



Myths, Facts, and Wishful Thinking in Responding to Palestinian Violence

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The recent wave of terrorism has seen illusion peddlers take center stage. While some are true believers, others seek only to promote personal, political, potentially dangerous agendas. Regional realities mandate a different, more prudent approach.

The series of terrorist attacks throughout the Sukkot holiday, especially the brutal murders of a Jewish couple in Samaria and two Jewish men in Jerusalem's Old City, seem to have become the podium from which a slew of public figures, from both the Right and the Left, seek to peddle their illusions. Some of these individuals truly believe in what they are saying, while others seek only to promote their personal agendas and worldviews, despite their irrelevance.

These individuals have made various statements over the past few days, including the following:

"We need a bold diplomatic initiative and courageous leadership to end the [Palestinian] despair that results in these murders."

Really? It is well known that in the midst of the political process that culminated in the 1993 Oslo Accords, when Israel ceded vast territories, terrorism reached new heights. It was when the Oslo Accords were signed and the government was pursuing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in earnest that explosive devices and suicide bombers exploded nationwide, killing Jews indiscriminately.

There is no real proof that "diplomatic initiatives," bold or otherwise, can quell terrorism. Some would even argue that the opposite is true, which it is, especially with regards to organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The chanting of the leftist mantra that "negotiations breed calm" is tantamount to a mystical ritual that has nothing to do with reality, regardless of the followers who believe in it.

"Regional peace could be used as leverage to have the moderate Arab states pressure the Palestinians to enable them to realize our shared interests. Cooperation with the region's nations is the key to a peace deal."

As attractive as this theory may be, it is not grounded in reality. Firstly, because the so-called "moderate" countries hold less than moderate views on some key issues, most notably Jerusalem; and secondly, it is clear to anyone who understands the workings of the Middle East that on most issues, these countries have no interest in pressuring the Palestinians. No Arab leader worth his salt will relinquish anything on behalf of the Palestinians, regardless of how "moderate" he may seem. Moreover, even if he wanted to, the Arab street will prevent such moves.

"Massive settlement construction is the only appropriate response to terrorism. It will deter the Arabs and decrease violence. It is the settlement freeze that leads to terrorism."

Such statements make me wonder if even those making them believe what they say. They know that settlement construction has never contributed to a decrease in terrorist activity, and there is no proof -- none whatsoever -- that anyone has ever shelved a terrorist plot over a settlement freeze.

Such statements seek only to take advantage of a difficult situation to promote a political agenda, which while legitimate, is ill-timed. Those endorsing settlement construction do so regardless of terrorism, and using this terrible time to push it further is just an excuse, and a poor one at that.

The problem is that the overall atmosphere has a powerful effect, and the government could find itself in a situation where this terrible excuse is somehow considered during the decision-making process. Responsible individuals, whose vision stretches beyond the short-term approval of 1,000 housing units in Judea and Samaria, must remember that Israel is waging a difficult battle in the international arena, and making hasty

decisions because despicable murderers spill Jewish blood may have far-reaching ramifications.

"The problem is the lack of significant military response. Deterrence has been eroded and the military must be allowed to operate forcefully."

This is the emotional reaction of those who are struggling to deal with the situation, and those cynical enough to exploit security tensions to lambaste the leadership. I doubt any defense official thinks the problem lies in the need for a more forceful reaction.

In most similar cases, a more forceful response would solve nothing. For example, you cannot shoot an Arab on the streets of the Old City before he pulls out a knife. What directive should have been given to the police, what change to the rules of engagements could have prevented the stabbing attack near the Lions' Gate? The terrorist assumed he would be killed during the attack -- most terrorists assume as much -- so what more could have been done to deter him? Does anyone really believe that if Israel had hundreds of dead Palestinians to deal with it would somehow fare better or that terrorism would somehow diminish?

Anyone seriously under that impression is dangerously deluded. Additional casualties in the hundreds would see Israel facing uncontrollable, raging Palestinian crowds and even more terrorism. Contrary to inflammatory recommendations, Israel cannot and should not launch a destructive onslaught, because it is both unethical and ineffective.

Specific operational tactics, such as sniper fire against rioters throwing stones and firebombs, can and should be used and perfected, and additional troops should be deployed to certain flashpoints, such as roads across Judea and Samaria, but we must remember that such deployment may hinder preparations for the next round of violence in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

Unlike the time between the Oslo Accords and 2002's Operation Defensive Shield in Judea and Samaria, the military is under no operational restrictions. The fact is that the solution to this complex situation does not lie in military might, but rather in better intelligence, which in some cases can be the difference between a foiled attack and bloodshed.

No one is claiming that there is anything restricting intelligence-gathering efforts, but in some cases, especially when a "lone wolf" who is not affiliated with any terrorist organization is involved, even intelligence is useless. Security forces cannot be

everywhere all the time, so it is pure luck and the rapid response of bystanders that determine the outcome of lone terrorist attacks.

"The attacker always takes the initiative and nothing can be done about it."

The Palestinians have no illusions when it comes to the immense power the IDF wields in the Middle East in general and opposite them in particular. Some of them are willing to die fighting the "occupation," especially when it comes to anything perceived as a threat to the Al-Aqsa mosque, namely the Temple Mount.

Some among the Palestinians are willing to abuse this zeal, especially the northern branch of the Islamic Movement, and some on the Israeli side are providing them with plenty of excuses for their nefarious acts, such as the arson attack in Duma.

One fact must be reiterated: We, the Jews, are the sovereigns. We are the stronger party in this fight, and no wave of terrorism, horrific as it may be, will change that basic element in the equation.

During the British Mandate, when the government often sided with the Arab rioters, the Jewish resistance groups Irgun and Lehi were right to mount a forceful response against murders. Now, we no longer have to prove anything. Israel is a strong, sovereign state, and as such it must use its force prudently, only when its results have proven benefits, and only as a last resort.

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