

**A LINKAGE STILL UNRECOGNIZED:
PALESTINIAN STATEHOOD AND JIHADIST TERROR**

Louis René Beres

Professor

Department of Political Science

Purdue University

West Lafayette IN 47907

USA

TEL 765/494-4189

FAX 765/494-0833

lberes@purdue.edu

If implemented, President Barack Obama's plan for a "Two-State Solution" in the Middle East will degrade both U.S. and Israeli security. This is because the associated *Road Map* to Palestinian statehood misses a crucial understanding: Jihadist terror has little to do with territory or politics or military strategy or tactics. In essence, it is a ritualistic and longstanding expression of *religious sacrifice*.

Hamas, with its still-growing ties to *al-Qaeda*, would quickly dominate any Palestinian state. In keeping with its primary commitment to terror, the *Islamic Resistance Movement* would soon launch visibly expanded forms of "freedom fighting" and "national liberation." Because such violence would express *Shahada*, or *Death For Allah*, there would be no room for any further negotiations over "Palestine."

Fundamental links between sacrifice and political violence have a pertinent history. To begin, President Obama could look with real benefit to ancient Greece. There, Plutarch's *SAYINGS OF SPARTAIN MOTHERS* revealed the exemplary female parent as one who had reared her sons for *civic* sacrifice. This mother was always relieved to learn that her son had died "in a manner worthy of his self, his

country and his ancestors." Significantly, those Spartan sons who had failed to live up to this standard were very conspicuously *reviled*.

One woman, whose son had been the sole survivor of a military engagement, killed him with a tile. Culturally, it was the only correct punishment for his apparent cowardice. Later, the eighteenth-century Swiss (Genevan) philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau, citing to Plutarch, described another citizen-mother's tale: "*A Spartan woman had five sons in the army and was awaiting news of the battle. A Helot (slave) arrives trembling; she asks him for the news. 'Your five sons were killed.' 'Base slave, did I ask you that?' The slave responds: 'We won the victory.' The mother runs to the temple and gives thanks to the gods.*"

The roots of still-impending *Jihadist* terror from "Palestine" originate, in part, from cultures that embrace similarly primal views of sacrifice. In these cultures, the purpose of sacrifice always goes beyond civic necessity. Here, sacrificial practice becomes a genuinely *sacred* expression of *religion*. More precisely, such sacrifice always derives ultimately from a hoped-for conquest of personal death, that is, for *immortality*.

There is no greater power in world politics than ***power over death***. Considered carefully, this point is not really difficult to understand, as more or less compelling promises of immortality underlie virtually all human religious belief. Oddly, however, this plainly core point is still not truly understood in either Washington or Jerusalem.

The *Jihadist* terrorist claims to "love death," but this claim is a boldfaced lie. Paradoxically, he (or she) kills himself/herself and innocent others only to ensure that he/she will *not die*, that he will live forever. The so-called "death" that he expects to suffer in "suicide" is anything but final. It is, instead, a merely momentary inconvenience on the trajectory to life everlasting.

Martyrdom operations have always been connected with *Jihad*. These planned spasms of violence are based upon a long-codified scripture. For example, unequivocal and celebratory invocations for such operations can be found in the *Koran* (9:111), and, even more explicitly, in the canonical *hadith*.

For the U.S. and Israel, the security implications of any enemy doctrinal fusion involving religion and violence warrant careful consideration. Convinced that *Shahada* violence against the U.S. or Israel will lead to *martyrdom*, the *Hamas* or *al-Qaeda* terrorist will never be deterred by ordinary threats of military reprisal or retaliation. It follows that our current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as calculated forms of counter-terrorism, are literally and incontestably beside the point.

Truth can sometimes emerge from paradox. It is the *Jihadists'* *terror of death* that leads them quite "logically" to "suicide." It is precisely because any short-term "dying" in the act of killing "infidels" and "apostates" is presumed to buy their freedom from the penalty of real death that these terrorists aim to conquer mortality by self-immolation.

In the end, America's and Israel's terrorist enemies have very distinctive orientations to "peace." This stark asymmetry puts us at a foreseeable and grievous disadvantage. While these enemies manifest their expectations for immortality, individual and collective, by the doctrinal slaughter of "heathen," our own leaders remain unaware of these enemies' systematic fusion of violence and the sacred.

We now face a steadily-expanding mega-threat of unconventional war and unconventional terrorism. Faced with adversaries who are not only willing to die, but who actively seek their own "deaths" in order to live, President Obama should promptly understand the inevitable limits of military remediation and homeland defense.

For our common Palestinian *Jihadist* enemies in West Bank (Judea/Samaria)

and Gaza, killing Americans and Israelis offers them an optimal reprieve from personal death. In psychological terms, the death fear of the *ego* is lessened by the killing, the *sacrifice*, of the *infidel*. Generically, this idea is best captured by Ernest Becker's famous paraphrase of Nobel laureate Elias Canetti: "*Each organism raises its head over a field of corpses, smiles into the sun, and declares life good.*"

Our *Jihadist* enemies do not intend to do evil. Rather, they commit to the killing of Americans and Israelis with an absolute purity of heart. Though mired in blood, their search for "infidels" is always tranquil and self-assured, born of the certain knowledge that the lofty goals of Holy War are never shameful, but always heroic.

To weaken and defeat *Jihadist* terrorists, the president must first acknowledge that *any* Palestinian state would be contrary to our national interest. For the sake of indispensable and interpenetrating American and Israeli security, it is now high time to replace the self-defeating cartography of his *Road Map* to nowhere with a more thoughtful and culturally-informed route to effective counter-terrorism. At its starting point, this now-promising path should be directed toward a sober historical understanding of violence and the sacred.

LOUIS RENÉ BERES was educated at **Princeton** (Ph.D., 1971) and publishes widely on world politics, terrorism and international law. Born in **Zurich, Switzerland** on August 31, 1945, he is the author of some of the earliest major books on nuclear war and nuclear terrorism, and also of articles in *Parameters: The Journal of the U.S. Army War College; Special Warfare; International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence; International Security* (Harvard); *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists; World Politics* (Princeton) and *The Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*. Professor Beres' columns have appeared in *The New York Times; Christian Science Monitor; Washington Times; Washington Post; Boston Globe; Chicago Tribune; Los Angeles Times; U.S. News & World Report; The Jerusalem Post* and *Ha'aretz* (Israel).