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JEWISH VIOLENCE

Some of the workers at TAPME, the anti-Israel group behind Measure E in Berkeley, were harassed and threatened in that city last week. During the same week, Israel, still buzzing with revelations about the Jewish terrorist underground, was further shocked by the killing of two Arab terrorists during questioning by defense personnel.

That raises the troubling question of Jewish violence.

Few of us believe that violence is bad in itself. There is no Commandment which says "Thou shalt not commit violence." There is a Commandment which says "Thou shalt not murder." But the Hebrew word ratzach (murder) is used, rather the words harag or hamit (kill). And commentary on the Torah points out that ratzach was associated with killing out of hatred and malice. There are circumstances, such as self-defense, in which killing is morally justified.

The same qualifications which the rabbis apply to the Sixth Commandment, apply to the use of violence. There are circumstances in which violence is not only morally acceptable but morally required.

But in any given set of circumstances, there have been endless debates about the line between "necessary" and "unnecessary," between "self-defense" and "aggression," and so forth. So let us leave the moral arguments aside for the moment, and just talk about the utility of any given act of violence.

Rabbi Yehoshua Ben-Meir, one of the leaders of the settlement movement in Judea and Samaria, reacted to the plans of Jewish terrorists to destroy the mosques on the Temple Mount with these words: "That is plain madness. They would have brought a war on all of Israel."

In other words, Rabbi Ben-Meir was opposing such Jewish terrorist acts on pragmatic grounds at least. Those acts won't help the Jews; as a matter of fact, they would hurt the Jews. By the same token, the TAPME people in Berkeley held a press conference, anxious to talk about the threats against their workers, certain that those threats would help to get votes for the anti-Israel Measure E. Except for other evidence, one might have suspected that anti-Israel forces were themselves making threats to the anti-Israel workers in order to help their own cause.

Finally, of course, the pragmatic effects of a violent act have a direct relationship to its morality. If an act of violence is unnecessary or excessive -- and certainly if it works against the survival of the Jews -- then it is immoral as well. For these reasons, a large group of militant settlement leaders in Judea and Samaria

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have just formed a council, named Moriah, to oppose the kind of Jewish terrorism which has been taking place.

It is important to note that such acts of unauthorized violence, including that committed against the captured Arab terrorists, are aberrations in Israel, condemned by the majority population and the government alike. The Israeli government has moved against such acts with alacrity, in the best tradition of democratic states.

Any movement for mindless Jewish terrorism in this region or country will be shunned by most Jews for the same reasons. The banner under which such violence flies is often that of "militancy." But what Moriah, the Israeli public and government, and militant American Jews say is that foolishness and bravado in the name of militancy can be both anti-militant and anti-Jewish.