



Commentary...

Sowing War Editorial Jerusalem Post

Here's how UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe described the situation to the Security Council on Tuesday, as summarized on the UN Web site:

"The crisis in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel had escalated dramatically since 15 January, due to daily rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli civilian residential areas by several militant groups from Gaza, and regular military attacks by the IDF on and into Gaza. There were also tight Israeli restrictions on crossings into Gaza to end rocket fire. IDF entered the Gaza Strip on 15 January and had been engaged in heavy battle by Hamas militants, including IDF air and tank operations. Hamas claimed responsibility for sniper and rocket attacks against Israel. Since then, more than 150 rocket and mortar attacks had been launched at Israel by militants, injuring 11 Israelis, and a sniper attack killed an Ecuadorian national on a kibbutz. Forty-two Palestinians had been killed and 117 injured by the IDF, which had launched eight ground incursions, 15 air strikes and 10 missiles this past week. Several Palestinian civilians had been killed in ground battles between IDF and militants, and in Israeli air strikes and targeted killing operations."

In other words, when the Security Council met to consider the situation in Gaza, it had the basic facts. Each country's representative knew a) Israel was responding to "daily rocket and mortar attacks on civilian residential areas," and b) Hamas "claimed responsibility" for at least some of these attacks, and must be held responsible for the rest. Furthermore, every ambassador representing a non-Muslim state had a similar reaction to that of the British ambassador, who said he "shared Israel's frustration and anger at continued rocket attacks and mortars... Israel had the right to defend itself."

Yet these same ambassadors joined their colleagues from Muslim states in condemning Israel for employing "collective punishment" against Palestinians in Gaza.

Much of this condemnation was based on a lie propagated by Hamas and repeated at the UN. The South African ambassador claimed, for example, "1.5 million people had been left without water, electricity and basic sewage" in Gaza. In fact, the supply of electricity to Gaza from the Israeli and Egyptian power grids (124 megawatts and 17 megawatts, respectively) has continued uninterrupted. This supply represents about 75 percent of Gaza's electricity needs. The remaining 25% is from a power plant in Gaza that is run by fuel supplied by Israel. Since only some of Gaza's fuel supply was cut by Israel, Hamas could have kept running that plant as well, but chose to shut it down as a propaganda stunt.

But the more fundamental problem is that the Security Council chose to meet not on January 15, in response to the major barrage of rockets attacks against Israeli civilians, but on January 22, in response to Hamas's staging of a "humanitarian crisis." The backwards sequencing of the international response serves to vitiate the supposedly balanced statements of the Western ambassadors. Hamas doesn't care about being condemned along with Israel, because it knows these condemnations are lip service. The timing says it all.

It is telling that the one country that could have prevented this "cycle of violence" - that is both Hamas's aggression and Israel's measures to defend itself - was not mentioned in the debate. That country was Egypt, which even had the temerity to join the chorus against what it called Israel's "brutal punitive measures."

ISRAEL NEWS

A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee
of Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

The moment Hamas took over Gaza in June, Egypt could have tightly controlled its border and prevented tons of weaponry, including sophisticated rockets, from entering the Strip. It could have closed the revolving door for terrorists leaving for training and returning to join Hamas's increasingly dangerous army. It did not.

Now, as a result of its propaganda victory, Hamas has allowed itself to

blow up the Egyptian border fence, while Egypt ignores its signed deals with Israel and does nothing to close or even monitor the border. Among the ordinary Palestinians streaming through to buy cheaper goods on the Egyptian side, we can be sure Hamas is bringing in more weapons, money and terrorists. By playing into Hamas's hands, failing to punish aggression, and refusing to hold Egypt responsible for stopping the weapons buildup, the UN is sowing the seeds of the next war and strengthening the forces it claims to wish to isolate. And it is doing this in the name of peace and humanitarian law - while producing the exact opposite. (Jerusalem Post Jan 23)

The Face of Evil By Michael Freund

"Sometimes," Blaise Pascal once noted, "we learn more from the sight of evil than from an example of good." The great philosopher's pithy observation took on new resonance this week, as Israelis were given ample opportunity to catch a glimpse of what sheer, unadulterated wickedness truly looks like.

In Beirut, it took the form of Hizbullah thug-in-chief Hassan Nasrallah. Speaking on Saturday to a crowd of tens of thousands of cheering supporters, the bearded and bespectacled terror boss delivered one of the most chilling speeches in recent memory.

"O Zionists," he declared, "your army has left the body parts of your soldiers in our villages and fields. Our mujahadeen fought these Zionists, killing them and collecting their body parts."

As if that weren't gruesome enough, Nasrallah went on to provide still more macabre detail. "I am not talking about regular body parts," he said. "I tell the Israelis, we have the heads of your soldiers, we have hands, we have legs ... there is even a near-complete body, a half or three-quarters of a body, from head, to chest to the torso."

Even for the Middle East, it was an exceptional demonstration of callousness and cruelty. For Nasrallah to gloat about mutilation and dismemberment is simply inhuman. Adjectives such as depraved and degenerate fail to do this cretin justice.

But the evil on display this week was not confined merely to our northern borders. To the east, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was boasting in an interview with Al-Jazeera that Israel is "doomed to collapse," in the process repeating one of his favorite mantras that Zionists are "enemies of mankind." Backing up his rhetoric with deeds, the tyrant of Teheran took delivery of another 11 tons of nuclear fuel from Russia as he races ahead with plans to produce atomic weapons. And we all know just where those warheads will be pointed, should he succeed with his nefarious schemes.

Then, to the south of us lies Hamas-controlled Gaza. In recent days, Palestinian terrorists have fired more than 160 Kassam rockets and 70 mortar shells from the Strip at Israeli towns and villages throughout the Negev, indiscriminately targeting innocent civilians.

The result has been that thousands of Israelis are being terrorized daily by the shrill sound of sirens and the piercing whistle of potentially-lethal projectiles hurtling at them through the air.

Not surprisingly, a new study released by the Israel Center for Victims of Terror and War found that over 75 percent of the children in Sderot exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

And so, an entire generation in that battered southern town is growing up with extensive psychological and emotional wounds.

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What are we to make of all this? What does this hatred mean? While this question might seem tantalizingly simple, or even simplistic, the answer to this query is in fact what lies at the root of Israel's foreign and defense policies.

For some, particularly those on the Left, the encirclement of Israel by hostile forces is what underlies their determination to reach a final deal as quickly as possible with Mahmoud Abbas.

Resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, they say, will sap the hostility directed at Israel throughout the Arab world, thereby securing the Jewish state's place in the region.

But such an approach amounts to little more than wishful thinking, as our brief little survey of the region clearly indicates. Anyone residing outside the left-wing echo chamber that is Israel's media should realize by now that the enmity we face is not merely political, but fundamentally theological too.

For Hamas, Hizbullah and the Iranian regime, which together constitute an arc of hate surrounding Israel, are ideologically committed to the Jewish state's destruction, regardless of whether a settlement of one sort or another is reached.

Addressing the political demands of our foes, while ignoring their deep-seated sense of sacred duty to erase the Jewish presence in this region, is an act of potentially lethal self-delusion.

Like all human beings, we Israelis are uncomfortable staring evil directly in the face. It strikes at our own historical and existential anxieties, and goes against our basic human need to be loved and appreciated.

But psycho-babble aside, we need to come to terms with the reality of our situation, which boils down to fighting back or being ejected from the ring.

The arc of hate is growing ever more bold, and it is only a matter of time before they seize upon the sense of weakness that our current leaders are projecting and ready themselves to pounce.

The events of the past week should serve as a jolting reminder to us all that Israel is engaged in a titanic, life-and-death struggle between good and evil. This is not about a misunderstanding over boundary lines, water rights or even refugees. It is a momentous, ongoing war of annihilation that our foes have been waging against us for over a century. Simply put, it is a struggle against evil.

And the critical component necessary for our survival and our success is maintaining an unwavering sense of faith, and never losing sight of the justness of our cause. The moment we do so is the moment when the battle will be lost.

Twenty-five years ago, during the Cold War with the Soviet Union, US president Ronald Reagan said, "I've always maintained that the struggle now going on for the world will never be decided by bombs or rockets, by armies or military might. The real crisis we face today is a spiritual one; at root, it is a test of moral will and faith."

Those words are equally applicable today. The evil is staring us right in the face, whether in the guise of Nasrallah, Ahmadinejad or Khaled Mashaal.

Our task is to stare it back down and defeat it, plain and simple. Like it or not, averting our eyes or making dangerous concessions simply won't make it go away. (Jerusalem Post Jan 22)

A Disappointing Trip JINSA

Maybe it was the Martin Luther King holiday and remembering the soaring rhetoric aimed at our better angels and the principles Americans strive, often imperfectly, to practice. President Bush was a serious disappointment in the Middle East. No, this is not a syntax joke. Mr. Bush is fully capable of soaring rhetoric - check his speech at Whitehall, or the June 24th speech on the Palestinians, or his post-9-11 speech to the Joint Session of Congress. It wasn't how he said it that troubles us. It was what he said or didn't say.

He told the Palestinians and Israelis to "make peace," i.e., to make a Palestinian state and stop building houses for Jews (a key Saudi demand). Not a word by the President (or Mr. Olmert) about Sderot, Gilad Shalit or halting incitement to violence in the Palestinian institutions Abu Mazen still controls. Not a word about the Palestinian civil war or the Palestinian war against Israel. He was, at least, sincere at Yad Vashem.

On to Saudi Arabia and the announcement of an enormous, sophisticated arms sale to the kingdom. The President threw his rhetorical arms around King Abdullah. Not a demand in sight. No brave speeches about democracy, civil society, women's rights or religious freedom. Mr. Bush made sure he didn't arrive on a Sunday. [Ironically, Michael Abramowitz of The Washington Post said, "There is a bond between the president and the king... They are both

religious men - obviously, of different faiths - and I think they share that." We suspect he didn't ask to visit the Riyadh synagogue.]

We are not big Bush/Saudi conspiratorialists. Every American president since FDR has been in bed with Saudi interests because our country runs on their oil. President Clinton was no less kissy with the Saudis, and our next president is unlikely to be either unless we suddenly drill for domestic oil or make a breakthrough in hydrogen fuel cells. Both possible, neither likely. The Saudis are not alone responsible for \$100/bbl oil and we understand the President's desire to have some of that money recycled to the United States rather than France, Britain or Germany in pursuit of arms.

But we thought Mr. Bush at least understood the fight. Radical Islamists, Sunni and Shiite, have declared war on the principles of tolerance; diversity; equality; freedom of speech, dress and thought; and on other, less radical, more tolerant forms of Islam and on tolerant Muslims themselves - in short, war on every principle for which America stands. People are dying every day in this war, and Saudi/Wahhabi intolerance of "the other" and support for al Qaeda - like Iranian support for Hezbollah - increases the threats to the United States and to our real friends in the region.

OK, explicitly criticizing a society that imprisons rape victims and beats people in the public square would be rude while standing there, but Mr. Bush could reasonably have quoted Ronald Reagan, Martin Luther King, or Thomas Jefferson. Friends and enemies of freedom would both have understood.

Instead, he went like a peddler with his wares on his back, sounding more like "Chicken Kiev" than "Tear this Wall Down" or "I Have a Dream." He failed the people of the region who put their hopes in him and failed his people at home. (Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs Jan 22)

Civilians First By Assaf Sagiv

In 1847, disaster befell a Portuguese Jew by the name of David Pacifico, a trader living in Athens. An anti-Semitic mob stormed his house, looted its contents, and left it wrecked and vandalized. The beleaguered merchant appealed to the Greek authorities, demanding compensation for the considerable financial losses caused by the attack. He was turned down. A British subject by birth, he then turned to Her Majesty's government, which responded with decisive force. In 1850, a Royal Navy squadron was dispatched to the Aegean Sea, where it seized Greek ships, confiscated property, and even blockaded the port of Piraeus for two months. The blockade was lifted only when the Greek government agreed to pay Pacifico restitution.

These punitive actions caused an international uproar: France and Russia, which along with Britain sponsored the fledgling Greek state, protested vehemently against the blockade. Even London itself was bitterly split over the issue. The House of Lords condemned the sanctions, but the House of Commons reversed the sentence following a lengthy speech delivered by Lord Palmerston, the foreign minister. The renowned statesman appealed to British legislators' sense of national pride, and justified his country's intervention on Pacifico's behalf by recalling an ancient and revered precedent: "As the Roman, in days of old, held himself free from indignity when he could say, *Civis Romanus sum* [I am a Roman citizen], so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong."

Some one hundred thirty years after this proclamation, the State of Israel proved that such commitments are not solely the privilege of imperial powers like Rome or Britain. Even a small country is sometimes prepared to take far-reaching measures--in more than one sense of the word--to defend its citizens against acts of aggression. On the night of July 3, 1976, an elite Israel Defense Forces (IDF) task force raided Uganda's Entebbe airport in a daring effort to free ninety-eight Israeli and Jewish hostages held by a group of European and Palestinian terrorists. The rescue mission, which came to be known as "Operation Yonatan" (named after its commander, Yonatan Netanyahu, who gave his life in the raid), was crowned a dizzying success, and is today considered one of Israel's finest moments. The pride felt by both Israelis and Jews the world over stemmed not only from the extraordinary operational achievement of the IDF, but also from knowing that--in this case at least--the young country had lived up to its promise of coming to the aid of Jews everywhere, even if it meant jeopardizing the lives of its finest soldiers in the process.

But in the three decades that have passed since the Entebbe raid, and particularly in the last few years, Israel's commitment to defending its citizens from the ceaseless aggression of its enemies has eroded considerably. Certainly the residents of the beleaguered Negev town of Sderot would agree with this statement: Many of them believe that Israel's political and military leadership has not done all it can to stop, or even substantially reduce, the rocket attacks that have endangered their lives and property for the last six years. Indeed, the rise of an Islamic terrorist regime in the Gaza Strip--and the concomitant deterioration in the living conditions of the Jewish communities nearby--has continued far too long without a serious Israeli response. Sderot's mayor, Eli Moyal, merely expresses a widely held opinion when he insists that the government knows full well what it must do to deal effectively with the rocket threat, "but it simply doesn't have the courage."

At the time of this writing, the Israeli government still has not ordered a comprehensive and systematic action against the Hamas terrorist infrastructure in Gaza, despite near-unanimous agreement that an extensive ground operation there is unavoidable. There are, of course, good reasons to delay such an order; Israel is hardly anxious to open yet another round of bloody clashes with the Palestinians, the results of which will most certainly be extensive civilian casualties, wall-to-wall international condemnation, and a torpedoed political process--however faltering it may already be--with "moderate" Palestinian leaders. But there seems to be another reason no less, and perhaps more, important for the hesitation displayed by Israel's political and security elite on this issue. In an article published in the Hebrew daily Haaretz in March 2007, commentator Amir Oren described the persistent nightmare that hangs over both government and IDF decision makers: "A campaign in Gaza... will be effective only if it is thorough and protracted," he wrote. "The price in Israeli casualties threatens to be heavy: According to one of the unofficial estimates--fifty to eighty dead and nine times as many wounded. The majority of the casualties are expected to be from regular infantry divisions, as well as the engineering, armored, and special forces units." Such a high casualty rate, he continued, will make it difficult for Israeli society--and in turn, its leaders--to maintain the patience and resolve required for a serious campaign against Gaza's terrorists. "IDF casualties will undermine public support for the campaign, even if the provocation for it is a horrendous terrorist attack," emphasized Oren.

In the face of such a scenario, the Israeli government's trepidation is understandable. The loss of a single soldier is a tragedy not only for the bereaved family, but for the entire nation. Nonetheless, a government policy that leaves its civilians at the mercy of the enemy in order to avoid military casualties is not merely a gross strategic error with ruinous longterm consequences. It is also a betrayal of the state's fundamental duty to its citizens. Sadly, this misguided order of priorities has already taken root in Israeli public discourse, becoming a near-unimpeachable consensus that guides politicians and commanders alike. Thus, we must not avoid an open and honest debate on this sensitive matter, nor refrain from pointing out some of its problematic ramifications.

The extreme equivocation, bordering on impotence, that characterizes Israeli policy towards the metastasizing cancer of Gaza-based terrorism is, not coincidentally, reminiscent of the confusion and indecisiveness that plagued decision makers during the Second Lebanon War in 2006. Then as now, Israeli leaders preferred, at least initially, to avoid sending massive ground forces over the border, largely out of concern that such a move would endanger too many soldiers' lives. And then as now, the home front, forsaken by the government, felt exposed and vulnerable to the enemy's wrath.

This feeling was, unfortunately, entirely accurate: Over the course of thirty-three days, from July 12 until August 14, Hezbollah fired close to four thousand rockets from South Lebanon into northern Israel. A quarter of these rockets hit population centers, killing thirty-nine civilians and damaging more than twelve thousand buildings. Others landed in open areas, causing fires that set hundreds of acres of natural woodland ablaze. More than two thousand civilians sustained either physical injury or mental trauma (or both); more than 300,000 residents left their homes for safer areas to the south; and tens of thousands spent endless days in bomb shelters. The economic damage has been estimated at billions of shekels. Israel's civilian population has not suffered such heavy wartime blows since 1948.

The barrage of rockets that wrought disaster on Israel's north, along with Hezbollah's stubborn battles against IDF ground forces, revealed to the Israeli public the true extent of the Shi'ite guerilla organization's entrenchment in South Lebanon. Since the IDF's withdrawal from the region in May 2000,

Hezbollah had worked incessantly to enlist and train new fighters, undergone exhaustive rearmament, established a ramified system of bunkers along the border, and deployed thousands of rockets aimed at Israel. These systematic preparations, undertaken with the encouragement and assistance of both Iran and Syria, went wholly uninterrupted by Israel. In an article recently published in the book *The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Dimensions*, Giora Rom, a senior analyst at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies and ex-deputy commander of the Israeli air force, explains the strategic approach that led to this long-running fiasco: "The IDF's aversion to a ground operation in South Lebanon goes back many years, and reflects a worldview according to which removing the rockets' threat to civilians does not justify the price (i.e., the lives of soldiers), and the solution to the operational problem is to be found elsewhere."

This desire to find the solution "elsewhere" dictated Israel's initial decision, in the first two weeks of the war, to concentrate on aerial bombardment of Hezbollah strongholds, artillery shelling of South Lebanon, and a limited deployment of infantry, armored, and engineering forces in villages close to the border. Only when this impressive display of power failed to achieve the hoped-for results did the necessity of an extensive ground operation begin to sink in. The psychological impasse that led to the postponement of the inevitable is delineated in journalist Amir Rappaport's 2007 book *Friendly Fire (Lebanon)*, which describes, among other things, the dramatic cabinet meeting of July 27, two weeks and a day after the outbreak of hostilities. Then-IDF chief of staff Dan Halutz, who had by now forsaken the illusion that Hezbollah's power could be broken through air strikes alone, proposed a full-scale call-up of IDF reserves. Yet Shaul Mofaz, the minister of transportation, and former minister of defense and IDF chief of staff, objected to the proposal. Mofaz, writes Rappaport, said straight out what the others preferred to keep to themselves: "The Israeli public is extremely sensitive to the price this is extracting from us." He pointed out that thirty-two soldiers had been killed since the beginning of the fighting. He didn't count the many civilians who had been killed by rockets. "We shouldn't distinguish between blood and blood, but the public takes casualties among soldiers hard, harder than casualties among civilians. Especially in wartime," said the transportation minister. Nobody bothered to mention that the IDF's job is to defend the country's civilian population, even at the cost of endangering the lives of soldiers.

Mofaz's view is hardly exceptional; it has, in fact, been a guiding principle behind many of the country's important political and military decisions. Perhaps the most striking of these are various prisoner exchanges in which Israel has released thousands of terrorists for a mere handful of POWs or MIAs. The journalist Ben Caspit, writing in the Hebrew daily Maariv this past October, defined Israeli policy on such deals in one word: "Recklessness." "The international price list decided upon in this insane game," he rages, "decreed that Israel should release thousands of murderers and terrorists in return for one soldier in the best-case scenario, the body of a soldier in a lesser case, and a drug dealer at worst. It will always be the same picture: On the one hand, buses packed with jubilant terrorists on their way to freedom, and on the other hand, one solitary soldier or three coffins."

Indeed, the facts speak for themselves: In 1979, Israel released seventy-six terrorists in exchange for Avraham Amram, a soldier taken prisoner by the Ahmed Jibril terrorist organization during the Litani Operation the year before. In 1983, 4,700 prisoners and another sixty-five detainees were exchanged for six Israeli soldiers who had fallen into Fatah's hands. In 1985, as part of the famous "Jibril deal," Israel freed 1,150 terrorists in exchange for three soldiers--Nissim Salam, Yosef Grof, and Hezi Shai. And finally, in 2004, Israel freed four hundred Palestinian terrorists and thirty-six detainees of other nationalities in return for the bodies of three IDF soldiers who had been kidnapped and killed four years previously, and one live civilian--the drug dealer Elhanan Tannenbaum.

The heavy price paid by Israel in these exchanges does not end with the release of thousands of terrorists, among them murderers of women, children, and the elderly. It also, and more importantly, includes the victims these terrorists claimed after they were set free. Many of those released in the Jibril deal, for example, played an active role in the first Intifada, which broke out in 1987. "Authoritative estimates have it that within a year of their release, over a third of these freed prisoners had resumed some form of clandestine activity," wrote Ehud Ya'ari and Ze'ev Schiff in their 1990 book *Intifada*. "In time Jibril would boast that his deal had planted the seeds of the uprising--and with good reason." And indeed, these seeds bore particularly poisonous fruit:

One of those released in the Jibril deal, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, founded Hamas in 1987.

The catastrophic effect of these deals surprised no one. The Israeli governments that gave in to the inflated demands of terrorist organizations knew all too well what the consequences of such a display of weakness would be. On this subject, Caspit cites the harsh criticism voiced by Professor Ariel Merari, a leading expert on terrorism at Tel Aviv University: "The moral duty of the government is to ensure that as few civilians as possible are harmed.... If you release five hundred terrorists you knowingly sentence dozens of Israeli citizens to death." Alas, those who set policy in Jerusalem may be aware of the dire results of their concessions, but appear to believe that there is no other possible course of action. The question that must be asked, then, is: Why?

The Israeli public's heightened sensitivity to military casualties is not unique; the somber sight of soldiers returning home in coffins is hard for any society that values life to bear. Yet it is arguably only in Israel that concern for the safety of soldiers overrides even the state's obligation to defend its civilians. "Everywhere else in the world, harming civilians crosses a red line that justifies action, since soldiers exist for the purpose of defense, and are therefore liable to be killed," remarked Udi Lebel, a lecturer in military psychology at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in an interview given to the Israeli news website Ynet last year. "But for us," he concluded, "the situation is reversed."

Upon closer examination, there is nothing mysterious about this anomaly. Clearly, it reflects the unique character of Israeli society and the far-reaching changes it has undergone over the last few decades. In a state born under fire, there has never been the luxury of an absolute distinction between the military and civilian sectors. Thus, although the IDF is officially a "professional" body--or at least aspires to be--it is still seen in the eyes of many as "the people's army." Compulsory military service has created a Gordian knot that inexorably links those in uniform with the broader Israeli public: Every soldier is a future civilian, and every civilian--apart, that is, from Israel's Arab minority and Haredi citizens--a potential soldier.

But Israeli soldiers are not only of the same flesh as the Israeli civilian population. They are, in truth, seen as the very best it has to offer: Young men on the cusp of maturity, "dripping with the dew of Hebrew youth," in the words of a famous Israeli poem. They are the not-yet-men who give their best years--and sometimes more--to the defense of the homeland. It is not surprising, then, that in Israel's national discourse--which often depicts the entire nation as one extended family--soldiers are perceived as "our children" or "our sons" who must be treated with the utmost care. Accordingly, the increasing involvement of soldiers' parents in matters of national security is accepted with sympathy and understanding. In his 2001 book *Is Bereavement Dead?* journalist Rubik Rosenthal investigates the complex relationship between soldiers' families and the state. Protests by bereaved parents against the political and military errors that led to the deaths of their loved ones, he explains, "gave legitimacy to soldiers' parents in general to rise up, and they began to make their voices heard every time soldiers were killed. In a process managed by nobody, and for which there were no rules, parents began to act, in groups or as individuals, in a number of scenarios: Mother against general, parents against military procedures, a father against a national or security convention." Probably the most prominent example of this phenomenon was the energetic campaign waged during the late 1990s by the Four Mothers movement for a military withdrawal from Lebanon. In 2000, the movement's high-profile protest achieved its goal, and "our boys" came home--albeit in a hasty and slipshod manner, which only ensured their return to South Lebanon six years later, this time under a shower of anti-tank missiles.

Israel's profound public concern for the safety of its soldiers is even more pronounced among the country's political and military leadership. Former IDF officers who go on to hold key positions in the government strongly identify with soldiers and their families. Indeed, some of them likely feel closer to the average soldier than they do to civilians who belong to sectors outside the social mainstream. After all, it is quite natural that a senior minister or chief executive officer with combat experience should feel a profound solidarity with young men who are sent into the thick of battle. On the other hand, it is doubtful that he will be capable of feeling a similar empathy with the daily hardships of, say, the aging and immigrant population of a bombarded development town.

However, the special connection between Israeli decision makers and soldiers is based not merely on a sense of camaraderie between generations of warriors. It also rests on the basic assumption that a kind of "contract" exists

between a soldier and the state he has sworn to defend. Asa Kasher, a philosopher of morality at Tel Aviv University, articulates precisely this idea when he justifies the high price Israel has been forced to pay for POWs and MIAs by explaining that "in such situations, the state's duty towards its soldiers outweighs its duty towards its civilians, for they arrived at where they are while acting in our name." In other words, the state should give priority to its soldiers, protecting them more than its citizenry. Allegedly, unlike the average citizen, the soldier does the state's bidding, and it must therefore show greater concern for his safety. "The obligation in respect to every citizen in danger is serious and profound," says Kasher, but "the obligation in respect to a soldier is even more serious and more profound."

This is no doubt an appealing argument, and many Israelis adopt its underlying logic. But therein lies the rub: This reasoning, however morally plausible it may feel, nonetheless takes a deeply misguided approach to the duty of a state towards its civilians. Therefore, even at the cost of no small measure of discomfort, we must try to expose its fallacy, and correct it.

Of course, no one would argue that the state bears a special responsibility for the fate of its soldiers, and doubly so in the case of young men and women engaged in compulsory service. And yet, although the state must acknowledge and honor this responsibility, it cannot neglect its more fundamental obligation towards its citizens--an obligation that may be, in fact, the very reason for the existence of the state in the first place. "The office of the sovereign, be it a monarch or an assembly," wrote the philosopher Thomas Hobbes in his classic treatise *Leviathan*, "consisteth in the end for which he was trusted with the sovereign power, namely the procurement of the safety of the people." Protecting the lives and property of citizens against both external and internal threats is the primary responsibility of the polity, in any place and at any time. This is the principle that lies at the basis of the unwritten contract between the people and their rulers. Any government that betrays this commitment, intentionally or out of negligence, has thus forfeited its most important duty.

The essential responsibility of the state to protect its citizens justifies the existence of a military force. In a law-abiding country, and especially in a functioning liberal democracy, this force is recruited in the interests of the general public, or at least the overriding majority of citizens. And in order to perform its task successfully, the army must often put its soldiers in harm's way, and sometimes knowingly send them to their deaths. Therefore, even in the most enlightened of states, the rights of a soldier are of necessity lesser than those of a civilian: Control over his person and his actions is taken from him at the moment of his enlistment and consigned to his commanders. As long as a man wears a uniform, he is not a free subject; he is, rather, a servant, and the civilian community--led by the government--is his master.

A reversal of these roles generally heralds the end of democracy. Fortunately, Israeli society is far from such a menacing state of affairs. It has, however, become inclined to adopt a distorted order of priorities when it comes to weighing soldiers' welfare against civilians' security. The sensitivity it reveals with respect to its men in uniform is certainly a praiseworthy trait, but it is also one that frequently leaves the public and its leadership incapable of decisive action at the moment it is most necessary--that is, when inaction means that greater and greater numbers of Israelis are left defenseless in the face of terrorist violence.

A state that behaves in this way does not fulfill the purpose for which it was founded. Furthermore, it indulges in a dangerous strategic shortsightedness. The exorbitant generosity Israel has displayed in its prisoner exchanges has turned the kidnapping of its soldiers into a lucrative terrorist endeavor. Gilad Shalit, Eldad Regev, and Ehud Goldwasser, currently held by the lackeys of Iran and Syria, are merely the latest victims of a cycle of violence motivated by this gruesome calculus. Furthermore, Israel's continued avoidance of direct confrontation with Hezbollah after its withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 only guaranteed that the worst would eventually happen. For, as we now know, delaying an inevitable military offensive only leads to more losses of both soldiers and civilians at a later date. Experience teaches us that against an enemy set on war--an enemy that dedicates every day to digging in deeper and arming itself more heavily--one must act quickly and decisively. Even if such action results in heavy losses on both sides, it will probably prevent a far worse catastrophe in the future. We can only hope that Israel's leaders will come to realize this bitter truth and, difficult and tragic though the price may be, act in accordance with their obligations to the public they have sworn to serve and protect to the best of their abilities. (Azure Winter 2008)