

The Middle Eastern Pot Boils

I don't know what time it was; probably 2:30 or 2:40 in the afternoon. I was getting ready for Shabbat, which at this time of year comes in about 4:30. Perhaps the first warning I received of the shooting was by the sirens. Sirens, sirens. The air was filled with the sound of sirens, vehicles, and all kinds of noise. Moments later, somebody in the household who was checking social media told me there was a terror attack around the corner. We had just been there. The night before, Joshua went for a beer at one of the pubs on Dizengoff Street. This is the heart of modern Tel Aviv. Dizengoff is where the young people hang out, couples shop, women stroll with their babies, and folks walk their dogs. In many ways, if Jerusalem is the soul of the Jewish people, Tel Aviv is the heart.

We still do not know if this was a terrorist attack, a nut with a gun, or something else altogether. We do know that the killer, who murdered two people and injured numerous others, was on the loose. He was carrying a submachine gun, and a manhunt ensued. In a democracy, manhunts are hard to do. Roads are not closed or blocked, and people are not randomly stopped on the street; but there was a large police presence in the city where police are almost never seen. There is no street crime, to speak of, in Tel Aviv. There are plenty of soldiers and border police involved in protecting the State of Israel from external enemies, but to see police presence like this is unheard of to the frequent traveler to the State of Israel.

News accounts indicate that the murderer was from an Israeli-Arab village. For years, Israelis and Arabs were proud of the relationship of the Jews and Arabs who are citizens of the State. The Arab village is proud of the fact that the father of the killer called the police and turned his son in. Members of the village have proclaimed that they do not hate the Jews, and are disgraced and embarrassed by the attack in Tel Aviv.

Yet, there is no beating around the bush. Arab members of Knesset have been outspokenly vicious in their attack on the Jewish State. Some of the members of Knesset who are Arab go to other lands badmouthing the very country which has given them their first democratic rights any Arab in the world has ever known of. Why this hatred exists, is anybody's guess. There are those who blame it on the Koran, which, towards the end of Mohammad's life, is more hateful towards Jews and Christians. The Holy Land is supposed to be free of non-believers, unless they are willing to subjugate themselves to Allah.

As soon as news of the murderous attack in Tel Aviv took place, organizations like Hamas in Gaza celebrated the war against the Jews and expressed hope that one of their members had carried out the killings. No Arab nation or Arab group of any consequence has condemned the killings. This represents yet a further divide between people who are supposed to share the land.

I remember a friend of mine telling me years ago that Israeli-Arabs, rather than being a good example of coexistence, were a fifth column and a danger to the existence of the Israeli State. This attack, whether it be terrorist or simply that of a madman, helps to prove the difficulty of Jew and Arab living together, even in a totally democratic state such as Israel. Israel is one of the few countries I know of, perhaps the only country I know of, where affirmative action is the law. Israeli-Arabs attend university and have other benefits equal to that of the Jewish population. Unfortunately equality, fairness, inclusiveness and democracy have not done very much to dissuade ancient Islamic hatreds bred into the soul by thirteen hundred years of teaching.

There is no doubt that it is difficult for the Jews of Israel to live here in peace. External enemies only seem to multiply with time, and internal enemies will not play by the rules of civility that the rest of us demand. As ISIS strengthens, the civil war in Syria gets worse and Shiite Muslims fight with Sunni Muslims, the Jews of Israel are caught in this great and horrible vice. The United States, in the last fifteen years, has gone from military hubris to confused non-involvement. Both strategies have not worked and represent no foreign policy at all. George H.W. Bush was right to call his son's advisors "iron asses." Current critics are likewise correct in their assessment that the Obama administration appears weak and confused in its understanding of the Middle Eastern world.

Hopefully, 2016 and the future will bring us a U.S. foreign policy which is consistent, meaningful, serious and credible. This does not necessarily mean more involvement in war. The United States does not have to become the great policeman of the Middle East, and probably should not do so. However, it is important for the United States to have a policy that people at least can understand. Are we for Assad in Syria? Are we for the rebels in Syria? Are we going to cooperate with the Russians in Syria? Are the Russians our enemies because of what they are doing in the Ukraine? All of these questions cannot be avoided. The United States cannot sit on the sidelines while the Middle East burns, since the fire is likely to spread to other places, including our own shores.

Arabs and Muslims as a group are not bad people. If 67% or 75% of Muslims believe in terror and war against Jews and Christians who reside in the Middle East, that means that several hundred million Muslims do not believe in war and terrorism. The problem is that the minority of Muslim Arabs who believe in peace and coexistence are not only afraid to stand up, but in fact risk their lives if they do not speak ill of the Christian crusaders and the Jewish invaders. Until there is a strong, well-financed, brave and sincere Muslim-Arab opposition to terror, the killing and mayhem in this part of the world will not stop.

We can only hope and pray and wish for our friends, colleagues, co-religionists, and others with whom we share this planet, regardless of race, color and creed, that there be Shalom Bayat, peace in our house. The house is the world, and we need

nothing more than the ability to teach tolerance to our friends, our children, and all those with whom we come in contact.

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