

Terror script

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [January 30, 2002](#) issue

George W. Bush and Ariel Sharon are working from the same play book, and for the moment, they are winning their wars against terrorism. But their strategy will ultimately fail. Maintaining a climate of fear and hatred against a demonized enemy will work only in the short term. Why? Because violence breeds violence. It does not provide security. Americans and Israelis can be diverted by war games for just so long before they begin to wonder: Where is this plan taking us?

Palestine author Ghassan Khatib points to the beginning of the current Palestinian intifada, when the Labor government “allowed its main political opponent to do something that no Israeli politician had ever done in the history of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.” Candidate Ariel Sharon was allowed to enter the area of Jerusalem’s Al Aqsa Mosque, “a statement of ownership that set off massive peaceful Palestinian protests.”

Then Sharon was elected prime minister with a commitment to reach a peaceful accord on his terms with the people he had just angered. Israeli citizens were vulnerable to renewed horrific suicide bomber attacks from radical and desperate Palestinians. Sharon retaliated with his own superior military violence. Events of September 11 gave him a cover to increase that military violence. He rushed to link Arafat with Osama bin Laden, and the Palestinian radicals with al-Qaeda. See, Sharon said, we are all victims of terror.

Once the massive air assaults in Afghanistan eliminated the terrorist threat in that region (though by no means in the rest of the world), Sharon’s cover was blown. Media attention turned to Palestine, and there was Sharon—busy demolishing Palestinian homes, assassinating leaders, shooting civilians, digging up roads, destroying air fields and generally acting like a tough guy who could do whatever he wanted to assure Israel’s security.

Trouble is, there is no security for Israelis as long as this Sharon strategy continues, because every slain Palestinian and every demolished home generates additional fury and guarantees future terrorists. Israeli writer Yossi Alpher notes that the prime

minister walked away from an Israeli policy that was designed to provide security for Israelis living in a hostile region. That policy called for finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so that peace could reign at home and Israel could turn its attention to dealing with the pressures it faces from Iran and Iraq.

Alpher points out that the “history of this conflict has shown that increasing pressure, particularly military pressure, on the Palestinians only hardens their position.” Sharon’s “retaliatory” attacks on Palestinian society, says Alpher, seem to be an “objective of the . . . government, whose sole achievement has been to deepen the hatred and hostility between the two peoples and push the chances for peace far into the distance.”

Sharon keeps looking for ways to isolate Arafat. He demands that Arafat “crack down” on Palestinian radicals from what has essentially become his prison in Ramallah. He blocks an American effort to broker a peace agreement by insisting on a seven-day period of total quiet before he will talk with Arafat. This is a guaranteed deal breaker because any Palestinian gunman can destroy the weeklong quiet period. Thus Sharon is assured that he won’t have to talk peace with Arafat.

The Israeli public is tired of war. And so is the world, with the exception of most Americans, who remain blissfully ignorant of Sharon’s strategy, thanks to pro-Israel drumbeating from politicians and media pundits. The recent destruction of Palestinian homes in Gaza has horrified European governments and has even brought cries of dismay within Israel. *Ha’aretz* journalist Zeev Schiff described the house demolitions as “an act of undistinguished ruthlessness, a military act devoid of humanitarian and diplomatic logic.” An editorial in *Ha’aretz* said the army risks losing support from the public for the steps it has taken, adding that “no Israeli can agree to such blind cruelty.”

Meanwhile, back in Washington, President Bush continues with his own game plan, which is to convince Americans that we are in for a long war against terrorists and countries that “harbor” terrorists. The Pentagon gloats over its Afghanistan success and looks ahead to future campaigns against other already devastated lands. Our government’s media strategy is to remind Americans that our al-Qaeda and Taliban prisoners are demons—the real “bad guys,” in the new Pentagon parlance. Media censorship keeps us from knowing or caring how many civilians died in our Afghanistan bombing.

Thanks to this script out of a bad Hollywood war movie, we are diverted from worrying about Afghan victims as we observe how our army handles the “demons” we have captured (not yet numbering bin Laden or Mullah Mohammed Omar, by the way). Our prisoners reached their Cuban prison bound and shackled, their faces covered with masks and goggles. General Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said they were placed in restraints for the flight to Cuba because they “are people who would gnaw through hydraulic lines in the back of a C-17 to bring it down.”

And somewhere in a tent in Gaza, an eight-year-old Palestinian boy remembers seeing his family home bulldozed in the middle of the night. In just a few years that boy could be trained in the fine art of gnawing through airplane hydraulic lines. Thanks a lot, General Myers.

Are we secure yet?