Calling It Like It Is
Defining Terrorism from the Top Down

By WILLIAM A. COOK

Tony Blair's refusal to acquiesce to Ariel Sharon's demands to sideline Arafat signals a recognition that sidelining one terrorist who has limited capacity to stop Hamas pales by comparison with Sharon's total control of the IDF and other renegade Israeli terrorist groups. Sharon's current trip to visit Blair and Bush, a calculated attempt to needle his bedfellows to control European governments' recognition of Arafat, is designed to force them to snub the democratically elected Arafat who is preventing the implementation of the Road Map while Sharon appears to be the man of peace. Needless to say, Sharon's insidious support of the settlements and his terrorist acts as he removes troops from the occupied territories stamps him as the obstacle in the road to peace. Sharon's trip follows President Bush's recent demand made to the EU ministers in Washington, that they declare Hamas a terrorist organization and take action to interrupt its economic activities, a demand that found little support among EU representatives.

The issue is complex because the definition of "terrorist" is not precise. Indeed, the very actions condemned by Bush about Hamas are actions that other nations find condemnatory about Bush. Terrorism is as terrorism does, or so one would think. Dictionary definitions reflect a consensus in meaning at a point in time, but definitions become the prerogative of those in power when it is in their interest to impose parameters on words that impact policy direction. To the victor belongs meaning and historical perspective. Thus it is with the words "terrorism," "terrorist," and "terrorize." To terrorize, according to the dictionary, means "to dominate or coerce by intimidation." A "terrorist" is one who attempts to dominate and coerce by intimidation, and "terrorism" is "a method of resisting a government."

These definitions incriminate Osama bin Laden and the undeclared leaders of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah, but they also incriminate the ultra right Zionists in Israel, and, one could argue, the hard-right Evangelical Zionists in America. More tellingly, and this is the point of this article, they incriminate the United States under Bush and Israel under Sharon. Obviously, our government cannot allow the consensus meaning to reflect the actuality. Therefore, the United States defines terrorism (18 USC 2331) as "violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by assassination or kidnapping."

While the dictionary definition is open-ended, allowing for the possibility of governments to be active in terrorist activities, the USC definition does not. The most recent Encarta encyclopedia article describing terrorism is quite specific on this point: "These violent acts are committed by nongovernmental groups or

individuals that is, by those who are neither part of or officially serving in the military forces " This description precedes the historical evolution of the word that marks its origin during the French Revolution (1789-1799), the regime de la terreur (Reign of Terror), a quite specific reference to a government!

In his most recent book, The Lessons of Terrorism (2003), Caleb Carr defines terrorism this way: "Terrorism is simply the contemporary name given to, and the modern permutation of, warfare deliberately waged against civilians with the purpose of destroying their will to support either leaders or policies that the agents of such violence find objectionable." Interestingly, Carr does not excuse armed forces or units of a nation from the definition. Indeed, Carr includes in his understanding of terrorist the likes of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, William Tecumseh Sherman, Richard Nixon, and Henry Kissinger to name a few. Each of these individuals supported deliberate and premeditated attacks against civilians. Carr's historical survey of terrorism, written in response to current world wide terrorist activity, is decidedly more inclusive than the government definition.

Why be concerned with the definition of a word? The answer is simple. By excluding governments and nation-states from the definition, the ruling powers can inflict corrosive and pejorative terms on those opposing them thereby justifying any actions they use to subdue their enemy.

Hatred, revenge, greed, and insecurity propel terrorists to act; all four motivations characterize the behavior of nation-states as well as individuals and groups. To exclude nation-states from the definition is to accept terrorist behavior against civilians and ultimately to justify it. That is the case with the Bush administration's acquiescence to the Sharon government's terrorism against the Palestinians. It also allows Bush to lie to the American people to incite them to invading another nation that is of no threat to them and to intentionally inflict harm, including death, on innocent civilians. Exclusion of nation-states allows for simplistic judgments on those who oppose government action by labeling dissenters as "anti-government," as in anti-Semitic or anti-American or unpatriotic, thus avoiding analysis of the government's actions by blanket condemnation. Indeed, the power of the respective governments, that of Sharon and that of Bush, to silence criticism and to marginalize vocal dissenters are well-documented and only points to the need to keep the issue alive.

For the past six months, criticism of Israeli IOF actions against civilians in Gaza and the West Bank has increased exponentially as reported in British, French, and Greek newspapers, and in Ha'aretz. Ha'aretz has condemned this reaction as "rising anti-Semitism." The nature of the criticism, however, is not against the Jewish people, but against the kinds of actions taken by the Sharon forces against civilians, actions that can only be labeled as "terrorist" acts.

Consider the recent actions taken by Sharon against the Palestinian people. These deliberate, provocative acts have predetermined consequences designed

to intimidate and coerce the people to relinquish their rights to their homeland and livelihood. They are acts that force another government to accept the perpetrator's intended goal; that other government is the United States and the goal is the erosion of the "Road Map" and the acquisition of additional land, belonging to the Palestinians, to the state of Israel. The Jerusalem Post reported on April 8, "The construction of over a dozen Jewish enclaves in predominantly Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem is aimed at blocking any possibility of dividing Jerusalem in the future." Edward Sheehan reports in The New York Review on June 5, "Israeli settlements in eastern suburbs effectively detach the Palestinian West Bank from Jerusalem. The final result of this strategy 'will be the transformation of Arab Jerusalem into a ghetto and slum.'"

Earlier this spring, Tikkun magazine provided its readers with an inventory of terrorist behaviors by the Sharon government. There are too many to list here but they include awakening residents in the town of Beit Lahiya in the middle of the night, over two hundred, "including small children and women who had given birth 2 days earlier were forced to huddle together for hours in the cold winter night until the army let them return to their homes." "Preventing the residents of entire cities from leaving their houses for weeks on end (no exceptions-not for chemo, dialysis, childbirth, buying food, attending school, or visiting your sick mother)", damaging ambulances, assassinating "people without the niceties of trial and due process, killing children including infants and toddlers, etc. These kinds of behaviors brought condemnation on Sharon's government by Bishop Tutu; he likened Israel's treatment of Palestinians to the oppression of blacks by the white apartheid government in South Africa. He added, "I can't believe the United States really believes in its impotence" to halt Israel's military reprisals.

Sheehan's recent report details Israeli actions and their consequences to the people. "I visited the town of Beit Hanoun the army destroyed twenty-five water wells and the sewage system, which resulted in drinking water being mixed with raw sewage." "Paved roads were broken up by Israeli bulldozers; great tracks of farmland citrus groves, olive trees, greenhouses as well were uprooted to create no man's lands around the Israeli settlements of Alai Sinai, Nevets Sala, and Nissanit." Such actions force civilians to move from their homes either because they have been destroyed or because their source of livelihood has been destroyed. These are terrorist acts.

Sharon's savagery against the Palestinian people has given rise to reactions in France, Germany, and Greece, especially Greece, and to the anticipated condemnation of these reactions as anti-Semitic. The European Union's Greek presidency "condemned the Israeli raid on Tulkarem and Ein Shams refugee camp last week, where at least 1000 Palestinians were detained and prevented from going back to their homes " Ha'aretz condemned the Greek papers for reporting Sharon's actions as comparable to those of the Nazis against the Jews, the image of Israel as a "Nazi country " that attacks "defenseless Palestinians."

The article in Ha'aretz does not attempt a comparison that might suggest to the Greeks and others how similar the actions of the Sharon government are to those of Nazi Germany. This past March, at an international conference on human evil, held in Prague, Professor Karen Doerr compared the terminology used by the Germans to that used by Sharon and the Zionist forces in Israel. The Germans "evacuated" and "resettled" the Jews; the Israelis "transfer" and "resettle" the Palestinians. The Nazis used the term "selection" to choose a concentration inmate for murder; Sharon uses "extrajudicial execution." The Germans detained Jews in "work camps"; Sharon uses Palestinian "territories" and only recently added, "occupied" territories. The Nazis had a "final solution" to their problem with the Jews; Sharon adopted "terrorists" following 9/11, a term used generally about the Palestinian people since they are guilty of harboring terrorists, to signify those he had to eliminate. Language always suffers from those who wish to camouflage the reality of their actions. Israeli forces make "incursions," never invasions, into Palestinian territories; they assault to "flush out" top fugitives, they do not assassinate; helicopter gunships "exchange fire" with Palestinian gunmen, they don't attack with overwhelming force; Arafat is "confined" to his compound, not imprisoned; he could be "expelled" from Palestine, never deported or forcefully removed from office by an occupying power; tanks "roll" into the territories, they do not crush and destroy homes and vineyards. Such is the abuse of language.

Is it not possible, then, to understand the reaction of people sitting outside Israel, witnessing the actions of the Sharon government and his IOF as they devastate a defenseless population? Are not these actions comparable to those used by the Nazis? Is not the walling in of the Palestinians with the cement fence and electrified wires, the destruction of water wells and diversion of others to Israeli use, the rounding up of Palestinian civilians in the night, the assassination without trial of leaders of those oppressed, the humiliation and dehumanization of the people, the forceful taking of their means of livelihood, the intentional intimidation of civilians, are not these actions comparable to those of the Nazis against the innocent Jews in Germany? If the ultimate purpose of Sharon's government is the eradication of the Palestinian people, not by use of gas chambers, but by forced removal, euphemistically called "transferal," from their land through intimidation including incremental killings, then the comparison, like that made by Bishop Tutu to the apartheid regime in South Africa, is apt. This is not condemnation of the Jewish people but of their government that acts in their name. For Americans, who must live with the Bush administration's acquiescence of Sharon's slaughter paid for by their tax dollars, the dilemma is the same, dissent and be damned as un-American or stay silent and be the means of support for terrorism.

Ran HaCohen writes of the "Hebron terrorists," the fanatical Jewish settlers who "ransack Palestinian shops, cut electricity lines and water pipes, wreck cars, and attack schoolchildren," that they are a "criminal gang actively nurtured by the State," a group of 450 protected by 4000 Israeli troops. This is terrorism defended and accepted by the state. How effective is this terrorism? "So far, the junta's policy has proven quite effective," according to HaCohen, "Driven away by

economic strangulation and fear of settlers' violence, the population of 12,000 Palestinians who inhabited Hebron's Old City has dwindled to 5,000 souls since the division of the city in 1997." That is premeditated intimidation and coercion of civilians, the very definition of terrorism, done by the state of Israel supported by the Bush administration.

Hamas has been condemned by the Bush and Sharon administrations for using bombs strapped around the body as terrorism against innocent civilians, and indeed they are. Yet these same men find the use of "flechette" bullets that scatter pellets of death into multiple civilians legitimate weapons to use against Palestinians. They find no problems using missiles fired into crowded city streets or the use of cluster bombs in Iraq as legitimate weapons of war. Both accept as legitimate weapons for use in civilian areas high altitude bombing whether from F-16s or Apache helicopters. Yet such use anticipates civilian deaths and is, therefore, deliberate slaughter and cannot even be placed in the category of "collateral damage." The day Sharon left Washington, having conferred his blessings on Bush, Israeli tanks again fired into a crowded Gaza neighborhood in Rafah and killed six civilians including children. This is terrorism.

Even as the Israeli military moved out of Beit Hanoun on July 1, 2003 to begin the process that would bring into existence the "road map," they "leveled dozens of homes and factories, tore up roads and uprooted trees," according to the Guardian. Why? For "security" reasons. That's why they destroyed 1,000 acres of citrus trees! "Security" says it all; it is the cover word for terrorist actions. Bush uses the same word to detain hundreds of men who have never been charged with a crime and never had access to a lawyer. These are the actions of a terrorist state.

Why is it that these two men can act like terrorists and not be condemned for it? Because a definition has been designed that excludes them as heads of state and terrorism cannot be applied to states. Therein lies the power of words. But the world has not been fooled. Consider the UN resolutions condemning Israel for such acts: 252 (1968) calling on Israel to rescind measures that change the legal status of Jerusalem, including the expropriation of land and properties; 446 (1979) calling upon Israel to abide by the Geneva Convention regarding the responsibilities of occupying powers, especially "not to transport parts of its civilian population into occupied Arab territories"; 465 (1980) calling on Israel to cease construction of settlements in Arab territories; 471 (1981) calling on Israel to prosecute those involved in assassination attempts of West Bank leaders; 799 (1992) calling upon Israel "to reaffirm the Fourth Geneva Convention in all occupied territories since 1967, including Jerusalem, and affirms that deportation of civilians constitutes a contravention of its obligations under the convention"; 1405 (2002) calling on Israel to allow UN inspectors to "investigate civilian deaths during an Israeli assault on the Jenin refugee camp; 1435 (2002) calling on Israel to withdraw to positions of September 2000 and end its military activities in and around Ramallah, including the destruction of security and civilian infrastructure;

and these are only a few. These resolutions describe terrorist activities, activities supported by the Bush administration including vetoing such resolutions. Given the severity of the actions challenged by the UN, one would think Bush would rush to the UN demanding that Israel be brought before it for defying its resolutions, something he used as a "gimmick" to take his "war" to Iraq. But deception and hypocrisy are the modus operandi of this administration, not openness, honesty, and reason.

Clearly, Bush's demands to the EU ministers in Washington to declare Hamas a terrorist organization fell on deaf ears because they have been involved in the development of the resolutions listed above. They know the terrorism perpetrated by Sharon and Bush and would find condemning Hamas, a complicated organization that provides humanitarian relief to Palestinians as well as militant activity against the occupying forces of Israel, a gesture in the wind. The beginning of the end of terrorism starts with regime change in Israel and Washington.