

A Perfectly Framed Assassination

By Robert Baer The Wall Street Journal

Stepped-up surveillance technology may be tipping the scales in the cat-and-mouse game between spies and their targets. Robert Baer on the current state of spycraft.

It was a little after 9 p.m. when a Palestine Liberation Organization official stepped out of the elevator into the lobby of Paris's Le Meridien Montparnasse, a modern luxury hotel that caters to businessmen and well-heeled tourists. The PLO official was going to dinner with a friend, who was waiting by the front desk. As they pushed out the Meridien's front door, they both noticed a man on a divan looking intently at them. It was odd enough that at dinner they called a contact in the French police. The policeman advised the PLO official to go directly back to the hotel after dinner and stay put. The police would look into it in the morning.

When the PLO official and his friend came back from dinner, the man on the divan was gone, and the Meridien's lobby was full of Japanese tourists having coffee after a night on the town. From here the accounts differ; in one version, a taxi blocked off traffic at the end of the street that runs in front of the Meridien, apparently to hold up any police car on routine patrol. In another, the traffic on the street was light.

What is certain is that as soon as the PLO official stepped out of the passenger side of the car, two athletic men in track suits came walking down the street, fast. One of them had what looked like a gym bag. When the friend of the PLO official got out of the car to say goodbye, he noticed the two but didn't think much of it. They looked French, but other than that it was too dark to see more.

One of the men abruptly lunged at the PLO official, pinning him down on the hood of the car. According to the PLO official's friend, one of the men put his gym bag against the head of the PLO official and fired two quick rounds into the base of his neck, killing him instantly. There was a silencer on the weapon. The two fled down the street and disappeared into an underground garage, never to be seen again.

That was 1992. And the world of assassins has changed a lot in the intervening years.

I knew the PLO official, and his assassins have yet to be found. Israel's Mossad security agency was quickly assumed to be behind the killing. Israel had accused the PLO official of having been a member of Black September, and his assassination seemed to

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be the last in an Israeli campaign to hunt down the perpetrators of the 1972 Munich Olympic attack. So far so good, but unable to identify even the nationality of the assassins, the French could do nothing but grumble. With no casings from the pistol found, no closed-circuit TV coverage in front of the Meridien, and no good description of the assassins, the French could not even send a strong diplomatic protest to the Israelis. If Israel indeed assassinated the PLO official, it got away with it cleanly.

Fast forward 18 years to the assassination of Hamas military leader Mahmoud al-Mabhouh on Jan. 20, and it is a graphic reminder of just how much the world has changed. Nearly the entire hit was recorded on closed-circuit TV cameras, from the time the team arrived at Dubai's airport to the time the assassins entered Mr. Mabhouh's room. The cameras even caught team members before and after they donned their disguises. The only thing the Dubai authorities have been unable to discover is the true names of the team. But having identified the assassins, or at least the borrowed identities they traveled on, Dubai felt confident enough to point a finger at Israel. (Oddly enough several of the identities were stolen from people living in Israel.)

Dubai had on its side motivation—Mr. Mabhouh had plotted the kidnapping and murder of two Israeli soldiers and reportedly played a role in the smuggling of Iranian arms into Gaza. And none of this is to mention that the Mabhouh assassination had all the hallmarks of an Israeli hit: a large team, composed of men and women, and an almost flawless execution. If it had been a Russian hit, for instance, they would have used a pistol or a car bomb, indifferent to the ...chaos left behind.

After Dubai released the tapes, the narrative quickly became that the assassination was an embarrassing blunder for Tel Aviv. Mossad failed spectacularly to assassinate a Hamas official in Amman in 1997—the poison that was used acted too slowly and the man survived—and it looks like the agency is not much better today. Why were so many people involved? (The latest report is that there were 26 members of the team.) Why were identities stolen from people living in Israel? Why didn't they just kill Mr. Mabhouh in a dark alley, one assassin with a pistol with a silencer? Or why at least didn't they all cover their faces with baseball caps so

that the closed-circuit TV cameras did not have a clean view?

The truth is that Mr. Mabhouh's assassination was conducted according to the book—a military operation in which the environment is completely controlled by the assassins. At least 25 people are needed to carry off something like this. You need "eyes on" the target 24 hours a day to ensure that when the time comes he is alone. You need coverage of the police—assassinations go very wrong when the police stumble into the middle of one. You need coverage of the hotel security staff, the maids, the outside of the hotel. You even need people in back-up accommodations in the event the team needs a place to hide.

I can only speculate about where exactly the hit went wrong. But I would guess the assassins failed to account for the marked advance in technology. Not only were there closed-circuit TV cameras in the hotel where Mr. Mabhouh was assassinated and at the airport, but Dubai has at its fingertips the best security consultants in the world. The consultants merely had to run advanced software through all of Dubai's digital data before, during and after the assassination to connect the assassins in time and place. For instance, a search of all cellular phone calls made in and around the hotel where Mr. Mabhouh was assassinated would show who had called the same number—reportedly a command post in Vienna. It would only be a matter then of tracking when and where calls were made from these phones, tying them to hotels where the team was operating or staying.

Not completely understanding advances in technology may be one explanation for the assassins nonchalantly exposing their faces to the closed-circuit TV cameras, one female assassin even smiling at one. They mistook Dubai 2010 for Paris 1992, and never thought it would all be tied together in a neat bow. But there is no good explanation why Israel, if indeed it was behind the assassination, underestimated the technology. The other explanation—the assassins didn't care whether their faces were identified—doesn't seem plausible at all.

When I first came into the CIA as a young field operative, there was an endless debate about whether assassinations were worthwhile. The CIA was humiliated by its failed attempts to kill Fidel Castro in the early 1960s, and embarrassed by the accusation that it was complicit in the murder of Chile's President Salvador Allende in 1973.

In the mid-1970s the Church-Pike committees investigating the CIA put an end to CIA assassinations. Since then every CIA officer has been obligated to sign Executive Order 12,333, a law outlawing CIA assassinations. It had—at least until 9/11—a chilling effect on everything CIA operatives did, from the informants they ran to the

governments they dealt with. I myself ran afoul of E.O. 12,333.

In March 1995 I was brought back from northern Iraq, accused of having tried to assassinate Saddam Hussein. It was true there had been a running fight between the Kurds and Saddam's army in the north, but if there had been a real attempt on Saddam's life I wasn't aware of it. And neither was the FBI, which was ordered by the White House to investigate the CIA for an illegal assassination attempt. The lesson I walked away with was that the word assassination terrified the White House, more than even Saddam. And as far as I can tell, it still does to a degree.

Post-9/11 the CIA got back into the assassination business, but in a form that looks more like classic war than the Hollywood version of assassination. The CIA has fired an untold number of Hellfire missiles at al Qaeda and Taliban operatives in the mountains between Pakistan and Afghanistan. One of its most spectacular assassinations was that of Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of Pakistan's Taliban, last year. In addition to the intended targets, thousands of other people have been killed. What strikes me, and what makes it so different from the assassination of the PLO official in Paris and Mr. Mabhouh in Dubai, is that the assassinations are obscured by the fog of war. Western TV cameras are not allowed in to film the collateral damage, and that's not to mention we're all but at war with Pakistan's Pashtun who live in these mountains.

Israel's conflict in the West Bank and Gaza is less than clear cut in the sense that Israel is not at war with the Palestinians, or even really with Hamas. It is at war with Hamas militants, people who have shed Israeli blood. The Israelis know who they are, and as a matter of course send hit squads into Gaza and the West Bank to kill them. The Israelis call it "targeted killings"—assassination by any other name.

A couple of years ago I visited the house where the Israeli military assassinated a Palestinian militant in the West Bank. It was in a makeshift refugee camp, where you could touch houses on both sides of the path only by raising your arms. The place was teeming with people. How the Israeli team got in, assassinated the militant and got out without any casualties, I will never know. The point is that the Israelis have become very good at it.

If in fact Mossad assassinated Mr. Mabhouh in Dubai, it no doubt modeled its planning on targeted killings in Palestinian areas—with the use of overwhelming force, speed and control of the environment. The problem with Dubai, which should be painfully obvious to Tel Aviv, is that it is not the West Bank. Nor is Paris now with its web of closed-circuit TV cameras and the ability of the French to track prepaid telephones. The art of assassination, the kind we have seen over and over

again in Hollywood movies, may be as passé as killing people by arsenic or with a garrote. You just can't get away with it anymore.

In America's war on terror, there has been a conspicuous absence of classical assassination. The closest thing to it was when the CIA kidnapped an Egyptian cleric in Milan and rendered him to Egypt in 2003. Most of the CIA agents behind the rendition were identified because, like the assassins in Dubai, the agents apparently did not understand that you can't put a large team on the ground in a modern country and not leave a digital footprint. It took a matter of days for the Italian prosecutors to trace their supposedly sterile phone to their hotels, and from there to their true-name email accounts and telephone calls to family. We might as well have let Delta Force do it with helicopters with American insignia on the side.

Israel has yet to feel the real cost of the hit in Dubai. But the longer it is covered in the press, the higher the cost.

And was Mr. Mabhohou worth it? Other than taking revenge for killing the two Israeli soldiers, he will be quickly replaced. Arms dealing is not a professional skill, and as long as Hamas's militants

are at war with Israel they will find people to buy arms and smuggle them into Gaza. In short, it's looking more and more like Mr. Mabhohou's assassination was a serious policy failure.

In cold prose, it sounds inhuman, but there should be a cost-benefit calculation in deciding whether to assassinate an enemy. With all of the new technology available to any government who can afford it, that cost has gone up astronomically. Plausible deniability is out the window. Obviously, if we had known with any specificity 9/11 was coming, we would have ignored the high cost and tried to assassinate Osama bin Laden. And there's certainly an argument to be made that we should have assassinated Saddam Hussein rather than invade Iraq. The bottom line, it seems to me, is that assassination is justified if it keeps us out of a war. But short of that, it's not. The Mabhohous of the world are best pursued by relentless diplomatic pressure and the rule of law.

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Israel has its faults, but apartheid isn't one of them

By Richard Cohen The Washington Post March 2, 2010

Toward the end of last year, Jimmy Carter apologized for some of his very harsh statements about Israel. In an "open letter to the Jewish community" -- and with a vagueness that ill becomes him -- he airily mentioned criticisms that "stigmatize Israel" but omitted his own contribution: the implication that Israel is, like the racist South Africa of old, an "apartheid" state.

Carter used the term in his book "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid." It could be argued that he meant the label to apply only to the West Bank, but even so the use of the term was incorrect and deliberately provocative. Carter was waving the bloody shirt of racism, and he knew it.

What can be said about others who apply the term to Israel in general? No apology has come from them -- and the way things are going, none will be forthcoming. The use of the word has become commonplace -- Google "Israel and apartheid" and you will see that the two are linked in cyberspace, as love and marriage are in at least one song. The meaning is clear: Israel is a state where political and civil rights are withheld on the basis of race and race alone. This is not the case.

The Israel of today and the South Africa of yesterday have almost nothing in common. In South Africa, the minority white population harshly ruled the majority black population. Nonwhites were denied civil rights, and in 1958, they were even deprived of citizenship. In contrast, Israeli Arabs, about one-fifth of the country, have the same civil

and political rights as do Israeli Jews. Arabs sit in the Knesset and serve in the military, although most are exempt from the draft. Whatever this is -- and it looks suspiciously like a liberal democracy -- it cannot be apartheid.

The West Bank, more or less under Israeli military rule, is a different matter. But it is not part of Israel proper, and under every conceivable peace plan -- including those proposed by Israeli governments -- almost all of it will revert to the Palestinian Authority and become the heartland of a Palestinian state.

Yet Israel's critics continue to hurl the apartheid epithet at the state when they have to know, or they ought to know, that it is a calumny. Interestingly, they do not use it for Saudi Arabia, which maintains as perfect a system of gender apartheid as can be imagined -- women can't even drive, never mind vote -- or elsewhere in the Arab world, where Palestinians sometimes have fewer rights than they do in Israel.

A recent op-ed on Israel in the Financial Times employs the word apartheid several times. Some of the time it seems to be applied to the West Bank, but other times it is applied to Israel proper. Either way, this shoe doesn't fit. (Security concerns are not rooted in racism.) The author of the piece is Henry Siegman, a harsh critic of Israeli policies and a former executive director of the American Jewish Congress, so anti-Semitism is not the issue here --

just sound judgment. Sometimes impatience can lead to imprudence.

But anti-Semitism is not so easily dismissed with others. This is "Israeli Apartheid Week" on campuses across the world, and it is clear that what furiously animates many of the protesters are not legitimate grievances but imaginary ones. Israel is not above criticism and the Palestinians have their case, but when that case is constructed out of lies about the Jewish state, it not only represents a wholly unoriginal cover of some old anti-Semitic ditties but also denigrates the Palestinian cause. It does not need lies.

As for Israel, its critics do it no good when they couch their criticism in insults. Years of this sort of

stuff have made Israel tone-deaf to legitimate criticism and exasperated with any attempt to find fault. That's why Israel refused to cooperate with the South African jurist Richard Goldstone when, on behalf of the United Nations, he looked into alleged war crimes. The United Nations had once equated Zionism with racism. After that, it was hard to care what the United Nations thought.

To Carter's credit, he must have understood that a hunk of his audience had stopped listening. He was right to apologize, wrong not to have been more specific and a bit late in appreciating the damage he's done. Israel has its faults, (don't get me started), but it is not motivated by racism. That's more than can be said for many of its critics.

Israel was not alone in wanting to 'detonate' the Hamas missile man

By Stephen King The Irish Examiner (Ireland) March 3, 2010

I was in Dubai at the weekend. Nice enough place if you like that kind of thing: glitzy, a bit soulless, but after the weather we've been having at home, who's complaining?

Well, some of the people who live there without any say in the way it's run actually. But if you ask no questions, the Emiratis won't ask you any either. You get the picture.

That's why Mahmoud Mabhohu dropped by presumably. No one quite knows why he was there. Some say he was also just passing through; others that he was buying arms. He was one of the military leaders of Hamas, after all. We don't know. Nor do we know which of his five passports he was travelling on.

Only one thing is for certain: he left his hotel room in a body bag. Much of the Irish media, without much in the way of evidence, has jumped to the unreserved conclusion that his assassination was a Mossad operation.

Certainly, RTE's Primetime last Thursday behaved as though it were an open and shut case. Maybe it was: the Israelis, as usual, are not commenting one way or the other. They are just glad he's gone.

That's hardly surprising. Mabhohu's crimes date back at least as far as 1989 when he masterminded the kidnapping and murder of two young Israelis.

In more recent years, he played a key role coordinating the smuggling of missiles and other weapons from Iran to Gaza. These have been used to kill and maim dozens of civilians.

But looked at from the perspective of the Middle East, rather than Donnybrook, it seems a whole lot of people – not just the Israelis – wanted Mabhohu out of the way.

Hamas themselves don't seem sure who killed Mabhohu. Some of their officials are pointing the finger at one or other of the Arab governments. He

was wanted by the authorities in Jordan and Egypt, for instance.

Some Arab media have reported that the operation against Mabhohu may have been carried out by a rival Palestinian group; others that Dubai's intelligence services tipped off the Jordanians. There has also been speculation that (Sunni) Saudi Arabia has an interest in limiting the regional power of (Shia) Iran and its proxies.

Who knows, perhaps his untimely death was due to a split within Hamas? They, presumably, knew his whereabouts and his plans at all times, as did the Iranians. The Syrians too – he had flown in from Damascus. Frankly, any Arab government trying to avoid a repeat of last year's war in Gaza had an interest in bumping off Mabhohu. But, rather than keeping an open mind, governments in Europe have been egged into behaving as though only Israel is in the frame. The Israeli ambassador was invited by Iveagh House for a (not very enlightening) chat and, for sure, just because the Israelis have not said that they did it doesn't mean for a minute that they weren't responsible.

As political commentator Tom Gross points out, the Dubai authorities themselves have not actually provided any forensic evidence that points to Israel, just a series of photos and videos of random hotel guests.

Besides, the persons shown in these images are not shown committing any crime. Nor has anyone come forward and said they recognise any of these people. To be honest, finding and adopting the identities of a few Israelis would not be very difficult. Any government's intelligence arm could have done this in the hope Israel would be blamed and attention diverted away from the true perpetrators.

Still, you can understand why the Dubai authorities are not happy about the killing of a Hamas senior military commander in one of their

hotel rooms. The United Arab Emirates tries to stay out of the Arab-Israeli conflict. There, money is all and it doesn't matter whose it is: unlike most Arab countries you can fly in with an Israeli stamp on your passport.

But it does make you wonder. There is an almighty stink about "passport fraud", but no western government has much to say about the fact that the terrorist in charge of illegally smuggling missiles from Iran to Hamas apparently had an open invite to hang out in Dubai. Funny that, isn't it?

Given the degree of rumpus you could be forgiven for thinking Mabhohu was some UN official or a foreign statesman. On the contrary, he lived by terrorism. He could hardly complain when a hit squad brought his life to a swift end. To say he had it coming is an understatement.

Yes, Dubai needs to carry out its investigations and the issue of passport security needs to be looked at, but is such a fuss strictly called for?

Mabhohu was on a mission to acquire Iranian weapons for use against civilians. He was a combatant. Unlike his victims, he was fair game for whoever crept into his hotel room that night.

In fact, as a combatant he would even have been fair game for Israel if they had killed him by means of an air strike on Gaza. It does not violate international law to kill a combatant, regardless of where the combatant is found, whether he is awake or asleep and whether or not he is engaged in active combat at the moment of his demise.

But Mabhohu was not killed in Gaza. He was killed in Dubai. It is against the law of Dubai for any foreign agent to kill a combatant while he is in Dubai. So the people who engaged in the killing presumptively violated the domestic law of Dubai.

Obviously, it would have been better if Mabhohu could have been captured and put on trial. But so long as he stayed out of Israel proper, what chance was there of that?

Would the Irish, British, French or Australian governments – let alone any Arab government – have issued arrest warrants and extradited Mabhohu to Israel? With what consequences for their own security? This case is merely the latest example of the failure of the international legal system and the UN to provide a remedy to mass terror.

The world is full of cold-blooded murderers but international law provides no means for stopping the likes of Mabhohu.

So, if Israel took him out it's because they had just two options: turn a blind eye to his murderous activities or kill him, preferably without harming any of the civilians around him. That's 'proportional'.

If Israel was responsible – and that allegation has to be treated with plenty of caution – it would be an indication of how strongly Israel feels it was between a rock and a hard place.

All the governments have in effect told the Israelis they cannot defend themselves when attacked by missiles from Gaza so perhaps they decided they had no choice but to try and prevent those missiles reaching Gaza in the first place.

Whoever wiped out Mabhohu, it was a daring operation. True, they got filmed but they got into Dubai, killed Mabhohu and got out. No drama, nobody captured, and nobody knows who the team were or where they are now.

And Hamas has been shown that their people aren't safe anywhere – even in the heart of the Arab world. A sloppy miscalculation? I'm not so sure.

Religious Zionism – When Crisis Becomes Opportunity

By Daniel Gordis The Jerusalem Post February 26, 2010

Religious Zionism is in crisis ... again. Or so we are being told. In the aftermath of the tragic allegations concerning Rabbi Mordechai (Motti) Elon, religious Zionists are bemoaning yet another crisis in the movement. It's a crisis of trust in charismatic rabbinic leadership, some are saying. Others are asking whether the movement holds its leaders up to standards of such perfection that it is virtually impossible for any high-profile person to acknowledge misdeeds and to ask for help. Still others focus on what this latest round may do to the image of religious Zionism among rank-and-file Israelis.

Important though these issues are, they are not the real crisis. The true crisis, which is wholly unrelated to Rabbi Elon, is that religious Zionism has long since had very little of importance to say to Israel at large. Sadly, the Elon storm is but a tempest in an increasingly irrelevant teapot.

Religious Zionism irrelevant? "How could one possibly say that?" its adherents will ask. True, "irrelevant" is a strong word, possibly too strong. But it is hard to deny that religious Zionism has not lived up to the huge opportunities of religious creativity that the State of Israel has made possible.

After all, the world in which we in the religious Zionist camp are raising our children is a radically different world from the social, political, cultural and security realities of Eastern Europe before World War II. Our children are part of the majority culture, not an oppressed minority. While we still face threats from the outside, our children are growing up with a sense of day-to-day security that the Jews who sent their sons to the Yeshiva of Volozhin could not have even imagined. No longer do we fear the stranger on the street, a gentile government or pervasive anti-Semitism among our immediate neighbors. Nor do

we confront the fear of assimilation that so deeply defines the contours of much of American Judaism.

The miracle of the State of Israel is that it has changed the very existential condition of what it means to be a Jew. Given this radical change in the condition of the Israeli Jew, it's astonishing that for all intents and purposes, the curriculum of Israel's great yeshivot is not all that different from what was taught in the yeshivot of Europe before the Shoah. Yes, Israeli yeshiva students probably learn a bit more Bible than did yeshiva students before the war, and yes, the methodologies of Talmud study differ from place to place. But the guts of what a yeshiva education is all about have changed scarcely at all, even though the world for which we are educating our children is radically different.

The true disappointment of post-independence religious Zionism is that it hasn't produced any creative religious thinkers of the likes of Abraham Joshua Heschel, Abraham Isaac Kook or Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, to name but three. Each of those three, radically different from each other, bequeathed to their followers a radically new way of seeing the enterprise of what it meant to be a Jew. From Heschel, we inherited the notion of a dynamic, deeply personal relationship with God that could be achieved through a critical but loving read of Judaism's canonical texts. With Kook, we got the first serious sense that the return to Zion might actually be the beginning of redemption, but Kook died 13 years before the state was created. And from Soloveitchik, in whose giant shadow much of the very best of modern Orthodoxy still learns and labors, we got a sense of the profundity possible when exacting Jewish learning and the demands of Jewish law are coupled to the rigors of Western philosophy.

But where are the Heschels, Kooks and Soloveitchiks of our day? Who are the brightly shining stars of post-independence Israeli religious Zionism who are equipping us with courageous, out-of-the-box, revolutionary ways of thinking about the tasks before us?

After all, for religious Zionism to really matter, it must produce the next generation of religious leaders for Israel, people who must have something to say not only to the yeshiva world, but to the Jewish,

democratic society that is Israel. What might happen, for example, if the great yeshivot studied John Locke's *Two Treatises of Civil Government* or *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (or Michael Walzer's much more recent *On Toleration*, for that matter) alongside the tractate *Sanhedrin*, or Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* alongside Maimonides's *Laws of Kings and Wars*? What does one need to know, and how does one need to learn to study and think, in this new, uncharted and exciting era of Jewish independence? And who in the world of religious Zionism is asking those questions?

Gone are the days when religious leaders can conceive of themselves as offering spiritual insight and guidance to people only in their own narrowly defined religious community. Like it or not, genuine religious leadership in the now independent State of Israel requires people who have what to say to secular Jews as well, who know how to expose them, no less than their natural "flock," to the profundity and richness of the Jewish tradition. Secular Jews, after all, are also searching for meaning. Today's Israeli religious leadership has effectively convinced them that the place to search for genuine spiritual depth is in India, or in Nepal. Could there be a more devastating indictment of the lack of creative discourse that is today's religious Zionism? How seriously do today's yeshivot take that responsibility?

In addition to everything else that it is, the State of Israel is an enormous religious and spiritual opportunity. It is the moment in which we might conceive of a Judaism born not out of fear, but of confidence. It is our chance to conceive of the outside world not as a challenge, but as a complementary source of wisdom. It is our moment for speaking to Jews across the spectrum, not only those who happen to register in our yeshivot.

The Chinese, in their wisdom, use the same symbols for "crisis" and for "opportunity." We face both. The personal tragedy unfolding in religious Zionism today has healthfully restored a sense of doubt to this essential community. We'll have made the most of this crisis, and of this opportunity, if we look far beyond the personalities involved, and ask ourselves what we would like our community to bequeath to the Jewish people, given the unprecedented richness of Jewish experience that the State of Israel now makes possible.

The dark side of Israeli Apartheid Week

By Leonard Stern The Ottawa Citizen (Canada) February 25, 2010

Beginning Monday, university campuses play host to an annual event known as Israeli Apartheid Week, where Israel is assigned the role of Jew among the nations — singled-out, cursed and harassed.

Some Jewish students at Canadian universities will discreetly choose to stay home, to avoid having to answer for the Jewish state. The whiff of something medieval hangs over this March ritual.

This isn't about Jews, say the organizers. It's about Zionists. Problem is, the activist groups behind Israeli Apartheid Week are doing everything to erase the distinction.

One of those organizations, the Ottawa Public Interest Research Group, refused in 2008 to promote a lecture on African development because Jewish students at the University of Ottawa happened to be organizing it. The event had zero

connection to Israel but OPIRG said it wouldn't partner with the Jewish students' union due to the latter's "relationship to apartheid Israel."

Demonizing Israel has become a central and unifying activity for those who practise radical politics. Consider Carleton University's Womyn's Centre and the Canadian Arab Federation. The first is a feminist organization; the second participated in a notorious conference in Egypt organized by fundamentalist Muslims who institutionalize violence against women. Both groups are endorsing Israeli Apartheid Week.

The perfidy of the Jewish state is a unifying belief just as the perfidy of Jews always was. The fascist right said Jews were bolsheviks and blamed them for the scourge of communism; the totalitarian left said Jews were financiers and blamed them for the predations of capitalism.

Of all the sponsors of Israeli Apartheid Week, the participation of gay and lesbian groups is most disheartening. Harvard University's Alan Dershowitz tells an anecdote about the time he gave a speech and spotted an anti-Israel sign in the crowd, held aloft by a gay rights group. Dershowitz reminded the protesters that Israel is the one country in the Middle East where they'd be able to hold a gay rights sign in public and not be lynched.

Israel's official government website celebrates Eytan Fox, one of the country's best known filmmakers. Fox's recent movie *The Bubble*, about a love affair between two men, Arab and Jew, won an award from the U.S.-based Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, for its sensitive depiction of gay people.

Films like that aren't being made in Syria or Gaza. Gay Muslims have to flee to democratic countries if they want to come out. Israel itself recently took in a gay Palestinian from the West Bank town of Jenin. The man settled in Tel Aviv, moving in with his partner, an Israeli. Thousands of couples — Arab, Jewish, mixed — show up for the gay pride parade in Tel Aviv.

Yet back in Canada, gay student groups denounce Israel as their enemy. They aren't protesting against the many Muslim countries where homosexuality is criminalized — where, as Der Spiegel recently reported, men suspected of being

gay are found with their genitals amputated and anuses sealed with glue.

(When Israel last year suffered an isolated act of homophobic violence — a gunman shot up a gay nightclub — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly expressed his personal horror.)

So am I saying Israel is a beacon of enlightenment and that anyone who disagrees is an anti-Semite?

No, I'm not. Israel is a flawed country, as are all countries. Criticizing Israel does not make one an anti-Semite anymore than criticizing the government of France makes one anti-French. But it's one thing to criticize France and another to declare the French nation illegitimate and to advocate its dismantling.

For that's what Israeli apartheid week is about. As Michael Ignatieff noted during apartheid week last year, "International law defines 'Apartheid' as a crime against humanity. Labeling Israel an 'Apartheid' state is a deliberate attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the Jewish state itself."

It is the fanatical, disproportionate focus on Israel — no other country is subjected to a week-long hatefest at university campuses — that points to something darker going on.

The classic giveaway of prejudice is holding the hated group to a double standard. Israel is denounced for its designation as a Jewish state, with a Star of David on its flag. Israel's accusers never complain that Muslim states have the half-crescent symbol of Islam in their flags. As the legal scholar Robbie Sabel notes: "For various Arab states to denote themselves Arab Republics is not objectionable, but a Jewish state is racism and apartheid."

Saudi Arabia officially prohibits the practice of non-Muslim religions; Egypt has persecuted its minority Christians; Turkey and other Muslim countries make sure the Kurds remain stateless and dispossessed — and campus activists couldn't care less. It's Israel, and Israel alone, that consumes them.

Israeli Apartheid Week represents a strange, collective stalking. I don't know why they do it. What's scary is that, as the unconscious instruments of an ancient hatred, they don't always understand their own obsession.

Assassination works – Killing terrorists is a necessary undertaking

By The Washington Times editorial February 26, 2010

Israel is facing uncomfortable questions regarding senior Hamas military commander Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, who was found dead in a Dubai hotel room on Jan. 20. Dubai police say al-Mabhouh was assassinated, but in his chosen profession, his fate really was the result of workplace-related injuries.

Dubai has named 26 suspects in the case, and has evidence including credit card records, flight itineraries and closed-circuit television footage

supposedly showing the accused assassins stalking their quarry. Much of the furor over the case has arisen over the apparent fraudulent use of British, Irish, French, German, Australian and other passports. The British government said it will mount a full investigation. To date, none of the suspects has been apprehended and there is no firm evidence linking any of them to Israel.

There certainly is no reason to mourn al-Mabhouh, a longtime terrorist with a track record including arms smuggling, kidnapping and murder. Most recently, he was suspected of being a primary link between Hamas and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, both of which the United States identifies as terrorist organizations. Al-Mabhouh had survived several assassination attempts, but this time his luck ran out. Fortunes of war.

There is an old-fashioned view that assassination is always morally wrong, but time and international custom have frayed that consensus. Assassination was famously "outlawed" in 1976 by President Ford, a policy reiterated in 1981 by President Reagan under Executive Order 12333. This was in response to events such as CIA complicity in the coup leading to the death of Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1973. Nevertheless, there always was some question whether and how this ban applied to violent non-state actors like terrorists, and President Clinton began to relax the standard in 1998. After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, targeting terrorist leaders became an integral part of American strategy. Had al-Mabhouh been a high-ranking member of al Qaeda, the White House probably would have issued a self-congratulatory press release.

The open season on terrorists is not limited to Israel. Russia has ruthlessly and effectively hunted Chechen terrorist leaders at home and abroad, such as killing rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev in Doha, Qatar, in February 2004. In 2008, Colombia sent a team into neighboring Ecuador that took out Raul Reyes, deputy commander of the anti-government FARC guerrillas.

The United States is the global leader in what is euphemistically called "targeted killing." Manned and unmanned aircraft have rained death on terrorists in (at least) Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen. In

his Valentine's Day interview on "Meet the Press," Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. bragged that the Obama administration is pursuing terrorists "with a vigor like it's never been seen before. We've eliminated 12 of their top 20 people. We have taken out 100 of their associates. . . We've sent them underground. They are, in fact, not able to do anything remotely like they were in the past. They are on the run."

The most significant difference between what the assassins did in Dubai and U.S. targeted killings is that in the Dubai hit, only al-Mabhouh went down. When Hellfire missiles are launched, frequently some civilians are taken out along with the intended target. The numbers of noncombatants who have been killed in these strikes are difficult to estimate, but most studies place them in the hundreds. This must cause some consternation among members of the Obama administration's anti-war base, but we have yet to see them hoisting signs tagging Mr. Obama as a war criminal, as the rabble did for President Johnson during the Vietnam War.

Some argue that it is useless to target terrorist leaders because there is always another waiting in the wings. Experience, however, has demonstrated that there are substantial benefits in taking out leaders. It disrupts networks, hampers operations and may deter others considering careers as violent extremists. The effects can be dramatic. When Abu Musab Zarqawi was liquidated by an air strike in June 2006, it was the beginning of the end for al Qaeda in Iraq.

Whoever was behind al-Mabhouh's killing may draw some lessons about tradecraft and covering their tracks more effectively. But they successfully eliminated an important terrorist and threat to peace, and for that they deserve thanks.

Hamas U By Thanassis Cambanis The Boston Globe February 28, 2010

Islamism has won hearts and minds across the Middle East. It also offers a BA Behind the arabesque arches of the five-story university library here, students occupy every available seat, cramming for finals in their humanities classes. Outside, a lucky few nap beneath palm and ficus trees on the cramped urban campus. At lunch, engineering students balance their books upright in the cafeteria and absent-mindedly munch subsidized falafel. This is exam period at the Islamic University of Gaza, charged with the bustle and anxiety of college life.

The first sign that this is a different place from the Western universities it resembles comes when a bell rings in the library. Quickly the students on odd-numbered floors - all men - gather their books and file into the stairwells. Women file in to take their turn. In keeping with a puritanical interpretation of Islamic law, men and women aren't allowed to study together, so they switch floors every two hours. They lounge in separate student unions and eat in

separate cafeterias. At intervals during the day, the call to prayer sounds from the minarets of the campus mosque, and classes come to a halt.

Their strict observance might sound extreme, but the Islamic University is no fringe institution: It's the top university in Gaza. The majority of students here study secular topics; not all of them are even religious. If you want to get a degree in Gaza, a territory that is home to more than a million people, it's simply the best place to go.

At the same time, the university is something else again: the brain trust and engine room of Hamas, the Islamist movement that governs Gaza and has been a standard-bearer in the renaissance of radical Islamist militant politics across the Middle East. Thinkers here generate the big ideas that have driven Hamas to power; they have written treatises on Islamic governance, warfare, and justice that serve as the blueprints for the movement's political and militant platforms. And the university's goal is even

more radical and ambitious than that of Hamas itself, an organization devoted primarily to war against Israel and the pursuit of political power. Its mission is to Islamicize society at every level, with a focus on Gaza but aspirations to influence the entire Islamic world.

In recent decades, as Islamism has grown from a set of isolated radical movements to a fully realized political philosophy, its powerful fusion of intellect, pragmatism, and fundamentalist faith has refashioned societies from the Gulf to Turkey, Egypt to Pakistan. For outsiders who want to understand its power and appeal, the Islamic University of Gaza is probably the best place to begin.

When the Islamic University was founded in 1978, there wasn't a single institution of higher education in the Gaza Strip. Its founders were members of the militant Muslim Brotherhood, believers that society should be organized according to Koranic principles, and they conceived the university as a sort of greenhouse for their brand of pure, uncompromising Islamism. At the time, Gaza was a freewheeling resort city, its seaside restaurants full of visiting Israelis and Egyptians attracted by Gaza's famous grilled fish. Secular Palestinians dominated society and the power structure in the 1970s, and scoffed at the prospect of Islamists making inroads.

With no local competition, the Islamic University had the market on higher education all to itself, a monopoly that took on greater importance as Israel made it harder and harder for Gazans to leave their territory to study in the West Bank. Meanwhile, the Muslim Brothers running the university turned their efforts to community and political organizing, leading within a decade to the establishment of Hamas, whose name in Arabic is an acronym for "Islamic Resistance Movement." By the dawn of the new millennium, the Oslo Accords were collapsing, the secular Palestinian Authority was proving an ineffectual government, and Israelis were souring on the peace process. Gaza's culture transformed in a historical blink: Hamas had risen in a couple of decades from an underground network of imams, teachers, and militants to a juggernaut that dominated Gaza's increasingly pious and conservative population.

Today Hamas doesn't run the Islamic University, but the overlap of the party and the school is nearly seamless. Scientists and academics at the university double as Hamas technocrats: doctors, engineers, economists, teachers, and media specialists. The Islamic University serves as an employment program and intellectual retreat for Hamas leaders, giving a perch to the prime minister, the foreign minister, and bureaucrats in charge of ministries.

In neighboring Israel, the Islamic University has become a symbol of recalcitrant Palestinian hatred. Many faculty members share Hamas's most hard-line beliefs, which include denying Israel's right to exist.

Israelis often talk about the university as if it were a key source of Hamas suicide bombers and missile manufacturers, a kind of clubhouse and recruiting ground. But to blame the university is to ignore the fact that much of Gaza is full of underground weapons labs and volunteers for martyrdom. In this, the university reflects the culture around it as much as it shapes it.

Today, a visit to the university's claustrophobic quarters testifies both to Gazans' piety and their thirst for academic advancement. Twenty thousand students take classes in a 20-acre grid that could fit snugly into Harvard Yard. The mosque holds pride of place at the center of campus. Not far away, a yawning crater cuts through the campus, where the engineering and chemistry labs once stood. Israel bombed them on December 28, 2008, the second day of the most recent Gaza War, believing that Hamas was using the academic laboratories to build rockets and explosives, a charge Islamic University officials have denied. In keeping with university rules, men congregate on one side of the bomb crater and women on the other.

The male students wear the uniform of contemporary Islamism: pressed dress shirts, modest polyester jackets, baggy trousers, clean-shaven faces or short, trimmed beards. The women all wear head scarves. Their dress and professional demeanor are meant to connote not only modesty and seriousness of purpose, but also engagement with the modern world. Like Hamas, the university embodies a brand of Islamism advanced through earnest, utilitarian labor, not by a radical rejection of modernity. The prayer beads and austere white robes of the otherworldly Salafist movement are as unusual here as they would be on a totally secular campus.

Students tend to gravitate toward disciplines likely to lead to stable careers: engineering, medicine, nursing, business, journalism, education, English. The faculties of religion and Islamic law are also big draws, since they, too, lead to secure careers as clerics or employees of the "waqf," or Islamic trust, a quasi-governmental body that regulates religious affairs in most Islamic countries.

The Islamic University of Gaza is considered second among Palestinian institutions only to the secular Birzeit University in the West Bank. (The Fatah movement - Hamas's political rival - built a more liberal university of its own, Al Azhar, right next door to the Islamic University in the 1990s, but the instruction there is considered second rate.) It maintains its high standards by making sure to teach vital secular material alongside the Islamist counterpoint, and is confident enough to admit even outspoken detractors of Hamas. One secular Palestinian I know, a man who has clashed with Hamas officials over their efforts to restrict speech and require head scarves in government schools, is enrolled and finishing a degree part time. "It's the best education, by far," he tells me with a shrug.

To the extent that students rebel here, it's against what they view as the secular excesses of the outside world. These university students support arranged marriage, Saudi-style morality police, and a hard-line theology that sees even their own religious parents as insufficiently pious. This campus culture might surprise an American or European public steeped in a history of libertine student activism, but in the Arab world for half a century, the idea of rebellion against authority has been closely associated with Islamists, the only constituency prepared to confront the region's ossified authoritarian dictators.

This kind of activism meshes perfectly with the university's most ambitious goals. "Our role as a university is to empower people, by teaching them to reform their lives in line with the revolutionary side of religion," explains the associate dean, a British-educated political scientist named Waleed Al Modallal.

This marks a change for Palestinian society, which traditionally has bred political militancy but not religious fanaticism. Today new generations of Palestinian leaders are steeped not only in the struggle against Israel, but in a current of Islamist thought. The young learn the benefits of prayer, a lifestyle free of alcohol and fornication, and ultimately, Modallal says, will embrace Islamism in all aspects of life, from armed resistance against Israel to quotidian matters like marriage and banking.

The scholarship and instruction at the Islamic University offer a map of the world Hamas's leaders would build if they had no political constraints. More than any single idea, the Islamic University promotes a view of a society inescapably suffused with religious doctrine. The questions at the start of any inquiry - how does this work, and how to do it best - must be joined immediately with another: What does God permit on this matter?

In any field - including math, engineering, and medicine - scholars are expected to consult the Koran, or Islamic jurists, as well as academic texts. In the natural sciences, the results don't look all that different from scholarship in the West, such as a recent research study that assessed the value of a particular protein for diagnosing rheumatoid arthritis. But in the social sciences, the imperative of hard-line Sunni Islam has yielded a body of work with a nearly Soviet ideological rigidity and predictability. One paper in the Series of Islamic Studies "proves" that a country's social development increases in proportion to the number of people who memorize the Koran. Another considers and dismisses Shia Muslim conceptions of the attributes of God for "contradicting the Koran" and other canonical Islamic texts.

In secular societies like the United States, similarly strict religious universities exist on the margins, attracting a devout subculture seeking a counterweight to mainstream values. In contrast, the

Islamic University of Gaza - like a growing number of religious institutions across the Islamic world - has simply become the mainstream.

Many students at the Islamic University see themselves as a privileged elite with an obligation to help the transnational "ummah," or global Islamic community. Almost every student I met - I was only allowed to speak to men - expressed a desire to continue his studies abroad.

Saher Al Haj was a case in point. A 29-year-old father of two and part-time cleric, Haj returned to university to study media because he believes his Islamist activism can have a greater effect if he is a journalist. According to his professor Husam Ayesh (also the university's spokesman), the young cleric has scored higher marks than any student in the department's history. He wants to move to England to study for a master's degree at City University London, and use his religious training, fluent English, and charisma to explain the religious transformation that has shaken the Arab world.

Unlike most of his classmates, Haj dresses like a mad prophet, with a tufted beard, a white cloth cap, and flowing white "thobe" that billowed over his sandals. The effect is intentional. Haj believes that the West has focused so much on the rise of extremist nihilists like Al Qaeda that it has failed to come to terms with people like him - the much more widespread Islamist activists who have come to dominate places like Gaza and the opposition political movements throughout the Arab world. He decries Al Qaeda's terrorist violence as immoral, distinguishing it from Hamas's Koran-sanctified Islamic resistance. "People in the West would see me dressed in these clothes and they would think I am a terrorist," Haj said to me in near-perfect English. "I want to talk to them and show them that their image of Islam is distorted, that we are reasonable people."

In the West, the idea of an Islamic state sounds radical. Inside the university's freshly whitewashed walls and among its growing alumni network, however, an Islamic society already thrives, and has become a leading model for how Arab societies should be shaped. In much of the Islamic world, radical Islamists are running their society's institutions, not bombing them, and changing their societies in ways that the West is only now beginning to grapple with. Haj's call for an assertive Islamic society is no longer a lone militant voice, shouting at the Arab ruling class from beyond the barricades. In Gaza, at least, it has become the voice of the establishment.

Thanassis Cambanis's book, "A Privilege to Die: Inside Hezbollah's Legions and Their Endless War With Israel," will be published by Free Press in September. He is a New Ideas Fund fellow and teaches at Columbia University.