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Agent Provocateurs in the Mideast

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Abstract. This article describes examples of agent provocateurs in the context of conflict between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA.)

Agent provocateur most often denotes an individual who--in the context of a conflict between A and B-- is controlled by A, initiates or instigates behavior perceived by most observers as originating from B and undesired by A, and thus provides a pretext for A to act against B. An example might be a PNA member or a covert agent under the control of Israel who instigates violence against Israel to provide a pretext for Israeli violence against the PNA. Another example might be an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) member or a covert agent under the control of the PNA who instigates violence against the PNA to provide a pretext for PNA violence against the IDF. However, these two examples sound almost bizarre in the context of the Mideast, because the nature of the agent provocateur in the Mideast is equally bizarre.

The PNA employs PNA personnel and its own citizens to overtly provoke IDF and Israeli settler violence against the PNA and its citizens to provide a pretext for PNA violence against the IDF and Israel. The PNA also employs nonviolent behaviors of Israelis--many of the common behaviors of living-- as pretexts for anti-Israel violence. In other words, Israelis ineluctably serve as the PNA's own agent provocateurs-- unintentionally.

And public and official policies of Israel provoke PNA violence without the need for the traditional agent provocateur. As well, PNA personnel and citizenry ineluctably serve overtly as Israeli provocateurs provoking Israeli violence.

It may well be that the agent provocateur as traditional intermediary is not often needed in the context of intractable conflict and religious and other ethnic passions. It is not often needed when each side to the conflict is its own worst enemy. (See Astor, R.A. (1994). Children's moral reasoning about family and peer violence: The role of provocation and retribution. *Child Development*, 65, 1054-1067; Douglas, H. (1991). Assessing violent couples. *Families in Society*, 72, 525-535; Gupta, D. K., Singh, H., & Sprague, T. (1993). Government coercion of dissidents: Deterrence or provocation? *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 37, 301-339; Mitchell, B. (1995). Provoked violence, capacity and criminal responsibility. *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 1, 291-300; Sidanius, J., Levin, S., Rabinowitz, J. L., & Frederico, C. M. (1999). Peering into the jaws of the beast: The integrative dynamics of social identity, symbolic racism, and social dominance. In D. A. Prentice, & D. T. Miller (Eds.). *Cultural divides: Understanding and overcoming group conflict* (pp. 80-132). Russell Sage Foundation.) (Keywords: Agent Provocateur, Israel, Palestinian National Authority.)