

PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE

by

Hank Schachte

Consider giving up the convenient notion that in the matter of human conflict it is the character of the people on each side that is different. People are people everywhere. What is almost always different is the situation. Do you think if the Israelis were few and lacked completely any military they would not also consider terrorist acts as perhaps one of the only means available to them to enforce their demand for security of territory and the right to life? (In fact when they were few on the ground they did resort to exactly these methods.) And do you think if the Palestinians had a large and sophisticated and unopposed military they would not employ it to enforce their demands for security of territory and the right to life?

What is the matter with our thinking that we continue to insist on vague and unsubstantiated arguments of character or moral superiority when simpler more demonstrable situational explanations are so obvious?

A careful glance at history will prove that small-scale terrorism has not been exclusive to any region or religion or period but has surfaced wherever unequal struggles appear, as a tactic of the desperate against the powerful.

Also, let us never forget that terrorism comes in different sizes: small-scale terrorism involves stones or molotov cocktails or suicide bombs employed by small groups in localised crimes; large-scale terrorism involves armies and airpower. Who would deny that the bombings of London or Dresden or Hiroshima or Nagasaki — or even Serbia — were acts of terrorism? Or the holocaust, or Rwanda or Nicaragua (I could go on)?

When we speak of terrorism but omit state-sponsored large-scale terrorism we eliminate from history the vast bulk of the problem, the World Trade Center notwithstanding. To absent governments from history, to excuse our collective selves, makes understanding the present and the future problematic.

This is the most compelling argument against the growing size and power of the American military and the relative weakness of the United Nations. We are in danger of bequeathing to our progeny a world where no situation will ever be equal again anywhere in the world — and that is the definition of tyranny.

And the response to tyranny has always been, not obedience but resistance and, sadly, terrorism.