

Americans getting a notion of how Israelis feel

BY GEOFF BERG

Berg, a Houstonian, is traveling in Israel.

THEL AVIV, Israel — The other day, I left a friend's apartment on foot to get a cup of coffee. As I walked up the small back lane on which he lives, I approached Dizengoff Street. It was on Dizengoff last year that a Palestinian blew himself and more than 20 Israelis to pieces aboard a city bus.

As I approached Dizengoff, I cut across the middle of the quiet lane and was told by a policeman to stop where I was and take a few steps back. I asked why (I thought I was going to be ticketed for jaywalking). The officer told me that Dizengoff (still a half block away) was temporarily closed because of a suspicious package. All around me, Israelis gathered to wait out what has become a daily routine in cities all across this small nation. People heading to work, people who are notoriously impatient when driving and infamously hurried on the street, seemed instantly to transform themselves. There was quiet as people waited calmly and patiently.

Looking up the lane, I had a view of the Dizengoff intersection. A policeman dressed head to toe in full body armor attached some kind of explosive charge to the suspicious package and strung out several feet of wire.

Some time passed. Israelis stood around, some looked out their apartment windows, but there was very little palpable tension. It was just another day in the Middle East. I wondered whether the package really did contain a bomb. I remembered that just a few days before, some Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip had accidentally blown themselves up preparing another bomb for the Jews. Two of those bombs did not go off and were displayed for the media. Nails were fastened to the devices so that those out of danger of being killed by the bomb's blast would be murdered by flying metal. I took several more steps back.

Finally, the blast. The police totally destroyed someone's forgotten groceries. As the police

waived the gathered crowd forward toward the now opened street, Israelis rushed onward. I took a few tentative steps in the direction of Dizengoff Street. All around me, Israelis moved along as if nothing had happened. Vendors returned to their stalls, people trapped in a bank lobby strolled out, and the police removed their armor. Traffic returned to normal. I passed the spot on which the lone package had been destroyed; if I hadn't witnessed it myself, I could never have guessed that anything out of the ordinary had happened there.

Such incidents happen every day in this country. Lost suitcases, backpacks and groceries are all looked upon as potential explosive devices and if not claimed are almost always destroyed by the police. All Israelis must cooperate. They have to be alert at all times to the possibility of terrorists striking anywhere. It thus falls upon them to report such stray personal items to the authorities without delay.

It is impossible to enter any public building in Israel without being searched. Islamic terror has killed so many Israelis and the danger is so ever-present that personal privacy is for the most part sacrificed so that terrorism can be combated.

Now that terror has come again to the United States, this time to the very center of our country, Americans from now on may be forced to heighten their awareness. Looks over the shoulder out of fear of crime could now be directed at the ground as well out of fear of bombs.

Will Randalls, The Summit and Goode Company Barbecue be forced to install metal detectors and hire guards to search purses and backpacks at the door? Although the prospect seems ridiculous, in Israel, where bombings are a constant fact of life, such precautions are taken at all public facilities; in fact, luggage loaded onto

buses is now searched as if it were being placed on an airplane. Could Houstonians ever get used to constant unexpected closures of major arteries because someone spotted an abandoned box on the shoulder of the Katy Freeway? Have such stringent security measures become necessary in America?

The terrorists who repeatedly strike at innocent Israelis do so in order to destroy this country and kill all of its Jewish inhabitants. They hate Israel's democratic traditions, Western inclination and Jewish character. To them, Israel is merely America's tool in the Middle East, the "tail of the Great Satan." Ultimately, their goal is not only to destroy Israel, but to defeat the United States. Islamic claims that they seek only to "change American Mideast policy" are simply lies. They seek to defeat the United States along with Israel.

Apparently, the Islamists' war is to be fought with car bombs detonated outside day care centers. Will anyone really believe that such a crime could be motivated out of a desire to "change policy" rather than a deep hatred for all that the United States stands for?

Whether or not the Oklahoma City bombing was committed by Middle Eastern terrorists, terror is terror. The members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad will shed no tears for the murdered infidels. If those groups did not do it, they have done all they could to make bombing innocents an expected part of life. Thus, they share in the blame for ratcheting up the level of acceptable butchery. It was, after all, like-minded terrorists who committed the World Trade Center bombing.

As unlikely as it seems, the people of Oklahoma City today know better than anyone outside of Israel what it is to be an Israeli. Today, no one feels for the people of Oklahoma City more than the people of Israel. In Oklahoma, Israelis can today see Israel.