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New Israeli settlements foment more terrorism

Renée Schafer Horton | Mar. 16, 2011 NCR Today

Ten years ago, I visited Israel as a guest of the government. I was part of a group of Catholic journalists invited to the Holy Land in hopes we would return to the U.S. and write articles encouraging travel to Israel. I have many memories of that trip, but a few stand out:

- Going to the Holocaust museum and realizing that what was done to Jews then is similar to what Jews do to Palestinians now. For instance, the Germans made Jews wear yellow stars; in Israel, Palestinians have to have green license plates.
- Interviewing the mayor of Jerusalem and naively asking, ?Why can?t you just share the land?? and flinching as he snapped, ?You Americans and your 200-year-old history. You know nothing of history!? He went on to describe with disdain the U.S.?s vision of starting fresh every day.
- Getting a phone call from a priest I?d met there and hearing him describe a complaint he?d received from a parishioner who had been stopped at an Israeli checkpoint as his pregnant wife labored in the back of the car. They were detained until the woman?s water broke and then, finally convinced she was actually pregnant, let them through.

I left the country deeply depressed about the state of life for Palestinians and I often thought if I had to live under those conditions -- so much of my life controlled by another country and made to feel second-class in just about everything -- I?d probably snap.

While none of those situations justify terrorism, it certainly helps one understand how it can happen. When someone feels caged in a corner, powerless to make changes in their life, as if they have nothing to lose, they will do just about anything to feel heard and seen.

That isn?t an excuse for Friday?s horrific killing of an Israeli family [1] in a Jewish settlement in the Palestinian territory of the West Bank, but it is a bit of an explanation.

The bodies of five members of the Fogel were found by 12-year-old Tamar Fogel, who was returning home from a meeting with her youth group. Tamar will have to live with the shock of finding her dead parents and siblings for the rest of her life, a trauma no one should have to endure. I have no patience with people who traumatize the young and so -- antithetical to the Christian message as it may be -- I have nothing but loathing towards the people who did this.

That said, there is plenty of blame to go around in the Holy Land; terrorism is in the eyes of the beholder.

Is it wrong to strap on a bomb vest and blow up innocent civilians? No question about it. Is it wrong to slaughter a family in their sleep? Absolutely. But is it not also wrong to bulldoze Palestinian houses to make way for Jewish settlements? [2]

Is it wrong to set up a network of checkpoints that cut families off from each other and workers off from their

jobs? Is it wrong to make a certain group?s life a living Hell and then claim that you can?t figure out why their young men want to kill you?

Israel?s announcement this week that it will increase the pace of construction of illegal settlements in the Palestinian territory of the West Bank [3] in light of the murders is just one more ?incitement to violence? in my opinion.

Building more settlements -- putting radical Jews in the middle of Palestinian land -- will not bring back the dead or make peace with moderate Arabs more possible.

Instead, it will feed right into the hands of Palestinian radicals, fomenting more terrorism. It is a bite-your-nose-off-to-spite-your-face action that won?t help anything and will most likely make everything worse.

Surely the government of Israel knows this, which makes one wonder about the nation?s true motives.

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