

Are the Palestinians Starting a Religious War?

The upsurge of Palestinian violence against Israeli citizens – by young people, female as well as male – the resumption of rocket fire from Gaza into Israel, the insistence on using Islamic holy places as an excuse for violence, the continuing deliberate falsehoods about Israeli intentions, and the inflammatory rhetoric of the Palestinian leadership have brought a new unhelpful dimension into the Middle East.

One of the unexpected and remarkable developments in the Middle East has been the collapse of the state system with the chaos in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. At present only Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and Israel remain as states characterized by some form of national identity if not total solidarity, and capable and willing to take action. The Middle East monarchies, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Gulf Emirates are less able and less willing to do so.

However, the biggest failure to create some form of a coherent political entity, strong enough to control its population and seek peace with its neighbors, has been the Palestinian Authority, which has obtained non-member observer status at the United Nations and can fly its flag there, and which seeks to establish a Palestinian state.

That failure was shown by the inability of Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas to formulate a coherent policy, even a clear message, on the current outbreak of violence, as shown by his statement on October 8, 2015 that he would strengthen the hand of those defending the Al-Aqsa Mosque while insisting that he is against violence. He has allowed the Palestinian geopolitical differences with Israel to become transformed into a holy war, which in essence means no solution to the conflict can ever take place.

Events of the last few weeks show both the untruthfulness of Palestinian leaders about the real nature of differences with Israel and their inability to control their population. They have either allowed or been unable to control the cycle of random violence in Jerusalem and in the West Bank that has led to the deaths of both Israelis and Palestinians. Violence has flowed, leading some Palestinians to favor and even call for a third intifada, with the memories in mind of the second one that ended in 2005.

The lack of control by Palestinian authorities has allowed stabbings and murders of Jews to continue and has heightened the feeling of insecurity. It was understandable that Hamas, which has controlled the Gaza Strip since 2007, should encourage the violence and attacks on Israelis. It is disappointing that the Palestinian Authority and Fatah, supposedly more moderate, should also have been involved.

There is no equivalence between Israel and Palestinians in the present round of hostilities. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research issued the result of a poll showing that 57 percent of Palestinians favor an attitude of armed intifada. The same percentage believes that launching rockets against Israel from populated areas in the Gaza Strip is justified. Half of those surveyed believe that the PA should not engage in security coordination with Israel.

Besides this Palestinian refusal to engage in mutual security activity, two things are troubling: the official Palestinian praise for terrorists and the disloyalty of Israeli Arabs to their country, Israel.

It is a matter of concern that almost all the recent terrorist acts have been committed by youngsters who have been educated in schools run by the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian violence has gone far beyond any sane rationale. Indeed, the Union of Palestinian Teachers demonstrated in the main squares of the West Bank and Gaza to oppose "the despicable [Israeli]

attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque.” The fact that no such attack took place did not deter the union from calling for action so that “Netanyahu, the criminal, the gangs of his soldiers and robbers, will understand that the Palestinian people will sacrifice its blood for the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque.” As a result, students left their schools to participate on behalf of the mosque.

It is a constant and continuing disgrace that Palestinians, official leaders as well as parents, celebrate and express joy over children who have died after committing terrorist acts, as martyrs and heroes who have made an offering to the Al Aqsa Mosque. In what is a depraved perversion of their own religion, they suggest that these martyrs have carried out the highest religious achievement and will find favor in the eyes of Allah.

A poignant video showed the mother of Muhannad Halabi , who was killed after stabbing two Israelis, one of whom was a rabbi, and injuring the wife and two-year-old son of the other Israeli, in the Old City of Jerusalem on October 3, 2015, singing and celebrating his death as a martyr. Halabi’s father was proud of his son for defending war over land claimed to be Islamic.

Fatah Central Committee member Mahmoud Al-Aloul in a Facebook message on October 5, 2015 told his youthful readers to rise up against the enemies, continue the attacks, and be potential martyrs for beloved Palestine.

Israel is faced with an extraordinary lack of loyalty by its Arab citizens, especially the Israeli Arab members of Parliament. A new example is the speech by one Arab parliamentarian, Jamal Zahalka, supporting a “non-violent public struggle” opposing Israelis ascending to the Temple Mount, where the Al Aqsa Mosque is located. The tensions concerning the mosque have been deliberately manufactured by Palestinians, who should be seeking peaceful resolution of

contentious issues.

How to control the wave of Palestinian terror? The Palestinian violence has led Israel to impose a temporary partial curfew on the residents in villages and neighborhoods in east Jerusalem. It is pertinent to recall that a full curfew was imposed on those areas in December 1987, when the First Intifada broke out and lasted until 1992. This cannot be a permanent solution. This is the moment for the secretary-general of the United Nations, which has been so hospitable to the Palestinians, to call on the Palestinian leadership, even Abbas, now in the eleventh year of his four-year term, to renounce terrorism and to end the shameful way in which the Al Aqsa Mosque has been made by irresponsible Palestinians into a political football.

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