

Terrorism in the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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1. Introduction

Terrorism is politically motivated violence directed against noncombatants. It is no doubt as ancient as organized warfare itself, emerging as soon as one society, pitted against another in the quest for land, resources, and dominance, was moved by a desire for vengeance, or, found advantages in operations against ‘soft’ targets. While terrorist violence has been present in the conflict between Jews and Arabs over Palestine for over eighty years, the prevalence of the rhetoric of ‘terror’ to describe Arab violence against Israeli and Western targets, is a more recent phenomenon. This rhetoric has fostered the popular perception that Arab terrorism is the central problem in the Middle East crisis, and that once solved, progress can be made on other issues.

Nothing could be more illusory. The Western obsession with Arab terrorism not only overlooks the fact that terrorist activity has been reciprocal, but, more generally, that attempts to remove an effect without touching its causes are utterly futile. Terrorism between Arabs and Israelis is the *product* of deep divisions, entrenched strategies, and fundamental grievances, and it will not disappear so long as both sides cling to their present political ambitions and convictions. No informed discussion can ignore its historical and political context. At the same time, terrorism is the most noticeable and tragic aspect of a bitter struggle, and any serious attempt to grasp the goals, methods, and passions of either party must realize that it has been central in giving the conflict the shape it has.

2. The Core of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs is fundamentally a struggle over land, over who is to reside in, own, and possess sovereignty over the territory that is variously called *Palestine* and *Israel*. Prior to 1948, the conflict concerned the entire 10,000 square mile area of Palestine as defined in the 1922 League of Nations Mandate, but since 1967, the conflict has been focused on the remaining 22 per cent of the area that was not incorporated into the state of Israel as delimited in the 1949 armistice agreements. Anyone familiar with this conflict knows that more than land is at stake; both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs are conscious that their very identity is bound up with that land, its terrain, cities, villages, and monuments. Both have been jealous in their attachments and have denigrated the claims of the other.

The reasons for these mutual attachments reach far back into the history of both peoples, but the conflict dates from the inception of the *Zionist* movement in late 19th century Europe that called for the establishment of a Jewish state in the historic homeland of the Jewish people, Palestine. From the outset, Zionism faced a moral problem, namely, that its vision of a Jewish state *with a decisive Jewish majority* could be fulfilled only at the expense of another people, the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. In 1897, Palestine contained approximately 600,000 people, 95 per cent Arab and 5 per cent Jews. Faced with this imbalance, how was the Zionist vision to be achieved? Zionist leaders like Theodor Herzl came to favor a two-step program for demographic change: first, to promote massive Jewish immigration into Palestine, and second, to encourage the emigration of the Arabs into the neighboring countries.¹

In late 1917, the British, whose forces now controlled Palestine, pledged to facilitate establishment of a Jewish national home and open the doors of Palestine to Jewish immigration.

As a result, Jews went from 8 per cent of the population in 1918 to 20 per cent by 1931, and by 1948, after three decades of British rule, Jews made up one-third of the two million people in Palestine.² Inducing the Arabs to emigrate proved more difficult. Official Zionism advocated peaceful coexistence with the Arabs, insisting that there was ample room in Palestine for both peoples, that the Jews had no intention of dispossessing people of their property and that the Arabs stood to benefit by cooperation with the Jews. But the *maximalist* idea—that there is no room for two peoples sharing sovereignty in Palestine—predominated among Zionist leaders, such as Chaim Weizmann, Israel’s first president, and David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister (Morris 1999, pp. 140-1), and with it, the prospect of forcibly *transferring* the Arabs came to be seen as the ‘obvious and most logical, solution to the Zionist’s demographic problem’ (Morris 2001, p. 40).³

In 1918, it became clear to the British authorities in Palestine the Arabs were opposed to Zionism and would resort to violence in order to stop a Jewish state from being established. One Palestinian, Pasha Dajani, summed up the Arab attitude in 1919: ‘If the League of Nations will not listen to the appeal of the Arabs, this country will be come a river of blood’ (Morris 1999, p. 91). Men like Ben-Gurion understood this as well and began preparing the Jewish community for armed conflict and forcible transfer (Morris 2001, pp. 42-3). ‘I am for compulsory transfer,’ he declared, ‘I don’t see anything immoral in it.’⁴ His view was echoed by his political rival, Vladimir Jabotinsky, who stated that intentional demographic change was a necessary evil that was neither unprecedented nor a historical injustice (Gorny 1987, p. 270).

Forcible removal of a population constitutes violence against civilians, and hence, the mechanism of demographic change that came to be pursued by Zionist leaders was—and continues to be— *terrorism*. Attempts at transfer would expectedly evoke outrage, resistance and

similar terrorism by Arabs against Jews. Jabotinsky predicted this, but seeing no other alternative, he insisted that the tit-for-tat violence was something that the Jewish community had to endure. Since the *end* of Zionism is moral, he contended, so are the *means* necessary to achieve it, even if this requires an ‘iron wall’ of military might to prevail against Arab opposition. In a nutshell, this reasoning is the most simple and straightforward Zionist attempt to show that terrorism is not only rational, but also morally justifiable.

3. Terrorism

While all terrorism is deliberate, politically motivated use, or threat, of violence against noncombatants, there are different kinds depending on facts about the agents and the modes and mechanisms whereby harm is threatened or carried out. Terrorism is *strategic* if violence or coercive threat is part of a plan to achieve a political goal, but *reactive* if it derives only from an emotional response to politically induced grievances, e.g., vengeance. Of course, since strategy and emotion can be jointly operative, and actions can have multiple agents, a given act might manifest both modes of violence.

A second contrast concerns the causal route whereby harm is inflicted. An act of *direct violence* consists in assault or an immediate threat to do so, for example, killing or maiming someone or giving the orders to do so. However, violence can be committed by other means, say, by imprisoning people, depriving them of essentials, like clean water, food, or necessary medical supplies, or by damaging the institutional fabric of their society, e.g., hospitals, schools, factories and businesses, through legal and other authoritative mechanisms. States, in particular, accomplish such *structural terrorism* by forcibly implementing or impeding institutions, laws, policies, and practices that result in harm to noncombatants.

A final contrast depends upon the identity of the perpetrators. In Western media, ‘terrorism’ is regularly used to depict the violence of individuals or groups pursuing specific political agendas, not that inflicted by states or governments.⁵ This restriction is questionable as a reportive definition since, etymologically, the root, ‘terror’, implies nothing about its cause, and, historically, ‘terrorism’ has been applied to states. Moreover, given that the term is *the* expression of choice for illegitimate violence, exempting states from being agents of terrorism yields an unfair rhetorical advantage to established governments, especially since states usually inflict greater harm upon civilians than do non-state agents. One could always yield this point and employ a different term to describe politically motivated violence against civilians by states, but apart from propaganda concerns, we may speak of the latter as ‘state-terrorism’ (e.g., Ashmore 1997, Primoratz 2004).

4. ‘A Miraculous Clearing of the Land’

It is idle to speculate on who initiated terrorist violence or in describing one side as engaging in ‘terrorism’ and the other in ‘retaliation’. In the broad perspective, the Zionists have been the aggressors in the territorial conflict,⁶ but, from the outset, both sides have been quick to resort to the gun to settle differences. Already in 1921, 62 Arabs and 90 Jews were killed in intercommunal violence (Hirst 1984, pp. 48-55), and in 1929, fighting in Jerusalem and surrounding towns resulted in the deaths of 120 Arabs and 133 Jews, including 64 native Palestinian Jews in Hebron (Smith 2001, p. 130; Morris 1999, p. 114). Although a British commission blamed demonstrations by Zionist factions advocating a Jewish state, Britain continued to promote Jewish immigration and land settlement.

By 1935, Jewish immigration reached 60,000 per year, and as land sales to Jews increased, Arab tenant farmers were turned off the lands and forced into cities under deteriorating economic conditions. Their discontent was fertile ground for the revolutionary ideas of men like Sheikh Izzeddin Al-Qassam, who was among the first to call for an Islamic-based resistance to Zionism. His 'martyrdom' in November 1935 sparked a three-year campaign of attacks upon Jewish settlements and British forces. In response, some Jews formed an underground group, the *Irgun Zvai Leumi*, in 1937. Its ideologue, Jabotinsky, urged 'retaliating' against Arabs who had targeted Jews and Jewish property, and denied that there was a choice between pursuing 'bandits' and punishing a hostile population. Instead, the choice is between 'retaliating against the hostile population or not retaliating at all' (Schechtman 1961, p. 485). The Irgun planted bombs in Arab marketplaces that killed 77 Arabs in three weeks in 1937 (Smith 2001, p. 143), and in the summer of 1938 massive marketplace bombs in Haifa, Jerusalem and Jaffa killed over 100 more Arabs; the most devastating bomb killed 53 Arabs in Haifa. Arabs began to imitate these actions by bombing Jewish civilians. Approximately 5000 Palestinians and at least 463 Jews were killed in the fighting before British forces crushed the Arab revolt in 1939.

Britain abandoned its policy of establishing a Jewish State in 1939, and began restricting further Jewish immigration, bringing itself into direct conflict with the Jewish community after World War II. Jewish underground groups once again employed terrorism, and in the single most spectacular incident, the Irgun, under the leadership of Menachem Begin, bombed the British Headquarters in Jerusalem's King David Hotel killing about 90 people, many of them civilian workers.

In November 1947, after the U.N. General Assembly recommended partitioning Palestine into two states, terrorism between Arabs and Jews occurred with greater frequency and on a

larger scale than ever before. On April 9, 1948, the Irgun and Lehi militias attacked the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin on the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem killing about 120 Arab villagers, and parading the survivors in Jerusalem while urging the Arab residents to flee. Arabs exacted revenge a few days later by killing some 70 Jewish medical and university personnel in an ambush of a convoy headed to Mount Scopus. But Deir Yassin and other similar massacres precipitated a flight of over 300,000 Arab villagers and townspeople from their homes into what they felt would be safer areas (Morris 1987, 2001). By the time the state of Israel was declared on 14 May, the better armed and better organized Jewish forces had crushed the Palestinian resistance, and after soldiers from five Arab countries entered the fray, more Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). When an armistice was signed in 1949, Israel controlled over 77 per cent of Palestine and approximately 750,000 Arabs had fled or been expelled from what was now Israel.⁷

Here was strategic terrorism at its most effective; through violence, Zionists had taken a decisive step forward in solving the demographic problem and ensuring a decisive Jewish majority in the newly-formed Israel. After the war had ended, Menachem Begin wrote, 'Of the about 800,000 Arabs who lived on the present territory of the State of Israel, only some 165,000 are still there. The political and economic significance of this development can hardly be overestimated' (Begin 1951, p. 164). For Chaim Weizmann, the exodus of the Arabs was 'a miraculous clearing of the land: the miraculous simplification of Israel's task' (Hirst 1984, p. 143).

5. 'The Gun and the Olive Branch'

With three-quarters of their homeland taken, and well over half their numbers in refugee camps, the Palestinians were initially too stunned and scattered to mount any attempt at reconquest or reprisal. Apart from sporadic cross-border raids, an organized Palestinian resistance did not emerge until the 1960s. Armed violence by *fedayeen* (those who sacrifice themselves) accelerated after the 1967 war as Palestinians realized that they could not wait for Arab governments to solve their political problems. While Yassir Arafat's *Fatah* initially claimed that it would not target Israeli civilians, especially not women and children, this guideline was often ignored. One Fatah fighter, captured in 1968, told an Israeli court that he had been order to sabotage everything he could. Asked whether that meant the killing of children too, he replied, 'Yes, to destroy everything, because we haven't forgotten Deir Yassin.'

As attacks against the Israeli military proved ineffective and PLO fighters were pushed out of the West Bank in 1968, some Palestinians resorted to more sensational terrorist tactics, including rocket attacks against Kiryat Shemona, airplane hijackings, and most spectacularly of all, taking Israeli athletes hostage during the 1972 Munich Olympics in which nine Israelis and five Palestinian *fedayeen* died. In 1974, there were two highly publicized attempts to take Israeli hostages and exchange them for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, resulting in the deaths of eighteen Israelis in Kiryat Shemona, twenty young Israelis in Ma'alot, and the six Palestinian *fedayeen*.

Palestinian violence had its own Machiavellian logic. Despite being exiled through a massive injustice, Palestinians, like all other peoples, retain rights of self-defense and self-determination in their traditional homeland. In an imperfect world, these rights cannot be won

peacefully, and facing a vastly superior Israeli military, they must demonstrate that they can do enough damage by other means so that their grievances will be addressed and their rights secured. Terrorism would achieve three important intermediary steps in working towards this goal. *First*, by demonstrating an ability to strike against their enemies, a sense of unity and confidence would be heightened within their own community, thereby strengthening its will to resist. *Second*, through violence against civilians, the Israeli sense of security would be undermined and Israeli leaders would be forced to consider the high price of continued occupation (Hroub 2000, p. 248). *Third*, through spectacular violence, the Palestinians could draw attention to their cause, neglected for over two decades by the world community. Here, they succeeded dramatically; probably some 500 million people witnessed the events in Munich on television as ‘the Palestinian people imposed their presence on an international gathering that had sought to exclude them’ (Abou Iyad 1981, pp. 111-12).

Though repelled by their tactics, people began to ask why the Palestinians had suddenly appeared on the world stage in so violent a manner. What are their grievances? What are their aims? Having grabbed the spotlight, in 1974 the PLO indicated willingness to work towards a negotiated resolution of the conflict. They were granted official recognition in many of the world’s capitals, and the PLO leader, Arafat, addressed the UN General Assembly, declaring that he carried a ‘freedom fighter’s gun’ in one hand, and warning not to let the ‘olive branch’ in his other fall to the ground. Despite the setbacks of the 1980s, the PLO emerged as a partner in the negotiations that led to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. As Menachem Begin had done fourteen years earlier, Arafat underwent the miraculous metamorphosis from strategic terrorist to Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

6. Structural Violence in the Occupied Territories

In the 1967 war, the remainder of Palestine came under Israel's control and remained so ever since. Israel argues that its presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is necessary to ensure its security in the absence of an overall peace settlement in the Middle East. 'Security' has largely been a ruse, however, for successive Israeli governments have embarked upon a massive transformation of these territories by progressively confiscating both public and private lands for the expansion of Jewish settlement.⁸ Currently, satellite images show 282 Jewish built-up areas in the West Bank, including east Jerusalem and 26 in Gaza, excluding military sites. The settlements surround every major Palestinian population center, are connected to each other and to Israel via a road network spanning almost 400 kilometers, and are situated to ensure Israeli authorities maximal surveillance and control over movement in the territories. Some of the settlement blocs sit astride major West Bank aquifers from which Israel currently draws one-third of its water supply. They are home to over 400,000 Jewish settlers, of which nearly 200,000 are in the neighborhoods surrounding East Jerusalem, while another 7000 settlers live in the Gaza Strip. While most settlers are ordinary Israelis taking advantage of Government subsidized housing, a good many are armed zealots who openly advocate expulsion of the Palestinians and justify it in religious terms (see Friedman 1992).

The settlements are weapons in a campaign of structural terrorism against the Palestinians, ultimately aimed at incorporating the territories, or large segments thereof, into the Jewish state. To maintain and protect them, Palestinians have been subjected to a vast institutional framework that features economic control, land expropriation, destruction of property, and regulation of Palestinian movement. Their protests against this creeping usurpation of their land and restrictions on their lives have been routinely met with more direct forms of violence that have

included house demolitions, destruction of trees, curfews, deportations, detention without trial, torture, and killings. For example, during the first Palestinian *intifada* (the shaking off) 1987-93, at least 1,283 Palestinian civilians were killed by the IDF, over 130,000 were sent to hospitals with injuries, over 2,500 houses were demolished, and thousands of trees were uprooted. 271 of the Palestinians fatally shot were 16 years of age or younger, and this age group constituted almost 40 per cent of the total number of Palestinians injured.⁹ The *intifada* and the iron-fisted response with which it was met, would be unintelligible apart from the underlying structural terrorism.

7. The Reign of ‘Terror’

Because terrorists are perceived as breaking the *jus in bello* principle of *discrimination*, the term ‘terrorism’ and its cognates have acquired an intensely negative connotation in contemporary discourse. This has provided governments with a powerful rhetorical tool for discrediting those who forcefully oppose their policies. The ‘terrorist’ label automatically places actions and agents outside the norms of acceptable behavior, and consequently erases any incentive an audience might have to question the nature of their grievances and the possible legitimacy of their demands.¹⁰ The rhetoric effectively stifles political debate, repudiates calls for negotiation, and, consequently, paves the way for state-sanctioned violence.¹¹

The Palestinians’ resistance fell victim to this rhetoric, for while their violence succeeded in placing their cause on the world agenda, too often their complaints were overshadowed by the sensationalism of their deeds. In the minds of many, disgust with the means outpaced sympathy with the plight of Palestinian refugees and trumped the patience needed to understand the root causes of the conflict. As the 1970s wore on, and various leftwing groups in Europe and

elsewhere made headlines with similar sorts of violence, the ‘terrorists’ came to be viewed as a new type of barbarians whose willingness to hijack airplanes, to take hostages, and carry their struggle into foreign lands placed them outside the bounds of civilized behavior.

Israeli officials quickly employed the rhetoric of ‘terror’ to deflect attention away from their own controversial policies in the occupied territories and towards the more spectacular reactions by Palestinians. They realized that it would be to their advantage to portray ‘Arab terrorists’ as the enemies not only of Israel, but of the entire Western world, and to depict the causes of their actions as something other than victimization by Israel. A prime example of this is a 1986 book entitled *Terrorism: How the West Can Win* by former Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who wrote that the ‘root cause of terrorism lies not in grievances but in a disposition toward unbridled violence’ traceable to ‘certain ideological and religious goals’ that ‘demand the shedding of all moral inhibitions’ (p. 204). In calling for a vigorous political, economic, and military response to any act of terrorism against ‘the West’, Netanyahu insisted that ‘there is certainly no moral imperative to confine the retaliation to the actual perpetrators,’ and that the only way to combat terrorism is ‘to weaken and destroy the terrorist’s ability to consistently launch attacks,’ even at the ‘risk of civilian casualties’ (pp. 202-5).¹²

By classifying Palestinian resistance to Israeli policies as ‘terrorism’ and by portraying ‘terrorists’ as monsters unworthy of moral dialogue, it became easier for Israel to implement the ‘reprisal’ policy enunciated by Ben-Gurion in 1948 by which ‘there is no need to distinguish between guilty and innocent’ (Ashmore, 1997, p. 107).¹³ Three days after the Munich killings, for example, Israeli air raids took the lives of between 200 and 500 Arab villagers (Hirst 1984, pp. 251, 314). After Ma’alot, Israeli air raids killed 200 people in Lebanese villages and Palestinian refugee camps, and after a bus hijacking in central Israel on March 1978 resulted in

the deaths of 38 Israelis, the IDF occupied southern Lebanon killing over 2000 people in the process and causing several thousand Lebanese to flee northward (Lilienthal 1982, p. 388).

In 1982, in an effort to crush the PLO, Israel invaded Lebanon again, taking the lives of nearly 20,000 Lebanese and Palestinian, 90 per cent of them civilians. The most devastating use of the 'terrorist' rhetoric to justify terrorism occurred in early September after PLO fighters had been evacuated from West Beirut. Israeli officials contended that some '2000 terrorists' remained in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in southern Beirut, a claim repeated in the Israeli press. On 15 September, three days after the assassination of the Lebanese Phalangist leader, the Israeli Defense Minister, Ariel Sharon, authorized entry of members of the Lebanese militia into the camps that were surrounded by Israeli tanks. For the next 38 hours, aided by Israeli flares at night, the militiamen raped, tortured, mutilated and massacred Palestinian civilians, killing between 2400 and 3000 (Hirst 1984, pp. 422-8, Ang 1989). Though Sharon was subsequently removed as Defense Minister because of 'indirect responsibility' for the massacre, four years later he was able to set a new standard forchutzpah in op-ed piece entitled 'It's Past Time to Crush the Terrorist Monster,' in which he called upon Western countries and Israel to stage a coordinated 'war on terrorism' through pre-emptive strikes on 'terrorist bases' and sanctions against the state supporters of terrorism.¹⁴

Twenty years later, the rhetoric of 'terror' was once again a prelude to violence against Palestinians, as Sharon unleashed the IDF to destroy the 'terrorist infrastructure' in the occupied territories. What transpired was a wholesale assault not only upon militants, but also the political, cultural, informational, and medical institutions that form the core of Palestinian civil society. The events of 11 September 2001 made it easier to cloak Israeli state violence as part of the on going 'war on terrorism.' Although human rights groups around the world, including in Israel,

accused the Israeli Government of military excesses and war crimes, the rhetoric dominating the mainstream media led the Israeli public and the American Congress to approve of Sharon's offensive against 'terrorism.'

The rhetoric of 'terror' is itself a mechanism of state-terrorism, enabling Israel to consolidate its hold on the territories by emphasizing the need for Israel's 'security' in the face of Arab terrorism, while submerging any consideration of the Palestinians' own security concerns. Because terrorists are portrayed as irrational beings devoid of a moral sense and beyond all norms, Israel has found it easier to justify military responses that deface the distinction between the agents of terrorist actions and the populations from which they emerge. The logic of the strategy is simple: to get away with a crime, demonize your victims.

8. Terrorism begets Terrorism

In February 1994, a settler from Kiryat Arba, Baruch Goldstein, massacred 29 Palestinian worshippers at the Ibrahimiyya mosque in Hebron. His suicidal terrorism was both reactive and strategic, for, while motivated to avenge the deaths of Jews at hands of Arabs, Goldstein also wanted to undermine the Oslo peace process that he feared would lead to a withdrawal from the territories. His action precipitated a like response by Palestinian militias such *Hamas*. Founded in 1988, Hamas initially confined its resistance to what it regarded as legitimate military targets in the occupied territories, but after the Goldstein massacre and the failure of the Israeli Government to respond to its May 1994 offer of an 'armistice' in which civilians would be immune from violence (Hroub 2000, p. 246), Hamas launched a wave of suicide bombings that took the lives of scores of Israeli civilians.

Like Jewish zealots, Hamas offers a religious justification for violence, but it also justifies its actions through the familiar self-defense argument. The Zionists are intent upon dispossessing the Palestinians of the remaining 22 per cent of their homeland, and its occupation is 'downright terrorism' (Alexander 2002, p. 346). By all laws, human and divine, people have a right to defend themselves against those who employ violence to dispossess them of their homeland. Since appeals to justice and the world's conscience are futile in stopping determined aggressors, and since attacks against the Israeli military are insufficient to stop Israel's expansionism or force the rest of the world to intervene, then making Israel suffer by striking at civilian targets is the principal mechanism Palestinians have left for self-defense. The effect of striking at 'the most vulnerable spot in the Zionist body' will be to exhaust Israel and weaken both its tourism and immigration programs. Like Goldstein, the terrorism of Hamas has been reactive as well as strategic, for Hamas routinely maintains that specific operations are carried out to avenge massacres and assassinations (Hroub 2000, pp. 245-51).

Hamas has been at the forefront of armed resistance in this second intifada after the collapse of the Oslo peace process. Sharon's visit to the Jerusalem mosques on 28 September 2000 began a round of terrorism by both sides that eclipsed any previous level of violence seen during the previous 33 years of occupation. Young Palestinians, finding little hope for improvement in their situation, began volunteering for suicide missions, and in time, women joined the ranks the martyrs. 'She is the first, but not the last,' said a teacher who knew the first of these women. 'You shouldn't think we don't love life and don't want to live. We do this only because it is the last thing we can do.' A student of psychology at the Islamic University in Gaza put it this way: 'The arbitrary killing that we've experienced during the intifada has caused every young person

to say, “If in any case I am destined to die, why shouldn't I die with dignity?” (*Ha'aretz*, 17 July 2002).

Facing a greater proportion of armed Palestinians in this second intifada, the IDF has responded with more firepower than ever before, employing Merkava tanks, F-16 fighter jets, and Apache attack helicopters. Implementing Sharon's directive to eliminate the 'terrorist infrastructure' has involved it more deeply in a war against a civilian population (*Ha'aretz*, 9 March 2003). In the process, the casualty rates have increased on both sides, this time with more deadly ratios from the Israeli point of view. In the first intifada, there were eleven dead Palestinians for every dead Israeli, but during the second, this figure has approached a three to one ratio.¹⁵ The Israeli Government justifies its violent response by invoking its right to defend its citizens from the threat of Palestinian terrorism, and the only effective means for this is a massive military crackdown in the form of checkpoints, curfews, house to house searches, detentions, interrogations, house demolitions, and targeted killings. Yet, just as Hamas had its Palestinian critics, some Israelis have dissented from this policy, including members of the Israeli military (*Ha'aretz* supplement, 14 September 2001), and four former heads of Shin Bet (Israel's domestic security service), who claimed that the Sharon's Government will 'gravely damage' Israel unless it stops its 'immoral treatment' of the Palestinians (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 14 November 2003). At the end of the IDF offensive in late April 2002, the Israeli Defense Minister ben-Eliezar admitted that 'it is impossible to eradicate the terrorist infrastructure,' and that 'military actions kindle the frustration, hatred and despair that are the incubators for the terror to come' (Zunes 2003, p. 149). More than a year later, this view was echoed by the Israeli Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Yaalon, who claimed that that Israel's military tactics against the Palestinian population were fomenting explosive levels of 'hatred and

terrorism' that might become impossible to control (Washington Post 31 October 2003).

9. Concluding Observations

Moral conjectures are nearly unavoidable in any philosophical scrutiny of terrorism. The suggestions I offer are preliminary, since a thorough moral assessment requires a more extensive study than allowed here. Still, I think that the facts point to the following conclusions.

First, the burden of ending this tragic violence lies primarily with the stronger party, Israel, especially since the Palestinian leadership and the Arab states have repeatedly expressed their willingness to accept a compromise that would recognize Israel in exchange for a Palestinian state in the territories. Because of this, the maximalists in charge of Israeli policy and their supporters in the United States and elsewhere, are chiefly to blame for the ongoing cycle of violence. The Jewish desire for security is a powerful one, and fully understandable in light of the prejudice, discrimination, and persecution that Jews have experienced, but it is doubtful that long-term security is best achieved through continued brutality.

Second, the rhetoric of 'terror' obscures the causes of violence and stifles the sort of critical examination and humanitarian concern that might create political pressure for a negotiated solution. Since news reports influence decision-makers and those who place them in power, the obligation of the media is to produce accurate and unprejudiced representations of what has happened. Because a term like 'terrorism' suggests an unlawful and immoral act in a way that 'retaliation', 'resistance' or 'self-defense' do not, then to use the former in labeling the actions of one party and the latter in describing the same actions of another, is an obstacle to understanding. To reach sound judgments about this conflict, we are better off using terms like 'terrorism' clearly and consistently, or avoiding them altogether.

Third, four powerful emotions, *humiliation*, *outrage*, *vengeance*, and *hopelessness*—derived from a sense of justice and honor, and from the experience of more than 36 years under occupation—ensure that Palestinians’ violence will continue if their situation is not rectified. And, when members of a society repeatedly resort to acts of suicidal vengeance, we must not fall for the incredible suggestions that it is because of their cultural or religious beliefs, or, even more ludicrously, because of an ‘unbridled disposition’ towards violence. That Palestinians have availed themselves of such a desperate expedient over the years indicates that something is seriously wrong with the political conditions under which they live. Rather than heap blame upon suicide bombers, it is more accurate to say their actions are a tragic testimony to the political failure of international diplomacy and the *moral* failure of the world community.

Fourth, it is tempting to make a sweeping denunciation of all terrorism on the grounds that it violates the rules of *jus in bello*, fails to treat people as moral persons (Katchadourian 1998), and undermines trust and the possibility of future coexistence. Yet, it is not obvious that these considerations trump all others if terrorism is the *only* means available to secure an overridingly justifiable end. As indicated above, there are those on both sides who have found terrorism *rational* in the self-defense of an entire people, and, given their conviction in the morality of this goal, they have also argued their violence to be *justifiable*. The real question is whether their respective ends of national self-preservation confer *overriding* moral significance upon their chosen means.

This question cannot be answered here, but I close by recalling Kant’s injunction that violence can be justified only if it is expected to contribute to future peace. In the long run, terrorism may be a strategy that backfires since the hatred and vengeance it generates raise the frightening possibility that genocidal annihilation of one or both parties might be the only way to

end violence. Intense struggles have never ceased to produce astonishing outcomes. While Palestinians have gained recognition and a place at the negotiating table, it is too early to tell whether their recourse to violence will secure their self-determination in Palestine, or even their survival as a distinct people. Similarly, while Israeli Jews presently enjoy a strong, vigorous state, it cannot yet be determined whether Zionism's expansionism by force can be long tolerated or sustained.

Notes

1. In his diary Herzl wrote: 'We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country. ... Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly' (Patai 1960, vol. I, p. 88).
2. Currently, the population is approaching 9 million, with approximately five million Israeli Jews, four million Palestinian Arabs (about one million of whom are Israeli citizens, 1.9 million in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and 1.2 million in the Gaza Strip).
3. See also Morris 1999, p. 91 on Ben-Gurion's realization of an unbridgeable gulf between Arabs and Jews on Palestine, and also on the views of Moshe Shertok (Sharret), Israel's second prime minister. For more on the normative debate concerning rights to Palestine, see Kapitan 1997, pp. 9-11, 19-24.
4. Flapan 1987, p. 103, and see Morris 1999, p. 659. Tom Segev writes that despite attempts by Ben-Gurion's biographers to distance Ben-Gurion from the idea of forcible transfer, his 'stand on deportation, like that of other Zionist leaders is unambiguous and well-documented' (1999, p. 407).

5. In the United States Code, for example, it is stipulated that terrorism is committed only by ‘sub-national groups’ or ‘clandestine state agents,’ never by the official military organizations of states (title 22 of the *United States Code*, Section 2656f(d)).
6. In 1938, addressing the Mapai Political Committee, Ben Gurion said, ‘When we say that the Arabs are the aggressors and we defend ourselves—that is only half the truth. As regards our security and life we defend ourselves ... politically, we are the aggressors and they defend themselves’ (Flapan 1979, p. 141).
7. As a consequence of an Cabinet decision in June 1948, Israel rejected UN-GA Resolution 194 calling for the repatriation of these refugees (Morris 2001, p. 38). The UN negotiator, Count Folke Bernadotte, was murdered by members of the Lehi militia in September 1948.
8. The Zionist movement had long held that the outmost chains of Jewish settlement would mark the frontiers of the Jewish state (Morris 1999, p. 653)
9. See Graff 1997, p. 157, and reports issued by Physicians for Human Rights USA, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Israeli human rights group B’tselem,
10. See Kapitan 2003. The strategy of discouraging inquiry into causes is typified in Dershowitz 2003, p. 24, who writes: ‘We must commit ourselves never to try to understand or eliminate its alleged root causes, but rather to place it beyond the pale of dialogue and negotiation.’
11. The general strategy is nothing new; it is part and parcel of the war of ideas and language that accompanies overt hostilities. The term ‘terrorism’ is simply the current vogue for discrediting one’s opponents *before* the risky business of inquiry into their complaints can even begin .

12. See the assessments of Netanyahu's book in Said 1988. See also Margalit 1995 and Kapitan 2003.

13. This policy was followed in a 1953 raid on the West Bank village of Qibya, by a military unit commanded by Ariel Sharon, in which 66 men, women, and children were killed. Discussions of the policy occur in Alon 1980, pp. 68-81, which mentions that Israeli policy includes the proviso that civilian populations that 'shelter anti-Israeli terrorists' will not be immune from punitive action. Gal-Or 1994 also discusses this aspect of Israeli policy as does the earlier study of Blechman 1971.

14. Sharon's article appeared in the *New York Times* on 20 September 1986. The rhetoric of 'terror' extends beyond the mainstream media and corporate 'think tanks.' Academics also employ it, e.g., Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz, who calls for the organized destruction of a single Palestinian village in retaliation for every terrorist attack against Israel. 'It will be a morally acceptable trade-off even if the property of some innocent civilians must be sacrificed in the process' ('A New Way of Responding to Palestinian Terrorism,' *The Jerusalem Post*, 18 March 2002),

15. In the first three years of the Al Aqsa Intifada that began on 29 September 2000, at least 870 Israelis lost their lives, and approximately 71% of these were civilians. Over 2600 Palestinians were slain, three-quarters of whom were noncombatants. Well over 5000 Israelis and 22,000 Palestinians have been injured in the on-going violence. These figures have been compiled from various sources, including the Israeli Ministry of Defense at www.israel-mfa.gov.il, the Israeli human rights group, B'tselem, at www.btselem.org, the Palestine Monitor at www.palestinemonitor.org, and Miftah at www.miftah.org.

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