

Yossi Gal

The PLO Can't Have It Both Ways

W Post 1/15/86

Yasser Arafat's denial of involvement in the Rome and Vienna airport massacres should be taken with a grain of salt. When Israel points an accusatory finger at Arafat, it does so with good reason. He has, after all, a proven track record of denial and deceit.

Well-remembered are the infamous "Black September" terror outrages of the early 1970s, such as the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. Arafat denied any knowledge of or responsibility for it—until it was revealed that the supposed "splinter" called "Black September" was really a covert arm of Arafat's own Fatah terrorist organization.

Fraud and mendacity characterized Arafat's most recent terrorist operations as well. Predictably, Arafat was quick to deny responsibility for the terrorist attack on Sept. 25 against Israeli vacationers at Larnaca, Cyprus. When shown photographs of the three men arrested by Cypriot authorities, however, convicted PLO terrorists imprisoned in Israel identified the Larnaca trio as members of the PLO's "Force 17."

Then there was the pirating of the Achille Lauro, at first "condemned" by Arafat. The mastermind of the Achille Lauro affair, however, was Abul Abbas,

Arafat's alter ego. Once this became common knowledge, cynicism continued to characterize the way in which the PLO handled the Achille Lauro fallout. Instead of punishing Abbas, as Arafat dutifully promised to do with any PLO operative involved with Achille Lauro, Arafat conspired to let his apprentice in terror go, and, to add insult to injury, condemned the mid-air American interception of the Achille Lauro terrorists as an act of terror and "cowboy logic."

After Rome and Vienna, Arafat again pleaded innocence while ignoring his responsibility for rationalizing, inspiring and sanctioning these attacks. Only four days after the Rome and Vienna massacres, for example, Arafat vowed to continue the "armed struggle" (the PLO's euphemism for terror) "in all its forms." In so doing, Arafat gives his imprimatur to any act of terror perpetrated in the name of the Palestinians and encourages a climate of competition between the PLO's rival factions as to which one of them can compile the bloodiest resumé.

He has likewise institutionalized terror by ordering and reveling in the assassination of moderate Palestinians whose only crime was having called for peace.

The claim that resisting and responding to terrorism—rather than terrorism itself—undermine efforts for peace, is more than absurd. To so suggest is to condone terrorism and to yield veto power to extremists. No Western democracy should allow terrorists, whatever their cause might be, to determine its agenda.

Nor can the terrorist murders deter those nations truly committed to the cause of peace and reconciliation from pursuing a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem. The resolution of the Palestinian question has to be sought. It is dangerously naive, however, to suggest that this will eliminate terrorism in the Middle East. Political violence and indiscriminate terrorism against innocents have been a way of life in the Middle East for centuries. In the 19 years between 1948 and 1967, while Judea, Samaria and Gaza were under Arab control, Arab terrorism against Israelis ran rampant. And in 1929, 19 years before Israel was even created, the Jewish community of Hebron was wiped out in an Arab massacre.

It is just as naive to suggest that the Palestinian problem is the root of all instability in the Middle East. A quick glance at the map of the re-

gion reveals many conflicts that have nothing at all to do with the Palestinian problem or with Israel: the Iran-Iraq war, Syria's decades-old ambition to exert hegemony over Lebanon, the strife between North and South Yemen and Libya's many nefarious adventures abroad, not to mention inter-PLO terrorism and bloodshed.

Most bizarre of all, however, is the naiveté inherent in the distinction of convenience reflected in recent days in some op-ed articles in *The Post*: when it comes to terror, Arafat is immune from blame, since he supposedly is not in control of Abu Nidal, Abu Musa, Ahmed Jibril, Naif Hawatmeh, George Habash and their like. One cannot escape the conclusion that Arafat represents no one but himself. But when it comes to the peace process, the conventional wisdom is that Arafat cannot be ignored since he advertises himself as the sole representative of the Palestinians. These positions contradict one another. If Arafat is not in control, why should anybody pay attention to him? And if he really is in control, why should he be sanitized? Yasser Arafat and the PLO can't have it both ways.

Yossi Gal is the spokesman for the Israeli Embassy.