



Cool Heads Needed in the Fight against Palestinian Terrorism

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: While there is no doubt that Israel is facing a difficult security situation, the surge in Palestinian violence does not pose any existential threat to Israel. Israel has weathered longer and harsher waves of terrorism. Israeli leaders must keep things in proportion, and reject calls for “massive retaliation” that will not truly improve security and could make things worse.

The security situation is complex. Israel’s decision to outlaw the Islamic Movement’s Northern Branch may have been unavoidable, but the surge in Palestinian violence cannot be used as an excuse to promote legislation targeting Israeli Arabs or infringing on their rights, directly or indirectly. Such measures will do more harm than good, especially in the long run.

Tempers are running high these days, but if anything this is when we should make a point of seeing the glass as half full.

Israel is home to 1.7 million Arab citizens, and we should always keep in mind the astonishing fact that only a handful of them have taken part in recent violent incidents. After two months of rising terrorism, Israeli Arabs have remained removed from the cycle of violence. Some may sympathize with the terrorists, and some may subscribe to the incitement spread by the Islamic Movement’s Northern Branch, but Israeli Arabs have not taken part in the murder of Israelis. We must examine what can be done to build up this positive trend of restraint by Israeli Arabs.

Nevertheless, the overall security situation is very frustrating. Every terrorist attack brings the same question with growing urgency: What can be done to quell terror and restore the public's sense of safety?

We see no shortage of grandiose statements on this subject, with suggestions that the IDF launch "a massive military campaign" and "seize Judea and Samaria." These are nothing but empty words. There is no need for a massive military campaign, as Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 established the IDF's control over Judea and Samaria, and Israeli forces are free to operate anywhere in the area.

If there is intelligence of a weapons' cache in the heart of Nablus, for example, the IDF can deploy troops within a day. The same goes for executing demolition orders on terrorists' homes. And soldiers pursuing a suspect can chase him wherever they must, even into a Palestinian hospital.

The suggestion of a door-to-door search for suspects in Hebron, home to the majority of terrorists involved in the recent knifing and ramming attacks, is also futile. What are the soldiers supposed to look for – kitchen knives? Over 90% of the attacks were carried out using weapons of opportunity, from screwdrivers to axes. Only a handful of attacks have involved firearms.

The IDF is already free to act on any intelligence or suspicion as needed, and the defense establishment clearly thinks that surrounding Hebron is a waste of resources, and that it would only aggravate friction with civilians who are, for the most part, innocent.

Tense times like these breed a tendency to infringe on the rights of the minority from which the terrorists emerge. We have seen how even the leaders of the most enlightened countries – the same ones who preach to Israel about tolerance and leniency – sideline all semblances of tolerance when they are hit close to home.

Israel should refrain from imposing harsh and unnecessary measures on the Palestinians, such as revoking work permits from Palestinians across Judea and Samaria. This measure would affect the livelihoods of thousands of families, when so far it is only one terrorist who abused his work permit to carry out an attack.

Exercising such measures could result in increasing the number of Palestinians who, feeling they have nothing to lose, might turn to terrorism. Harsh punishments should be imposed wisely if they are to generate deterrence.

The truth should also be voiced clearly. Little can be done to prevent lone terrorists from carrying out their plans, especially when their motives are no longer clear. Many of the attacks recently have been "atmosphere attacks," resulting from a killing trend fueled by the Palestinian Authority's incitement. The PA seems to be the main component in promoting murder as a "hobby" among the Palestinians, but most attacks have not been directed by a known terrorist group.

While swift action and the better screening of suspects are vital to fight the violence, these two measures alone cannot quash it. Acts of terror are growing in popularity on a global scale, and the Palestinian trend is inspired by international events.

The wave of terrorism is likely to continue until it proves itself useless; something that brings only grief to the perpetrators and their families. This is why Israel cannot offer any gestures to the Palestinians. Israel must make it clear that this prolonged violence will yield nothing.

There is also a need to avoid unnecessary panic. Rhetoric suggesting these attacks pose an "existential threat" to Israel is oblivious to reality and sidelines history in favor of hysteria.

No one can dispute that recent weeks have been stressful for the Israeli public, especially in Judea and Samaria, where residents come in greater daily contact with their Palestinian neighbors, which in some cases makes it easier for terrorists to carry out their vile plans. But the situation is far from posing an "existential threat." Israel has weathered longer and harsher waves of terrorism, and they did not pose such a threat. Neither did Israel's wars.

While there is no doubt that Israel is facing a difficult situation, the nation will continue to thrive. I believe the economy will grow, as will the number of Israelis living in Judea and Samaria and the number of Jews immigrating to Israel. The surge in violence does not pose an "existential threat." But it does call for keeping things in proportion.

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