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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*

Commentary...

The New Guardians of Israel By Caroline Glick

Moshav Tzipori, in the Lower Galilee, is a microcosm of the history of the Land of Israel. A regional capital under King Herod, Tzipori was the seat of Jewish learning and the preservation of the Torah through some of the most tumultuous periods of Jewish history.

After the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, refugees from Jerusalem fled to the Galilean town. Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, who presided over the writing of the Mishna, or oral law, moved to Tzipori from Beit Shearim, and it was there that he codified the six books of the Mishna and died.

The Jews of Tzipori revolted against the Roman Emperor Constantine, refusing to accept Christianity and the city was destroyed. The Jews later returned during the Islamic period. On and off, for the next millennia, Jews settled, were forcibly removed and resettled the city several times under various conquerors of Israel.

During the 1948 War of Independence, the ancient city was the site of a major battle between the new Israel Defense Force and the neighboring Arab villages assisted by invading forces from Syria and Lebanon. The Arabs were routed. In 1949, Moshav Tzipori was founded.

Last Friday afternoon, the struggle for Jewish control of Tzipori, the Galilee and the Land of Israel as a whole continued on the ancient ground. On that quiet afternoon of Purim, under the blistering sun, three horses stood happily grazing in a field of shrubs and grasses. The only problem with the otherwise pastoral scene was that the horses belong to Arab squatters from the Kablawi clan. In recent years, the Kablawis have built themselves an illegal village of some 20 houses masquerading as storage containers on stolen Jewish National Fund land adjacent to Tzipori's fields. The horses, who entered through a hole cut into the field's fence, pranced about and ate, destroying the field that was painstakingly cultivated for the moshav's cattle herds.

The farmers and ranchers of the Galilee, like their counterparts in the Negev are at wits' end. Fearing Arab riots or political condemnation by the Israeli Left, Arab leaders, the Islamic Movement and their allies abroad, the police and the state prosecutors have simply stopped enforcing the laws against the Galilee and Negev Arabs. Surrounded by increasingly hostile and lawless Arab and Beduin villages, local Jews' livestock and crops are continuously plundered.

They are faced with three equally unacceptable options for contending with this state of affairs. They can do nothing and let their livelihood and lives' work be destroyed. They can pay protection money to Arab criminal gangs, who in exchange agree not to rob them. Or they can try to sell off their lands and abandon agriculture altogether.

The obvious recourse - filing a complaint with the police - is an exercise in futility. Thousands of complaints are filed each year. Almost none of them end in indictments or trials. Most of the files are closed by the police due to "lack of public interest."

On Friday, the field in question belonged to a cattle rancher named Haim Z. Over the past few years, Haim has filed more than 250 complaints against local Arabs from the Kablawi family and from neighboring Arab villages like the Islamist stronghold Mashad with the police. None have ever gone anywhere. Last year, a helpful police officer recommended that Haim simply start paying protection money.

Last year Haim told his son that he had had it. The son of the moshav's founding generation, Haim said that he just couldn't go on anymore. The state's refusal to protect Jewish property rights had forced him to devote all of his energies to playing cat and mouse games with Arab poachers. He couldn't invest in his herd. He couldn't develop his land. All he could do was sit by and watch as year in and year out, his lands were plundered, his cattle stolen and the work of his life and his father's life was destroyed.

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His son, a 23 year old soldier in one of the IDF's elite commando units decided that it was up to him not only to save his father's farm, but to stem the tide of Arab infringement on Jewish land and property rights. Due to his position in the IDF, his name is classified. We'll call him J - for Jew.

In response to his father's desperation, J. took a storage container to a hilltop that overlooks Tzipori's

fields, the surrounding Arab villages and the access routes to the moshav's fields. He placed a sofa, a bookshelf full of Jewish history books, religious texts and philosophy classics, and canned food inside and moved in during his furloughs from the army. Rather than hang out with his friends, he began standing guard. He confronted every Arab he caught infiltrating the moshav's fields, and both filed complaints with the police and chased them away.

Given his impossible schedule, J. enlisted his friends to help out. The sons of other desperate farmers, who also serve in combat units, they joined him enthusiastically. Within months, J. had set up an organization of more than a hundred young volunteers - soldiers, college students, and high school students from his moshav, other moshavim in the lower Galilee and surrounding non-agricultural communities.

He called the organization, Hashomer Hayisraeli Hahadash - or the New Israeli Guardsmen. The original Hashomer, or Guardsmen was established in the Galilee in 1909 for the same purpose - protecting Jewish farming communities from Arab marauders who demanded protection money from the farmers. It was the progenitor of the Haganah, which in turn, became the Israel Defense Force.

As J. puts it, "We're not simply a security service. We see ourselves as a new movement. Our activities rest on three foundations: securing the land, expanding our operations throughout the Galilee and the Negev, and teaching Zionist and Jewish values to our members, our communities and the general public."

Tzipori, one of the stops of the Cross Israel Hiking Trail, is a popular destination for school groups, youth groups and just regular hikers. J. has organized visits to his guard post for thousands of hikers over the past year. During their visits the hikers listen to lectures about the New Guardsmen, about the Jewish history of the Galilee and the development of agriculture in the area, and topics of general interest provided by local residents, politicians and professors.

Friday afternoon, after noticing another encroachment on his father's field, J. called the police at the Nazareth police station. Joined by two of his fellow guardsmen, who are also sons of farmers and soldiers in commando units, they waited in the sun for over an hour for the police to arrive and planned their moves. They approached the horses with reins and bits.

"We will seize the horses and bring them back to our stable. If the Kablawis pay the damages, then I'll give them back, if not, I'll sell them," J. explained.

As the young men approached the horses, Yasser Kablawi, the head of the clan appeared. According to Haim, over the past year, the Kablawis have trampled his fields with their animals on more than 20 occasions.

Haim, who arrived at the scene some 10 minutes before the police made their grand appearance turned toward Kablawi and said, "Why are you doing this?"

"This land belongs to the JNF, not to you," Kablawi said.

"Why are you lying? I sat in your home with the JNF inspector months ago, and he told you straight that this is my land. You know you are stealing from me, and you're doing it while you're illegally squatting on JNF land. You've caused me tens of thousands of shekels in damages by trampling my fields today alone, and you know it."

By the time the police arrived, J. and his friends had roped one of the horses. Kablawi was joined by three grandsons and four sons. J. was joined by another seven Guardsmen. It was a standoff.

The police, who were informed of the presence of a journalist at the scene, acted with some resolution. After speaking with the JNF inspector, they explained to Kablawi that he could either sign a statement acknowledging that the land belongs to Haim and that he would be arrested if he trespassed

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again, or they would allow Haim to seize his horses. Kablawi signed.

J.'s activism is not just a personal quest to save his father from economic ruin. "If it were just about me and my family, my brother and I could take care of the thieves. They'd leave us alone. But then they'd just move on to our neighbors. It isn't about one family. This is a question of control over the land of Israel. The state is weak. We need to be strong if we want to remain here."

Last month, J. registered the Guardsman as a non-profit organization. He has a grand vision for the future.

"In the space of just a few months, I have brought in thousands of people, exposed them to our mission. I have more than a 100 volunteer guards. We have reduced theft by 80 percent.

"I want to raise money to buy night vision goggles and some all terrain vehicles to do proper patrols. I'd like to be able to give students scholarships so that they can guard and study at the same time. I've been in touch with farmers and ranchers in the Negev and they are anxious for us to expand to the south. I believe that within five years, the Guardsmen can end the protection rackets."

Back in June 2005, then vice premier Ehud Olmert gave an American audience his opinion of the Israeli people. "We are tired of fighting, we are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies," he whined.

Young people like J. and his colleagues, secular, yet deeply rooted Jewish sons and daughters of Galilee and Negev farmers, like their religious friends prove everyday that Olmert was not speaking for his countrymen. Whatever messes Olmert and his colleagues in the government still manage to make before they are finally thrown from office, it is absolutely clear that these young people and millions like them are willing and able to clean them up for themselves, their countrymen, and for the next generation of Jews in the land of Israel. (Jerusalem Post Mar 24)

Why Not in Joy? By Jonathan Rosenblum

It is part of human nature, I suppose, that external threats bring us together - the bigger the threat, the closer together. Only in Israel have the magnitude and multiplicity of outside threats not made our society generally less fractious, unless a general apathy is viewed as a sign of unity.

Last night and this morning, we read in Megillat Esther how a decree of annihilation brought the Jews of Shushan and subsequently those of the entire Persian Empire together. When Haman first describes the Jewish people to Ahasuerus, he refers to them as an am ehad m'fuzar u'm'fudad - "a scattered and dispersed people." Many classic commentators have seen in those words a description of the disunity and internal divisions of the Jews of Persia.

But once Haman's decree to destroy and kill every Jew is issued, the Jews of Shushan quickly find unity. They fast for three days in anticipation of Esther's uninvited approach to Ahasuerus. Later, the Jews of all the far-flung provinces are repeatedly described as "gathering together" as they prepare to face their enemies.

The horrible slaughter at Mercaz Harav two weeks ago brought a measure of momentary unity to the world of religious Jewry. In part, the feeling of closeness reflected a general awareness that the murderer could have walked equally unimpeded into thousands of minyanim and hundreds of crowded batei midrash in Jerusalem.

But I think that identification with the Mercaz Harav victims went beyond "There but for the grace of God go I." True, there should have been more haredim at the funeral (myself included). But who could have possibly imagined prior to the tragedy the circumstances that would bring the Belzer Rebbe, heads of the Mirrer and Hebron yeshivot, some of the most respected contemporary Torah scholars, and the head of Agudath Israel of America to the citadel of religious Zionism?

Who could have imagined the fiercest ideological foe of Zionism in all its varieties, the Satmar Rebbe, telling his followers - two days after eight yeshiva students in religious Zionism's flagship institution were mowed down in the midst of their studies - "When a tragedy of this magnitude occurs - murderers penetrating a yeshiva - it is in Hashem's eyes comparable to the burning of the Temple. They were learning, at that moment, the same Torah we learn. The Talmud is the same Talmud?"

For two weeks, the haredi press has been filled with detailed stories about each of the martyrs and about the faith and strength of their families in their grief. There has been nothing half-hearted or restrained about the praise lavished on the murdered students or their families.

The haredi press has been similarly filled with stories of the community's leaders reaching across the divide in the Orthodox world: How the Belzer Rebbe secluded himself after hearing the news, despite the presence of thousands of his hassidim in Jerusalem to celebrate the bar mitzva of his oldest grandson, and how he went to the funeral and to visit the wounded in hospitals. And how the Gerrer Rebbe, on his way to Jerusalem for a celebratory Shabbat with his hassidim, turned around upon hearing the news,

and declared that it would be impossible to celebrate after such a tragedy.

Rabbi Avrohom Schorr, one of the most respected Torah scholars in Brooklyn, speaking after the savage murders, was almost inaudible through his sobbing. "What did you do after you heard the news?" he asked. "Did you go on with life as usual? Did you eat supper as usual? HOW COULD YOU?"

A rabbi from Queens flew to Israel to make a shiva call to each of the bereaved families. And many of us in Israel did the same.

What was at work in the haredi community was, in part, a desire to reach across barriers and to break out of its isolation. There is, I think, a desire on the part of many haredim for more chances to connect with their fellow Jews, and the terrible events at Mercaz Harav provided one such opportunity.

That desire for a closer connection with non-haredi Jews perhaps explains the wildly disproportionate involvement of haredim in founding volunteer organizations serving the entire population, such as Yad Sarah and Ezer Mizion, and a host of medical referral organizations. It also explains, in part, the communal impulse to try to engage secular Israelis in Torah study. (Jerusalem Post Mar. 20)

The concept of Klal Israel, of all Jews sharing a common history and a common mission, is a live one in the haredi community. But it is also an abstraction. And like any abstraction, it requires the reinforcement of concrete experience.

After the events of Purim, Mordechai and Esther issued a decree that all the Jews of the empire should send mishloach manot ish l'reyehu - "portions of food each man to his friend." Having found unity in the face of an adversary determined to destroy every single Jew, they now sought to preserve that unity amidst their rejoicing.

That would be a good lesson for us as well. Unity need not be only a by-product of fear or sadness. And it is not necessary to wait for tragedy to discover the considerable merits of those who follow a different approach.

One major halachic authority writes that the primary purpose of mishloach manot is not to do something nice for one's friends, but to make new friends among those from whom one previously felt distant. Perhaps if we each reached out today and sent mishloach manot to someone outside our close circle, we could begin to discover one another in joy and not just in tragedy. (Jerusalem Post Mar 20)

A Tale of Two Peoples By Dennis Prager

The long-suffering Tibetans have been in the news. This happens perhaps once or twice a decade. In a more moral world, however, public opinion would be far more preoccupied with Tibetans than with Palestinians, would be as harsh on China as it is on Israel, and would be as fawning on Israel as it now is on China.

But, alas, the world is, as it has always been, a largely mean-spirited and morally insensitive place, where might is far more highly regarded than right.

Consider the facts: Tibet, at least 1,400 years old, is one of the world's oldest nations, has its own language, its own religion and even its own ethnicity. Over 1 million of its people have been killed by the Chinese, its culture has been systematically obliterated, 6,000 of its 6,200 monasteries have been looted and destroyed, and most of its monks have been tortured, murdered or exiled.

Palestinians have none of these characteristics. There has never been a Palestinian country, never been a Palestinian language, never been a Palestinian ethnicity, never been a Palestinian religion in any way distinct from Islam elsewhere. Indeed, "Palestinian" had always meant any individual living in the geographic area called Palestine. For most of the first half of the 20th century, "Palestinian" and "Palestine" almost always referred to the Jews of Palestine. The United Jewish Appeal, the worldwide Jewish charity that provided the nascent Jewish state with much of its money, was actually known as the United Palestine Appeal. Compared to Tibetans, few Palestinians have been killed, its culture has not been destroyed nor its mosques looted or plundered, and Palestinians have received billions of dollars from the international community. Unlike the dying Tibetan nation, there are far more Palestinians today than when Israel was created.

None of this means that a distinct Palestinian national identity does not now exist. Since Israel's creation such an identity has arisen and does indeed exist. Nor does any of this deny that many Palestinians suffered as a result of the creation of the third Jewish state in the area, known -- since the Romans renamed Judea -- as "Palestine."

But it does mean that of all the causes the world could have adopted, the Palestinians' deserved to be near the bottom and the Tibetans' near the top. This is especially so since the Palestinians could have had a state of their own from 1947 on, and they have caused great suffering in the world, while the far more persecuted Tibetans have been characterized by a morally rigorous doctrine of nonviolence.

So, the question is, why? Why have the Palestinians received such undeserved attention and support, and the far more aggrieved and persecuted

and moral Tibetans given virtually no support or attention?

The first reason is terror. Some time ago, the Palestinian leadership decided, with the overwhelming support of the Palestinian people, that murdering as many innocent people -- first Jews, and then anyone else -- was the fastest way to garner world attention. They were right. On the other hand, as *The Economist* notes in its March 28, 2008 issue, "Tibetan nationalists have hardly ever resorted to terrorist tactics..." It is interesting to speculate how the world would have reacted had Tibetans hijacked international flights, slaughtered Chinese citizens in Chinese restaurants and temples, on Chinese buses and trains, and massacred Chinese schoolchildren.

The second reason is oil and support from powerful fellow Arabs. The Palestinians have rich friends who control the world's most needed commodity, oil. The Palestinians have the unqualified support of all Middle Eastern oil-producing nations and the support of the Muslim world beyond the Middle East. The Tibetans are poor and have the support of no nations, let alone oil-producing ones.

The third reason is Israel. To deny that pro-Palestinian activism in the world is sometimes related to hostility toward Jews is to deny the obvious. It is not possible that the unearned preoccupation with the Palestinians is unrelated to the fact that their enemy is the one Jewish state in the world. Israel's Jewishness is a major part of the Muslim world's hatred of Israel. It is also part of Europe's hostility toward Israel: Portraying Israel as oppressors assuages some of Europe's guilt about the Holocaust -- "see, the Jews act no better than we did." Hence the ubiquitous comparisons of Israel to Nazis.

A fourth reason is China. If Tibet had been crushed by a white European nation, the Tibetans would have elicited far more sympathy. But, alas, their near-genocidal oppressor is not white. And the world does not take mass murder committed by non-whites nearly as seriously as it takes anything done by Westerners against non-Westerners. Furthermore, China is far more powerful and frightening than Israel. Israel has a great army and nuclear weapons, but it is pro-West, it is a free and democratic society, and it has seven million people in a piece of land as small as Belize. China has nuclear weapons, has a trillion U.S. dollars, an increasingly mighty army and navy, is neither free nor democratic, is anti-Western, and has 1.2 billion people in a country that dominates the Asian continent.

A fifth reason is the world's Left. As a general rule, the Left demonizes Israel and has loved China since it became Communist in 1948. And given the power of the Left in the world's media, in the political life of so many nations, and in the universities and the arts, it is no wonder vicious China has been idolized and humane Israel demonized.

The sixth reason is the United Nations, where Israel has been condemned in more General Assembly and Security Council resolutions than any other country in the world. At the same time, the UN has voted China onto its Security Council and has never condemned it. China's sponsoring of Sudan and its genocidal acts against its non-Arab black population, as in Darfur, goes largely unremarked on at the UN, let alone condemned, just as is the case with its cultural genocide, ethnic cleansing and military occupation of Tibet.

The seventh reason is television news, the primary source of news for much of mankind. Aside from its leftist tilt, television news reports only what it can video. And almost no country is televised as much as Israel, while video reports in Tibet are forbidden, as they are almost anywhere in China except where strictly monitored by the Chinese authorities. No video, no TV news. And no TV, no concern. So while grieving Palestinians and the accidental killings of Palestinians during morally necessary Israeli retaliations against terrorists are routinely televised, the slaughter of over a million Tibetans and the extinguishing of Tibetan Buddhism and culture are non-events as far as television news is concerned.

The world is unfair, unjust and morally twisted. And rarely more so than in its support for the Palestinians -- no matter how many innocents they target for murder and no matter how much Nazi-like anti-Semitism permeates their media -- and its neglect of the cruelly treated, humane Tibetans. (FrontPageMagazine.com Mar 25)

Olmert's Agenda By Moshe Arens

Who says that our prime minister does not have an agenda? It is true that on occasion Olmert has said that there is no need for the prime minister to have an agenda - he simply needs to do his job. It is also true that since he came into office, Olmert has adopted and discarded agendas whenever it suited him. First there was "convergence," then victory over Hezbollah, and then Annapolis. He feels that the mantle of the man dedicated to bringing peace to Israel suits him, and that he will not let anything, no matter what, get in his way. But don't be fooled, his real agenda is survival, no matter what the cost.

You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, Abe Lincoln said, and Olmert is taking this famous saying almost literally. He cannot, however, fool all of the people in Israel even some of the time, because too many became wise to his ways long ago. But he may have

adopted George W. Bush's jocular addition to Lincoln's aphorism: "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and those are the ones you want to concentrate on."

So who are some of the people that Olmert is concentrating on? The peace camp, of course. Those who jump to attention every time the word peace is mentioned. Those who will support any and all Israeli concession. Gaza - get rid of it! Judea and Samaria - we should have gotten out of there a long time ago! The Temple Mount - who needs it! The Golan Heights - everyone knows it belongs to Syria!

And as far as they are concerned, the concessions we should be prepared to make may not even stop there. The "they" here are the Labor Party and Meretz. And as long as Olmert succeeds in fooling them, they will support him through thick and thin. Labor from inside the government and Meretz from the outside, looking in.

But wait a minute: Is Olmert not really moving toward peace agreements that will involve all these concessions? You must be kidding. The negotiations with Mahmoud Abbas are a sham. That man controls nothing and can commit to nothing.

In fact, Abbas would not even be able to keep up the appearance of peace negotiations with Olmert were there to be an effective IDF ground operation in Gaza to put an end to the rocket attacks against Sderot, Ashkelon, and the communities in the western Negev. So, to keep up the appearances of negotiations, the people there will just have to continue to take it. What did Olmert say on his recent visit to Ashkelon - you have to get used to it. You cannot fool the people in Ashkelon, but you can fool some of the people in Tel Aviv.

As for conceding the Golan Heights to Syria, Olmert, after the disengagement tragedy, is not about to try to uproot the over 20,000 Israelis who have been living there for the past 40 years.

To those who have their doubts about the wisdom of Olmert's policy, he produces the American card. Visits by Condoleezza Rice to Israel and Tzipi Livni to Washington give the impression that Israel really has no choice. The U.S. will not allow effective action to be taken in Gaza and the negotiations with Mahmoud Abbas must continue.

Nobody who knows the U.S. scene will be fooled by this argument. George W. Bush might welcome an Israeli-Palestinian agreement to crown the final months of his tenure as president, but he surely has the Palestinian Authority sized up. In any case he is not about to get into a confrontation with Israel at this time. That's all he needs in addition to his other headaches. But some people want to be fooled, and some even want to be raped.

With the peace camp in tow, all Olmert needs to survive politically is Shas. He is showering them with presents they could only have dreamed of. Meanwhile, Labor and even Meretz grin and bear it. After all, this is for the sake of peace.

Who is fooling whom here? Is Shas fooling Olmert or is Olmert fooling Shas? It seems they both understand each other. Unlike the Labor Party, both sides here are shrewd politicians and have no illusions as to what is happening. Shas knows that nothing will come of the negotiations with Abbas. Olmert also knows that nothing will come of them, but in the meantime he is keeping his coalition together. Each gets what he needs, at least for the moment.

This is Olmert's agenda. That's all there is to it. (Haaretz Mar 24)

The Impact of the Mercaz HaRav Attack

By Yaakov ("Ketzaleh") Katz and Baruch Gordon

The country and media are still in upheaval over the murder of eight students at the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva. The attack had a powerful impact on the Israeli public, more so than rockets from Gaza or other recent attacks.

Why?

The terrorist could have perpetrated a greater massacre had he boarded a crowded bus and sprayed his 500 bullets at the passengers. Tens, G-d forbid, or more Jews from all walks of Israeli life could have been victims.

But, the terrorist's handlers had a different objective. It wasn't another deadly mission to instill fear in the Israeli public and wear down its staying power. The target was specific.

Already during the 1982 Peace for Galilee Operation in Lebanon, soldiers who were alumni of the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva discovered a large picture of the yeshiva's dean, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook, in a magazine published by a terrorist group. The caption under the picture read: "This is the spearhead of the enemy."

What the terrorists perceived back then, the Israeli public and media have gradually come to recognize in subsequent years: the religious-Zionist movement, and its Torah cradle, Mercaz HaRav, are the leading force behind the fulfillment of the Zionist dream today.

The terrorists aimed for the heart, as though plotting to assassinate the IDF Chief of Staff. They aimed for the central organ of the State of Israel that

pumps national vitality and morale to the entire nation.

In stark contrast to the prime minister, who told an American audience on June 9, 2005: "We are tired of fighting, we are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies... We want them to be our friends, our partners, our good neighbors."

In stark contrast to our government ministers who rely on neighboring Arab nations to stop the smuggling of weapons to Gaza, and who arm Arab terrorists and rely on them to defend Israel's interests.

In stark contrast to government spokesmen who base their public relations campaigns on "security needs" and never utter the phrase "the Jewish People's inalienable rights to their historic homeland."

In stark contrast to Israel's security establishment, which abandons cities to rocket attacks for fear of bad ratings if they dare engage the enemy and soldiers get killed.

In contrast to all of the above, Mercaz HaRav and institutions established by its graduates stand as the nerve center of a vibrant movement that raises the flag for Jewish renewal in its ancient homeland. Despite wars and terrorist attacks, and despite the betrayal of the religious-Zionist pioneers of Gush Katif by their own brothers, Mercaz HaRav, Beit El, and the religious Zionist nerve centers continue to produce Torah scholars, educators, high-tech industry leaders, agricultural innovators, and IDF officers, imbuing them with a burning love for the Land, People and Torah of Israel.

No terrorist attack or retreat can extinguish this flame.

It hasn't gone unnoticed that for some ten years, 50% and upwards of graduating IDF officers have been religious-Zionists. In addition, the public heard, during the 2005 Disengagement, the Gush Katif expellees speaking with great faith and unwavering resolve, and warning of the results of retreat from Gaza. Israelis placed faith and hope in the promises of the Oslo and Disengagement architects, yet watched how their unfolding only strengthened the enemy and brought rockets upon Haifa and Ashkelon.

Two weeks ago, the terrorists wanted to strike a blow at what the media, the left and the entire country have come to recognize as Israel's ideological and spiritual heart. Therefore, Israelis are glued to Mercaz HaRav and monitor the aftermath of the attack. Amidst the fog of battle, they seek clarity of direction. In the eulogies and speeches, they hear leaders with strong stature, and they are encouraged.

Eight of the finest students who went to the Mercaz HaRav library for extra study time were murdered in cold blood. As the former Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu said: Who knows what terrible decree was annulled in the heavens through this human sacrifice? According to friends, one of the boys finished the entire Mishnah 70 times, studying 18 chapters a day since his Bar Mitzvah. Another would weep in weekday prayer during the morning, afternoon and evening silent devotion.

We stand in silence and awe at this decision of the Heavenly Court.

But a thundering response must follow the blow. There must be revenge. "The G-d of vengeance" will exact a price in due time. The leaders of the State of Israel must dismantle the terrorist state in our midst.

And we, the citizens and lovers of Israel, must also contribute to a forceful retaliation. The Torah students amongst us must deepen their understanding. Those who are building the land, and especially Judea and Samaria, must intensify their efforts and pace. Soldiers, businessmen, philanthropists, artists and each person in his field of achievement must invest more sacrifice, determination and resources, and strengthen Israel on every level.

The terrorists stopped eight students from studying, having children, building towns, joining the IDF, and from singing and rejoicing on Shabbat. To make up for the loss, the Jewish people must in every field exhibit ten times greater initiative, prowess and joy.

As in the time of the Biblical Esther and Mordechai, may the month of Adar usher in victory over our enemies, and great joy and celebration for the Jewish People. (IsraelINN.com Mar 19)

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The Price of Washington's Obsession with the Palestinians

By Michael Freund

While the West fiddles, the Middle East threatens to burn. Recent months have seen a renewed surge in American efforts to jump-start the political process between Israel and the Palestinians, as a stream of high-level officials have made their way to the region. We've had visits by President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, and Condoleezza Rice looks set to be upgraded to "platinum" in whatever frequent flyer program she takes part in. The Secretary of State has already been to Israel twice this year, and it's only March.

Of course, these labors have thus far failed to achieve anything, other than to send a message to the Palestinians that they can continue to use violence against the Jewish state while hoping to wring out still more concessions at the

negotiating table.

But there is a much deeper, and even greater, cost involved in all the American time and energy that are being expended on cajoling the recalcitrant Palestinian leadership.

For just as there are a finite number of hours in the day, so too there are a finite number of issues that senior US diplomats can grapple with. And the more time they spend banging their heads against the Palestinian wall, the less they have to devote to a far more pressing matter, one which threatens to shake the foundations of the entire region - the growing danger of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

Indeed, by focusing so incessantly on the Palestinian issue, American officials seem to have dropped the ball on containing Iran's drive toward nuclear supremacy, and this is having far-reaching consequences.

Make no mistake. The West's failure to shut down Iran's nuclear program has sent shudders throughout the neighborhood, prompting Arab states from the Persian Gulf to North Africa to begin to seek ways of maintaining strategic parity. Whether you are a Bahraini living in Teheran's shadow, or a Moroccan policymaker in Rabat, the very thought of the ayatollahs with their fingers on the trigger is nothing less than a nightmare scenario.

THE ARAB leadership knows full well that an atomic Iran would transform the strategic dynamic in the region, further boosting radical Shi'ite fundamentalism and revolutionary triumphalism. It would give Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad unprecedented leverage with which to threaten the entire Middle East.

Moreover, if Iran does become a nuclear power, it will compel the Arab states to adopt even more extreme anti-Israel and anti-Western positions, as they seek to placate the ayatollahs.

Fearful that America and the West do not have the will to stop Iran, the Arab states, as expected, are now embarking on nuclear programs of their own.

Several have already announced plans to build nuclear power plants, and others will undoubtedly do so as well out of fear of being left behind.

Take, for example, Egypt, whose president, Hosni Mubarak is in Moscow this week, where he is expected to sign a bilateral deal that would pave the way for Russia to construct nuclear reactors for Cairo. The Egyptian government is currently facing violent unrest at home, as they can not afford to provide enough subsidized bread to feed the poor. But that isn't stopping them from proceeding down the costly road to nuclear power out of fear of Iran.

Likewise, on Monday, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced that it was establishing a government agency, the Nuclear Energy Implementation Organization, to look into developing nuclear assets. And in an interview earlier this month with the Qatari newspaper Al-Sharq, Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz al Saud boasted of the "eagerness" of various Gulf Arab states, including his own, to make use of nuclear energy.

All told, 11 Arab countries have declared an interest in nuclear technology. They are: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, the UAE, Yemen, Morocco, Libya, Jordan and Egypt.

HOW'S THAT for a threat to the stability of the region? Sadly, though, American officials seem to have been spending more time rifling through mini-bars in Ramallah hotel rooms in between meetings with Palestinians, than in tackling the growing spread of nuclear ambition in the Middle East.

Sure, the Arab states all say that their intentions are "peaceful," and that they seek nuclear power only for the sake of generating cheaper electricity.

But this excuse is as transparent as it is feeble. We all know from the case of Iran just how easy it is to keep one's nuclear progress, and intentions, under wraps. After all, Teheran's nuclear program was revealed in 2002 only after an Iranian exile group held a press conference and disseminated photographs and data regarding the country's covert nuclear installations.

It turned out that Iran had been working in secret for 18 years (!!!) on its nuclear program, which it had concealed from the international community and repeatedly lied about its existence.

What would stop a tightly-controlled dictatorship such as Riyadh from doing the same? Moreover, there is little reason to believe that oil-rich Arab states awash in petrodollars are truly in need of finding cheaper sources of electricity.

It is not too late to stop this regional rush toward nuclear proliferation, which is still in its initial stages. Tackle the Iranian threat head-on, strip them of their nuclear program, and the Arab states' "excuse" to pursue atomic energy fizzles away.

But if the Bush administration continues to fritter away its remaining months in office, instead expending precious political and diplomatic capital on the bleak prospects of a Palestinian about-face, it runs the risk of turning this region into a dangerous nuclear powder-keg.

So the choice before Washington is really very simple. Keep focusing on the Palestinians if you wish, but then don't be surprised if you wake up one day to discover a nuclear Middle East. (Jerusalem Post Mar 25)