

3 January 1986

ROME AND RAS BURKA

AFTER THE attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin replied with commendable bluntness to the sanctimonious – and gratuitous – advice emanating from a variety of Western sources that Israel, if she retaliated at all, should not, Heaven forbid, attack the wrong terrorists.

He asserted that Israel was not engaged in a policy of retaliation, but was fighting a sustained war against the terrorists, and would not distinguish between one murderous organization and another.

As all the terrorists involved in the attacks at the airports were either killed or captured, some governments would prefer to regard the “incident” as closed. The UN Security Council has warned against any reprisals for the attack, which it described as “unjustified.” According to the council’s moral scale, even when terror is “unjustified,” nothing should be done about it, except to wash the bloodstains away.

Notably, the first word from Washington similarly urged inaction. The knee-jerk response from the White House advocated “self-restraint.” Two days later, after the U.S. had collected evidence supporting the claim that it was not Arafat’s Fatah which was responsible, retaliation was pronounced permissible; and indeed all states were called upon to act against international terror.

The U.S. went on to accuse Libya – PLO-dissident Abu Nidal’s financial and diplomatic sponsor – of being the world centre of terror.

Libya, whose current preeminence in the field of terrorism is beyond question, is, however, not the only Arab country which sponsors and maintains its fellow-Arab terrorists. Fatah, founded by Arafat, has throughout the 21 years of its existence been financed, armed, provided with training facilities, and given political, diplomatic and propaganda support, while its members were accorded shelter and asylum, by every Arab state. The supply of “moral” and material sinews for the PLO’s international front against Israel (though drastically reduced since Israel destroyed its Lebanese home in 1982) continues to this day.

Three months ago, Israel carried out an air raid on a PLO headquarters where attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets are planned, and which sent out the murderers of three Israeli civilians vacationing in Larnaca, Cyprus. From there the hijackers of the Achille Lauro also came. At news of the Israeli raid a howl of international rage went up. How dare Israel invade the innocent airspace of Tunisia, whose peace-loving, moderate president, Habib Bourguiba, was, after all, only giving his moderate friend Arafat shelter and facilities for the murder of Jews, in Israel and elsewhere.

Today the question asks itself: was murder in Larnaca directed from Tunis less criminal than murder in Rome and Vienna directed from Tripoli?

IF LIBYA were to sink into the sea next week, the overall Arab terror structure would be only marginally affected. The truth is that unless the Western nations put a stop to PLO activity in their own lands and, moreover, bring pressure to bear for a cessation of the Arab states’ massive support for the PLO – the talk of a war against international terror will remain empty rhetoric.

Last Monday Prime Minister Peres did charge the European nations that grant shelter, equipment and diplomatic recognition to terrorists with responsibility for the weekend terrorist attacks. He added that all countries lax in airport security, as well as in diplomacy, are extending a cooperative hand to international terror.

He omitted to mention that the reason for that cooperation was the identification of those governments with the PLO's interim target: the reduction of Israel to the vulnerable armistice lines of 1949. He failed to mention, moreover, that that is why the European governments (and Washington as well) promote the myth that Arafat and the "mainstream" of the PLO have renounced terror.

They persist in this fairy tale even now, after Arafat was once more caught red-handed. They have swept the Larnaca murders under the carpet.

They have "forgotten" the hijacking of the Achille Lauro, and its original purpose: to land in Ashdod and sow death in its streets. Nor do they mention the murder of Leon Klinghoffer. They have erased from memory the denial by Arafat and the PLO of any connection with these crimes – a regular ploy used by Arafat over the years – until dramatic intervention by U.S. planes caught the PLO members flying from the scene of the crime to Arafat's headquarters haven in Tunisia.

Here was another significant omission by Peres: his failure to remind the Europeans of the Achille Lauro incident – in its stark exposure of their misplaced belief in Arafat's grotesque claim of innocence of terror. Or did Peres fight shy of recalling that episode because it would inevitably bring to mind that another fibber then had been Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, towards whom he is currently engaged in pursuing a

policy of oily appeasement; and it would draw attention to Mubarak's special relationship with the PLO.

IT WAS because of that relationship that Arafat's bluff over the Achille Lauro crime was exposed. Three of the known hijackers were in Egypt's hands. Even if guilty only of hijacking they should have been detained until it was determined where they should be tried. Mubarak decided to save them from any trial at all.

He had them smuggled out on an Egyptian plane bound for Tunis. He pleaded later that he had thought they were only hijackers and did not know that they were also murderers. This was proved to be a lie. He had known.

This dark chapter only provided an up-to-date exposure of the years-long collaboration and identification of Egypt's leaders with Arafat and the PLO. Mubarak has been Arafat's most prominent Arab champion, working indefatigably since 1983 to help restore his political fortunes, notably by masterminding and overseeing – together with Washington – the proposed Hussein-Arafat partnership. It is now reported that with Arafat's Tunis base having proven to be vulnerable to Israeli attack, it is Mubarak who has given the PLO "elite" Force-17 a base in Egypt – thus incidentally cocking a snook once more at the peace treaty with Israel.

THERE IS, however, a deeper spiritual relationship between Egypt and Arafat: their common callousness towards Jews. Mubarak's spontaneous reaction to the particularly barbaric murder of four children and three adults at Ras Burka was that it was an unimportant incident. The soldier who fired the shots has been sentenced to life

imprisonment, but his companions who stood by while five still living victims slowly bled to death, refusing to allow them succour, are scot-free. And nobody in Egypt, no public figure, no journalist, no educator, no private conscience, has suggested that they should be punished, that they were guilty of any wrongdoing.

Yet it is quite understandable. Nobody in Egypt feels that there was any wrongdoing. If there was, it is not the soldiers who are to blame. They are the sons of their environment, the products of an education which incessantly tells how evil a creation Israel is, how evil the Israelis are, how evilly disposed towards the Arabs, how worthy of death.

Therein indeed is the acid test of Egypt's signature on the peace treaty. Significant beyond all its other violations is the calculated failure to root out the hatred and hostility and contempt for Israel inculcated into the Egyptian people, especially the educated class. The reason for that failure is the need of the leaders of Egypt to maintain that climate until the time ripens for the next hoped-for Arab onslaught on Israel.

Over and beyond the formal relations with Egypt, over and beyond the discussion whether the peace treaty is or is not a fraud – the Israeli citizen is entitled to ask the government why it continues to allow the Egyptians to trivialize the gruesome act at Ras Burka, and to ignore its causes. Is the blood wantonly shed at Ras Burka by Egyptians cheaper in the eyes of our government than that shed by other Arabs at Larnaca, at Rome and at Vienna?