

Arafat exposed as bad actor

By MOSHE FOX

WASHINGTON — Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat has exceeded himself in bamboozling. He was caught with a shipload of killing potential, which Israeli naval commandos seized in the Red Sea earlier this month.

He has minced words of peace (only in English for export consumption) and escalated violence to the brink of full-fledged war with the hope of being saved by foreign intervention.

Am I being impolitic? So sorry.

The lives of our citizens, already cut down month after bloody month by Palestinian terrorist attacks, are of higher priority. Diplomatic tact is a distant second.

Israel has negotiated in good faith with Mr. Arafat. We're in our 10th calendar year of trying to establish a formal reconciliation with him. We've tried soft and strong, sweet-talking and tough talking. We've tried from left wing to right wing: Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Benjamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon.

We even tried overlooking Mr. Arafat's deceptions, his condemnations of attacks one day (and then only under Western pressure) followed by his ordering more violence the next. No more. The mask is off the villain. In fact, it's been off most of the eight years of "peace."

Now, we in Israel are getting back to basics like never before. The problem is not our leaders, our approach, our method, our sincerity. The problem is Yasser Arafat. He has complained about Israel being out to undermine, even assassinate him. He's passed the buck more often than a counterfeiter.

Israel has no reason to weaken him or want him dead. Mr. Arafat is too valuable to Israel alive and in charge. Mr. Arafat is digging his own proverbial grave.

With each bloody attack on Israeli civilians, Peacemaker Arafat is further exposed as a hollow vessel.

The latest cycle started in early December, when 26 people, half of them teen-agers, were blown up in Jerusalem and Haifa. That was followed by an ambush on a bus near Emanuel in the West Bank with six more fatalities. After a 14-day lull, another three civilians were killed in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and six innocents celebrating a bat mitzvah in Hadera were massacred. Another shooting rampage in Jerusalem's Zion Square killed two women and wounded 42 other civilians.

Mr. Arafat's reluctance to act against terrorism forced an Israeli army brigade to enter Tulkarm this week for a door-to-door

hunt for terrorists and weapons. Tulkarm, in the West Bank, has become a hub for terrorists launching attacks on the nearby cities of Hadera and Netanya. The 30-hour army operation resulted in the arrests of 10 suspected terrorists. What Mr. Arafat ought to do is left for us to carry out.

One might expect better behavior in the post-Sept. 11 era. Then again, that's what we'd been expecting since Sept. 9, 1993, when Mr. Arafat penned a landmark letter to then-Prime Minister Rabin. It committed him to resolve differences "through negotiations" and to forge "peaceful coexistence, free from violence and all other acts which endanger peace and stability" and renounce "the use of terrorism and other acts of violence."

The agreement assuredly does not add, "unless violence proves more profitable," or "except when we opt for a war of attrition," or "only until we resume fighting."

The 1993 Oslo accords, concluded with meticulous attention to detail, expressly limit the Palestinian Authority to 30,000 police officers. That number was long ago illegally doubled. The accords regulate police weaponry to pistols, machine guns, rifles and "light personal weapons."

The arms smuggling attempt was a gross violation of the accords. Rocket-propelled grenades were not approved at Oslo. They're not peacekeeping weapons but armaments for war.

Israel's naval raid likely prevented the slaughter of thousands of Israelis. Rather than enter our cities and blow themselves up in Israeli crowds, Palestinians could have fired shells and missiles from the comfort of their own homes in the PA-protected areas, then returned to watching Palestinian television programs glorifying exploding Israelis. Consider, too, that the seizure also prevented the future killing of hundreds of Israelis and foreign tourists flying near Ben-Gurion Airport, within range of missiles.

The quality and quantity of the arms seized were staggering. Not more staggering than Mr. Arafat's brazenly denying their connection to the PA — this, when we captured aboard the weapons ship, the *Karine-A*, a PA coast guard colonel and PA naval policemen.

Anyone with the faintest knowledge of Mr. Arafat's notorious micromanaging would laugh off claims that he knew nothing of the *Karine-A*'s purchase and mission. What is it about "no more terrorism" that Mr. Arafat does not understand?

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