

The Australian

We must learn more about our enemies

Greg Sheridan, Foreign editor | *March 29, 2008*

IT has become an article of liberal faith that the term war on terror is wrong because it empowers the terrorists.

Yet one virtue of the word war is that it forces us to understand that there is an actual enemy, not a sociological tendency, but a living, breathing, intelligent, resourceful enemy, determined on our destruction.

One of the dumbest things you can do in a war is not listen to your enemy. He may lie to you, but even that may tell you something. But if you get a chance to listen to the enemy talking to his friends, that is invaluable. The worldwide Islamist terror movements are nothing if not voluble and it is amazing how little we listen to them.

A prime case is the Palestinian terrorist movement, Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip. This column has predicted several times that later this year there will be a massive Israeli ground campaign to rout Hamas, as Israel cannot ignore the many rocket and mortar attacks on its territory from Gaza. Yet in all the endless reporting on Gaza, almost no one examines what Hamas says about itself.

Last week The Australian gave extensive coverage to some of the thousands of newly translated documents from the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein, which indicated a promiscuous and intense relationship between Saddam's government and international terrorism.

Saddam was a great backer of Palestinian terrorism, including Hamas. The documents show that after the 9/11 attacks a Palestinian leader, presumably a Hamas leader, told the Iraqis that Hamas had 35 armed terror cells across the world, mingled with refugee populations, including in France, Sweden and Denmark.

An internal Iraqi intelligence report of March 26, 2003, reads: "We have lately been visited by representatives of the Hamas movement in Baghdad who inform us of the following points: The leadership of the movement in Damascus called us a number of times to make sure we renew our commitment to you against the foolish American attack.

"A request to open our border checkpoints to let the volunteer fighters participate in the war.

"An offer from Hamas leader Dr al-Rantisi to carry out demonstrations and suicide attacks to support Iraq."

Other documents detail the Iraqis learning of the depth of Iranian involvement in Hamas. A report from August 1, 1998, reads: "An agent supplied us with information about a pact between (Hamas leader) Sheik Ahmad Yasin and the Iranian leadership. The most significant information was Iran's support for the Hamas movement and the appropriating of \$15 million a month, as well as supplying Hamas with commando teams to carry out operations abroad, and forming a new organisation named Hezbollah-Palestine to divert suspicion away from Hamas in case it carries out sensitive operations and assassinations."

Hamas began life in 1988 as the Palestinian branch of Islamist group the Muslim Brotherhood. It is extremist, committed to terrorism as a way of life and totalitarian in its Islamist ideology. It won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in January 2006 but still had to operate under the overall auspices of the Palestinian Authority. In June last year, in a gruesomely violent Palestinian civil war, Hamas took absolute control of Gaza while the more secular Fatah group consolidated control of the West Bank.

Since Hamas took over, it and its proxies have relentlessly fired rockets and mortar shells into southern Israel, mainly at civilian targets. Last Wednesday alone there were 20 such rockets and mortar shells. Because of the breakdown of border security between Gaza and Egypt, ever longer range rockets are being smuggled into Gaza, and the big Israeli city of Ashkelon is often hit. But with longer range rockets coming from Iran, there is no reason Hamas ultimately will not be able to fire on Tel Aviv.

As this column has previously assessed, Israel will eventually have to respond. I believe there will be a big Israeli campaign and this will convulse the Middle East. Because to really remove the rocket threat, Israel will have to take back control of the Gaza-Egypt border, establish military intelligence and response posts at least in some parts of Gaza, and possibly occupy some of what have been the rocket launch points in northern Gaza.

Given Hamas's murderous methods, there is no way it will lose control of Gaza through any democratic election.

I put this to a visiting Israeli cabinet minister, Isaac Herzog, recently. Herzog is on the Left of Israeli politics, a Labour Party minister, a strong supporter of the two-state solution who believes Israel should compromise over territory. However, his response was very intriguing. He merely asked whether Hamas would be in the same position it is in now in Gaza after an Israeli ground operation. Anyone who thinks it unfair to characterise Hamas as extremist, terrorist, Islamist and totalitarian should read the Hamas charter, which is easily found on the internet. It is a sickening document, full of violence, crude anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories.

It says, for example, that Rotary and Lions clubs, as well as the Freemasons, of course, are spy organisations in the pay of the Jews. It relies on the notorious tsarist forgery, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, to establish Jewish behaviour. It accuses the Jews of being behind not only the French revolution and the communist revolution and World War I, but even World War II.

Why did the Jews promote World War II, in which six million Jews were killed? According to the Hamas charter, it was for purposes of profiteering and to pave the way for the establishment of the state of Israel.

The Hamas charter demands Islamist control of all the territory of Israel and Palestine and repeatedly denounces any peace process or compromise that allows Israel to continue to exist.

But the most telling feature of the Hamas charter is its pervasive religiosity.

The failure to understand that Islamist terrorism is a religious, ideological movement, with a coherent if grotesque world view, is one of many failures of Western commentators. Reading the Islamists' documents would be a good place to start in remedying that so far abject failure.