

# The Other Twin Towers

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## Articles & Testimony

**T**hey are the tallest towers in town, a pair of them in the hub of the city's financial district. And thanks to some good intelligence and smart police work, which nabbed the terrorists before they completed their mission, the buildings are still standing today.

In this real-life story the city is Tel Aviv, not New York. According to an Associated Press story of September 23, Israel arrested two Palestinians in early August who planned to blow up a massive car bomb at two office towers -- 50 and 46 stories high, respectively -- that stand side-by-side across from the main highway running through the heart of this seaside city. The would-be terrorists, members of the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, were arrested as they attempted to cross into Israel from Jordan, via the Allenby Bridge.

What makes this story newsworthy is not that Israel prevented its own version of the World Trade Center disaster. That happens on almost a daily basis, though most of the failed or intercepted terrorist plots never make it to trial or into the media, as this one did.

And what makes this story so compelling is not that the indictment against the alleged bombers accuses them of receiving money, logistical support, and explosives training at a PFLP base in Syria -- a country many in Washington would like to court as a possible member of the global anti-terror coalition now being formed. While Syria has kept its own fingerprints off terrorist attacks since it was caught red-handed trying to blow up an El Al jetliner in 1986, it has played a central role in supporting a wide-ranging consortium of secular and religious terrorist organizations operating from political offices in Damascus and field bases in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. Without Syria and Iran, the other leading Middle East sponsor of international terrorism, groups such as Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Ahmed Jibril's PFLP-General Command would die on the vine.

What makes this story so shocking is not the fact that virtually none of the Middle Eastern governments, politicians, or religious leaders who rushed to denounce the terrorists who slew thousands at the World Trade Center would make similar denunciations of those who would slay thousands in Israeli skyscrapers. Remarkably, many would actually applaud the bombings as an act of "legitimate resistance." Indeed, according to the head of the Arab League, Israel -- not Syria, Iran, or Libya -- is the state guilty of "terrorism." An official spokesman of the Saudi foreign ministry warned that the U.S.-led coalition had better not target groups like Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, or the regional governments that support them or else Saudi Arabia won't participate. And in the words of the highest

religious authority in Egypt, "It would be wrong, unethical, and contradictory to the truth to attach the terrorist label to our Palestinian brothers who are defending their land, themselves, and their dignity."

More than all of this, what makes this story so special is that it is not special at all -- none of it, not even in the wake of September 11. On so many fronts, remarkably little has changed. For Israelis, fighting terrorism (and living with terrorism) is a way of life, whether the peace process is active or dormant, whether U.S. diplomats are shuttling or not. For many (indeed, all but a brave few) in the Arab world, the fact that Israel lives with terrorism is also utterly acceptable, and condoning it may even help insulate weak potentates from the anger of their own people. And for some in Washington, the distinction certain states make between supporting terrorism against Israelis and terrorism against New Yorkers or Virginians is big enough to allow room for diplomatic maneuver and insipid "confidence-building measures."

Consistency, said a wag, is the hobgoblin of small minds and small countries. As a superpower, the United States can and should adapt different standards to different local problems around the globe. But precisely because today's terrorism is, by definition, global in scale, the fight against it will never be won until we express outrage at terrorism wherever it exists; refuse to truck with terrorists and their sponsors wherever they operate; and insist on a single standard against terrorism, applicable everywhere: No targeting of civilians. When that day comes, then maybe the world will react to an attack anywhere as it is reacting to the outrages of September 11. ❖

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