



## PERSPECTIVES

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# When Palestinians are Hopeless, Terror Declines; When Hopeful, Terrorism Increases

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** It is a widespread belief that Palestinian hopelessness feeds terrorism and the prospects for peace decrease it. This has always been false. In fact, the opposite is true: when Palestinians feel hopeless, Palestinian terrorism declines; when they are hopeful of gaining the upper hand, Palestinian terrorism increases. An Israeli iron fist is necessary to save both Israeli and Palestinian lives.

The common mantra that Palestinian hopelessness increases terrorism and that the prospects for peace decrease it has always been fake news. Palestinian terrorism invariably rises in tandem with their hopes of gaining the upper hand.

During the first intifada, Palestinians killed 91 Israelis over the course of slightly over five years. Palestinian terror shot up dramatically, however, as the Camp David peace process initiated at the end of 1991 morphed into direct negotiations with the PLO. The Oslo "peace" process was thus accompanied by a precipitous increase in Palestinian terrorism.

The more Israel made concessions to the Palestinians – the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the granting to PLO leadership and major Palestinian terrorists entrance into the West Bank and Gaza and even Israel – the higher the terrorist toll climbed. In 1992, when the Palestinians realized Israel was going to withdraw from Gaza to make way for some kind of Palestinian autonomy, the number of Israelis killed jumped from 11 the previous year to 34. After the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the

establishment of the PA in the summer of 1994, that figure nearly doubled (61). When the PA was expanded in 1995 to include the major Arab towns in the West Bank, they killed 65 people, mostly as a result of three suicide bombings. The towns had become terrorist sanctuaries into which the IDF could not enter for fear of international condemnation.

The left-of-center Israeli government and leading left-wing intellectuals called the victims of these terrorist acts *korbanot hashalom*, or sacrifices killed on the altar of peace. Needless to say, many relatives of the victims, as well as other Israelis, found this appellation offensive.

Palestinian hopelessness set in after Netanyahu's electoral victory in 1996. According to the mantra, terrorism should then have increased. The opposite took place. Terrorism declined dramatically: it more than halved to 32 deaths in 1997, dropped to 13 in 1998, and dropped further to four in 1999, Netanyahu's third and final year in office at the time.

Part of the decline could be attributed to the PA's efforts to come down on Hamas terrorists. This was done in the knowledge that further concessions by a right-wing government were only conceivable if Jewish blood-letting subsided.

Since the second intifada, the same trend has prevailed. Israel's conquest of the Arab towns in the West Bank in 2002 brought about a radical reduction of terrorism, from a high of 452 deaths in 2002 to 13 in 2007. And once again, a renewal of peace talks in 2008 coincided with an increase in terrorism, this time to 36 deaths. In the year following the *failure* of the talks, that figure abated to 15.

Netanyahu's return to office in 2012 coincided with a low of ten victims of Palestinian terror. Then, as if on cue, Secretary of State Kerry's strenuous efforts to restart the peace talks led to a resurgence of terror – 19 deaths in 2014, not including the 72 deaths in the third Israeli-Hamas round of conflicts.

Why does hopelessness lead to less Palestinian terrorism and hopefulness to more? This is not as counterintuitive as it sounds. The tendency to rebel increases not when all appears lost, but when prospects for the rebellious appear to be improving but the improvement does not meet rising expectations.

The same phenomenon occurred during the Iranian revolution and the so-called Arab Spring. The Iranian revolution occurred not after a period of hopelessness, but after a sharp rise in the income level of urban Iranians over at least a decade. Many of those urbanites – the very people who made the revolution a reality – lived to regret their role in the Shah's downfall.

Similarly, in the Arab Spring, revolutions took place in the two Arab states – Tunisia and Egypt – that had shown the greatest improvement in the Middle

East over the three previous decades on the human development index. This index is a composite of three indicators: gross domestic product per capita, educational attainment, and life expectancy. This time span coincided with the rule of Egypt's Mubarak and Tunisia's Zein Abidin Bin Ali. Once again, violence was not the product of a lack of improvement. There was plenty of improvement – so much so that expectations rose even more sharply than the human welfare curve.

The same irrational dynamic, incidentally, can be seen in real estate bubbles or in Madoff-style Ponzi schemes, which have ensnared even the most rational and educated.

Peace processes also fall victim to spoilers. Hamas, which won a majority in the last elections to be held in the West Bank and Gaza, and the smaller Islamic Jihad are forever keen to derail attempts to peace.

The moral is that there must be a significant majority on both sides ready to make necessary concessions well before any “peace” process is attempted. Until that time, it is hardly concessions that are needed but an Israeli iron fist to save Israeli and Palestinian lives.

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