



## Commentary...

### How Olmert Defies Gravity By Caroline Glick

Monday Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni opened negotiations with her Palestinian counterpart Ahmed Qurei regarding the partition of Jerusalem; the destruction of hundreds of Israeli communities in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem; the expulsion of between a hundred thousand and half a million Israelis from their homes; the borders of Israel; and the right of immigration of millions of foreign, hostile Arabs to Israel.

The Olmert government's Palestinian policies are overwhelmingly rejected by the Israeli public. In a recent B'nai Brith poll, two thirds of the public said that the government has no mandate to conduct negotiations on these issues. Two thirds similarly said that they oppose any Israeli concessions in Jerusalem.

Since the end of the war in Lebanon a year and a half ago, the Olmert government's approval ratings have remained in the single digits. Last Friday's media polls showed Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his government enjoying the support of a mere eight percent of their fellow citizens.

Given the public's rejection of the government's policies and contempt for its elected leaders, it would be reasonable to assume that the Israeli "street" would be ablaze with protesters. But there are no fires and no impassioned cries - just an eerie, unsettling silence.

What is going on? How is it that the Olmert government is still in power? There are five main factors contributing to the Olmert government's staying power. The first, and perhaps least problematic was pointed out on Monday by investigative journalist Yoav Yitzhak. Yitzhak reported on his news Web site that Olmert's bureau secured positive media coverage of US President George W. Bush's visit to Israel last week by setting up interviews with Bush for Channel 2 television's anchorwoman Yonit Levy and Yediot Aharonot's senior diplomatic commentators Shimon Shiffer and Nahum Barnea. Yitzhak argues that it is scandalous for the government to trade access to policymakers for positive coverage. But the fact is that such arrangements are the stock in trade of politics.

More interesting than Olmert's use of the media is the media's use of Olmert. Olmert's need for sympathetic coverage is clear. But what do the local media need Olmert for? Their star reporters would be granted the same access by any Israeli government.

An examination of a recent incident involving the editor of Israel's supposed "newspaper of record," the radically left-wing Haaretz provides the beginning of an answer. Two weeks ago, the New York Jewish Week reported that Haaretz's editor in chief David Landau asked US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to "rape" Israel. Landau also told Rice that it was his "wet dream" to tell the Secretary of State to "rape" his country.

Landau made this shocking appeal to Rice at a dinner in September at the home of US ambassador Richard Jones. Also in attendance were Israeli intellectuals and media elites.

Jewish Week's report was a major scoop. But it raised troubling questions. Why did it take three months for Landau's statements to be reported? Why were they not reported by the Israeli media? One of the participants in the dinner was Yediot commentator Barnea. He preferred not to publish the story. After another participant at the dinner told him about Landau's statement, a spokesman for a major academic institution sought to interest Israel's largest dailies and television stations in the story. Appeals to Yediot editor Rafi Ginat and Barnea's colleague Shimon Shiffer were rebuffed. Similarly, Ma'ariv's deputy editor, Avi Bettelheim refused to publish the story. Channel 2 reported the story but without exposing Landau's identity. Two weeks after the Jewish Week broke the story, the Hebrew media still continues its blanket refusal to report it.

How is the media's belief that protecting their colleague (and competitor) outweighs the public's right to know connected to the Hebrew press's insistent and seemingly unnecessary support of Olmert? Ahead of the withdrawal from Gaza, both Landau and his colleague from Israel's Channel 2 Amnon

## ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel  
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee  
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Bromovich said openly that in order to ensure that the withdrawal from Gaza went through, the media needed to protect then prime minister Ariel Sharon from all criticism. Landau openly admitted that he ordered his reporters not to report on allegations of criminal misdeeds by Sharon and to underplay the significance of the ongoing police investigations against Sharon, his sons and his close associates.

Bromovich called for the media to protect Sharon like an etrog - the delicate citron used to celebrate the high holiday of Succot. Like etrogs, Bromovich argued that Sharon needed to be insulated by layer after layer of protection to make sure that he wasn't indicted or criticized for his actions or policies.

The media's protection of Sharon was all-encompassing. For instance, to enhance his chances for reelection, the media refused to report Sharon's visible physical deterioration and mental disorientation in his last year in power. And they reported Sharon's first stroke as a minor episode. Consequently, the public was shocked when two years ago Sharon was felled by his massive and eminently foreseeable stroke.

After Sharon was succeeded by Olmert, the media oligarchs from Haaretz, Channel 2, Yediot and Ma'ariv made clear that the extension of their "etrog" treatment to Olmert was conditioned on his adoption of their radical leftist agenda of land surrenders and settlement destruction. To ensure Olmert's election, the media ignored the significance of the Hamas electoral victory in the Palestinian Authority and the post-withdrawal transformation of Gaza into an international terrorist hub.

After Olmert led Israel to defeat in Lebanon, the media rallied to his side. Reservists calling for his resignation were demonized as "settlers" and "agents of settlers." State radio and television refused to cover the reservists' protests against Olmert. And the media heavyweights overwhelmingly supported the establishment of a commission of inquiry as a way to block the call for immediate elections.

The media are so arrogant in their assertion of control over public debate in Israel that they don't even try to hide their political agenda. On Monday, Haaretz ran a column by Akiva Eldar calling for Olmert to refuse the IDF's request to conduct a major ground operation in Gaza. The column ran under the title, "The etrog is Abu Mazen."

The meaning was clear. Just as the media protects Olmert despite his incompetence in the interest of advancing their agenda of destroying Israeli communities located beyond the 1949 armistice lines and expelling their residents, so Olmert must protect PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, (aka Abu Mazen), despite his defense of Hamas in Gaza, in order to advance the same agenda.

The leftist media do not simply prevent attacks on Olmert from gaining coverage and momentum. They also intimidate into silence people who might otherwise protest. In the case of Landau's rape remarks for instance, there were several people at the dinner party who clearly did not agree with his statements. They came as representatives of the "moderate" Right. Yet they did nothing to protest or publicize his remarks. They made no calls to the media. They did not post them on their Web sites. And why would they? They know that the price one pays for breaking ranks with the leftist establishment is enormous. Those who break ranks are boycotted by television and radio. If they are employed by leftist organizations, they can expect to be fired from their jobs. And so they say nothing, do nothing, and in the end, accomplish nothing.

Worse even than the media's intimidation of Zionists is the official harassment suffered by those who insist on speaking out. And as Olmert moves ahead with the leftist establishment's program of expelling Israelis from their communities and transferring them to Palestinian terrorists, that harassment is becoming more and more palpable.

To prevent protests of Bush's call to establish a Palestinian terror state and divide Jerusalem, the government and the police placed Jerusalem under virtual martial law last week. Fully a third of Israel's entire police force was transferred to the capital. Schools and businesses were closed. Jerusalemites were strongly encouraged to stay off the streets.

On January 9, three activists stood in front of the Dan Panorama hotel in the capital where the foreign press accompanying Bush on his visit to Israel was being housed. Jeff Daube, Susie Dym and Yehudit Dassberg were

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attempting to distribute a report on Fatah's support for and involvement in terrorist attacks against Israel to members of the foreign press. The report, written by veteran researcher Arlene Kushner, contained no policy recommendations. It simply documented Fatah's terrorist activities. For their efforts, they were detained by the police and accused of distributing "seditious materials" and causing a public nuisance.

Beyond its harassment of street protesters and activists, the government is now attempting to silence online protests of its policies. Last week, the ministerial committee on legislation approved a bill that would make Web site owners and editors legally responsible for comments published on their sites. Given the government's arbitrary and biased definition of sedition and incitement, if the law is passed it will effectively force bloggers and Web site operators to block all comments to their Web sites. Yet another avenue of protest will be silenced.

The cumulative impact of these phenomena has been the fifth and perhaps determinative factor enabling Olmert to continue in office. Simply stated, between the media's intimidation and the official harassment of citizens who dare to protest or even disagree with the government's policies, the public has simply lost faith its ability to influence the course of the country. This sense of disenfranchisement has demoralized the public into silence.

For those who wish to help end the tenure of a government pushing a radical, post-Zionist agenda with the support of a mere eight percent of the public, it is important to understand this state of affairs. All ameliorative actions must be geared towards ending the stranglehold of the radical Left on the national debate, and towards defending the civil rights and upholding the reputations of those who protest. (Jerusalem Post Jan 14)

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### **Bush Promotes a Palestinian "Right of Return"** By Daniel Pipes

The Palestinian "right of return" entered the lexicon of American policymakers in December 2006, when the Iraq Study Group Report urged the U.S. government to support Israel-Palestinian negotiations that addresses what it termed a "key final status issue." That recommendation came as a mild shock, given that the "right of return" to Israel is transparently a code phrase to overwhelm Israel demographically, thereby undoing Zionism and the Jewish state, and so never before a goal of official Washington.

A year later, White House deputy press secretary Dana Perino adopted the term, though without much notice. Out of seemingly nowhere, she informed journalists at a press briefing on November 28, 2007 that "The right of return issue is a part of the road map and it's going to be one of the issues that the Israelis and the Palestinians have to talk about during ... negotiations."

Indeed, on schedule, "right of return" emerged as a motif before and during George W. Bush's recent trip to Israel and the Palestinian Authority, when he mentioned it three times publicly:

- \* January 4: In an interview with Israel's Channel 2, Bush announced himself "optimistic that we can have the outlines of a state defined. In other words, negotiations on borders and right of return and these different issues can be settled."
- \* January 9: At a joint press conference with Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, he referred to the core issues of the conflict as "territory and right of return and Jerusalem."
- \* January 10: In a parallel joint press conference with Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, he stated that the two-state idea "really doesn't have much bearing until borders are defined, right of return issues resolved, Jerusalem is understood, ... [and] the common security measures will be in place."

In a different setting, also on January 10, Bush, somewhat elusively, stated his belief that "we need to look to the establishment of a Palestinian state and new international mechanisms, including compensation, to resolve the refugee issue." Is the "right of return" to be one of those new international mechanisms?

Comments:

(1) Despite the major shift in policy implied by the U.S. government adopting the "right of return," the media has largely missed the story, as "The Lurker" documents in "Censoring Bush's call for Palestinian 'right of return.'" In particular, the Jerusalem Post reported on this reference, then posted a second story denying it.

(2) When the Iraq Study Group Report first appeared, analysts puzzled over the "right of return" mention, as one person close to the process explained: "It's hard to know whether that language got in there because of carelessness – I know there were many revisions up to the very last minute – or whether it was a deliberate attempt to fuse something to the Bush rhetoric which wasn't there before." Retrospectively, it appears that the reference was indeed intentional – and quite successful in its purpose. "The Lurker" concludes, perhaps correctly, that James A. Baker, III, lead author of the Iraq Study Group Report, "has once again become a major factor in setting U.S. Middle East policy."

(3) This is only one of several problematic statements from the Bush administration, such as the president's morally equivalent reference to "terrorism and incitement, whether committed by Palestinians or Israelis" or

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's calling the Arab-Israeli conflict the central issue of the Middle East and seeing Palestinians as analogous to Southern blacks.

(4) Bush prefaced his January 10 comment by asserting, "I'm the only president that's really articulated a two-state solution so far," and he is right. Put differently, he is the only U.S. president to promote a "Palestine" and now to call for a Palestinian "right of return." More broadly, throughout his presidency, Bush has marched to his own drummer on the Arab-Israeli issue, offering novel and personal solutions to a century-old problem and throwing out the rulebook on Arab-Israeli diplomacy.

(5) One can only guess how often Bush raised the "right of return" in his private conversations with Israelis and Palestinians, and with what intensity and pressure.

(6) Looking ahead, to the last year of the Bush presidency, quoting myself: "should the Israelis resist a joint U.S.-Palestinian position, I see a possible crisis in U.S.-Israel relations of unprecedented proportions." I am not predicting this will happen but noting that the pieces are all in place for such a development.

(7) Although Bush is "seen by many Israelis as the best friend the Jewish state has had in the White House," I have long doubted that characterization, and now more so than ever. (FrontPageMagazine.com Jan 14)

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### **Pressure from Fantasy Land** By Moshe Arens

Once upon a time a president of the United States applied pressure on Israel – and brutal pressure at that. Dwight Eisenhower and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, threatened to impose sanctions on Israel if David Ben-Gurion did not order the Israel Defense Forces to withdraw from all the territories it occupied in the 1956 Suez Campaign. Ben-Gurion was not very conversant with the American political scene and assumed that he had no choice but to obey President Eisenhower's command, and very unwillingly the IDF was withdrawn from the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip in 1957.

Actually, it just might have been possible to marshal sufficient support for Israel in Congress to bring about a softening of Eisenhower's position, but it was never tried. After his retirement, Eisenhower admitted that his demand for Israel's withdrawal had been a mistake.

That was the last time that Israel came under substantial pressure from the White House. The U.S.-Israel relationship has been improving steadily since the 1967 Six-Day War. There have been disagreements but no serious arm twisting. It looks like it is going to stay that way for the foreseeable future. But that does not mean that managing that relationship does not constitute an important challenge for the Israeli leadership.

With Israeli prime ministers making frequent visits to the U.S., and having become welcome guests in the White House, they have also come to feel themselves to be experts on the U.S. political scene. And almost invariably, they conclude that nothing matters except the man who sits in the White House.

Once they think they have established what they regard as a warm personal relationship with the president, they feel they have nothing more to learn about the U.S. Used to the Israeli political scene, where the Knesset is not much more than an ineffectual appendage to the government, they tend to disregard the U.S. Congress. Once enraptured by the man in the White House, they tend to forget that there are two political parties in the U.S., and that sooner or later another party's candidate will occupy the White House.

They also tend to forget that unlike Israel, where politicians' careers seem to stretch to infinity, in the U.S. the president wields power for four, or at the most eight years, and then somebody else takes over. This focus on the president, to the exclusion of the other parts of the American political system, was a mistake committed by Yitzhak Rabin, repeated by Ehud Barak when he was prime minister, and Ehud Olmert is following in their footsteps. Nobody is going to teach Olmert anything about America.

Olmert's repeated assertion that what needs to be achieved in the peace process has to be achieved while George W. Bush is in the White House is not very intelligent. There is no point in antagonizing the person who will move into the White House a year from now. Nor for that matter should one antagonize the members of the Democratic Party, who now control Congress and might run the administration a year from now.

The talk about the need to give in to American pressure comes straight out of fantasy land. There is no American pressure and there will be no American pressure for Israeli concessions. If unauthorized outposts in Judea and Samaria should be removed it is not because of a "commitment" Israel made to the U.S., but because these outposts are illegal under Israeli law.

To paint Israel as a servile obedient servant of the U.S. who has to dance to the tune dictated in Washington is both wrong and damaging to Israel's long-term interests. Whatever "pressure" Olmert talks about is, in effect, pressure that he himself is inviting to be applied.

The Annapolis conference would never have taken place had Olmert not made it clear that he was looking forward to such a conference, where he could publicly state his view that the State of Israel is finished if a

Palestinian state does not come into being. The slogans "two states for two peoples" and "the occupation must end" were launched in Israel and not Washington. The tail is wagging the dog.

Those Israelis eager to have Israel withdraw to the 1949 armistice lines don't mind this masquerade at all. If it helps to convince the Israeli public that Israel has no choice but to withdraw to this line, because that is what the U.S. requires of Israel, so much the better. The end justifies the means.

But a government policy that is based on misconceptions and untruths is bound to founder sooner or later, even if Shas and Yisrael Beiteinu continues to provide the anchor that keeps it afloat for the time being. (Haaretz Jan 15)

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### **Enough Crocodile Tears** By Yehudit Tayar

Everyone, it seems, commiserates and feels sad for a dead Jew. Each media-covered visit of a foreign official to Yad Vashem portrays the sad reaction of the visitor to the well-planned and premeditated murder of our people. What is missing is the official response that never again must the Jewish people be hunted down and murdered anywhere in the world simply because they are Jews.

Ironically, just the opposite is the reality. US President George Bush supports the implementation of a "Palestinian state" run by the very murderers who, since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, and despite United States guarantees, have continued to refuse to implement the very basics of each agreement signed then and after. The only response we heard from President Bush is that the "outposts must be removed" and "Israel must return to the 1967 borders."

Perhaps, if President Bush would have had someone next to him to explain the map of Israel, and the historical, symbolic and strategic importance of these critical areas - Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethlehem, Judea, and Samaria - then he would have been made to understand, finally, the basic inherent rights of a free Jewish people in our land.

Perhaps, if there were a government of Israel that took responsibility for the welfare and future of the Jewish people in Israel, we would hear the voices of truth from the President of the United States, the country that is supposed to be the most loyal friend of Israel in the world.

What we hear instead are Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, Ehud Olmert, Chaim Ramon, Tzipi Livni and all the rest of this criminal, impotent government continuing with the charade of a possible partnership with those who have in the past, and continue today, to perpetrate and plan the destruction of Israel and the Jewish people. Continuing to meet with those who have used guns, weapons and public relations to try to destroy us and our existence in our country, the government of Israel is also responsible for each and every life that has been lost since the signing of the unfortunate, pathetic Oslo agreements.

Under normal circumstances, each and every one who is responsible for the misery and murder of our people since the implementation of Oslo would, first of all, be forced to leave public office and then, tried for crimes against the nation. We, however, live in a society that has courts and police that protect the governmental figures, and ignore the safety and welfare of the citizens that it has a mandate to protect.

Our way to protest will be in the continued building of our land, the continued attempt to ensure the survival of the Jewish people in Israel and for the Jews throughout the world. This, we must continue.

The Land of Israel is "very, very good," as it says in the Bible, but the governments of Israel are transient, weak, criminal and irresponsible. We must put our faith in G-d and try to do, as Jewish citizens of Israel, whatever we can to ensure the survival of our people. And we must do so while ignoring the crocodile tears of the world when they survey the documentation of their own indifference to the slaughter of our people during the Holocaust. These crocodile tears will not help us to survive today and ensure that there will be a Jewish tomorrow in the Land and State of Israel.

It is up to us to continue determinedly to build our communities, to walk every meter of our beloved Land, and to force the government of Israel to protect the interests and future of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. May G-d protect us and guide us. (IsraelNationalNews.com Jan 16)

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### **A Nation That Is in Search of Leadership** By Isi Leibler

With the impending release of the Winograd Report, most Israelis will be mulling over the future of their current leadership. Those old enough will recollect with nostalgia the extraordinary quality of the Israelis who led the country from its inception to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.

Some will be asking themselves why, in recent years, Israel has been afflicted with such a disastrous crop of unsuccessful and failed politicians who to this day remain unwilling to accept accountability for their failures. Indeed, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has brazenly announced that he has no intention of resigning regardless of what Winograd says.

In the past, outstanding leaders who affected the course of history - for better or for worse - were usually men consumed by a vision or a cause. They

held views that were often initially unacceptable to the public and obliged to undergo periods as lonely outsiders. Often enough, prior to obtaining popular support, they were marginalized, dismissed as wild visionaries and sometimes even condemned as dangerous extremists.

Take, for example, Winston Churchill. It was only well after Munich, when Neville Chamberlain's policies of appeasement had become utterly discredited, that Britons ceased branding Churchill an irresponsible warmonger.

The same applied to the early Zionist leaders and the founding fathers of Israel.

Theodor Herzl was regarded by most Western and educated Jews as an eccentric, promoting utterly unfeasible utopian ideas. Even within the Zionist movement itself, David Ben-Gurion faced enormous opposition as he battled unflinchingly for Jewish independence, emerging as the dominant leader only in the wake of the Holocaust.

That also applied to those who succeeded him. The most extreme example was Menachem Begin. Seven times he lost elections and for almost 30 years was all but ostracized, shamefully vilified, and even condemned as a fascist until his extraordinary electoral victory in 1977. Today he is recognized as one of our greatest national leaders.

What did these people of varying political persuasions share? They all had visions and strategies in which they genuinely believed and were convinced would best serve the interests of the nation. They stood their ground and refused to be dissuaded even when public opinion was opposed to their ideas. Rarely did they allow a personal agenda to intrude or influence the formulation of policy. In many cases, when they recognized that they had reached an impasse and could no longer pursue their objectives, or concluded that they had failed, they voluntarily resigned. That applied to Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir and Begin.

In other words, until recently, the underlying motivation of most Israeli leaders of all hues was an unhesitating willingness to prioritize the interests of the nation above any personal agenda. Of course, they made mistakes and were at times utterly misguided. But neither public opinion nor a lust to cling to power could conceivably have led them to subordinating what they perceived to be the best interests of the people.

That was as true of Rabin as it was of others. In the course of time, even after Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilin had dragged him against his will into endorsing the Oslo debacle, he convinced himself that in order to forestall the impending nuclearization of Iraq and Iran, the national interest required that he make peace with Israel's immediate neighbors even if it entailed a gamble. That the gamble subsequently proved to be a disaster does not detract from the sincerity of his objective. Despite his failures, nobody could conclude that Rabin's failures stemmed from a crass desire to gain popular support or retain power.

It was during the leadership of Ehud Barak that the strategic long-term interests of the nation became relegated to a secondary position and were subordinated to a personal agenda. Barak's policy zig-zags reached their climax toward the end of his term, by which time he was already making statements in the afternoon which contradicted those he had expressed in the morning. His policies were increasingly determined not by what he perceived to be in the public interest, but by public opinion. From that point, polls, not principles, determined the national interest.

Ariel Sharon refined this approach into an art form, utilizing the services of pollsters and PR spin doctors as never before. All this has now reached its most cynical climax under Olmert, whose entire agenda gives the appearance of being dominated by his all-too-transparent overriding obsession to remain in office. To promote this, he has been tailoring his policies to blend in with vox populi as reflected in opinion polls. Yet even this has failed to enhance his ratings.

Olmert has also used the Prime Minister's Office and encouraged associates such as Haim Ramon to test the waters on every major issue in order to gauge public opinion before introducing new policies. When there was a strong negative response from the public (as when Ramon suggested handing over jurisdiction of the Temple Mount to the Palestinians), Olmert simply backed down.

Needless to say, it is entirely legitimate and even obligatory for politicians to utilize opinion polls to ascertain the mood of the nation.

But over the past few years this has gotten out of control. Today Israel has become a haven for pollsters and spin merchants. In fact, it is fair to state that today most potentially contentious policies are not being determined on what is considered to be the national interest. They are resolved only after being superficially approved by the fickle public via the medium of telephone opinion polls.

The same also applies to most political parties, with the possible exception of the ideologically motivated religious, hard-Left and ultra-Right.

Thus, today, a large proportion of the political establishment also formulates its policy primarily on the basis of the number of votes it estimates will be gained: National mood as manipulated by spin doctors and not national interest has become the order of the day. We have become like

a ship without a rudder.

Today, Olmert's failure as a leader has become transparent. But there is a danger that without renewed recognition of the role that responsible leaders must assume, the underlying problems of leadership could become institutionalized even after he retires.

What is needed? First and foremost, genuine leaders as opposed to self-gratifying politicians. Leaders who will determine policies and respond to challenges on the basis of only one criterion - and it isn't how many votes such policies will generate, or whether "the street" approves of them. Long-term strategies must be based exclusively on national interests, even if that requires campaigning to persuade the nation to consider its collective destiny rather than personal or sectional aggrandizement. (Jerusalem Post Jan 15)

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### Misplaced Faith By Cal Thomas

During his recent trip to Israel, President Bush visited several places that re-affirmed his faith, including Bethlehem and the Sea of Galilee. Then exhibiting far greater faith than believing Jesus could walk on water, he asserted that "peace" could be had between Israel, the Palestinians and her Arab neighbors. One exhibition of faith has some historic roots and witnesses; the other is rooted in fantasy.

Since 1937, there have been 18 formal attempts by commissions, conferences, resolutions, summits and other gatherings to persuade the Jewish lamb to lie down with the Arab lion. All have failed. This latest attempt by President Bush, like those of presidents before him, will also fail, no matter the level of rhetoric or pressure on Israel to "do more." As Hillel Halkin writes in the January issue of Commentary magazine, "When time after time a problem cannot be resolved, it is reasonable to suspect that it may be unresolvable, at least in the manner in which it is conceived."

That manner of false conception is that the Palestinian side, in conjunction with Arab and Muslim states, will stop trying to destroy Israel if a new state is created in the region. From such a state, enhanced by a "right of return" that would flood Israel with enemies of Zionism and encourage those committed to Israel's destruction that the end of the Jewish state is at hand would come the final days of Israel's modern existence.

As the president's visit neared, one might have expected the Palestinians, were they interested in peace, to at least tone down anti-Israel rants. According to Palestinian Media Watch, the government-controlled television station instead "intensified its rhetoric calling for the destruction of Israel by advocating the "liberation" of Haifa, Tiberias, Acre and Tel Aviv," cities that do not figure in the debate over Israeli "occupation" of Palestinian land.

Amidst all of this, President Bush suggested more Israeli concessions to the Palestinians might have to be part of a peace agreement (such as dismantling homes on land claimed by Palestinians), while promising a monitoring process that supposedly would police any agreement. The monitors would not be given enforcement powers. The fallacy of such a monitoring process can be seen in previous agreements, which required the Palestinian side to cease terror, stop using television to incite violence against Jews, reform textbooks that teach hatred of Jews and Christians and respect a ceiling in the number of Palestinian police allowed to carry weapons.

The Palestinian government has failed to comply with a single agreement. Rather than acknowledge they are waist deep in the "Big Muddy," the big fools in the Bush administration say to "push on."

There is not a credible statement, action, sermon or policy utterance by anyone in the Arab-Muslim-Palestinian world that gives any hope for a repeal of their expressed goal to destroy Israel and "liberate" Arab land. Honest enemies will say that includes land "occupied," beginning in 1948, when Israel became a state at the behest of the United Nations.

Instead of a credible plan for countering global jihadists and Palestinian "liberationists" committed to Israel's (and America's) destruction, the Bush administration continues to practice a faith rooted in self-deception. If, after all of Israel's concessions, her enemies have failed to take a single step toward peace, what makes anyone think that more concessions will turn a one-way street into a two-lane thoroughfare?

Even if a deal is concluded, the best that can be expected from the Palestinian side is a temporary lull in the violence followed by the creation of a pretext for more violence and demands for new concessions.

President Bush repeated a familiar line in Israel that he believes G-d's gift of freedom is to every person, not just Americans. If that is so, why don't those in oppressed Arab and Muslim states overthrow their dictatorial leaders? Why don't these "un-free" people support the freedom in those countries to which some flee instead of seeking to undermine them and separate themselves from culture and national life? Their idea of freedom is to be free of our freedom and impose Sharia law on all.

Instead of stepping into this unresolvable (by America) breach, it may be time to step back, let the parties fight it out and - as in Northern Ireland - reach a peace agreement on their own, after both sides are exhausted and sick of fighting.

This latest Bush push for peace can only bring more war and less stability

for America's "friend." (Jewish World Review Jan 15)

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### A Giant Hug By Rabbi Chaim (Ian) Pear

On January 8, I participated in a wonderfully heartening experience.

A human chain was formed around the Old City walls as a sign of the Jewish people's commitment to keeping Jerusalem united. I rode my bike down to this event organized by One Jerusalem and circled the area to get a sense of what it was all about.

And my description? In a word: inspiring.

There, despite the rain and dropping temperatures, thousands of people lined - nay, celebrated - the ancient walls of the Old City. As I rode my bike around the human chain, I was struck again and again by the enthusiasm and joy of the participants - most of whom were young (and people say youth today are apathetic - certainly not that day, and certainly not about Jerusalem). Spontaneous bursts of song and, yes, even dance, were commonplace. Good spirit and hearty laughter were ubiquitous.

"This is a protest?" I wondered to myself. Where is the shouting? Where is the name calling and angry rhetoric? Where was the enemy? To my surprise - and complete joyous satisfaction - none of these could be found.

Yes, serious people made serious arguments of why Jerusalem must never be divided. Some, of course, touted the fact that Jerusalem has always been a Jewish capital and center of our millenia yearnings, and that our Bible mentions its significance hundred and hundreds of times, while in contrast, Jerusalem has never been an Arab capital (to the contrary, it was relegated to a backwater distant outpost when under Arab control), and is not mentioned even once in the Koran (except when it may be referred to as the unspecified location of the distant mosque).

Others reminded the press in attendance that religious freedom for followers of all religions has only been protected over the past 2,000 years under the Jewish rule of the past 40 years, and that all previous regimes harassed followers and destroyed holy sites of the non-majority faith. Surely, the argument went, anyone concerned with tolerance must pray for Israel's continued sovereignty.

Yet, in spite of such arguments being made, I did not sense the human chain formed around the Old City was a political statement. No, it reminded me more of an enormous hug. To be sure, when one hugs another, he shields the person he is hugging from outsiders and those that may wish to hurt the person. The hugger's back and arms protects the huggie. The purpose of the hug, however, is to express love, whatever the other positive consequences might be. So too, here. There may have been a political statement made against those who would divide Jerusalem, but that was secondary. The main thrust was to express love - and the singing and dancing certainly did this.

This whole experience reminded me of a beautiful teaching of (I believe) the Maharal of Prague. He describes a midrash in which one receives a glimpse into the life of the righteous in the World to Come. Everyone is dancing in a circle, says the Maharal, joyously celebrating the existence of God, whose presence can be felt - but not seen - in the center of the circle. As they dance around and around the unseen presence of God, they point to the center, heaping praise and song upon that focal point.

Now here is where it gets interesting. Think for moment: When all these people point to the center - for that is where the unseen God, the source of their common joy resides - who are they really pointing at? If one draws a line from their pointed finger straight through the center - where God exists but cannot be seen - the line will cross the center and arrive at a person on the exact opposite side of the circle.

What a beautiful point! When a person points at God in the center of his or her life, he or she will ultimately be pointing - and heaping praise and song - upon a person exactly opposite him or her. For the first time, he will see the person opposite him, and as he sings and dances, his gaze will be nothing but joyous.

And here I am not just talking about geographic opposition, but rather a whole host of differences - spiritually, politically, culturally, ethnically, and on and on. A commitment to a common center - a common purpose - has the wonderful ability to unite all varieties of people and ideas committed to that center.

And this is what I saw in the enormous hug formed around Jerusalem's Old City. People of different ages and backgrounds circled the walls. People who never met one another. They turned to Jerusalem and sang her praises and celebrated her beauty, spiritual and physical alike. In facing the city, though, they did not just face ancient stones; they also directed their love to the person on the other side of the circle, and in so doing united people who were as far apart physically as one could be. Most people had no idea who was on the other side of the circle, but by sharing a common commitment to Jerusalem, they felt as one with each other.

Which, I imagine, is one of the reasons why the One Above chose Jerusalem in the first place.

Now that's a demonstration I was proud to be a part of. (IsraelINN.com Jan 16)