



## Itamar case: Beyond terrorism

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The debate “is it freedom-fighting or is it terrorism?” is well standing, even after 9/11, the London and Madrid bombings. There are still those who try to distinguish whether a violent activity against civilians can be considered legitimate as means of struggle or it is unacceptable terror in order to coerce governments to give in to demands. And of course the actors behind even of the crudest violence deny the words “terrorism” and “terrorists” that express pejorative notions and label them as the “bad guys”. With terrorism having definitional problems unsolved even for scholars, the argument is more pressing when there is the background of an ongoing conflict that involves military parameters, like for example the Russian-Chechen or the Israeli-Palestinian one. When there is occupation, military operations etc, the distinctive lines between terrorism and legitimate resistance can indeed seem unclear. Those who fight against a powerful army, insist on the necessity of unconventional attacks that make up for their smaller military capacity against the strong enemy.

Yet, sometimes the question is not whether a specific attack is terrorism or resistance. There are cases when an attack succeeds to go beyond the common discussion of terrorism and can be discussed only as cruel murder. What took place in the Israeli settlement of Itamar on March 11 brings to surface the issue of evil, of crime beyond the lines of freedom fighting or even a terror campaign. Shabbat had already begun and it was night, when Arab individuals<sup>1</sup> broke into the home of an Israeli family and brutally murdered the parents, the two young children aged 11 and 4 and the 3 month infant<sup>2</sup>. The murderers stabbed some of the victims in the heart and slit the throat of others. Thanks to lucky circumstances, three children are today the only survivors of a family almost exterminated. While the horrible incident shocks, it is not the first one of its kind to happen. The story goes way back. In 1979 Arab individuals broke into a house. While some again managed to escape the deadly attack and stay alive (through dramatic events), the perpetrators according to their court conviction and eyewitnesses took down to the beach and shot one boy in front of his little sister and then smashed her skull against a rock with the rifle butt.<sup>3</sup> Another murder following the same pattern

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<sup>1</sup> It is reported in the news that a certain Palestinian group has taken responsibility for the murderous incident, see <http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=211780>

<sup>2</sup> For information about how the incident is suspected to have taken place, see <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/142843>, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itamar\\_killings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itamar_killings), <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism->

[+Obstacle+to+Peace/Palestinian+terror+since+2000/Fogel\\_family\\_stabbed\\_Itamar\\_11-Mar-2011.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-+Obstacle+to+Peace/Palestinian+terror+since+2000/Fogel_family_stabbed_Itamar_11-Mar-2011.htm)  
<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Templates/ArticleDynamicFix.aspx?NRMODE=Published&NRNODEGUID={53412193-9981-49F2-B7DF-8945F153CD86}&NRORIGINALURL=%2FMFA%2FTerrorism-%2BObstacle%2Bto%2BPeace%2FTerror%2BGroups%2FThe%2BKuntar%2BFile%2BExposed%2B-%2BYediot%2BAharonot%2B14-Jul-2008.htm&NRCACHEHINT=Guest>

took place in 2002 at Kibbutz Metzger with the result of five dead victims, including a mother and her two little boys.<sup>4</sup>

Condemning fully and unconditionally the slaughtering of babies and exterminating families in cold blood is not a sentimental issue. There are practical implications that usually regard future treatment. Itamar style murderers should be treated and regarded by the criminal justice system for what they do: attack to kill in cold blood with sole purpose to kill and a mens rea of hate. Once they are caught and sentenced, they should never be part of any exchange program that releases fighters and even- under certain conditions-terrorists. Fighters and terrorists, both kill as a way to reach their goal. Terrorists are of course unholy and their actions are condemned as dangerous, detrimental, hurting and homicidal. Yet, in terrorism violence is a political decision; it is a chosen tool, part of a greater scheme and strategy, not murder for the sake and enjoyment of murder. The "Itamar way" murderers do not deserve to be treated not even like terrorists; they are something far worse. They are murderers who enjoy taking the life of families, of little children, of infants. Their actions are not just to be condemned as terror; they are appalling as pure evil.

The pattern chosen by a criminal to carry out his act gives valuable information about and how he views his action. In criminology the crime scene, the weapon used and the way the murderer inflicted the deadly injuries give out valuable information about the perpetrator and the crime. Breaking into someone's home- the sacred asylum and castle of a family, a place of security and control- is a first thing to notice. Then, one must look carefully at the method of killing: stabbing a knife to a child's heart, penetrating the soft flesh and slitting its tender throat; smashing the skull of a little girl against a rock with pieces of the head. These actions, these killing are not the same as a planned bomb attack, done in seconds by pressing a detonator, sometimes arranging the time of the explosion, so that the actor is no where near the blast scene. Itamar style murders are a manual procedure, a "hand-made" crime, a "man to man" (or better "man to baby") personal deadly service and all these characteristics speak of actors that enjoy every bit of the murders, not hesitating and not chilling before the whole procedure of slaughtering and taking other people's life, even of babies. They go and stay close to their victim; they can look into his eyes and hear his breath go fast from fear. If the unfortunate prey is unaware and sleeping peacefully, then the predator takes advantage of this most vulnerable phase to exercise his violent power. The perpetrator chooses a messy murder, with blood spilled all over, with literally blood in his hands and a crime scene that reminds of a butcher shop. All the above mentioned elements of the murderous act reveal the worst kind of violence, carried out for and with the pleasure of killing. The victims, including those in the age of complete innocence, have no place in the world of human beings. The murderers have already dehumanized them in their mind and heart, probably through hate and anti-Semitism.

At this point, some may say that the weapon in the hand of the perpetrators was put by rage, despair created by everyday conditions that Palestinians face, frustration against Israeli policy and the whole issue of the settlements. The problems Palestinians encounter require careful response and solution by the Israeli State, but massacres of this kind have absolutely no excuse. They cannot even be seriously justified as crimes of revenge. How can collective responsibility and collective revenge stand in the name of reason or justice, when children and babies are slaughtered? What can be the responsibility of a 3 month old infant for whatever wrong measures the Israeli

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-%20Obstacle%20to%20Peace/Memorial/2002/2/Revital%20Ohayon>

government adopts? What revenge can dictate the massacre of infants? The argument of avenging the “crimes of Israel” by cutting the throat of a baby reveals nothing more than sick thinking and sick disposition. Such murders can never be part of a fair struggle.

The international scene must deal seriously with the matter. When Israel is carrying out military operations where Palestinians live, there is usually strong condemnation by the international opinion for any non-combatants, women and children that are victimized. The excuse and argument of “collateral damage” is not accepted and Israelis are accused of war crimes and unacceptable behavior. It does not matter if according to Israelis the children killed are caught in cross fire, or they are used purposively by terrorists as human shields. The international public opinion is absolute and regards the human life of children as utmost sacred and under no circumstance allowed to be endangered. In compliance with this attitude, the international opinion must show now its strong condemnation for Israeli non combatants and especially children been massacred. The murder of Jew kids and Jew infants is exactly as repulsive and horrifying as the murder of Palestinian ones. Thus, the children of Israel deserve the same protection as the children of Palestine. In addition, there can be no mathematic equation and keeping scores, when we are talking about lives and kids. The alleged or true sins of one part of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict do not justify the same or worse response by the other.

There is another aspect that requires attention. The killing that took place is tragic not only because human beings have lost their lives, but also because it can influence the peace prospect and process between Israelis and Palestinians. Again, it is not an emotional issue, but one with far more practical, objective implications. Itamar like massacres do nothing, but broaden the gap between the two people and ruin any attempt for reconciliation that obeys the voices of reason and consent. Such attacks will be interpreted by many as conveying the message “Arabs are dangerous and threaten the existence of Israelis”, accentuating the most conservative and defensive reflexes of Israeli population. From this point of view it is evident that the Itamar killing is not helping at all the Palestinian cause, if of course the Palestinian cause is still the development of a Palestinian State next to the Israel (and not murdering or throwing to the sea all Israelis). The only thing gained from this murderous act in the land of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” is that the story of “all who take the sword will perish by the sword” will go on and the vicious cycle of death will continue...