

Assassination

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The outpouring of protests over the assassination of a terrorist in Dubai is another case of hypocritical anger and symptomatic of a complete loss of moral compass.

From a Jewish ethical point of view, if someone is trying to kill you, you have every right to disable or remove the threat in any way you can (preferably without killing). If this threat comes from a country, then you attack the country. If it comes from an army, you attack the army. If it comes from an individual, you attack that individual. And when in doubt, your safety comes first. In no way do I compare the removal of a threat, to torture which is always wrong. I have yet to be persuaded that torture ever provides accurate information that other means of interrogation cannot.

In the past you could settle a war by sending two champions to fight in single combat and the two armies didn't need to massacre each other. Alexander didn't offer the Persians that option. The niceties of medieval warfare and chivalrous challenges were relevant to knights in armor. The tactics of terror are altogether a different matter. There are no Geneva Conventions of Terror.

The rules of international law are all well and good if you dealing with someone who feels bound by international law. But not where an enemy organization explicitly and uncompromisingly calls for your destruction. In the asymmetrical modern battlegrounds around the world today where there are no rules of chivalry or legitimate combat or separating civilians from combatants. It is a matter of kill or be killed. If one is facing an enemy who is buying arms to use against civilians, assassination is a legitimate form of self-defense. So is confiscating a boatload of arms heading for enemy shores.

It is indeed dangerous to argue that just because assassination has been and is being used by states and individuals therefore it is legitimate. If the USA, and indeed Britain, practiced it once with regularity against regimes they disliked, they are nowadays a little more concerned with appearances. Usage is not a moral argument, but self-defense is. Even if world public opinion thinks everyone can defend himself, apart from Israel.

As for infringing sovereignty and due process of law, what happens when the perpetrators are protected by regimes which tacitly support their aims? What happens if everyone else is not standing up for justice? Was Israel wrong to ignore International conventions to land in Entebbe and rescue hostages? Has anyone ever suggested Von Stauffenberg was wrong to try to assassinate Hitler? Would the USA be wrong to assassinate Bin Laden? Why should not Israel target those who carried out terrorist attacks against its citizens on Israeli soil and beyond?

It is argued that this is a reasonable deterrent, to warn potential attackers that for the rest of their lives they would remain wanted, hunted, and potential targets. Although it hasn't worked too well as a deterrent judging by the numbers increasingly willing to blow themselves up.

The protests in Europe are really a smokescreen for NATO and USA assassinations by drone in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Civilians are killed in collateral damage or by errors of arms and information. Why have I not heard anyone suggesting that NATO forces be charged with Crimes against Humanity? Why can China get away with oppressing its minorities and the Tibetans, and the UN and most world governments simply kowtow to them? Why are both the USA and Europe so craven towards Saudi Arabia and most of the Arab world? It is money and politics stupid, not morality, not justice, not fairness.

Israel was and is used as the scapegoat for all Arab and Muslim woes. Blame the Jews, blame the Israelis, and this will deflect criticism from barbaric, incompetent rulers. Now the disease has spread to Europe. Your economy is in a mess? Find a distraction. Blame Israel for everything. Make a huge issue over forged passports.

Actually the tactics that were used in Dubai are behind the game. Things have progressed. With modern surveillance and passport technology, using old Cold War methods gives too much away. Remote control, drones—these are the new tactics and indeed Israel excels at them. That is why I am not convinced this was not the work of Fatah, even if some Israelis might have helped.

I hate violence and war. I wish it would all go away and we could all live in peace, and Israel could spend the money on education, health, and welfare that it now has to waste on arms. But wishing never won anything or got Nazis to go away.

No, of course two wrongs do not make a right. A great rabbi living in Spain 800 years ago said, "If the law is not applied fairly and equally to all citizens, it cannot just bind one part of the population and not the other." And if that was true of Christian Spain, it is also true where the Nations of the World do not apply one fair and equal standard across the board. Two wrongs do not make a right. But, conversely a right is not necessarily wrong!