

In the last 35 years, there has never been such a serious threat to Israel's survival as today. Tourism is down at least 70%. Israel's economy is being strangled by a carefully orchestrated campaign of terror.

Fewer and fewer of us can remember a world without an Israel. Youngsters under 60, who likely do not remember the 1948 War of Independence, have lived all their lives with Israel and may take its existence for granted. Those with memories going back less than 35 years, for whom the 1967 six day war was eons ago, have little or no memory of an Israel that was not a major Middle Eastern military power.

Up until last week, we in the United States could not fully comprehend what it is like to live under the imminent threat of random acts of terror. The tragic events of last week have been a stunning wake up call for our government and the American people, forcing them to reevaluate the question of what is an appropriate response to terrorist acts.

Arafat as the leader of the Palestinian Authority, along with several other groups devoted to the eradication of Israel, are stepping up their efforts to destroy the State of Israel. Arafat has been negotiating with Hamas, an organization devoted to the use of terrorist tactics. Several days before one of the recent suicide bombings, Israeli security forces learned that an Israeli Arab had left his home to join a Hamas terrorist cell specializing in suicide bombers. They repeatedly appealed to the Palestinian Authority to detain him. In spite of this, the PA did nothing and Muhammad Shaker Habishi blew himself up along with three other people in Nahariya on Sunday, September 9.

As I mentioned yesterday, a recent opinion poll of Palestinians revealed that 81% favor suicide bombings as a legitimate way to fight against Israel as long as Israeli measures against Palestinians continue. Worse, 54% favor suicide bombings, even if Israeli measures cease. Today's generation of Palestinian children are being deliberately and systematically indoctrinated, with textbooks stained with blood libels, and children's television programs dripping with hatred.

Major news media, such as CNN, have been taken in by an organized campaign of misinformation, designed to portray Israel as brutal oppressors. One egregious example: Three Palestinians were killed in a car accident in the West Bank. The locals told the CNN crew that they were killed by the Israelis. The CNN reporter asked an Israeli Defense Ministry spokesperson if this was true. The spokesperson, wanting to be absolutely accurate, asked the reporter to give him a few hours to check it out. In the meantime, CNN aired the story unconfirmed, spreading a Palestinian lie.

Vicious lies that we thought died a welcome death after the Holocaust and the reforms of Vatican II are being revived. King Assad of Syria told the Pope during the Pope's visit that Christians and Muslims should make common cause against 'those who try to kill the principles of all religions with the same mentality with which they betrayed Jesus Christ; in the same way that they tried to commit treachery against Prophet Muhammad.' Muhammad Ziyadah, Minister of Religion, said, 'We must be aware of what the enemies of God -- malicious Zionism -- conspire to commit against Christianity and Islam.' The Pope listened without responding.

Friends, now is the time to put aside any differences we might have with the Israeli government, and remember that it is our brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews, our family, our flesh and blood, that are struggling to survive. Every day living in

Israel, living a normal life is an act of heroism -- although they would never admit it. For them, it is just that life must go on, amidst the shelling, bombing, gunfire, and economic stagnation.

Israel has taken risks to try to make peace with her neighbors that in hindsight have cost the lives of her citizens, yet she has been viciously attacked. At a recent United Nations conference against racism in Durban, reprints of Nazi era caricatures of Jews from the Arab press were circulated, and vicious speeches were given, accusing Israel of using poison gas, depleted uranium bullets, and injecting babies with the AIDS virus. Judging by the resolutions passed in Durban, Israel is the one nation responsible for all of the evils afflicting humanity today, a world-wide satanic cult, the carriers of colonialism, poverty, slavery, and ethnic cleansing.

In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote:

"You declare, my friend, that you do not hate the Jews, you are merely 'anti-Zionist'. And I say, let the truth ring forth from the high mountain tops. Let it echo through the valleys of God's green earth: When people criticize Zionism they mean Jews... Zionism is nothing less than the dream and ideal of the Jewish people returning to live in their own land... And what is anti-Zionism? It is the denial to the Jew of the fundamental right that we justly claim for the people of Africa and freely accord to all other nations of the globe. It is discrimination against Jews because they are Jews. In short it is antisemitism."

Friends, I ask you, what if there were no Israel? To put the question another way -- What if there were an Israel in 1933? How different would our history have been if European Jewry would have had a place to flee. Shimon Peres, in a recent conference call with North American Conservative rabbis, observed that the greatest accomplishment of Zionism has been the absorption of 1 million Jews from the FSU in the last dozen or so years alone.

Consider also that Israel is a world leader in medicine, technology, and desert farming, including desalination and irrigation. Israeli teams have been involved in famine relief, earthquake and other disaster response, and war rescue operations in Rwanda, Bosnia, the FSU, and India. Last week, Israel sent people to New York and Washington to help with upgrading security, anti-terrorism, and disaster relief. Israel is an 'or goyim,' a light of ethics to the world as a model of what it means to be a responsible nation among nations.

For us the instruction, כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה, is central to our ideology, the idea that we are bound to and responsible for Jews around the world. The Federation slogan "We are One" reflects this notion, central to the survival of Judaism. I go a step further, and say to you that Judaism needs a strong Israel at its center to thrive.

Israel is the center of Jewish scholarship and life.

Israel is soon to be the largest Jewish community in the world.

Israel is the only reliable refuge for persecuted Jews.

Israel is the only government in the Middle East that is democratic and seriously struggles with issues of pluralism and morality.

So what are we to do? The Jewish people is one body -- when one limb is in pain, then entire body suffers. Israel, our heart and soul, is suffering -- how can we help? It is absolutely critical that each one of you, to the best of your ability and means, shows active support to Israel. Here is what I want you to do:

Number 1 -- Visit Israel. I know this is a lot to ask you to think about right now, but if you were here this past Shabbat morning to hear two of our young people, Aaron Lewis and Jay Rapaport, speak so passionately about their experience in Israel this past summer, urging each of

us to go, you would know that it is not such an outrageous request. You would have also heard Lindsay Miller talk about her summer with USY, and express a desire to go to Israel next year, and you would have heard me speak about Mara Kurlandsky filling out an application to spend a semester of High School in Israel this year, and Sarah Levenburg's dream to go to Israel next year. These five young people, demonstrating both courage and a deep commitment to the Jewish idea of Ahavat Zion, love of Zion, have laid down a challenge for us. There is a Grand Rapids Mission going this June. I will be on it. I want you to join me. There are other missions going all the time, from Detroit, from Chicago, from Federation small cities from Women's League, and from Hadassah. It doesn't matter what you're looking for, you can find a suitable trip for students, young leaders, families, or senior adults. Find one going when you want to go, and give Israel the economic and social support of your presence.

If you can't visit, then there are other ways to contribute towards the Israel economy. You can give to the Ahavas Israel scholarship fund, to support those who are visiting Israel. You can give an extra gift to the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids. All money not allocated towards local or selected national needs goes to the United Jewish Communities, supporting Jews in Israel and other parts of the world. You can give to another organization which directly supports an Israeli institution.

There are also ways to strength Israel that don't involve giving money, but rather involve giving your time and energy. You can pay attention to the news media reports, and write appropriate letters against bias. Use your Internet connection to subscribe to news from Israel, or read it off Jewish or Israeli websites. Letters are effective, if there are enough of them, if they are well written, or if they are directed to those who can make a difference. One example: It came to the attention of one of my colleagues that the Nat'l geographic website map of Israel showed Jerusalem outside of Israel. He wrote one letter to the web site, and within a day it was corrected.

You can also talk about Israel to your non-Jewish friends, coworkers, and neighbors, to correct the misperception that it is a country brutalizing its powerless minority inhabitants and neighbors. The more people you speak to, the more people will understand and accept our side of the story. In part, Israel's struggle is a public relations war. A change in public opinion against Israel could have serious consequences with respect to the American government's continued support. Some of what I am bringing to you from reputable news sources, has not been widely reported. We need to do our part to bring out the truth.

Friends, this is a critical time for the survival of Israel. Let us recall the words of the Prayer for the State of Israel that we pray every Shabbat and Yom Tov:

Our Father in heaven, Rock and Redeemer of the people Israel: Bless the State of Israel, the dawn of our redemption. Shield it with your love; spread over it the shelter of your peace. guide its leader and advisors with Your light and Your truth. Help them with Your good counsel. Strengthen the hands of those who defend our holy land. Deliver them; crown their efforts with triumph. Bless the land with peace, and its inhabitants with lasting joy. And let us say, Amen.