrorists attack unarmed civilians at work, play, and prayer. Accumulated American frustration that Arafat walked from what was perceived as a potentially far-ranging Israeli diplomatic offer, choosing violence instead, solidified identity to Israel. And finally, American Jews, particularly, see physical attacks in Israel and against Jews in Europe as assaults on themselves. The next visible impact of American Jewish political mobilization will be seen in the 2002 Congressional elections.

Lesson 8: If the international community waits for the violence to recede or end, it engages in tacit complicity to death and destruction on both sides. Solutions must be negotiated, not imposed, and led multi-laterally by Washington. A properly structured international or regional conference with adequate pre-negotiations of substantive issues, where bilateral Palestinian-Israeli talks emerge as the result of the conference, can change the dynamic of the tradi-

tional Palestinian-Israeli paradigm. It can go from violence-counter violence to one predicated on change on the ground. This requires an end to Israeli settlements and their expansion, Israeli withdrawal, an imposition of severe penalties for Palestinian violence, strong Arab state advocacy and repetitive support for a negotiated settlement, and an economic flow of capital for the next decade to change the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza areas. ☆

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The View from Israel

The Parts are More than the Whole

By Carl Alpert

Haifa - The gory total of hapless victims of the various suicide bombings is more than just a statistical figure. Each individual had a personal life, a future unfulfilled, a family left in mourning with painful memories. The Hebrew press has sought to report tales of the victims, each more sorrowful than the last. We select one such report, taken from the daily Yediot Ahronot, for its special significance.

Ze'ev and Zehava Vider, whose home was in moshav Bikot in the Jordan Valley, planned to make the Passover Seder a very special festive event, and they reserved places at the Park Hotel, in Netanya, together with friends. With them was daughter Gili, 22, and her fiancé, Avi Beckerman, 25, and a second daughter, Sivan, 20, a soldier about to be released from the service. Son Nimrod had other plans and was not with the family.

The blast that took a toll of more than 25 lives ruptured the family. Sivan was killed instantly. Gili's groom-to-be was utterly destroyed. Father Ze'ev was very critically injured and rushed to the hospital. Only Zehava and her daughter, Gili, were spared, suffering from shock and minor wounds. One can only conjecture that the bodies of the others shielded them from and received the full impact of the flying nails and shrapnel.

The funeral of the two young people was a sad occasion, and the prayers for the dead were intermingled with prayers for Ze'ev, who hovered between life and

death - for four days. And then he died of his severe head injuries.

The medical personnel who had cared for him had a delicate mission to perform. With great tact and understanding they approached the widow. Since her husband's body had been only lightly injured, his internal organs were intact. There were ill people waiting for just such opportunities. Would Zehava Vider give her consent?

A quick consultation with her two surviving children followed, and without further hesitation she assented. The operations were performed, and a heart, liver and two

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"Their mother, Aisha, had been waiting for a suitable kidney for four years. ... Only after the transplant had been deemed a success was the recipient's family told the identity of the donor."

kidneys were transplanted into waiting, ailing bodies at the Rabin Medical Center.

At the request of the family, Ze'ev was buried next to his daughter in the military cemetery at Kiryat Shaul. At the graveside, Nimrod addressed his father: "Abba, don't worry up there. I assume the job of running the house. I must take care of Imma, and I shall do it in the way you taught me. But you, take care of

Sivan and Avi up there."

Once again the family began to sit Shiva. It was during this period that there came a gentle knock at the door. Outside were three young men, obviously Arabs. "Vider family?" they asked, oblivious of the black-bordered death notices on the wall.

"We don't speak Hebrew very well, but have come to thank you for saving our mother's life," said Said, Muhammad and Sami Khadir, from Shuafat, a north Jerusalem neighborhood. The story was soon told. Their mother, Aisha, had been waiting for four years for a suitable kidney, and in the meantime had been receiving treatments three times a week at the hospital to keep her alive.

Only after the transplant had been deemed a success, was the recipient's family told the identity of the donor, and they came to express their heartfelt thanks.


"It didn't matter to us who would be the recipients," Zehava said. "We did what we knew Ze'ev would have wanted. The important thing was that lives should be saved." She turned to the young men. "From now on you are one of us. We are one family." They embraced warmly. Yediot reporter Yossi Yehoshua described the moving scene.

"When mother recovers sufficiently she will come to visit you," Said promised. "For her, you are angels."


The meeting concluded with a joint statement: "We, ordinary people, can change the situation. We must have the courage to go out and talk about peace, and not be afraid." ☆

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