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The New York Mets and the business of terrorism

Aaron Levitt

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By hosting an event in support of Hebron settlers at Citi Field, the New York Mets are supporting terrorism. (Mamoun Wazwaz/MaanImages)

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November 20, 2009 - When I first learned that the New York Mets were hosting a fundraiser for the nonprofit Hebron Fund at Citi Field in support of the Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron, I honestly assumed it was a joke, albeit a poor one. When I realized this was an actual, planned event, I still found it almost impossible to believe. This is because, even aside from the devastating impact of settlement expansion on the prospects for peace in the region, I have had the misfortune to see, repeatedly and at first hand, the fruits of the Hebron Fund's labors... [60271]

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During the summers of 2005 and 2006, and very briefly in 2008, I spent several weeks working as a human rights observer in the Tel Rumeida section of Hebron, home of the Beit Hadassah and Tel Rumeida settlements that are supported by The Hebron Fund. During that time, I encountered racist graffiti with such statements as "Gas the Arabs" and "Fatimah, we will rape all Arab women." I repeatedly observed settlers throwing stones and clods of earth at young Palestinian girls on their way to elementary school; yelling racial epithets at Palestinians walking in the streets; pushing, kicking, and spitting on Palestinian children and (occasionally) adults who were quietly minding their own business; and hurling large stones down on Palestinian homes and residents from settlement balconies.

I have witnessed this behavior by men and women, boys and girls, from



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pre-school-aged children to middle-aged adults. I was myself assaulted, on Shabbat, by a group of six teenage settlers, when I came between them and their intended victim, an elderly Palestinian woman who also happened to be the proud mother of a US Navy fighter pilot (the picture of her son standing by his plane was prominently displayed on her living room wall). The settler youths then turned to attack my companion, a young Scandinavian woman who was videotaping the original assault. I have heard and read numerous, credible reports of far worse violence than I personally experienced from other human rights observers, who were in the area for different and/or longer periods.

The Hebron settlers engage in this violence for the express purpose of driving out Palestinian families from Tel Rumeida, site of the Cave of Machpelah, or Cave of the Patriarchs, which is holy to both Jews and Muslims. Settler leaders have said as much in at least one published interview, and a young man from the Beit Hadassah settlement confirmed it to my face in September 2006. The settlers' efforts have been remarkably successful: of more than 600 Palestinian families originally living in the neighborhood, probably less than 100 remained when I was last there in 2008. If the settlers continue to receive free reign, and full funding, we may soon add a new chapter of completed ethnic cleansing to the troubled history of this ancient city.

According to the US Code, Title 22, Chapter 38, S 2656f, our country defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents." The Hebron settlers' violence is certainly premeditated. It is, by their own admission, politically motivated. It is perpetrated solely against noncombatant targets (overwhelmingly children), and it is obviously the work of a subnational group -- the settlers themselves.

The business of the Hebron settlers is terrorism, pure and simple; not quasi-terrorism, crypto-terrorism, neo-terrorism, potential terrorism, or something akin to terrorism, but the very thing itself. And the business of the Hebron Fund is funding terrorism. This does not mean that all, or even most, donors knowingly support these actions; many may be innocent victims misled by the fund's innocuous marketing materials. Although the fund's staff and Board member attempt to maintain a cloak of respectability, they are another matter entirely.

This year's Hebron Fund dinner will "honor" Hebron settler and spokesman Noam Arnon (whose picture is featured with other "Hebron Fund and Hebron Community Leaders" on the Hebron Fund website). In 1990, Arnon told Israel Radio that three Jewish militants, convicted of car-bombings that killed three Palestinians and maimed two Palestinian mayors, were "heroes" who sacrificed themselves "for the security of Jews." In 1995, Arnon was further quoted by the Associated Press when he called Baruch Goldstein, another settler who slaughtered 29 Palestinians at prayer in Hebron and injured more than 100 others, an "extraordinary person" denied "historical justice."

The 2008 Hebron Fund dinner honored Board member Myrna Zisman, who accepted her award on behalf of Yifat Alkoby, an "extraordinary woman" who received international attention in 2006 when she was videotaped repeatedly calling a Palestinian woman and her daughters whores and telling them to stay in their "cage," as the family sought refuge in their own home, with bars on the windows to protect them from recurring settler attacks.

I could say something about how the Mets, as a treasured New York City institution, shouldn't be lending their facilities, or their name, to such practices, and that would certainly be true. I could say something about the extraordinary irony of such an event being held on top of the Jackie Robinson Rotunda, and that would be true as well. Yet the larger truth is that no American team, no American business, and no American individual should be

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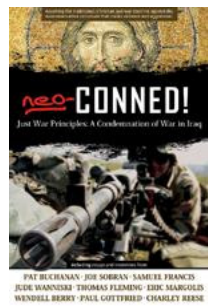


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providing material support for terrorism, or assisting those who provide such support. Unless and until the Mets reverse their terribly ill-considered decision to host this event, that is precisely what they have chosen to do.

Aaron Levitt is a member and past board member of West End Synagogue in Manhattan, a member of Jews Against the Occupation (JATO), and is presently Director of Research at a large New York City social services agency. Levitt has been working in support of a just peace in Israel/Palestine for the past seven years. He can be contacted at aaronjlevitt AT gmail DOT com.



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