

Palestinians and Terror

by Michael Curtis

On June 8, 2016 two young Palestinians from the town of Yatta, near Hebron in the West Bank entered Israel illegally and attacked a popular shopping center in Tel Aviv, close to Israel's military headquarters, killing four civilians and seriously injuring nearly 20 others. Among the four murdered were an executive at Coca Cola's Israel headquarters, and a sociologist teaching at Ben-Gurion University.

Responsible political leaders starting with French President François Hollande condemned the "odious attack with the greatest strength," and said France will join Israel's war against terror. But the less responsible Palestinian political activists expressed opposite feelings. It was Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, who should not have surprised, but was "shocked the leaders of Hamas have chosen to welcome this attack and some have chosen to celebrate it."

Indeed, the attack was greeted with fireworks, singing, and waving flags in some Palestinian camps. The leader of Hamas, Ismael Haniyeh, posted several tweets praising the attack and hailed the murderers as heroes with "glory and salutation to the Hebronites." He was praying for the soul of the terrorist who was injured in the attack, and is now being carried for in an Israeli hospital. The ominous official Hamas statement reads, "The Ramadan act of heroism in Tel Aviv ...is the first of the surprises that await the Zionist enemy."

On the social media, Palestinians created hash tags, one "Carlo Bullet," the name of the submachine gun used in the Tel Aviv attack; the other "Ramadan Operation."

The supposedly more moderate Fatah, headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, now in the 11th year of his 4 year term, issued a statement that Israel "was reaping the repercussions of

choosing violence against the Palestinian people.”

Ban Ki-Moon, either optimistically or naively, asked the Palestinian leadership to live up to their responsibility to stand firmly against violence and the incitement that fuels it. That leadership had been silent over earlier attacks in Tel Aviv: on New Year's Day 2016 when three Israelis were murdered; in March 2016 in an attack when one American was killed and seven Israelis were wounded; and a third, a week before the June 8 attack.

What made Bar Ki-Moon believe that leadership might behave differently? He might remember and reconsider two facts: the United Nations gives funds to Hamas in the Gaza Strip; and the two terrorists of June 8 will be given, awarded, a month's salary by the Palestinian Authority.

Naturally, Israel is presently discussing a range of offensive and defensive steps by the police, military, and security services to try to stem the violence. They may include banning Palestinians from using Israel's only international airport, Ben Gurion airport.

Contrary to some naysayers, there is no loss of moral compass on basic questions of security in Israeli society. Israeli actions may be justifiably criticized, but they are in almost all cases a dramatic contrast to the violence and murders by Palestinians. Paradoxically, on the very day of the June 8 attack, Israeli authorities announced that travel restrictions ought be eased to allow a larger number of Palestinians in the west bank and Gaza strip to travel during the Muslim month of Ramadan. The measures were approved by the IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot and Major General Yoav Mordechai who observes civilian movement between Israel and the Palestinian areas.

The measures would allow 500 Palestinians from Gaza to attend prayers at the Al Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Hundreds of other Palestinians would be able to

travel between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to visit families. The mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, said his administration was investing in improving the city's appearance and in producing cultural events in honor of Ramadan. In view of the terrorist attack, it is likely that the relaxations of travel restrictions for Palestinians may be postponed.

It is enlightening to appraise the Palestinian resort to violence and terrorism, rather than any commitment to peaceful negotiations with Israel, in the context of increasing violence, conflict, and the dramatic increase of refugees and displaced persons in the Middle East, including some friendly to Palestinians.

The Global Peace Index of 2016 issued by the Institute for Economics and Peace ranks nations by assessing the level of peace, security, level of conflict, and militarization the 163 nations studied. In 81 countries, peaceful conditions have improved, while in 79 they have worsened, with 3 unlisted. The gap between the most and the least peaceful countries is widening. Moreover, the size of the deteriorations was larger than the improvements, and therefore the global average has declined. The greatest destabilizing factors were terrorism, political turmoil, and the wars in the worst areas.

Travellers will be delighted that the most peaceful countries in the world are Iceland, followed by Denmark, and Austria. Nor surprisingly, the least peaceful are Syria, South Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia. The most important factor in relation to the Palestinian terrorist activity is that most of the global deterioration is due to activities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), already the least peaceful region in the world, and remaining even worse because of terrorism, deaths from conflicts, and the number of refugees and displaced persons.

The worst country is Syria. Three of the five largest declines

in peace in the world are Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain. The situation there and in the Middle East has worsened because external parties have become increasingly involved in MENA internal conflicts. Disregarding the MENA area, the rest of the world's average peace levels would be higher

The world community should note that the effects of violence, in humanitarian and economic terms, have increased. The 2016 Global Peace Index calculates that in 2015 a record 59.5 million people, one in every 122 in the world, are either refugees, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. In Syria, it is more than 60 per cent. Deaths resulting from terrorism increased by 80 per cent from last year.

Economically, the costs of the lack of peace are immense. The Index Report suggests that the cost of violence in 2015 was \$13.6 trillion, about 13 percent of gross world product, or \$1,876 per person.

The Global Peace Index Report issues a call for the international community to promote peace and just societies. The so-called international community must issue a similar specific call for Palestinians to stop terrorist activities and murders of innocent Israeli civilians. Terrorism must not be allowed to prevail. Instead, the Palestinian community must find leaders, of whom there are presently none, who are agreeable to starting peaceful negotiation with Israel.