

JIHAD

Hamas has never spared women and children

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The horrifying news from Israel, after Hamas militants on October 7 killed dozens of infants, slayed newborns and it's claimed beheaded others, reminds us two separate and opposite worlds coexist. The world we live in forbids the maltreatment of children. In this world, anyone who thinks otherwise, is considered a monster, without justification, a person to condemn.

But, as we should also know by now, another world exists where childhood is denied rights or protection, in which the children of adversaries are considered enemies to be annihilated, where it is conceivable to sacrifice one's own children: in war, sent to die, and in peace, killed in the name of family honour. At the same time, we mustn't forget, how many children were killed in Israel, torn apart by explosions, at the time of the suicide bomb attacks. As children could pass security checks more easily unnoticed, Palestinian youths were forced to wear explosives vests and then blown up at bus stops and on public transport. For this reason, Israeli parents did not let their children travel on the same means of transport and for this reason, in 2002, construction began on the anti-terrorism barrier which half the world condemned as the "wall of apartheid" or "wall of shame", which instead saved the lives of hundreds, perhaps thousands of Palestinian and Israeli children.

The young Palestinian attackers recruited by terrorists were called *shahids*, martyrs, witnesses of the faith, fighters in the holy war, the jihad. "The *shahids* constitute the fundamental and victorious force of our people" – the leader of the PNA, Yasser Arafat, said in 2002 during a speech addressed to some children – "isn't the child who grabs a stone, who faces a tank, the best message to the world when that hero becomes *shahid*?". The videos broadcast on Palestinian television showed child heroes leaving their mother, home and toys to go and die, mothers of little *shahids* in tears, but proud and happy with their children's decision. The little Palestinians learned at school, from textbooks and from their teachers, that martyrdom is glorious, it opens the way to Paradise.

Yet, transforming children into fighters and educating them to hate is a very serious violation of their rights. The extreme perversion transforms them into instruments of war. Hamas terrorists are using them as human shields by sending them on advance patrol along the borders with Israel exposed on the front line, while they remain safe, beyond the Israeli military range. The example came from Iran, from the Shiite regime of the ayatollahs. It was they who recovered the ancient idea of self-sacrifice as a weapon of war. During the conflict with Iraq, from 1980-1988, the military, convinced families to give their children up or kidnapped them on the street, enrolling

tens of thousands of children and teenagers to become *shahids*. Everyone was given a golden plastic key to hang around their neck or hold in their hand. They are said to have purchased hundreds of thousands of them. If they died, they assured the children and their parents, with that key they would open the door to Paradise. In this way they convinced them to sacrifice themselves, for the supreme cause of victory in the name of Allah. Then they forced them walk through the minefields, to make them safe before the troops crossed, or march against the enemy, in front of everyone. On the other side, distraught Iraqi soldiers sometimes abandoned their machine guns and fled rather than shoot children the same age as their own children.

In addition, Hamas also used women, mothers, to carry out its bomb attacks.

One of the first Palestinian mothers to blow herself up was Reem Salah al-Rayashi, in January 2004. She was 23 years old, belonged to a wealthy, secular family, resident in Gaza, had two children, one aged three and one aged 18 months. She killed four Israelis at the Erez crossing. In reality, Reem's death was an execution. The woman had had a lover and now she had to die to restore honour to her family. It was her husband, a Hamas militant, who took her by car close to the crossing and it was her lover who provided the explosive belt. With this the latter, also a Hamas commander, was able to redeem himself, avoiding the death sentence that in this case, Muslims also inflict on the seducer.

Other women, however, spontaneously chose to become *shahid*. One of these, Hanadi Jaradat, 28 years old, in October 2003, caused a massacre in Haifa in the Maxim restaurant where she had entered carrying a newborn baby in a stroller. The Italian singer-songwriter Roberto Vecchioni dedicated a song to her called Marika. "Sing Marika sing – say the verses – how beautiful you are the hour of destiny, now that you hold the dynamite like a child in your bosom... sing Marika sing we are your eyes we are your smile, sing that God looks at you that even on earth paradise exists, hold tight to the flower you wear under your black dress". The "flower" is the explosive charge that killed 21 Israelis, including three children aged 11, 4 and 1, and injured 60.