



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

Events...

Monday May 5, 8:00PM

Caroline Glick will speak on her book Shackled Warrior: Israel & The Global Jihad at Holy Blossom

Tuesday, May 6, 8:00 PM

Westmount Shul presents Rabbi Seth Mandell speaking on "Insanity or Inspiration: Why Risk Living in Israel?" at their closing program for "60 Days for 60 Years: Israel", at BAYT

Wednesday May 7, 7:30PM

Communal Yom HaZikaron Commemoration and Yom HaAtzmaut Celebration at BAYT.

Commentary...

Israel and the Palestinians: Has Bush Reneged? By Norman Podhoretz

On June 24, 2002, George W. Bush, having already become the first American President to come out openly and officially for the establishment of a Palestinian state, attached two stern conditions to that new policy. The United States, he declared, "will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure." This commitment constitutes what I have called the "Fourth Pillar" of the Bush Doctrine, and many friends of Israel now believe that Bush has reneged on it.

Paul Mirengoff of the influential "Power Line" blog puts the case in precise and succinct terms: "The Fourth Pillar has, in my view, fallen. [For] to my knowledge, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is not engaged in a sustained fight against its terrorists, nor has the Palestinian terror infrastructure been dismantled. Nonetheless, the Bush administration is working to create a Palestinian state."

Another highly regarded blogger, Rick Richman of "Jewish Current Issues," elaborates on Mirengoff's charge by pointing to what would seem to be a violation of the Road Map through which Bush's conditions for support are supposed to be implemented. He begins by quoting my own summary of the three phases of the Road Map: "In Phase I, the Palestinians are required to 'undertake visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt, and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israel anywhere,' and also to mount 'effective operations aimed at ... dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.'" Only when the Palestinian Authority does this are the parties to enter Phase II, in which negotiations are supposed to culminate in "the creation of a Palestinian state with provisional borders." At that point, Phase III kicks in, and the process begins of forging a "permanent-status agreement [on] borders, Jerusalem, refugees, and settlements."

Yet, Richman writes, in the latest version of the "peace process" that was jump-started at the conference in Annapolis convened on November 27, 2007 by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Phases I and II have been skipped over, and the negotiations now going on between the Israelis and the Palestinians are entirely concerned with the issues reserved by the Road Map

for Phase III. Richman ^{ד"ר} then quotes me as also having promised that, if this were to happen, I would admit that I had been wrong in predicting that Bush would continue to resist pressure-including from his own State Department-to "fast-track" the Road Map by doing precisely what he seems to have done now in getting Israel's agreement to skip the first two phases and plunge right into the

third.<1>

Correctly suspecting that I still stand by that prediction, Richman challenges me to explain how I can reconcile Annapolis with the principles embedded in the Fourth Pillar and spelled out in the Road Map. In meeting that challenge, I will accordingly try to show that the Road Map has not been superseded by Annapolis and that, far from reneging on the commitment he made on June 24, 2002, Bush has in at least one key respect strengthened it in Israel's favor since the Annapolis conference was held.

To judge from much of the comment on Annapolis, there is still very little understanding of how radical a departure the June 24, 2002 statement represented from the standard conception in official Washington of what for the first two decades after 1948 had been called the "Arab-Israeli conflict" and then came to be known as the "Palestinian-Israeli conflict." I therefore want to begin with a brief rehearsal of the historical background against which the full significance of what Bush said on that fateful occasion can properly be appreciated.

Like the commonly used phrase "cycle of violence," the word "conflict" suggested, and was intended to suggest, that the two parties were equally to blame for the state of war between them. This idea served, and continues to serve, as a way of concealing or denying the plain truth, which is that the "conflict" can only be understood if seen as an ongoing Arab war against Israel.

The pattern was set in 1948-49, with the attempt by the armies of five Arab countries to strangle the infant Jewish state in its cradle, and the same objective has been pursued ever since through (depending on how you count) five or six more military campaigns. Some of these (the War of Independence of 1948, the Six-Day war of 1967, the Yom Kippur war of 1973) were waged with conventional weapons, and others (the two intifadas of more recent years) with various forms of terrorism. To describe all this as a "conflict" is to equate aggressions against Israel with Israel's defense of itself against those aggressions. And indeed, thanks to the Arab world's relentless political campaign to delegitimize Israel-a campaign that has gone hand in hand with the military ones-this is exactly what much of the world has consistently done. The perverted reasoning here is that if Israel has no right to exist, it follows as the night the day that Israel has no right to defend itself, either.

To be sure, the United States has never gone this far. No American President, not even Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was perhaps the least friendly to Israel of them all, ever acquiesced in the idea that Israel had no right to exist or to defend itself against attack. Even though each of them tried very hard to be, or at least to seem, "evenhanded" and to act as an "honest broker" between the warring parties, most of Eisenhower's successors were, some more and some less, and for one reason or another, sympathetic to Israel.

So, too, up until 1967, as might have been expected of people with a natural tendency to favor the underdog, was the American liberal community. After all, on the Arab side of the "Arab-Israeli conflict" stood two mighty forces yoked together by a common objective. One was the Arab nationalists to whom Israel was an alien implantation imposed by the imperialist West upon the region that belonged to them as a matter of political right. The other was the entire Muslim umma (or world), to which it was a violation of the will of God for a sovereign Jewish state-any Jewish state, no matter where its boundaries might be drawn-to exist on land reserved by Allah for Islam.

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Between them, these two forces—one secular and the other religious—numbered in the hundreds of millions, controlled more than two dozen countries and vast stretches of territory, and also had a stranglehold on global oil supplies. As for the Israeli side, it consisted in the early years of fewer than three-quarters of a million Jews living on a sliver of land that could have fit into New Jersey. Even if all the twelve million or so Jews in the entire Diaspora could be counted as active supporters (which was far from the case), Israel would still be vastly overmatched.

Then came the Six-Day war of 1967. Launched by the then Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, with the openly declared aim of wiping Israel off the map (its very existence, he said, was an “aggression”), the war ended instead with Israel in control of the West Bank (formerly occupied by Jordan) and the Gaza Strip (which had been controlled by Egypt). It was like a reenactment in modern dress of the slaying of Goliath by David.

And yet, in one of the greatest achievements ever of Orwellian inversion, this humiliating defeat was eventually turned into a great victory by Arab propagandists who redefined the ongoing war of the whole Arab/Muslim world against the tiny Jewish state as a struggle between the conquered Palestinians and the all-powerful Israelis. In this new scheme of things, it was the Palestinians who were cast in the role of David and the Israelis who became Goliath. Thus did the vastly outnumbered and besieged Jewish state lose much of the sympathy—especially on the Left—that it had always enjoyed before.

What George W. Bush did in his June 24 statement was to set this Orwellian inversion right side up. Not only did he reconstruct a truthful framework by telling the Palestinian people that they had been treated for decades by the Arab nations “as pawns in the Middle East conflict.” He was also open and forthright about these nations and about what they had been up to: “I’ve said in the past that nations are either with us or against us in the war on terror. To be counted on the side of peace, nations must act. Every leader actually committed to peace will end incitement to violence in official media and publicly denounce homicide bombs. Every nation actually committed to peace will stop the flow of money, equipment, and recruits to terrorists groups seeking the destruction of Israel, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hizballah. Every nation committed to peace must block the shipment of Iranian supplies to these groups and oppose regimes that promote terror, like Iraq. And Syria must choose the right side in the war on terror by closing terrorist camps and expelling terrorist organizations.”

Here, then, Bush restored the broad context in which to understand the narrower Middle East “conflict.” It was not, he insisted, a war between Israel and the Palestinians, but rather a war against Israel being waged by the surrounding Arab/Muslim states, currently through terrorist proxies. Most of these proxies were Palestinian but they also included Hizballah, which was supported and controlled by Iran.

Nor did Bush stop there. Although he made an effort toward the end of his statement to seem evenhanded by challenging Israel “to take concrete steps to support the emergence of a viable, credible Palestinian state,” he most emphatically did not follow the usual practice of blaming the persistence of the “conflict” on “Israeli intransigence.” On the contrary: he squarely and unambiguously placed the onus on the Palestinian leaders and the Arab states backing them up. By saying up front that “There is simply no way to achieve ... peace until all parties fight terror,” he was blaming the absence of peace on the Arab states and the “Palestinian authorities” (who were “encouraging, not opposing, terrorism”) and exonerating the Israelis (who were being “victimized by terrorists,” not supporting them).

Furthermore, Bush eschewed the usual practice of demanding that Israel take the first steps toward peace by making unilateral concessions. That responsibility he assigned not to the “Palestinian leaders” alone but also to “the entire Arab world,” which he called upon “to build closer ties of diplomacy and commerce with Israel, leading to full normalization of relations” with the Jewish state.

It was an extraordinary statement, and it is no wonder that the Israelis themselves, and their American friends, greeted it with great enthusiasm. Yet only about a year later, upon the publication of the “Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” elation began giving way to alarm. This document was supposed to be a blueprint for implementing the principles of the June 24 speech, but the very fact that it had been produced by a so-called Quartet (the U.S., the UN, the EU, and Russia) was enough to arouse suspicion and cause apprehension. Given that three of the four members of the Quartet were hardly known for friendliness toward Israel, and that the U.S. contingent was made up of the State Department, how could

this entity be expected to resist undermining the principles of Bush’s June 24 speech while pretending to show how they should be put into practice? Surely the drafters of the Road Map would either ignore the President’s tacit repudiation of the cult of moral equivalency, otherwise known as “evenhandedness” and at whose shrine the Arabists in the State Department worshiped, or else they would find a way to sneak it back in.

And indeed, this is precisely what was charged by critics of the Road Map like Abraham Sofaer (who actually used the word “evenhanded” in characterizing it); Daniel Pipes (“the Road Map might be thought of as the State Department’s belated answer to the President’s June 2002 proposal”); and Robert Satloff and David Makovsky (who argued that the Road Map represented not the fulfillment but “the antithesis of Bush’s June 24 vision for peacemaking in terms of substance, sequence, and procedure”).

Perhaps the worst of the many discrepancies they all found was the egregious example of “evenhandedness” that Satloff described as the “sham, even indecent, parallelism between Palestinian and Israeli behavior.” Summarizing Satloff’s documentation of this point, Joshua Muravchik wrote that the Road Map calls on each side, in virtually identical language, to “cease violence” against the other, as if acts of terror and counterterror are commensurable. It also balances a demand that “official Palestinian institutions end incitement against Israel” with one that “official Israeli institutions end incitement against Palestinians.”

At first, I found these criticisms entirely persuasive. As time went on, however, I gradually came to the conclusion that, despite the best efforts of the drafters of the document in the State Department, and contrary to what they probably imagined they had pulled off, they had failed to eliminate the most radical feature of the President’s June 24, 2002 statement—namely, its insistence on putting the onus on the Palestinians in particular and the Arab world in general.

Of course the State Department drafters made sure to place as much emphasis as they could get away with on the concluding section of the speech in which the President had reiterated the usual demands on Israel to do its part by “freezing settlement activity in the occupied territories”; by “permitting innocent Palestinians to resume work and normal life”; and by pulling its military forces out of areas heavily populated by Palestinians. Still, and in spite of this bone the President had thrown to the cult of “evenhandedness,” the drafters of the Road Map simply could not maneuver their way around the fact that he had made these demands on Israel contingent in the first place upon Palestinian action against terrorism. Absent such action, the parties would be stuck in Phase I of the Road Map. This meant that the negotiations toward a Palestinian state with “provisional borders” that were reserved for Phase II would continue to be deferred, with the “permanent status” negotiations of Phase III indefinitely put off beyond the original target date of 2004-05.

It would be hard to pinpoint the moment when it dawned on the members of the Quartet that the Road Map had failed to take the ball out of the Palestinian court into which Bush had thrown it. But no sooner had they come to this realization than they began trying to disown what they themselves had wrought. Knowing all too well how unlikely it was that the Palestinians—even now that Yasir Arafat had died and been replaced as president of the Palestinian Authority by the supposedly moderate Mahmoud Abbas—would meet their obligation under Phase I to put an end to terrorism, the Quartet took refuge in the position that the only way forward was to “fast-track” the Road Map.

It was around this time that I made the promise of which Rick Richman now reminds me. Having already indicated that I am not ready to admit that I was wrong about Bush (or, for that matter, about Ariel Sharon), let me now try to explain why in greater detail.

It is true that both Bush and the Israeli government agreed at Annapolis to enter into the “final status” negotiations that, according to the Road Map, are not supposed to begin until Phase III is reached. But it is also true that neither party has allowed itself to be bamboozled into forgetting about Phase I. Thus in the speech he gave on January 10, 2008 during his visit to Jerusalem, Bush made sure to reaffirm in unmistakable terms that “implementation of any agreement is subject to implementation of the Road Map.” For the Palestinians, he said, this required “confronting terrorists and dismantling terrorist infrastructure,” and he also said yet again that American support for a Palestinian state depended upon the fulfillment of that condition (“No agreement and no Palestinian state will be born of terror”).

Picking up on that reaffirmation, the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni,

as reported recently in the Jerusalem Post, stressed that any agreement reached with the Palestinians would be subject to the implementation of their Road Map commitments. ... Livni made it clear that without changes on the ground, there would be no Palestinian state. "The road to a Palestinian state goes through renunciation of violence and terrorism, responding to the situation in Gaza, and being more effective in the West Bank," the foreign minister said. "This is a part of Annapolis and something the United States supports deeply."

But to the critics of Annapolis this raises another question: if any final-status agreement that may be reached in the current round of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians will have to be shelved until such time as they fulfill their obligations under Phase I, why bother trying to reach such an agreement now? To which Bush and Rice reply that it will give the Palestinian people new hope by presenting them with a clear "vision" of what they can expect if they follow the (putative) way of Abbas instead of the way of Hamas. If they choose the path of the Road Map, they will be rewarded with a sovereign democratic state of their own that will live alongside Israel in peace and prosperity, whereas the jihadist route of Hamas will lead them to nothing but endless war, and the chaos, poverty, and oppression that they can already see in Gaza under Hamas's control.

As against this justification for the Annapolis process, Zalman Shoval, who once served as the Israeli ambassador to the United States, mounts a powerful set of arguments. Apart from the many other things he finds wrong with Annapolis, Shoval contends that in itself a "shelf agreement" would be bad for Israel. For even if implementation of such an agreement—which will necessarily involve highly controversial concessions by Israel—is made to wait upon the cessation of terrorism, it will still become the starting point of (so to speak) the "real" final-status negotiations in Phase III, where Israel will be pressed to make even more, and more dangerous, concessions.

In my opinion, Shoval is right in the abstract, but the actual chance that Phase III will be reached in the near future is close to zero. Even on the generous assumption that Mahmoud Abbas really does wish to forswear terrorism, he is far too weak to make that wish come true—not on the West Bank (where he as the head of the Fatah party retains control but which, if not for the presence of the Israeli army, Hamas would long since have taken over as it has Gaza), let alone in Gaza itself (where the grip of Hamas is so tight that some have taken to calling the place Hamastan). Nor could the current Israeli government under Ehud Olmert survive if he were to try implementing an agreement that would, at a minimum, involve ceding East Jerusalem to the Palestinians as the capital of their new state.

In short, so long as Hamas, and factions like the al-Aqsa brigade within Abbas's own Fatah party, refuse to give up on terrorism, and so long as they go on pursuing the dream of ridding the Middle East of a Jewish state, the Fourth Pillar will remain standing. Which means that the "shelf agreement," even assuming it is reached, is destined to mold on the shelf until it winds up in the same mass grave in which the innumerable "peace plans" that preceded it have found their ignominious resting place.

But if his speech in Jerusalem demonstrates that Bush has not reneged on the commitment that constitutes the Fourth Pillar of the Bush Doctrine, it also shows that, far from weakening that commitment, he has strengthened its promise to ensure that Israel's security will not be jeopardized by the establishment of a Palestinian state.

As originally proffered in the June 24, 2002 statement, this promise was formulated in the following terms: "[T]he Israeli occupation that began in 1967 will be ended with a settlement negotiated between the parties, based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, with Israeli withdrawal to secure and recognized borders.

Then, in a letter he sent to Sharon on April 14, 2004, Bush went farther: "In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final-status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949. . . . It is realistic to expect that any final-status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities." Translated into plain English, this meant that Israel would not be required to retreat all the way to the pre-'67 borders or to dismantle the major settlement blocs in Judea and Samaria.

True, Bush's parallel insistence on a "contiguous" Palestinian state also meant that Israel would have to withdraw from the Jordan Valley. As Dore Gold of the Jerusalem Center for Policy Analysis never tired of demonstrating, to abandon this strategically vital piece of geography would leave Israel naked to attack on the ground. The demand was thus raised by Gold and others for

"defensible borders," which became code words for the retention by Israel of a military presence in the Jordan Valley.

Initially, the Bush administration did not look with favor upon this demand ("It's not going to happen," declared a White House official). But then, in his speech in Jerusalem on January 10 of this year, Bush signaled a change that has gone curiously unnoticed by friends of Israel:

These negotiations must ensure that Israel has secure, recognized, and defensible borders. And they must ensure that the state of Palestine is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent. [emphasis added] By adding for the first time the word "defensible" to the "secure and recognized borders" he had specified in his previous statements, Bush was for all practical purposes endorsing continued Israeli control over the Jordan Valley; and by reiterating that the Palestinian state must be "contiguous," he was saying that, contrary to Palestinian objections, a way could be found to reconcile these two requirements.

At this point, Paul Mirengoff raises another question. Even if, he says, I am right about Bush's continued commitment to the Fourth Pillar, will it survive his departure from office?

Well, it would be foolish to deny that the odds are against this. Even so, I believe there are reasonable grounds for—shall we say?—the audacity of hope on this issue, especially if John McCain becomes our next President, but even if either Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama does.

Consider as a precedent what happened to a comparable commitment made to Israel—the one by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1974 that the United States would refuse to deal with the PLO unless and until it first disavowed the articles in its charter calling for the destruction of the Jewish state and then agreed to extend recognition to it. Less than two years later, Jimmy Carter became President. There is little doubt that he himself and his secretary of state, Cyrus Vance (not to mention his National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski), would have been all too happy to accept the PLO's claim to being the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" and to deal with it on that basis. Nevertheless, when it was discovered that Andrew Young, Carter's ambassador to the UN, had secretly met with a PLO official (which very likely he did with the knowledge and approval of Vance, Brzezinski, and perhaps the President himself), there was such an outcry from the Israelis, their American friends, and all others to whom this violation of a solemn commitment besmirched the honor of the United States that Young had to resign.

The Reagan administration that followed in 1981 came under great pressure from the international community to end the American boycott of the PLO. But for nearly eight full years Reagan and his secretary of state, George Shultz, gamely held on to the Kissinger commitment. Not until its last weeks in office, and only after being persuaded by a speech delivered by Arafat on December 14, 1988 that the PLO had finally met the conditions spelled out by Kissinger, did the Reagan administration give in by authorizing a "dialogue" between the U.S. ambassador to Tunisia and the PLO representatives there. <3>

This helped set the stage for George H.W. Bush (who succeeded Reagan) and James Baker (who succeeded Shultz) to convene a "peace" conference in Madrid to which they wanted to invite the PLO. Yet the problem was that the then Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, did not agree with the American interpretation of Arafat's speech as having truly met the Kissinger conditions. Consequently, Bush and Baker could persuade the Israelis to attend the Madrid conference only by assuring them that the Palestinians being invited were not representatives of the PLO. This piece of diplomatic legerdemain worked to the extent of making the conference possible, but it did not and could not work to make anything much happen there.

The decisive turning point came after Shamir was ousted by a Labor government with Yitzhak Rabin as prime minister and Shimon Peres as foreign minister. Unlike Shamir's Likud party, Labor was champing at the bit to "trade territory for peace." In fact, without (so far as we know) a single push from the U.S. (now with Bill Clinton as President), Peres, a hawk turned dove, saw Madrid and raised it with Oslo, where with his active encouragement an Israeli team was conducting negotiations with the PLO. These negotiations were kept secret not only from the public but (again so far as we know) even from the still hawkish Rabin—who, however, soon persuaded himself that it would be the better part of political prudence to get with the program. <4>

This having been accomplished, the long journey that had begun at Madrid and had proceeded from there to Oslo finally wound up on the White

House lawn. There, under the beaming gaze of Bill Clinton, Rabin overcame his visible misgivings and shook the hand of Yasir Arafat, a hand still dripping with Jewish blood and notwithstanding his universally acclaimed metamorphosis from arch-terrorist into responsible statesman-soon to be dripping with even more as Oslo brought not peace to Israel but a continued string of terrorist attacks.

The crucially important point to grasp is that it was the Israeli government, acting on its own initiative and not in response to American pressure, that gave birth to Oslo. No American administration would have dared to demand that Israel do this much this fast-not even the unfriendly one run by Bush and Baker. Indeed, for demanding a lot less, they had been widely accused of bigotry.

But the Oslo agreements proved to be only the first time Israel would get ahead of America in its dealings with the Palestinians. The next big one came with Ariel Sharon, who became Israel's prime minister only a month after George W. Bush became President of the United States. This was the decision to effect a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. It was reached, as Oslo had been before it, by the Israeli government all on its own-in this instance not only without American pressure but actually in defiance of it. The United States was not opposed to an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, but Washington wanted it done through negotiations, not by unilateral action. Sharon refused, and got his way.

Similarly with Annapolis. We do not know for certain who first came up with the idea of forging an agreement that would give the Palestinians a detailed picture of the great benefits they would reap by fulfilling their obligations under the Road Map. But even if, as is generally assumed, Condoleezza Rice was the author, it was Olmert who forced the pace by jumping on the idea quickly and enthusiastically. My guess is that if Olmert had instead resisted, George W. Bush might well have yielded to him. But as with Sharon and Gaza, how could Bush-notwithstanding the depth of his feeling for Israel-be more Zionist than the Israelis?

Speaking of Gaza brings up yet another challenge that Rick Richman has thrown at me. Much to his surprise-and not his alone-I supported the "disengagement" from Gaza. But, he asks, now that it has "proved to have been a strategic disaster of the first order for both Israel and the United States," am I willing to admit that I wrong about Sharon as well as about Bush?

In taking up this second challenge, I have to begin by explaining that I did not see disengagement as a concession to the Palestinians or as an example of trading land for peace. Like Sharon, I did not believe that peace could be negotiated with the Palestinians in the foreseeable future (because if Abbas was only "Arafat Lite" or "Arafat with a suit," he would never follow the Road Map to its final destination, while if he was truly willing to do so, he was too weak to pull the Palestinian people behind him). Like Sharon, too, I also thought that peace would come not through anything Israel were to do or fail to do, but only when the Arab/Muslim world in general, and the Palestinians in particular, made their own inner peace with the existence of a Jewish state in the Middle East and gave up trying to destroy it.

In the meantime, it seemed to me a good idea for Israel to take matters into its own hands. This entailed figuring out how it could best position itself to fend off external attack while at the same time protecting its internal security as a Jewish state through a maximum degree of separation from the Palestinians. Seen in this light, the disengagement from Gaza revealed itself as only one part of a prudent strategic retreat to a more defensible perimeter. The second part was the security fence being built around the West Bank, and the third was the inclusion on the Israeli side of the fence of the large settlement blocs in Judea and Samaria (as agreed to by the United States in Bush's letter to Sharon of April 14, 2004).

Obviously I could not foresee that Sharon would be felled by a stroke and that Ehud Olmert would be left to follow through on his strategy. Nor did I anticipate the takeover of Gaza by the terrorists of Hamas. Nor in any of the wildest worst-case scenarios I could conjure up did it ever occur to me that, in the aftermath of disengagement, an Israeli government-any Israeli government-would sit by passively while missiles were being fired day after day from Gaza into Sderot or any other patch of Israeli territory.

If I had envisaged such a state of affairs, I would not have supported disengagement. But then again, I cannot for the life of me imagine Sharon behaving as Olmert has done. More likely, with no Jews left to protect in Gaza, he would have felt free-and totally justified from both a military and a moral point of view-to hit back with overwhelming force the minute the

Kassams started flying.

And so I come to one more challenge-the third and last-that Rick Richman has posed to me in asking what I would recommend that Israel do now about Gaza and about the Fourth Pillar.

On Gaza: I find it incredible that the Olmert government has for so long been incapable of discharging the most elementary responsibility any government has of protecting its people against attack, and even more incredible that, in spite of this dereliction, Olmert remains in office. If he can be pressed into doing what I believe Sharon would have done, and doing it soon, or if he can be replaced with someone-Bibi Netanyahu? Ehud Barak?-who has the guts and the competence to do it, the situation would surely change for the better.

On the future of the Fourth Pillar: taken together, Bush's statements of June 24, 2002, April 14, 2004, and January 10, 2008 constitute a solemn commitment that has been made to the state of Israel not by a passing administration but by the United States of America. Consequently, if the Israelis (backed up by their American friends, and anyone else who cares about the honor of the United States) bind themselves to this commitment with hoops of steel, the next President may very well have no choice but to abide by it-just as Carter was reluctantly forced to do with the Kissinger commitment of 1974.

These are, I know, two very large "if's." But to Rick Richman, Paul Mirengoff, and many others in both Israel and America who agree with them, I would say this: that the count is very far from in, and that the day may yet come when it is they who will be challenged to admit that they were wrong about the durability of the Fourth Pillar of the Bush Doctrine, and conceivably-just conceivably-even about the three-part strategy of Ariel Sharon. (Commentary Magazine April 2008)

The writer is the editor-at-large of COMMENTARY. His new book, World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism, was released by Doubleday on September 11, 2007.

Footnotes

1 I made the prediction, and the accompanying promise, in these pages (Letters from Readers, July-August 2005) in response to a query addressed to me by an Israeli reader named Israel Pickholtz about my article "Bush, Sharon, My Daughter, and Me" (April 2005).

2 Syria, which joined with Egypt and Jordan, also lost the Golan Heights, but the "Syrian track," which has nothing to do with the issues arising from the Fourth Pillar, is a story for another day.

3 The late Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, who had served as Reagan's ambassador to the UN in his first term, was sharply critical of this move on the ground that Arafat's speech had done no such thing ("How the PLO Was Legitimized," Commentary Magazine, July 1989).

4 There has been much speculation as to why Rabin changed his mind. My own theory is set forth at length in "Israel and the United States: A Complex History" (May 1998).

5 To judge from an interview he recently gave to al-Dustur, a Jordanian daily, Abbas is more "Arafat Lite" than a new species of Palestinian leader who has renounced terrorism and is intent on making peace with Israel. Thus, as reported in the Jerusalem Post, he told al-Dustur that "he does not rule out returning to the path of armed 'resistance' against Israel." He went on to say that "he was opposed to an armed struggle against Israel-for the time being. 'At this present juncture, I am opposed to armed struggle because we cannot succeed in it, but maybe in the future things will be different.'" In the same interview, the Jerusalem Post reports, "The PA president also expressed pride both in himself and in his organization, Fatah, for trail-blazing the path of resistance: 'I had the honor of firing the first shot in 1965 and of being the one who taught resistance to many in the region and around the world: what it's like; when it is effective and when it isn't effective; its uses; and what serious, authentic, and influential resistance is. It is common knowledge when and how resistance is detrimental and when it is well timed. We [Fatah] had the honor of leading the resistance and we taught resistance to everyone, including Hizballah, who trained in our military camps.'" This rationale for a tactical pause in terrorism does not exactly amount to a ringing renunciation of it.