

# Enemies of Peace or Defenders of Palestine

Rivers on a roadmap without bridges

**I**n order to resolve the Palestinian problem two conditions must be met: one, the end of terrorist attacks on unarmed, but by no means innocent, Israeli citizens; and two, the creation of an independent Palestinian state free from the yoke of Israeli intervention. Surely, both these goals are achievable, but not without the consent of the Hamas and other Palestinian paramilitary groups.

The Hamas view the Israelis as cunning and ruse, and the US government as friends of their worst enemy. Everything I have read since I first began taking an interest in the Palestinian side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- there was a time when I viewed the Israeli state through far more benevolent eyes -- suggests that the Hamas are correct.

Of course, the Zionists point to Yasir Arafat and claim that he is a champion of deceit and not to be trusted, and major US news journals, like the New York Times, only recently refrained from calling the new Palestinian prime minister "Mahmoud Abbas called Abu Mazen", or "Mr. Abbas, who is also known as Abu Mazen". What the Zionists do not achieve through rabid acrimony, the New York Times achieves through targeted disdain.

Though after many years of obscurity the Palestinian voice is finally becoming heard, the means by which this was achieved has been both ignominious and heroic, and therefore easily exploited by Israeli propagandists. While hiding behind the veil of the Jewish holocaust, Israeli Zionists point their finger at Palestine's ignoble heroes, and thereby succeed in turning the world's attention away from Israel's daily crimes against humanity. The people of Palestine have been pillaged, raped, murdered, and humiliated for more than half a century by successive Zionist governments, and now the United States is demanding that they surrender their arms in exchange for peace, or be driven further into the ground by the Israeli government. Is this not asking too much?

The Palestinians are not without friends in the world, but the United States government is the only government in a position to restrain the Israelis from further Palestinian humiliation and a worsening of the Middle East crisis were the United States to wash its hands, and leave the Israelis, Arabs, and Palestinians to their own fate. Obviously this will not happen because the world's greatest deposit of petroleum fuel and US American access to it are on the table. Moreover with its new stake in Iraq it is unlikely that the United States can simply close its eyes to continued Israeli aggression. There is simply too much at risk.

In order for the road map to succeed, however, the United States

government and the USAmerican people must begin taking a more salubrious view of Palestinian terror.

Firstly, it must set aside its bankrupt notion that terror is an immoral, undemocratic defence against social injustice. Political terror, when it has the backing of the people in whose defence it is carried out, is both democratic and legitimate.

Democratic governments who engage in oppressive domestic and overseas operations must be held accountable for their actions. Direct confrontation by the oppressed against the overwhelming odds of foreign established powers is a recipe for defeat and further oppression. By attacking the unarmed electorates of oppressive foreign governments, Palestinian terrorists awaken those who are ultimately responsible for abusive government. Nothing could be more democratic! Governments who claim that political terrorism is attempting to destroy democracy are disingenuous and thrive on the ignorance of their own electorates with regard to foreign affairs.

Not only does political terrorism have the wide implicit support of the Palestinian people, but it has the explicit support of very large segments of the entire Islamic world. Political terrorism cannot and should not be viewed as an abstract criminal notion that is everywhere condemnable; rather, each case must be valued on its own merits and demerits. With regard to Palestine the merits of political terrorism far outweigh the demerits.

Secondly, no matter how heinous suicide bombings truly are, they are inherently fair and thus moral and partly justifiable.

According to international law only the armed should fight against the armed, and the unarmed should be allowed to seek and find refuge. International law also argues, however, that each nation has a right to self-determination and self-defence, and that the international community should intervene when nations can no longer defend themselves from attack by others. This was the legitimising claim of the first Bush Administration when it attacked Iraq in defence of Kuwait during the Gulf War.

The Palestinians have never been a match for Israeli power under the rules that guide international conflict, and "war games" are only fair when both sides enter into a conflict voluntarily, and each side has a reasonable chance of winning. Suicide bombings are a heinous, but effective means to level the playing field.

The average Palestinian is trapped by a system that is not only humiliating and egregiously unfair, but offers no escape. Though many Palestinians could probably leave Palestine, they do not, because leaving would result in feelings of guilt and haunting spiritual overseas imprisonment. Fear of the unknown and the absence of means are other good reasons for not seeking flight. Thus, the Palestinian is left with the uncomfortable choice of

living in constant humiliation or attacking the system that gives rise to his wounded pride. The suicide bomber chooses the latter and escapes his plight applauded by some, condemned by others, but in all cases a hero of self-sacrifice.

Neither war nor suicide are easily justifiable acts, and many would argue that neither are ever justifiable. Nevertheless, they do occur and from an historical point of view some outcomes are better than others. The Israelis are few, the Arabs and Muslims of our world are many. The Israelis are unjust. Common sense argues in favour of the Palestinians, and self-sacrificing suicide bombers.

Thirdly, by its very nature suicide bombings will not go away until the social conditions that give rise to their justification disappear. What conscientious leader can fully condemn the only effective tool that his/her people have to contradict the humiliating injustice imposed upon them by established foreign powers.

Suicide bombers need not be poor, stupid, or crazed to commit their heinous acts; they need only understand the injustice that their fellow countrymen and women are suffering, recognise this suffering as a part of their own, and have the desire and courage to bring an end to their own humiliation. In this sense they are far more noble and socially committed than their victims who claim innocence and condemn them for committing cowardly acts.

Those, who would have the clergy of the Arab world preach that suicide bombings and the killing of unarmed enemy are immoral, grossly underestimate the role of religion in the politics of human society. If war were such a terrible evil in the minds of those who hold religious office, then why has nearly every established religion sat on its hands, while national political leaders around the globe wage war in the name of their Gods?

Fourthly, one only surrenders to a superior force, when the cause for which one has been fighting no longer seems worthy, or alternatively the act of surrender leads to a better outcome than continued fighting. If that better outcome does not address the problems which gave rise to the original conflict; however, the outcome is probably not worth considering. Is this not the current position of the Hamas? Who can blame them for refusing to surrender their arms and munitions as a precondition for peace?

In short, the United States government must negotiate with the Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and others, or at least support -- either directly or indirectly -- negotiation between them and the Palestinian Authority. The principal of non-negotiation with political terrorists only works when these do not enjoy broad support among their people.

One may rightfully accuse the Hamas and others of coercing other

Palestinians to support them, but this would not be the end of the story. Not having to choose sides in a conflict is a luxury enjoyed only by those who are not at its centre. No, the Hamas were not elected by the Palestinian people, but Yasir Arafat has been sidelined by the Israeli and US governments and the Palestinian Authority seriously damaged. Who is left to defend Palestine? Palestinian paramilitary groups have filled the vacuum.

Surely the Hamas stance is extreme, even in the eyes of most Palestinians, but their active resistance against Israeli war crimes and relentless social abuse is not without virtue and applauded by many. Moreover, suicide bombings are only a small, but vital part of the Hamas' total effort. Refusing to negotiate with Yasir Arafat may placate Ariel Sharon, but refusing to acknowledge the need on the part of any Palestinian leader to negotiate with Palestine's paramilitary groups is a recipe for failure.

The Hamas are not the fedayeen. They work openly in Palestinian society hosting an entire network of schools, hospitals, and other non-governmental public institutions that are of direct benefit to other Palestinians. Moreover, their political influence among their people rivals that of the Fatah party whose power structure has been badly damaged by incessant Israeli bombings and equally damaging, but less violent bulldozing of the Palestinian government's infrastructure.

Would it be wrong to claim that every negotiated agreement between Yasir Arafat and the Israelis failed because the negotiations did not receive the full support of Palestine's paramilitary groups?

Fifthly, the United States can never be viewed by the Palestinians as a fair arbiter. The United States has long defied the world community in its support of the Israelis. The best the United States government can hope to achieve is to persuade Israel to perform that which it is reluctant to do, but is in its own best interest -- cede territory, recognise the existence of a Palestinian state, relinquish its autocratic claims on the city of Jerusalem, and compensate the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians it has displaced and to whom it refuses re-entry and return. In addition, the United States government can also apply pressure through various external channels -- primarily through Arab governments with a vital interest in a permanent settlement of the conflict -- on defiant Palestinian groups to recognise Israel's right to coexist on former Palestinian land.

US observers standing between the Israelis and Palestinians will always be viewed by Palestinians with circumspect, and are even likely to become priority targets should push come to shove.

Sixthly, so long as the Hamas view the system of injustice to be

that of the Israeli nation and its staunch ally, the United States government, they will never accept the continued existence of the Zionist state. In their mind destroying the state of Israel and that of the United States is synonymous with destroying the source of their humiliation. Thus, the Israeli and US governments must provide visible and substantial evidence that both justice and continued Israeli existence can be achieved.

Though balance should be the ultimate goal, balance can only be achieved by recognising the obvious and persistent imbalance that gave rise to the conflict in the first place -- Israeli military and economic superiority, and channels of influence. In short, the initiative must come from the Israeli side, and the United States government must compel the Israeli government to take it. Token gestures, such as forcing Israeli citizens to abandon "illegally" occupied outposts, do not properly address the true nature of the imbalance. Complete withdrawal from territories occupied since the beginning of the most recent intifada would be far more meaningful, and much more likely to produce the desired result -- a temporary and eventual permanent ceasefire on the part of Palestinian paramilitary forces.

Finally, one may applaud President Bush and the US government for becoming involved in the conflict, but unless the above six points are acknowledged and acted on, the so-called road map will become just another piece of paper blowing in the wind of diplomatic farting. There are those who struggle within themselves to achieve peace and those who struggle against others to obtain justice. Those who preach peace while condemning those who struggle for justice cannot be taken seriously. Just a week or so ago the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, labelled the Hamas "enemies of the peace". Even more recently President Bush has demanded that the Hamas and others surrender their arms.

What makes the hypocrite different from the fool is his knowledge of his own hypocrisy. The self-righteous are a kind of fools, because they are blind to their hypocrisy. Neither can be trusted; both are a threat to common sense and mutual understanding.

R. A. Stegemann  
Hong Kong, 28 June 2003  
word count: 2151