

# Jerusalem Suicide Attack Aftermath: Searching for a Coordinated Strategy

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## Brief Analysis

**T**he horrific suicide terror bombing today, during lunchtime in the heart of downtown Jerusalem, cannot merely be dismissed as an attack by a deranged fanatic. In the immediate aftermath of the suicide bombing, Islamic Jihad leader Ramadan Abdullah Shalah immediately went on the popular Arab satellite television station al-Jazeera defending the attack and calling for similar blasts to be launched against the United States. (Immediately after providing Shalah with twenty minutes to deliver a soliloquy, the al-Jazeera anchor called the terrorist incident that killed at least fifteen civilians, including six infants, a fedayeen or guerilla operation.)

The backdrop to the killing is very significant. Shalah is correct that it takes an organizational apparatus to carry out such attacks. Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasir Arafat committed himself just two months ago to the director of the CIA, George Tenet, to arrest terrorists. The commitment to Tenet is just the latest in a series of promises that Arafat made in this regard to top-level U.S. officials within the last year. Arafat made similar security-related commitments to former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in Paris, President Bill Clinton at a summit in Sharm el-Sheikh and as well during his repeated discussions with Secretary of State Colin Powell.

When the agreement with Tenet was reached, Palestinian attacks dropped sharply, putting to rest the notion that a man who has twelve security forces and 40,000 people under arms still possesses adequate control.

The Tenet agreement states: "The PA will move immediately to apprehend, question, and incarcerate terrorists in the West Bank and Gaza and will provide the security committee the names of those arrested as soon as they are apprehended, as well as a readout of actions taken." It also states: "The PA will undertake preemptive operations against terrorists, terrorist safehouses, arms depots, and mortar factories. The PA will provide regular progress reports of these actions to the security committee." Yet, sadly the Tenet principles were not followed up by arrests. Instead, there have been repeated attacks since the accord.

There are credible reports that Israel's General Security Services quickly found out the names of two people who had dispatched the bomber of the Dolphinarium disco in which twenty-one people were killed. Although the Israelis presented their names to Palestinian security leaders and requested that they be arrested, this did not occur. Instead, the two were summoned for a conversation with PA security agents, admitted their involvement in the massacre,

signed their consent not to carry out similar activities in the future-and were sent home. Moreover, Arafat has told visiting dignitaries that he believes the perpetrators of these killings of Israeli teenagers were actually secret Israeli agents.

### Sharon under Pressure

The importance of arresting terrorists cannot be overstated, since failure to do so, is what triggers Israel's current policy of seeking to kill leaders of militant cells before the cell blows up. The Sharon policy has had support among its centrist and left-wing voters, because it is seen as the most moral course available. The other choices are less palatable: an all-out war, or sitting on one's hands amid intelligence warnings that close to a dozen "ticking bombs" are currently being prepared.

The objection to Sharon's current policies comes increasingly from his own party base. By a lopsided 66 percent versus 22 percent, right-wing voters prefer Binyamin Netanyahu over Sharon. Netanyahu has called for a more muscular policy. Even among those who voted for Sharon in February-a group that includes Labor Party-crossovers-Sharon is less popular than Netanyahu. In the latest poll, Sharon was behind by a 54percent versus 30 percent margin. This drift by the Israeli public rightward runs counter to Palestinian hopes of a political "pendulum swing" in the event that Sharon is seen as not delivering on his campaign promise to bring greater security.

What prevents this swing, first and foremost, is a widespread sense inside Israel that there is no longer a Palestinian partner. This is exacerbated by repeated polls taken by different Palestinian pollsters, which show that three quarters of the Palestinians support suicide attacks against civilians in Israel. Moreover, PA Information Minister Yasir Abd Rabbo said just a day before the bombing that he could foresee a joint government, bringing together Arafat and Islamic militants. Undoubtedly, pressure on Sharon from the right will sharply intensify with today's attack.

### U.S. Policy

Despite the violence swirling around, the policy debate has shifted to the ideas of dispatching State Department "monitors" to the West Bank and Gaza. Indeed, deployment of such monitors to report on incidents would not have done anything to stop today's terrorist incident. Rather, the issue at stake remains whether there is any penalty to be paid when someone fails to fulfill commitments he personally made to Tenet, Powell, Clinton, and Albright. Signing cease-fires has been an Arafat specialty as he signed several dozen ceasefires during the first seven years of the Lebanon Civil War. The issue is not word but deed.

Throughout the eight years of Oslo, the international political system has not put forward penalties for non-adherence to commitments. This benign neglect-in Washington and other capitals around the world-was due to a desire to avoid messy confrontations while the prize of a grand final status deal beckoned. This Faustian bargain ultimately failed. The net effect was there was neither behavior modification on the ground nor was there a grand deal at the table. One of the key lessons is that you do not defuse explosions by sweeping everything under the rug.

There are two approaches that need to be tried in tandem. First, the United States needs to point out which side is fulfilling its commitments and which is not. The threat to go public is the best hope to give the trilateral security committee involving the U.S., Israel and the Palestinians genuine teeth, and measure their adherence to Tenet. As one official in the Mideast put it this week, "the issue is not about observers, but observance." Without the fear of some form of sanction, the current meetings have little value. Palestinian Chief of General Intelligence Amin el-Hindi, who participates in those talks, told Voice of Palestine Radio this week that the current meetings are "useless." If public censure does not succeed, there should be a graduating scale of penalties to be paid in the bilateral relations with the United States. There is no doubt that that Palestinian adherence to Tenet agreement will facilitate the next phase of the Mitchell Report, which places obligations on Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Second, the United States and Europeans need to coordinate a strategy of diplomatic isolation of Arafat. There is no doubt that Yasir Arafat has been a master in playing Europe off against the United States. He has parlayed the support of the European Union and equated it with what he calls "international legitimacy." In contrast, the times he has proven more flexible is when he was diplomatically isolated abroad as was the case after he supported Iraq during the Gulf War. Another recent example was when German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer demanded a cease-fire in the wake of the Dolphinarium attack. Just as Arafat is not invited to the Bush White House, the same should hold true for 10 Downing Street and other chanceries in Europe. Unfortunately until now international pressure on Arafat has been episodic at best. For such pressure to be effective over time, international pressure needs to be sustained.

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