

Israel, the UN and the assassination of Count Bernadotte

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On July 25, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) launched a sustained attack on a United Nations outpost in southern Lebanon. Over the course of six hours, the UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization—established in 1948) post was hit at least 16 times, according to press reports, including five direct hits on the base. The unarmed staff, assert UN officials, repeatedly contacted the Israeli military and begged them to stop.

The *Los Angeles Times* reports: “UN officials who briefed reporters here said the attack began at around 1:20 p.m. Radio contact with the post was lost around 7:30 that evening. During those hours, UN officials made at least a half-dozen calls to the Israeli mission to the UN to seek an end to the attack, a senior UN official said. Additional calls were made to the Israeli military by UN generals on the ground demanding that the Israelis hold fire.”

The calls went unheeded, and finally, the IDF managed to score a direct hit on the well-marked building, leveling it and killing four observers, from Canada, Finland, Austria and China. The bodies of three of the observers in Khiam have been recovered, but the fourth corpse is buried in the rubble. Heavy equipment cannot reach the site due to continued Israeli bombardment, UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon—established in 1978)—which generally works with UNTSO—has said.

In the wake of the killings, and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s statement of the obvious, that the attack could only have been purposeful, the Israeli government, along with perfunctory statements of regret, self-righteously defended itself against Annan’s accusations. Israeli foreign ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor sounded a common theme: “Why on earth would we deliberately target UN observers? What good would that do either on the military or the political level, because it is obvious that this would be harmful.”

The *Jerusalem Post*, one of the noxious mouthpieces of the Israeli political establishment, echoed Palmor’s comments: “And why, pray tell, would Israel target UNIFIL [actually UNTSO]? Is Annan suggesting some sort of Israeli anti-UN sadism, or that Israel would have some reason to target UNIFIL in its war with Hizbullah?”

The argument that such an attack would “not do any good” for Israel is preposterous on its face. The attack on Lebanon, the deaths of hundreds of civilians, the wounding of thousands, the displacement of nearly a million and the destruction of that country’s infrastructure has also “not done Israel any good” in the eyes of world public opinion, but that has not restrained the Tel Aviv regime and its murderous IDF.

As for “why on earth” the Israeli military would attack UNTSO or UNIFIL, one can think of a number of excellent reasons.

Apologists for the Zionist regime always overplay their cards when they comment on this question. Rejecting even the possibility that Israel might be guilty of such a horrendous crime, they invariably go on to display their utter hostility to the UN force, arguing that the international observers have been more or less a shield for, if not a direct accomplice of

Hezbollah activity.

Thus the *Jerusalem Post* editors, in the aforementioned piece, demand an investigation that would determine how “UNIFIL stood by without a murmur as a terrorist organization amassed thousands upon thousands of rockets whose unprovoked use has killed and wounded dozens of Israelis and precipitated the current war.... We are owed more than that: an independent, blue-ribbon investigation into how UNIFIL forces became human shields for the terrorist army they should have been fighting to dismantle.”

Dan Gillerman, Israeli ambassador to the UN, went farther, claiming that the UN peacekeeping force’s facilities “had sometimes been used for cover by Hezbollah militants,” according to the Associated Press. “It has never been able to prevent any shelling of Israel, any terrorist attack, any kidnappings,” he commented in New York. “They either didn’t see or didn’t know or didn’t want to see, but they have been hopeless,” Gillerman said.

Given that a leading Israeli diplomat accuses the UN observers of witting or unwitting collaboration with Hezbollah, why should anyone be astonished by a deliberate IDF assault on the UN outpost? According to Gillerman’s logic, such an assault would be entirely legitimate. There is a history of such attacks. In 1996, the Israelis massacred more than 100 civilians attempting to seek refuge at a UNIFIL facility in Qana, southeast of Tyre. The IDF claimed that was a mistake, too.

In any event, the Israelis have quite practical reasons for attacking the UN observers. First, to remove witnesses to their invasion of Lebanon and the war crimes they are committing against the Lebanese civilian population. Second, to make a point about their attitude toward any international interference in their operations. The Israelis have rejected the UN, the victimized party, playing any role in the investigation of the destruction of the UNTSO outpost. In all this, they are sending a message that any “peacekeeping” force sent to the region must be entirely under Tel Aviv’s thumb.

This attitude is nothing new. The Israeli record is one of gangster-like defiance, not only of the United Nations, but more generally, of international law. The Zionists have consistently rejected any suggestion that the state of Israel should be constrained in its choice of methods, no matter how violent, for pursuing its interests. On its official web site, the Permanent Mission of Israel to the UN has a document, “Israel and the UN—An Uneasy Relationship,” which accuses the General Assembly of “a long-standing tradition of singling out Israel” for its human rights abuses against the Palestinians. Indeed, the various Arab regimes have a history of grandstanding at the UN, loudly denouncing the crimes of the Zionist regime, even as they yield all along the line to the continued oppression of the Palestinian people.

Although the Israeli Declaration of Independence in May 1948 was officially made possible by a UN General Assembly resolution the previous November, the Zionist leaders came into conflict with their international sponsors from the outset. They were dissatisfied with the

partition proposed by the UN and were guided by far greater ambitions, which the world has seen unfold over the past nearly 60 years.

When United Nations plans and concerns conflicted with the Zionists' ambitions, the latter were prepared to resort to violence and terrorism to gain their aims. One of the first criminal acts committed against the UN by the Zionist movement was the assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte on September 17, 1948.

Bernadotte (born 1895) was a Swedish diplomat, the nephew of King Gustavus V, who gained recognition as the head of the Swedish Red Cross during World War II. He used that position to negotiate with Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler and save 15,000-20,000 Jews and others, mostly Scandinavians, from concentration camps. Near the end of the war, Bernadotte received Himmler's offer of Germany's surrender to the US and Britain on condition that it could continue its war against the USSR.

On May 20, 1948 (six days after Israel declared independence), Bernadotte was appointed the United Nations' mediator in Palestine. He was mandated to "promote a peaceful adjustment of the future situation in Palestine" and allowed to negotiate beyond the terms of the Partition Plan.

In the summer of 1948, he was sent by the UN to arrange a truce between Israel and the Arab countries that had attacked it. On June 11, he succeeded in organizing a 30-day truce. During the lull in the fighting, Bernadotte "put forward his first proposal for solving the conflict. Instead, it was to seal his fate. Bernadotte's transgression, in the view of Jewish zealots, was to include in his June 28 proposal the suggestion that Jerusalem be placed under Jordanian rule, since all the area around the city was designated for the Arab state" (Donald Neff, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* [WRMEA]).

Other eventual proposals by Bernadotte, published after his death, included granting the Negev desert to the proposed Arab state and the Galilee to the Jewish state; granting control over the Arab sections of Palestine to the Arab states (in effect, Transjordan); ensuring that the port in Haifa and the airport in Lydda served both the Arab and Jewish portions of the country, as well as the neighboring Arab states; returning Arab refugees to their homes; establishing a Reconciliation Committee as the first step toward achieving a lasting peace in the region.

The reaction of the Zionist organizations to Bernadotte's suggestion about Jerusalem was predictable.

"The UN partition plan had declared Jerusalem an international city that was to be ruled by neither Arab nor Jew. But the Jewish terrorists, including [future Israeli prime ministers Yitzhak] Shamir [member of LEHI, known as the Stern Gang] and Menachem Begin, the leader of the largest terrorist group, Irgun Zvai Leumi—National Military Organization, also known by the Hebrew acronym 'Etzel'—had rejected partition and claimed all of Palestine and Jordan for the Jewish state. These Jewish extremists were horrified at Bernadotte's suggestion.

"By July Sternists were already threatening Bernadotte's assassination. *New York Times* columnist C.L. Sulzberger reported meeting with two Stern members on July 24, who stated: 'We intend to kill Bernadotte and any other uniformed United Nations observers who come to Jerusalem.' Asked why, 'They replied that their organization was determined to seize all of Jerusalem for the state of Israel and would brook no interference by any national or international body' " (Neff, WRMEA).

LEHI (Lohamei Herut Yisrael—Fighters for the Freedom of Israel), the Stern Gang (named after Avraham "Yair" Stern), was a nationalist-fascistic outfit, which called for the establishment of a "Hebrew kingdom from the Euphrates to the Nile." Following Stern's death at the hands of the British police in February 1942, the group created a new command structure, but "Terrorism continued to be the organization's guideline" (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org). It came into conflict with more mainstream organizations, including the Haganah, the Zionist underground military outfit from 1920 to 1948.

On November 6, 1944, two Stern Gang members assassinated Lord

Moyne, the British Minister for Middle East Affairs in Cairo. LEHI also bombed the Haifa railroad workshops in June 1946. In December 1947, Begin's movement, Etzel, threw bombs from a car into a crowd of several hundred Arabs, killing six and wounding 42. In the subsequent communalist violence, 42 Jewish workers at the refinery were killed and 49 injured. Emulating Etzel the next day, Haganah carried out a similar attack in a town where Arab refinery workers lived, killing some 60 men, women and children.

Bernadotte's assassination was decided upon and planned by three leaders of the Stern Gang, including Shamir, who would become prime minister of Israel in 1983. Although LEHI had officially disbanded and dissolved itself into the Israeli Defense Forces at the end of May 1948, the Jerusalem Stern Gang group remained an independent organization, insisting that the fate of that city had not yet been settled.

LEHI called Bernadotte a British agent and a collaborator with the Nazis. (They apparently drew a veil over the fact that the Zionist organizations had extensive dealings with the Nazis, including Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann, during World War II.) "The organization considered his plan to be a threat to its goal of an independent Israel with expanded territory on both sides of the Jordan River" (www.palestinefacts.org).

On September 17, 1948, Bernadotte's three-car convoy was stopped at a small roadblock in Jewish-controlled West Jerusalem. Two gunmen shot out the tires of the automobiles and a third gunman fired a pistol through the open back window of Bernadotte's vehicle. The UN mediator was struck by six bullets and died instantly, along with a French officer seated next to him.

No one was ever charged for the murders, although those ultimately responsible were well known. Natan Yellin-Mor and Mattityahu Shmuelevitz, Stern Gang leaders, were charged with belonging to a terrorist organization. Found guilty, they were immediately released and pardoned—Yellin-Mor had meanwhile been elected to the Israeli parliament. Shamir was never tried for his role in the killing.

The actual assassin of Bernadotte, Yehoshua Cohen, went on to become a bodyguard for Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. The first public admission of the Stern Gang's role in the murder was not made until 1977.

The attack on the UN outpost earlier this week, in other words, was entirely in keeping with the origins and traditions of the Zionist state, whose "birth pangs" involved terrorism and contempt for international law.



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