

COMMENTARY

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Terror on the Border: Who is the True Victim?

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Thanks to the One Who dwells on High, Israeli Intelligence, Shabak (Israel's General Security Service) and the IDF, Israel was able to foil a massive attack on 5 August, when it attacked and destroyed a terrorist cell that had infiltrated from Sinai by way of the Kerem Shalom Crossing in an Egyptian personnel carrier, intending to enter an Israeli settlement and sow within it indescribable death and destruction. In the process of the attack, the terrorists killed 18 Egyptian security people who were manning the crossing. Since then all of the analysts of the event speak of Sinai as an area without law and order, where the Bedouin do whatever they please, where jihadists have found shelter and a base for their terrorist activity; and the terrorists of Gaza are involved in everything that goes on. Much has also been said of the intention of the terrorists to drive a wedge between Egypt and Israel by causing Israel to blame its neighbour for the responsibility for the attack, since it originated from within its sovereign territory. And if a few Egyptian soldiers were killed, this is not a bad thing at all in the eyes of the jihadists, because these soldiers cooperate with an infidel regime that does not implement the Islamic Sharia as the law of the land.

However, the circumstances that were created after the murder of the Egyptian soldiers and the failure of the terror act against Israel proves the truth of the saying: "Success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan." We can only imagine how great would be the cries of joy in Gaza if 18 Israeli soldiers had been killed, heaven forbid, instead of Egyptians. Unfortunately for the people of Gaza, all of the fatalities resulting from the attack were Egyptians.

Here we will turn for a moment to one of the main components of the culture of Middle Eastern discourse: the conspiracy theory. Five days before the attack, the staff of the Bureau of the Counter-terrorism branch of the Prime minister's office issued a severe and immediate travel

warning, which called on all Israelis in Sinai to return immediately to Israel because of concrete intelligence regarding an imminent attack. This announcement—according to more than a few Arab spokesmen—proves that Israel had prior information about the action; information that focused on the Kerem Shalom Crossing, before its execution. From this, many Arabs concluded that it was Israel who organized the act, saying the fact that it knew about the act proves that it was partly responsible for it. The fact that no Israeli was injured is considered additional proof of Israeli involvement and the intention of the "Zionist Entity" to place responsibility on Hamas operatives in order to justify attacking them in the future and harm the improving relations between Hamas and the new Egyptian regime.

Despite the fact that many Arabs wish to believe this conspiracy theory, many of them know that it is not so, and this is the source of the great tragedy that has befallen Gaza, because there are many who accuse Hamas of creating the background for the attack, even if the organization was not directly involved in it. The Hamas movement has already used Egyptian territory to harm Israel, and spokesmen of the Palestinian Authority, principally Dr. Jamal Nasal and Muhammad Dahlan have this week clearly cast Hamas as the party responsible for the attack and have called on Hamas to cut the ties of money, training and guidance that bind it to the jihadists in Sinai. They claim that Hamas has been developing the terror infrastructure in Sinai for years, and now the Egyptians are reaping the stinking fruit of the activities of Hamas.

And herein lies the tragedy, because the people of Gaza know well that the Egyptian army knows well what the spokesmen of the Palestinian Authority say, and is already preparing a dual response: one part is vigorous action against the terror nests in the North of Sinai and perhaps in other parts of the Peninsula as well, and the other part is to take revenge against Hamas and Gaza Strip. There are reports that some of the members of the terror squad that carried out the attack on that Sunday were members of the organization called *Jaish al-Islam*, the armed militia of the Dua'mish tribe, which lives in the fortified compound in the Sabra neighbourhood in the Gaza Strip. Another organization that was apparently involved in the attack is *al-Tawhid wa'al-jihad* which is present in the Gaza Strip as well as in Sinai. The people of Gaza are consumed by the sense that Gaza will be the victim of the failed terrorist action and they express this concern.

The situation in Gaza in recent months, especially since the Muslim Brotherhood won the parliamentary elections and the presidency in Egypt, has vastly improved compared to the past, because the Rafah Crossing is almost totally open, goods enter the area freely and people come and go into and out of Egypt almost without limitation. The blockade on the Gaza Strip—in which Egypt took an integral part—has been almost totally dismantled, and with it also the sense of distress that has burdened the people of Gaza ever since Hamas took over the Strip in June of 2007.

The Egyptian military holds the Hamas government responsible for the part that the people of Gaza took in the action, because in its view - Hamas is capable of imposing discipline upon those under its control and is obligated to do so. Therefore the people of Gaza fear that the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, and especially President Mursi, will have no choice but to surrender to the will of the Egyptian military which wants to renew the blockade on Gaza, whether as an act of

self-defence on the part of Egypt and its soldiers, or in retaliation for Hamas's responsibility in the killing of Egyptian soldiers.

Dr. Mustafa Yusuf al-Lidawi expresses the fear of the Gazans in a most concrete way in his article entitled *Darkness encompasses the Gaza Strip*, with the following words (my comments are in parenthesis - M.K.).

It was with great sadness and intense sorrow that the residents of Gaza received the news about the accursed attack on the Egyptian soldiers on the Egyptian-Israeli border (not the border of Gaza and Israel). They were struck speechless, their tongues adhered to their palates, their breath was stopped and on their Ramadan night (when they are supposed to rejoice) they were confounded ... whatever harmed the Egyptian people, its sons and the guardians of the homeland also harmed the entire Palestinian people (Hamas too) because the event is terrible, the damage is tremendous, the losses incalculable, the damage extensive and the results were far worse than could have been imagined. Sorrow has engulfed every home and worry consumes every heart... Everyone wonders who could have carried out such a terrible slaughter such as this; those who did this ignored the sanctity of Ramadan, and the holiness of Muslim blood, as the soldiers sat down to break the fast with an entreaty to the Master of the World to accept their prayer, guard the homeland and return them to their homes in peace.

Nothing can justify the attack. Its perpetrators are murderers, criminals, corrupt and defiling, conspirators and traitors, misguided and deceiving, enemies and hate-mongers, foolish and stupid, their only desire is to destroy, their goal is to corrupt and their aim is to harm the interests of the people (the Egyptians? the Palestinians?) and the nation (the Arab? the Islamic?). They are not Muslims and are not believers, they are not rebels for a noble cause and are not nationalists. They are also not Palestinians because he who kills his brothers is not Muslim, and he who attacks his own people is not a believer. Whoever causes distress to his people (by causing the closing of Rafah), who besieges his own family and acts to deny them light, food, medicine and all of the necessities of life is not Muslim, and whoever acts against the interests of his people, and serves the goals of its enemy and achieves that which the occupation has not succeeded in achieving, is not Palestinian...

Egypt today is grieving, wounded, weeping, bereaved and sighing, it has declared mourning on its faithful members and is determined to capture the murderers and do to them what they deserve... Palestine in general and Gaza in particular are no less downcast than Egypt, and not less shocked. Our warm tears flow continuously, our sighs are deep and our wounds are bleeding. We console the Egyptian people... and say to them: do not punish an entire people for what a small contemptible group has done, whether they are Palestinian or Egyptian, there is no difference. The group is not Palestinian even if some of the members are Palestinians, because they do not represent the Palestinians... do not allow the magnitude of the crime to cause you to punish the residents of the Gaza Strip, to close its only point of access to the world and to cut its arteries of life that come from Egypt. Do not prevent the people of Gaza to travel to the

Hajj in Mecca, and do not prevent the sons of Gaza from coming to Egypt, their homeland. Do not restrict entry of food to the people of Gaza (which arrives by way of Egyptian ports) because we are saddened just as you are, more angry than you and more determined than you are to take revenge on the murderers. We ask you to rise above the event, not to punish us collectively and not to deny from a whole people the sources of livelihood. Please open quickly the gates of the Strip and do not close them; prevent the return of the residents' suffering as it was in the past... because they love you and wish for you only the best, they do not accept any harm that may befall you and will not be silent about those who attacked you and harmed you. The sons of Gaza will pursue anyone who is proven to be guilty and will settle accounts with anyone whose crime is revealed. They will not cover up crime and will not support exploitation and aggression.

Allah, the prophet, the believers, the nation of Islam, the Egyptian people, the entire Palestinian people and especially the people of Gaza, all reject the criminal, aggressive, traitorous murderers, who carried out this terrible crime . We reject them ... and call out to Egypt to pursue them, and to punish them with the most severe punishment."

With this article the writer admits the responsibility of some residents of Gaza for the attack, and he expresses the fear that exists in the Gaza Strip that the Egyptians might close the Rafah Crossing and destroy tunnels, to prevent terrorists from getting into Sinai. He knows that the Egyptian military will do this without hesitation, because when this military becomes enraged it acts "without the constraint of a High Court and human rights organizations", with great determination and without pity. It may soon become clear that the actual victim of the action on Sunday is, oddly, the Gaza Strip.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this event:

- Israel must retain its intelligence and military capabilities even in neighbouring countries with which Israel has a peace agreement.
- Countries that ignore terror will themselves become victims of terror.
- Israel must immediately initiate an explanatory campaign that will show why the blockade on Gaza, whether justifiable or not, is not Israeli, but Egyptian.
- The lack of control that reigns in Sinai may also take hold in Syria, where hundreds of armed groups are also active.
- The State of Israel must be vigilant and attuned to all activities directed against the regime in the entire Negev, because when the laws of planning and building are not enforced it is the beginning of the decline of the rule of law, which may ultimately give way to a situation similar to that which exists in Sinai. No one can say "It can't happen here".

Note: This article was originally published in Hebrew in *Makor Rishon* and the English translation is reproduced here with permission of the author. Web link: <http://israelagainstterror.blogspot.co.il/2012/08/mordechai-kedar-terror-on-border-who-is.html>

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