

Exclusive Interview / By Yosef Rapaport

Re-Thinking Anti-Terrorism in the United States

Michael Wildes, a former mayor of Englewood, New Jersey, and a former federal prosecutor in the Eastern District, is an expert on terrorism. He has also been involved with the American Jewish Congress in this regard. After the arrest of two suspects who allegedly plotted to attack Jewish houses of worship in New York City, Hamodia interviewed Mr. Wildes on security issues and related matters.

Please tell us a little bit about yourself.

I had the privilege of serving as an auxiliary police officer when I was younger. I always felt it was important for our community to be active in public service; that as *frum* people we can live very comfortably in two worlds, both in our observance and practice, and in our professional work in the secular world.

That came together very profoundly for me when I had the privilege to serve as a prosecutor at the U.S. Attorney's office and then as mayor of a city in New Jersey.

I take great pride in the time and effort it takes to learn about our vulnerability, and hope that we will learn very quickly to assess that, and act very judiciously to prevent further attacks against our community and our nation.

Observers often cite the Orthodox community's political move to the right. But most of the Orthodox still vote Democratic. After the killing of Osama bin Laden by order of a Democratic president, do you think there is still a difference in the approach to terrorism between the Democrats and the Republicans?

We are Americans, and presumably partisanship should never enter into how to face this challenge. I've been greatly disappointed with both Republican and Democratic administrations.

I do not believe that the Democratic or the Republican parties have acted in good faith when it comes to our immigration policies. They've acted in a politically astute fashion to ensure that they get reelected but have not conducted the people's business.

We have a deafening silence from Washington on this issue, and as a result, we have debates throughout our nation when governors are footing the bill to ensure that residents can live comfortably. We see that our federal elected officials stand silently in Washington.

So are you for immigration reform?

Absolutely. Sworn police officers throughout the United States should be developing relationships and gathering intelligence and developing strong ties to the immigrant communities.

There's no way a police officer who is not skilled in immigration forensics can adequately protect the interests of someone when he is charged by the governor to look at people who have accents and look different, and only then seek information on their immigration status.

Our police are already overwhelmed. This has a collateral effect particularly in our community, since we are a hard target, since they are coming after synagogues and institutions such as Chabad, like we saw in Mumbai.

We have to be particularly careful that the government has the right resources

and tools in its arsenal, and immigration is one of those. If you do not embolden this country to protect its borders and immediately address the challenge of those ten-million-plus people already here, we are then vulnerable from within as a homeland. And that is just unacceptable.

President Reagan created an amnesty in 1986, effectively allowing anybody who could prove he or she had entered before January of '82 to remain in America, and then shifted the responsibility of policing immigration and the workforce to employers. President Reagan created a blanket amnesty, again, in '86, for anybody who was here unlawfully and could prove he or she was here before '82. President Clinton came up with an earned amnesty, where you had to show that you wouldn't displace Americans who would be in need of employment or who had the same talent.

I'm not for a blanket amnesty. I think you create an environment where the next generation will see forgiveness on the horizon and come in unlawfully. But we have a system that is not acting in concert with our Homeland Security agenda. We do not have enough handcuffs, airplanes and beds to house, detain, and then deport the ten and a half million people. We only have 7,000 ICE agents, 268 immigration judges, and 58 immigration courts.

You have ten and a half million unlawfully documented individuals. [ICE is] deporting an average of 300,000 or 400,000 a year. I believe the numbers are all skewed and this is not an effective system.

It is unconscionable to me — and every president has effectively spoken about this, in and out of office — that we do not have an inventory of those who are here — at the very least, for people to be insured when they drive.

But hasn't history shown that, at least when it comes to giving carte blanche to refugees from Somalia, from Yemen — I'm sure everybody would agree that 99.9% of those immigrants are law-abiding citizens and are not terroristic. But it has opened the door to a small minority.

You have to understand that right now, anybody who is a foreign national in America, who has an expired passport and is here unlawfully, can use that identification to get on an airplane, the very instrument used to destroy the World Trade Center. We are fixated sometimes on what seems to be pertinent for elections and regional concerns, rather than looking at the entire nation.

In private practice, I have a chance to represent significant industries, from fashion to hospitality, from shipping to finance. We see that the foreign student talent is deciding not to come to the United States because of the disdain with which they're treated. Individuals now have their



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— Michael Wildes

Mr. Wildes with President Obama

BlackBerries gone through. Facebook pages are looked at in airports when people are waiting for secondary inspection.

Instead of just addressing the war on terror the way it ought to be addressed, which is with great strength, might and care, it looks like it will deteriorate into the war on drugs and go on for yet another generation.

Many of us believe that this battle began in 1979 when our hostages were taken in Iran. The thing should have a certain element of time and should be ended quickly. But we see that in a decade we haven't come far. It's still thanks to the vigilance of civilians and citizens who are alert, and police officers and military agents and intelligence operatives.

Most of these apprehensions, even the Times Square attempted bomber, were made by civilians.

There it's because the [guy] couldn't even put together a bomb properly, and because somebody saw smoke coming from it.

Commissioner Kelly mentioned that he has about a thousand police officers employed in terrorism facilities. On Shabbos in many neighborhoods, we see just two officers sitting in a car. How might feel comfort in that, but how is it supposed to protect a synagogue? Aren't many of these positionings just for show and can't stop a determined terrorist?

A determined terrorist or a lone wolf. I represented Mrs. Teitelbaum, whose husband was felled and murdered in Mumbai. He was in charge of cleaning and checking the mushrooms in India. He put his suitcases down in his hotel — I spoke to his father — and went directly then to the Chabad House, only to be found dead with a *Gemara* in his hand, shot in the back of his head.

For the first time, terrorists were able effectively to "multitask" in Mumbai and hit several locations. Chabad was one of the main targets. We have to be prepared and vigilant, if only to have a few people outside your shul who are trained properly, who have done an inspection of the shul, who will inspect individuals and packages coming in. This will make a lone wolf, or somebody who's trying to make a name for himself or for a terrorist cell move on to another target.

If our entire community remained vigilant and prepared ahead of the game, we

wouldn't have to react and then deal with tragedy. I tip my hat to the New York City Police Department for the masterful work they did — and the FBI — in uncovering this recent plot. But how many others are being hatched as we speak, and how vulnerable are we if we don't take this seriously?

We now have Mumbai in the news again with a Pakistani businessman, Mr. Tahawwur Hussain Rana on trial in Chicago. Convicted Mumbai plotter David Coleman Headley is set to testify against Rana. The Feds are requesting that certain evidence against this terrorist plotter shouldn't be made public. They don't want to confront Pakistan right now after the whole embarrassment they had after the killing of Osama bin Laden.

I feel this is the opposite of common sense. The government of the United States should be taking Pakistan to task. Why, after \$2 billion a year, was the ISI duplicitous, both to the Taliban and to the United States, in hosting this gentleman who was the progenitor of terrorism. If anything, the United States has the best leverage at this stage to hold Pakistan and its intelligence services to international transparency and scrutiny, to make sure that they cooperate. If anything, it shows that the dollars should stop flowing there, and that the cooperation is self-serving, as they stand in fear of both the United States and the Taliban.

Given the American governments' utter dependence on Pakistan in its war with Afghanistan, some observers feel that the Pakistani government is actually now the master and the United States is the slave.

I've had clients who were hunted down by the ISI. I do believe that they sit with duplicitous interests at heart. But if we don't stand as an example to other nations and insist that our allies and those who would host terrorists cooperate, then this war will carry on for another generation. I'm also talking about friendly countries such as Saudi Arabia, for example, who hosted Idi Amin for 20 years after the fiasco in Uganda.

And right now the former president of Tunisia is in Saudi Arabia.

We have to send out a very strong message that nobody will provide a safe haven. I did that when I was mayor of Englewood,

when Gadhafi wanted to sleep in a white tent in our community. Following my colleague Mayor Bloomberg, I would not put out a red carpet or a white tent for a person who admitted to killing 38 residents of the state of New Jersey on Pan Am Flight 103.

Getting back to Mumbai, there is anticipation that the deep involvement of the ISI, Pakistan's intelligence services, will come out in the trial; that they had a hand in planning and executing the Mumbai attack. Is that sufficient for your client, Rebbetzin Teitelbaum, to sue the government of Pakistan?

Absolutely. This is not the time for the United States and its state department to form bridges of friendship with those countries that would support terrorists. Now is the time for us to get the true taste of the government of Pakistan and its intelligence service: If they were complicit in any fashion or if they stood by silently, knowing that this attack was going to take place. I would like to see what our president and our administration do.

If it means that somebody has to force transparency or turn the lights on via the media or through an international court action or in a United States federal court, this would be a very legitimate concern. It would be an inappropriate response for somebody to try to keep things hidden, away from the sunlight.

Are you aware whether there is any initiative to sue? Is anything being followed legally in order to sue the government of Pakistan and its involvement in the Mumbai killings?

I've been approached by several families who lost loved ones in that attack. It's a very delicate matter. Certainly if recent events have uncovered any information, it is no doubt the responsibility of these families to pursue it, and the obligation of our government to support it.

In other words, it should be made public to those who can investigate it further. The evidence needs to be studied and then an appropriate response made. If they can establish that the government of Pakistan was complicit in attacking Jews in Mumbai, that's an act of war, particularly against any American-citizen Jew.

One thing is for sure: The more transparency we have in this war on terror, the more everybody allows us information. I was a proponent of the release of the photos of Osama bin Laden and information that would not compromise the agents who made the heroic effort. But at the same time, I believe it is very important that the duplicitous relationships a lot of these countries and leaders have with terrorist organizations needs to come out.

One thing is for sure: This hydra of terrorism has metamorphosed in the last decade. It's no longer an individual male from a Middle Eastern country who is unemployed and uneducated. They've now hit the university

campuses, everywhere from the United Kingdom to Asia. We see a very sophisticated breed trying to undermine the West and spread this insidious venom throughout the world. If we don't act stronger, faster, more deliberate and transparent, this will continue.

You seem to be arguing for a more sensible — or some would say a more liberal — approach to immigration. On the other hand, you are advocating a stronger response to the terrorist threat.

I consider myself a conservative Democrat and believe that immigration — the sovereignty of our nation and its national security — is critical to the conclusion of this war, vis-à-vis U.S. citizens and our own borders and soil. We see the terrorists having lain in wait. All the police officers who stopped Muhammad Atta on several occasions still were not able to avert the 9/11 attacks.

I don't see a dichotomy between the two positions. I do see our fledgling economy and foreign students and foreign talent are heading to other countries that have point systems rather than the archaic system we have.

The forms we have when we ask people to apply for citizenship still ask whether or not you supported the Nazi party. They have not been brought up to date in decades.

Part of winning the war on terror is reminding ourselves in the homeland what it is we're fighting for. That's the very dream for which our founding fathers established this nation; so that people could continue to profess their own religion, whether they *davened* or prayed on Friday, Saturday or Sunday, and ultimately so that they can contribute.

This country was built by the hands of immigrants, and for us to turn on ourselves because there are foreign nationals who are trying to undo us is a horrible thing to do.

This country is a big *cholent* of diverse peoples, hailing from all over the world, all with one common denominator: to do the best they can in their professions and for their families.

That's how we move this ship forward. There's a compass, one little device, and that is ultimately what keeps us on the right path. We can't lose that moral compass and the war on terror.

One of the tools we take for granted is strong immigration controls. When we do not handle this responsibility judiciously, from without and within; when we just focus on the border with Mexico and we don't look at what's happening in Canada — I'm a big proponent of punishing alien absconders and criminal aliens. In other words, people who had a day in court and then absconded, or individuals who committed crimes, should be punished — and if necessary, deported. It doesn't mean that we are going to start giving police officers in Arizona the authority to shake down people who look

different and have accents. I'm comfortable in my skin on both of these positions. You can't travel a subway in the city of New York, having grown up in Queens myself, without a feeling for the immigrants of our nation and the prosperity that they created. At the same time, there's nothing inconsistent with being fiscally responsible and socially responsible at the same time.

Do you have any political ambitions? And if so, for which seat?

I started a campaign account when I was elected mayor in 2004, with an eye towards one day serving in Washington. It's a prayer I have that I'll earn the trust of the community.

At this time I'm privileged — I'll be teaching immigration law at Cardozo Law School. My father is retiring after teaching 32 years there, and I'll be teaching the course going forward, focusing as the managing partner of our law firm at this segment of my life. So I do hope to serve. You can look up Wildes for Congress, for the ninth congressional seat in Burton County.

Who has the seat now?

Steve Rothman is the current congressman. It takes millions of dollars to lodge a campaign, and it takes, more importantly, a lot of experience in both domestic and international matters to really have a sense of propriety and purpose, so that when you do have the privilege one day of serving, you don't then learn on the job.

You have the other congressman, Bill Pascrell. He's not the best friend of Israel, is he?

He's got a tremendous constituency in the Arab world. It's very delicate with the politics of the newspapers for you to be a friend of everybody when you have a completely different constituency. I had the same challenges when I was mayor. I found there were great tensions, more between the secular and the Orthodox community than between the Jewish community and the African-American community.

You had your own neighborhood problems concerning the eruv.

That's right. That was a problem in Tenafly, the neighboring

town. So it's *alalachas kama va'kama*; more so, for a congressman like this to maintain his stalwart support of the state of Israel and at the same time be honest to his constituency is a tremendous accomplishment. It's just not easy, and you have to be true to yourself and consistent. You can't dance at two *chasanahs* at the same time.

He's no doubt got a challenge, and I believe that he has worked faithfully for the State of Israel and for our people.

I had the privilege of traveling to London this past December. I met with the security leadership in the Jewish community, and I was thrilled to see how proactive and how significant their relationships were with everyone, from the local constables to the prime minister of that country.

A remarkable relationship has developed in our nation, in their nation. The Jewish community of the Diaspora has to make sure that it leads by example and word. I'm a member of Hatzolah for 20 years, and I take great pride in that relationship, because ultimately we'll be judged not by what we say, but what we do.



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