



Commentary...

Yasser Abbas By Tom Gross

No amount of wishful thinking can obscure the fact that the true "root cause" of Palestinian terrorism is the leadership of the Palestinian Authority.

On the very day that five Israelis were murdered and over 60 injured outside a shopping mall in the coastal city of Netanya earlier this month, the official Palestinian newspaper Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reported that Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas had approved fresh financial assistance to the families of suicide bombers. The family of each "martyr" will now receive a monthly stipend of at least \$250 -- a not inconsiderable amount for most Palestinians -- from the Palestinian Authority. Altogether, the families of these so-called martyrs and of those wounded in terrorist attempts or held in Israeli jails might receive \$100 million, according to Al-Hayat Al-Jadida.

Around 30 percent of the Palestinian Authority budget comes from international donations, including a hefty amount from the European Union -- ultimately, from EU taxpayers. If an Arab government funded stipends to the families of the London or Madrid bombers, it would probably be pretty big news. But this is the Palestinian Authority, and no matter how little it does to discourage terrorism, or to educate its people to coexist with Israel, it can rely on excuses being made on its behalf by an army of sympathizers throughout the West -- in the press, on college campuses and, most disturbingly, in foreign ministries.

For over a year now, since Mr. Abbas succeeded Yasser Arafat, his boss of 40 years, many in the West have done their utmost to "explain" or ignore Mr. Abbas's failings. But if Americans and Europeans are genuinely interested in promoting Palestinian-Israeli peace, it is time for them to take a realistic look at his record. Some Western commentators were quick to emphasize his condemnation of the Netanya attack. But did they really listen to what he actually said? True, Mr. Abbas condemned the Netanya suicide bomb -- but only in the Palestinian Authority's usual inadequate and half-hearted terms. He said that it "caused great damage to our commitment to the peace process" and that it "harmed Palestinian interests." But he could not bring himself to say that murdering people is simply wrong.

His outright refusal to confront and disarm terrorists, in violation of the Road Map, hardly registers anymore in the Western media and where it does, it is usually excused and attributed to his relative political weakness. However, the media also give very little idea of the extent to which the Palestinian Authority continues to glorify terrorists. A typical instance is the elevation of Al-Moayed Bihokmillah Al-Agha, who murdered five Israelis in a suicide bombing in December 2004. When the Rafah crossing, the scene of his terror attack, was re-opened at the start of this month, the Palestinian Authority renamed it "in honor of Shahid (martyr) Al-Agha." Then there is the soccer tournament named in honor of the terrorist who murdered 30 people at a Passover celebration in Netanya, or the girls' high school named by the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Education after a female terrorist who murdered 36 Israeli civilians and an American nature photographer. (The school was recently renovated with money from USAID, channeled through the American Near East Refugee Aid.)

Examples could easily be multiplied. A poetry collection published by the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Culture, for instance, is named in honor of a suicide terrorist (dubbed "the Rose of Palestine" in one of the poems) who killed 21 at a restaurant in Haifa. (The collection was distributed this August as a special supplement in the daily Al-Ayyam. Most of Al-Ayyam's editors are appointed by Mr. Abbas.) Reliable nongovernmental organizations like Palestinian Media Watch meticulously translate such hateful material, but Western journalists almost invariably refuse to report it. They prefer to cling to the illusion that the present-day Palestinian leadership is genuinely striving

ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
A service of the Bet El Twinning Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

to achieve peace and ד"ס
coexistence.

This lack of proper coverage leads many people, including even many who are broadly sympathetic to Israel, to hold a false view of Mr. Abbas and to persuade themselves that the Palestinian Authority has undergone a fundamental change for the better since Arafat's death. No amount of wishful thinking, though, can obscure the fact

that the true "root cause" of Palestinian terrorism is the leadership of the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian Authority sometimes goes so far as to stamp out even the most symbolic gestures of coexistence with Israel. Consider last month's soccer match, organized by the Shimon Peres Center for Peace, in which Israeli and Palestinian soccer stars played together in a joint "Peace Team" against Barcelona. They played well, losing only 2-1 at Barcelona's famous Nou Camp stadium in front of 31,820 spectators, including many dignitaries. Yet on the Palestinian Authority's orders, the Palestinian Football Association announced that it would punish the Palestinian players for daring to participate in such a match.

Meanwhile Palestinian militias have begun firing enhanced Kassam missiles -- with a larger diameter and longer range than previous Kassams -- recently hitting for the first time the city of Ashkelon and Israeli villages which until now had been out of range of Palestinian rockets. Equally ominous, the Palestinian Authority is allowing terrorists and weapons to pass freely through the newly opened Gaza-Egypt border.

So where does this all leave us?

It remains conventional wisdom, especially in the media, that the Israeli government or people are somehow the main obstacles to peace. The fact is, however, Israelis are desperate for peace. Almost no one in Israel now rejects the idea of a Palestinian state. But how many Palestinians really accept the idea of a Jewish state?

All the evidence, sad to say, points to the fact that most do not. In the recent Fatah primaries, it was those candidates who were most opposed to peace with Israel who swept to victory. Other Palestinians go beyond Fatah and support the even more extreme position of Hamas, which polled very strongly in last week's local elections in the West Bank.

The hope must still be that in the long run Palestinian attitudes will change. When that happens, frontiers can be settled by mutual agreement. But it would be dangerous folly to suppose that the necessary change has already taken place, and until it does, the Israelis have no choice but to put considerations of security first and reserve the right to determine their own borders. (The Wall Street Journal Europe Dec 22)

The writer is a former Jerusalem correspondent of the Sunday Telegraph.

Interview: Persecuting the Holy Land's Christians By Jamie Glazov
Justus Reid Weiner is a Scholar-in-Residence at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, an independent policy studies center. He currently teaches courses on human rights and international law at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His main research field is the human rights challenges facing Arab Christians. He is the author of the new book, "Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society".

Front Page Magazine: Justus Reid Weiner, welcome to Frontpage Interview. Weiner: Thank you Jamie.

FP: First things first, what motivated you to write this book?

Weiner: My initial interest in human rights began at the age of 10 or 11 when my great-grandfather, then almost 90, came for an extended visit. Jacob, who spoke with a heavy Yiddish accent and was missing the index finger on his right hand, regaled me with stories about his childhood in Odessa during the reign of the Czar. He described what it was like for Jews living in fear of pogroms in which the police looked the other way as drunken anti-Semites roamed the streets murdering any Jews they came across. I was embarrassed to ask him what happened to his finger, but Jacob told me anyway. Like in other Jewish families, Jacob's parents feared the Czar's

Readers are requested to please mail contributions to: BAYT - re: *Israel News*, 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario. L4J 5V3
Annual Rates: Friend - \$36, Supporter - \$50, Benefactor - \$180. Dedications are welcome at \$120/week. Call (905) 886-3810 for further info.
See *Israel News* on the internet at www.bayt.org and www.frumtoronto.com Visit the *Israel News Blog* at www.frumtoronto.com/news/index.asp
Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the views of BAYT. Thank you to Continental Press for their ongoing support.

conscripted gangs who, without asking for permission, would kidnap boys of 12 and ship them off to serve in Siberia or the Far East. The term of service was 20 years and few ever returned to their families. To prevent this, Jacob's parents got him drunk and took him to the butcher who chopped off his trigger finger, rendering him unsuitable for army service. As I was then almost the age at which Jacob lost his index finger, I had nightmares about what he told me.

My specific interest in the plight of Christians living in Palestinian society is more recent. Eight years ago I met a Christian pastor who, knowing that I was a human rights lawyer, urged me to investigate the human rights abuses directed at Muslims who converted to Christianity. I knew nothing about this, and frankly doubted that anyone would victimize the adherents of the world's largest religion. But as I began to interview people most were reluctant to even meet me. If they agreed to reveal what they had suffered, they insisted that I refer to them by a pseudonym.

FP: Why do you think there has been an increase in Islamic fundamentalism in Palestinian society?

Weiner: The increase is a regional phenomenon. Indeed it would be hard to find any predominantly Muslim country in the Middle East, North Africa or even into Asia, where Islamic fundamentalism is not on the rise.

FP: Tell us about the persecution of Palestinian Christians and why their persecution became so much worse since the Oslo peace process began.

Weiner: These are acutely trying times for the Christian remnant residing in areas 'governed' by the Palestinian Authority. Tens of thousands have abandoned their holy sites and ancestral properties to live abroad, while those that remain do so as a beleaguered and dwindling minority. They have faced virtually uninterrupted persecution during the decade since the Oslo peace process began, living amidst a Muslim population that is increasingly xenophobic and restless. Chaos, nepotism, and corruption are endemic. Their plight is, in part, attributable to the influence of Muslim religious law (Sharia) on the inner workings of the Palestinian Authority. Moreover, the Christians have been abandoned by their religious leaders who, instead of protecting them, have chosen to curry favor with the Palestinian leadership.

My new book reveals and analyzes why this persecution, largely ignored by the international community, the media, and even the human rights organizations, has metastasized to the extent that it threatens the very existence of this 2000-year-old community. If current demographic trends continue Bethlehem runs the risk, in another 15 years, of becoming a Christian theme park for tourists -- with no "real" living Christians.

FP: Christian Palestinian women have suffered terribly. Can you tell us some of the details of their plight?

Weiner: Christian women suffer rampant sexual harassment, rape and even forced marriage. For example, Islamic militants have attempted to force Christian women wearing modern, revealing clothing to conform to the strict, modest Muslim dress code. In addition, Muslim men have attempted to rape Christian women, sometimes achieving their objective. These victims may, ironically, end up marrying the man who raped them because in their society they are regarded as unclean for marriage purposes.

Christian men risk being jailed when they intervene to rescue Christian women being attacked or insulted. The Muslim perpetrators get off scot-free because they have family members in the upper echelon of one (or more) of the 12 "security" forces.

FP: Why does the international community ignore the plight of Palestinian Christians?

Weiner: This is something I have never fully understood. This is a human rights issue par excellence, not merely a Christian issue.

Perhaps a partial answer is simple ignorance -- as only of late have a few courageous Christians begun to complain to the media and human rights groups. Scholars are beginning to address this tragedy as well. But really, there can be no justification, just excuses.

FP: Islamic militants want Christian women to dress more modestly yet at the same time they engage in sexual crimes (i.e. rape) against them. Isn't there some kind of pathological contradiction here in terms of what sexual morality is? So it is supposedly wrong for a woman to wear what she wants, but it is somehow ok to rape her? What gives here? And what kind of God does a person believe in when he is raping a woman and thinks that God is happy with, and supportive of, what he is doing?

Weiner: Yes, Islamic militants frequently complain that Christian women dress immodestly and they use that "justification" to harass, or in some cases, even to rape them. And this phenomenon is not by any means unique to the West Bank and Gaza -- it has been addressed in articles from far-flung countries with substantial Muslim immigration such as Australia and Norway.

modern fashion, Islamic law no doubt provides others with a handy excuse for criminal conduct. Of course Western courts would never accept the argument that women who don't wear the veil are announcing to the world that they are sluts or even prostitutes. In Western jurisprudence such a "justification" would simply not be tolerated.

By way of background, the Qur'an (Islam's holy book) is rife with gender and religious discrimination. Thus, for example, Muhammad taught that women are inferior to men, their testimony in court carries less weight, and their inheritance rights are halved. Marriage (or sexual relations) between Christian men and Muslim women is prohibited, and punishable by death. But a Muslim man is allowed to marry a Christian woman, even if he has abducted and raped her. Moreover, their offspring would be forced to accept Islam, and the woman would have no say if her husband engaged in polygamy by marrying up to three additional wives.

Historically Christian women taken captive by Muslims in warfare have been enslaved or worse. And even when there is no conflict, legally speaking it is virtually impossible to convict a Muslim man of raping a Christian woman. This follows from the fact that testimony of non-Muslim witnesses is inadmissible in Muslim courts. Furthermore, it is most unlikely that the Christian rape victim will be able to find four male Muslims willing to testify on her behalf that they had witnessed the penetration. Indeed, even leveling such a charge can backfire on the victim. That is, if a woman levels a charge of rape against a Muslim man and cannot prove it, she runs the risk of being severely punished for fornication or adultery, both ruthlessly punished by Islamic law.

FP: If the Palestinians received their own state, what kind of state do you think it would be? Would democratic rights be respected? How would Christians exist in such a state?

Weiner: Your question is profound. It forces me to think and worry. Certainly precedent is not encouraging. Former Chairman Yasser Arafat's (and current leader Mahmoud Abbas's) commitment to democratic values was/is vague at best. The Palestinian Authority's indoctrination of Palestinian children, from a very young age, to hate and kill Christians and Jews, for example, directly contributes to a culture that produces suicide bombers and cheers on September 11.

Moreover, the testimonies provided in my new book make it pointedly clear that lawlessness and anarchy have swept the West Bank and Gaza Strip in recent years. Gangs of Muslim thugs and thieves have created what a former Palestinian Cabinet Minister described as "total chaos." It is essential that the Palestinian Authority arrest these militants who, in their range of mafia-like conduct, frequently abuse and intimidate Christians.

But let's think optimistically for a moment. Clearly, if the Palestinian Authority were to adopt sound human rights policies and practices it would contribute immeasurably to the survival of the Christians, not to mention the success of any future peace process. Christian Palestinians' expectations regarding an improvement in their personal liberty deserves to be met, and should not be limited to empty promises and rhetoric.

FP: What can we do to help Christians being persecuted by Palestinians?

Weiner: In essence, the U.S. statute known as the International Religious Freedom Act was intended to enable the President and the State Department to use incentives and pressures to improve the lives of groups like the Palestinian Christians. But regrettably, because the U.S. wants to maintain friendly relations with countries that are crucial to its national security and policy interests, President George W. Bush may choose largely symbolic steps to oppose religious persecution abroad.

President Bush however, has made the support and spread of religious and political freedoms a cornerstone of his foreign policy during his second term. Clear evidence of this comes from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's trip to China earlier this year, during which she made a highly publicized visit to a church. In remarks she made to the press following her visit, Secretary Rice described how "religious communities are not a threat to transitioning societies; in fact, they are very often... a force for good, for stability and for compassion in societies that are undergoing rapid change." If the Bush Administration were to target the Palestinian Authority explicitly with its stated policy - which makes religious freedom part of the Bush Doctrine of democratization - it could only improve the situation for Palestinian Christians.

The United Nations is less likely to perform a useful role. The UN's feeble response to the gross human rights violations perpetrated by the Palestinian Authority further exemplifies the extent to which the desire for peace between Israel and the Palestinians supercedes the basic rights of individuals, especially the Christian minority, living under the Palestinian Authority. That is, the UN has taken the posture of compromising its role as protector of human rights in order to maintain a political role in negotiating

While some Muslim men may truly be offended by women's revealing

peace. Unfortunately, through the discretionary use of its own human rights doctrine, the UN has sacrificed not just its legitimacy and objectivity, but the human rights of minority groups such as the Palestinian Christians.

I am not suggesting that human rights concerns should trump considerations of peace making, national security or economic stability, but rather that the necessity of the realization that peace, national security, and economic stability often depend directly on the respect for human rights. This situation must be recognized by those who would otherwise willfully ignore the plight of Palestinian Christians in the name of peace. There cannot be peace in the Middle East until the Palestinians respect the rights of their internal minorities. This is no less important a prerequisite to negotiations than the oft-repeated demands of a cessation of terror.

The future of the Palestinian Christian community and any other religious minority living under the PA will rest on the potential for religious tolerance and the rejection of fundamentalist and archaic attitudes towards non-Muslims. As long as the constitution of the PA reflects the principles of Sharia law, it seems as though the emergence of religious tolerance will remain highly unlikely. As long as the PA continues to shirk its agreed-upon commitments to uphold the principles of religious freedom, the Palestinian Christians will continue to suffer. Furthermore, as long as the international community continues to ignore the human rights problems in the Palestinian territories, there will be no chance for a proper liberal democracy to emerge upon completion of the peace process. Instead, the world will be left with yet another Middle Eastern autocracy that abuses the most basic human rights values without regard for international norms.

FP: Justus Weiner, thank you for joining us today.

Weiner: Thanks for the opportunity. (FrontPageMagazine.com Dec 23)

Al-Qaeda in Gaza By Jamie Glazov

Frontpage interviews David Keyes, who assisted a former Israeli ambassador to the U.N. and specialized on terrorism at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. He recently returned from the Middle East where he co-authored academic papers with the former U.N. ambassador and the former head of Israeli military intelligence research and assessment. His latest paper, entitled "Al-Qaeda Infiltration of Gaza: A Post-Disengagement Assessment" was published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

FP: David Keyes, welcome to Frontpage Interview.

Keyes: Thank you for inviting me.

FP: There have been some disturbing reports that after Israel's disengagement from Gaza, al-Qaeda has crossed into that territory from Egypt. Can you tell us what you know about this disturbing possibility?

Keyes: The Israeli Ministry of Defense recently reported that in the wake of disengagement from Gaza, al-Qaeda members infiltrated the evacuated areas from Egypt. This is not the first time al-Qaeda has been spotted in Gaza. There is, in fact, increasing evidence of al-Qaeda influence and infiltration in Gaza and parts of the West Bank. Back in 2003, Israeli forces arrested Hamas terrorists after they returned from al-Qaeda training facilities in Afghanistan. That same year, two al-Qaeda operatives were recruited into Hamas in order to execute the Mike's Place suicide bombing in Tel Aviv. More recently, according to the Palestinian Authority, a new al-Qaeda group called "Jundallah" (Allah's Brigades) has formed in Gaza. In May 2005, this group executed its first attack against Israelis. Al-Qaeda's presence in Gaza has also been confirmed by one of Hamas' leading spokesmen, Mahmoud az-Zahar. Lastly, leaflets in Khan Yunis have been distributed by al-Qaeda's "Palestine Branch."

These are just a few of the recent developments regarding al-Qaeda in Gaza. As you can imagine, this does not portend well for the future of global counter-terrorism efforts. It is important to emphasize that this is not a danger to Israel alone. Rather, America and the entire free world are also threatened by the growing al-Qaeda presence in Gaza. Due to their global ambitions and uncompromising ideology, there is no safe place to hide from groups such as al-Qaeda. Nor is there a reasonable policy that will satisfy these fascists. Appeasement will only invite more terror and carnage. It is—quite literally—a fight to the death. New York, London, Madrid, Casablanca, Amman, Bali... this is only the beginning.

FP: What are Islamists up to in trying to infiltrate Gaza? What are their objectives?

Keyes: Naturally, they are attempting to destroy Israel. But that is certainly not all they seek. Radical Islamists, like al-Qaeda, hope to topple all Western governments, overthrow moderate Arab regimes, and impose the most severe restraints on all who disagree with their perverted world-view. They wish to replicate the Islamic conquests of the seventh century and restore the Caliphate. Wahhabism, specifically, typifies the most intolerant strain of Islam

and actively seeks to subjugate Shiites, homosexuals, Jews, women, Christians, and anyone who even remotely resembles a non-Wahhabi. They make no distinction between civilians and the military. Those who struck America on September 11th were not all that different from the Wahhabis who put 5000 Shiites to the sword in Karbala in 1802. An infidel is an infidel. We must not kid ourselves about the true nature of this threat. Nor can we delude ourselves into thinking that the problem will dissolve of its own accord, if only left alone.

FP: Tell us the consequences if al-Qaeda achieves a foothold in Gaza.

Keyes: The existence of al-Qaeda anywhere, poses a grave threat to nations everywhere. Before September 11th, the presence of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, sheltered by the Taliban, raised little concern throughout the world. This was true on the security, as well as the human rights, level. Think: How many anti-Taliban rallies were held world-wide to protest the brutal oppression of women in Afghanistan before 2001? No, it took Operation Enduring Freedom to find something to protest. Those who sat silent as an entire population was enslaved by the Taliban somehow found time to protest the war it took to destroy that dastardly regime. Incidentally, the same was true of Saddam's Iraq. The liberation of Iraq from the clutches of one of the worst tyrants of the 20th century, elicited more opposition than the Butcher of Baghdad's own fascistic 30-year rule. Strange times we live in.

On September 11th, however, the world witnessed that the delusions of a relatively small number of fanatics could have the deadliest of consequences. Though the message had been sent countless times prior, from the seizing of American hostages in 1979 through the 1993 World Trade Center bombing up to the 1998 attacks on our embassies in Africa, few choose to take the threat seriously. The world—America included—was asleep at the wheel. Terrorism had been treated as a criminal problem and people like Mullah Omar, Abdul Rahman Yasin, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had little more to fear than the wrath of an American prosecutor armed with an arrest warrant. Unfortunately, these types of people don't fear that type of response. What they have rightly come to fear is the U.S. 101st Airborne. Though bin Laden declared war on America in the mid-1990s, it was not until years later, after 3000 men, women and children had been slaughtered in a single morning that America decided to respond in kind. In short, we were not on war-footing against the forces of radical Islam and totalitarianism in the Middle East until it was far too late.

It would serve us well to remember that the deadly machinations of 9/11 were hatched largely in remote regions of Afghanistan, a far distance from America or Western civilization. It is in this context that the threat of al-Qaeda in Gaza should be viewed. Al-Qaeda has always sought security vacuums from which to operate, from Afghanistan in the 1980s to Somalia in the 1990s to the Waziristan provinces near the Pakistani border today. After the 2001 U.S.-led military intervention in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda dispersed, in large part toward the Kurdish regions of Iraq. Many al-Qaeda members fled to Iran as well. Since Operation Enduring Freedom, two-thirds of al-Qaeda's senior leadership have been killed or captured.

It is likely that al-Qaeda now believes it can capitalize on the disarray in Gaza. At a time when it needs all the help it can get, assistance from groups like Hamas, would be welcomed with open arms. Even a small number of al-Qaeda operatives in chaos-ridden Gaza poses a serious threat—especially if it continues unchecked and is allowed to metastasize. A former Chief of Staff of the I.D.F. recently remarked to me that the precise number of al-Qaeda members in Gaza is largely unimportant. Rather, their infectious ideology coupled with the dogged persistence of a few dedicated terrorists can wreak havoc upon the world.

FP: When the Israelis disengaged, they left supervision of the area in the hands of Egyptian and Palestinian security personnel. Isn't this a joke? Egyptian security might be more credible than Palestinian "security" -- if that is what we can even call it -- but this is really a tragic situation, no?

Keyes: Absolutely. Leaving oversight of sensitive entry-exit points in Gaza to the Egyptians and Palestinians was one of the worst upshots of Israel's disengagement. In effect, it allowed for massive amounts of arms and terrorists to enter Gaza and approach Israel's doorstep, with little or no interference. In the past few years, literally hundreds of smuggling tunnels have been discovered and destroyed by the I.D.F. Without the tireless efforts of the Israeli security forces, what awaits Gaza is all likelihood a mini "Hamas-stan," "Hezbollah-stan" or "al-Qaeda-stan," armed to the teeth, with the belief that enough violence can force Israel into retreat. Kassam rockets continue to reign down on Israel from Gaza with disturbing regularity. Though these rockets do not have the lethality of suicide-bombers, entire cities are held hostage by the frightful prospect of rockets randomly falling from the sky. Surely this is an untenable situation from Israel's point of

view.

As a result of disengagement, Israel has lost control over territory, which has proven to be a most vital asset in stopping terror attacks. As Israel withdrew from more and more territory during Oslo, and allowed the Palestinians to build up a terrorist infrastructure, violence and suicide bombings flourished. Doron Almog, the General who was in charge of Gaza from 2000-2003, estimates that 70% of hostile action in Gaza was prevented inside the territory through offensive Israeli action. Additionally, Israel has lost much of its intelligence gathering capability which, for the past many years, has helped stop countless suicide bombings. It is possible that the true effects of disengagement will not be seen for some time to come. The second intifada, for example, began several months after Barak's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon. Many believe that the former was encouraged by the latter. Sheikh Nasrallah called on his Palestinian brethren to rise up and follow Hezbollah's example of forcing Israel into retreat through armed struggle. Just a few days ago, Israel's Defense Minister pointed to a number of attempted suicide-bombings and predicted a major outbreak in Palestinian violence. Disengagement was an enormous security risk for Israel. Though there is little reason for optimism here, let us hope that the Palestinians will do more than they have done historically in cracking down on terrorism.

FP: What can the U.S., Israel and other allied nations do to counter act this terrible threat?

Keyes: First and foremost, Egypt must be pressured to a far greater degree to siphon off smuggling routes and underground tunnels. It is no secret that al-Qaeda has built up forces in the Sinai and are likely moving toward Gaza to escape the heavy-handed tactics of Egyptian security forces. Egypt has done a terrible job cracking down on these tunnels, and has likely been complicit to a degree as well. Former I.D.F. Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Yaalon stated not long ago that smoke was seen rising from Egyptian army posts after smuggling tunnels were blown up. Egypt receives about \$2 billion of aid from the U.S. yearly. Despite the fact that it is a dictatorship, holds only sham elections, intimidates candidates, assaults voters in the streets, restricts basic freedoms of speech and press, the money still flows. The absolute bare minimum Egypt should be expected to do is effectively patrol its border, much as Jordan has done to counter its al-Qaeda threat. One can only conclude that the U.S. is not putting nearly enough pressure on Mubarak—not only in the way of Gaza smuggling—but regarding democratic reform as well.

The Palestinian Authority is, unfortunately, also a part of the problem. Though some believe Abbas is completely different from Arafat, his recent actions suggest otherwise. First, he has continually stated that he will not disarm or confront radical groups like Hamas. This is undeniably a recipe for continued bloodshed in the region. America should cease funding this madness in the PA—especially if Hamas (which has killed many Americans as well) is allowed to run in Palestinian elections. Abbas also recently enacted a law to send money from the PA to families of suicide bombers. That is exactly what Arafat and Saddam Hussein once did. Actions such as these directly encourage suicide bombing, period. Though many have pinned their hopes for Middle East peace on Abbas, the question remains as to how he can provide direct financial support to encourage suicide bombing and simultaneously be considered a moderate leader who is an ally in the war on terror?

The PA continues to refuse to take any serious measures against terrorist groups emanating from the territory they control. Israel stands alone in shouldering this heavy burden. The I.D.F. should further pursue its policy of targeted assassination against terror leaders. Periodically, Israel stops this policy for an extended period of time, but this only allows terrorists to reconstitute their infrastructure and rejuvenate their ability to fight. It is my belief that the I.D.F should continue in the vein of when it eliminated Hamas leaders Rantisi and Yassin in rapid succession, without apology. When radical Palestinian groups attempt to negotiate a cease-fire, often their first demand is an end to Israeli targeted assassinations. This is a wonderful indicator that the policy is working. Terrorist groups spend the majority of their time avoiding assassination, instead of planning future attacks, and that is the way it should be. Furthermore, immediately after a suicide-bombing, it is not unusual to hear that in response, Israel has destroyed a Hamas or Islamic Jihad weapons making factory. My question is, if Israel knew where the weapons factory was, why didn't they take it out before the suicide-bombing? Would this not have been a more effective tactic? Where, after all, do terrorists get their weapons if not from weapons factories?!

FP: David Keyes, thank you for joining us today.

Keyes: It's been a pleasure. Thank you again for inviting me.

(FrontPageMagazine.com Dec 28)

The Irony of Miracles By Michael Freund

Thank God it is Hanukka this week - the holiday could not possibly have come at a more opportune or meaningful moment for the Jewish people.

Israel's elections may be just three months away, but the mud and dirt associated with campaigning have already begun to fly, filling the air and the news with a pall of internal dissension and political strife.

The Palestinians continue to fire rockets at Israel's towns and cities and to dispatch their youth on lethal missions of murder and mayhem, all of which are aimed at breaking our collective spirit and forcing us off still more of our land.

Neither Right nor Left seems able to offer much of a vision for the country's future, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish between them, while a seemingly record number of elected officials have either been indicted or are under investigation.

In light of all this, it is hardly surprising that some have started to wonder whether the dream that gave birth to this country might be running out of steam.

Yet it is precisely at times such as this, when our people are divided from within and under assault from without, that Hanukka takes on added resonance and significance.

Consider for a moment the principal ceremony of the holiday. The ritual centers around fire, which escalates in power and magnitude each night as we kindle additional candles over an eight day period.

I don't mean to be facetious, but the fact is that our nation's experience with fire over the centuries has been far from pleasant. From the flames which consumed the Temples in Jerusalem, to the medieval burning of the Talmud in places such as Paris and Venice, to the ovens of Nazi Europe, fire has served time and again to wreak havoc and destruction on the Jewish people.

In recent years, the shells of burned out buses on the streets of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and the inferno that consumed Joseph's Tomb in Shechem, served as painful reminders of our enemies' timeless, and searing, hatred.

IT ALMOST seems incongruous, then, to be using fire, of all things, to commemorate our deliverance from the Syrian-Greeks over two millennia ago. Couldn't some other less ironic instrument have been chosen instead?

But that is exactly the point, for it is irony which lies at the root both of the miracles of the past, and of those still yet to come.

Indeed, one of the central themes of Hanukka, as the special Al HaNissim prayer inserted into the liturgy states, is that God "turned over the strong to the weak, and the many to the few." In other words, what was incongruous, inconceivable and downright inexplicable nonetheless became reality.

And it is that theme - the irony of Jewish survival despite the odds - that embodies not only the story of Hanukka, but of our modern-day return and rebirth as a nation.

By striking a match and bringing a small flame into the world to light the Hanukka candles, we are sending a message of defiance. We are telling our enemies that all their efforts to consume us have and will come to naught, for we are still very much here.

And despite all the devastation they have wrought on us through the use of fire, we will not be deterred from kindling our own unique light, with which we will one day illuminate the world.

But there is, I think, still a deeper message to be found in Hanukka, one that is especially apt for a nation such as ours that finds itself so utterly divided.

When you next light the candles, take a few steps back and watch. If you look carefully, you'll see how the flames dance from side to side, each one moving with its own unique rhythm, flickering and sparkling independent of each other.

Some candles will burn faster, others will go slower. There are those which sit on the right side of the Hanukkia, and those whose place is on the left. Regardless, all come together at the base, which unites the disparate branches to fulfill one central purpose: creating a crescendo of light whose sum is greater than its parts.

That is the challenge facing Israeli society - to craft a framework in which each flame has room to dance individually while still remaining part of a cohesive whole. Obviously, this is far more difficult to achieve than merely kindling a few candles. But the lesson of Hanukka is that it can, and will, be done. (Jerusalem Post Dec 28)

The writer served as deputy director of communications & policy planning in the Prime Minister's Office under former premier Binyamin Netanyahu. He is currently chairman of Shavei Israel (www.shavei.org), a Jerusalem-based group that assists "lost Jews" seeking to return to the Jewish people.