

REINFORCEMENT OF OTHER BEHAVIOR

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In the 1970s, Yasir Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had a serious problem. Their terrorist group Black September was one of the most feared terrorist organizations in the world.

The problem, however, was that Black September had served its purpose. The PLO and its chairman had the recognition and acceptance they craved. Indeed, any continuation of these terrorist activities, ironically, now threatened to undermine all that had been achieved. In short, Black September was, suddenly, not a deniable asset but a potential liability. Thus, according to my host, Arafat ordered Abu Iyad "to turn Black September off." My host, who was one of Abu Iyad's most trusted deputies, was charged with devising a solution. For months both men thought of various ways to solve the Black September problem, discussing and debating what they could possibly do, short of killing all these young men, to stop them from committing further acts of terror.

Finally they hit upon an idea. Why not simply marry them off? In other words, why not find a way to give these men—the most dedicated, competent and implacable fighters in the entire PLO—a reason to live rather than to die? Having failed to come up with any viable alternatives, the two men put their plan in motion.

They traveled to Palestinian refugee camps, to PLO officers and associated organizations, and to the capitals of all Middle Eastern countries with large Palestinian communities. Systematically identifying the most attractive Palestinian women they could find, they put before these women what they hoped would be an irresistible proposition: Your fatherland needs you. Will you accept a critical mission of the utmost importance to the Palestinian people? Will you come to Beirut, for a reason to be disclosed upon your arrival, but one decreed by no higher authority than Chairman Arafat himself? How could a true patriot refuse?

So approximately a hundred of these beautiful young women were brought to Beirut. There, in a sort of PLO version of a college mixer, boy met girl, boy fell in love with girl, boy would, it was hoped, marry girl. There was an additional incentive, designed to facilitate not just amorous connections, but long-lasting relationships. The hundred or so Black Septemberists were told that if they married these women, they would be paid \$3,000; given an apartment in Beirut with a gas stove, a refrigerator, and a television; and employed by the PLO in some nonviolent capacity. Any of these couples that had a baby within a year would be rewarded with an additional \$5,000.

Both Abu Iyad and the future general worried that their scheme would never work. But, as the general recounted, without exception the Black Septemberists fell in love, got married, settled down, and in most cases started a family. To make sure that none ever strayed, the two men devised a test. Periodically, the former terrorists would be handed legitimate passports and asked to go to the organization's offices in Geneva or Paris or some other city on genuine nonviolent PLO business. But, the general explained, not one of them would agree to travel abroad, for fear of being arrested and losing all that they had—that is, being deprived of their wives and children. "And so," my host told me, "that is how we shut down Black September and eliminated terrorism. It is the only successful case that I know of." (p. 36)

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