



## 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*

Dear Readers:

*There was no issue last week as I was sitting shiva for my beloved mother, Sylvia Zeifman, ז"ל. This issue is dedicated in her memory. LWZ, Editor*

## Commentary...

**The U.S.-Israeli Divergence** By Meyrav Wurmser  
*Two countries, two sets of priorities.*

Today, at one of the most dramatic moments in Israel's short history, U.S. and Israeli officials view the purpose and spirit of their bilateral relationship differently. That much was confirmed by Monday's meeting between Pres. Barack Obama and Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at which the two leaders seemed to operate off two different scripts.

At the top of the agenda for Washington is the Palestinian issue. The Obama administration has made it clear that, notwithstanding the most recent Israeli elections — in which Israelis voted strongly to depart from past policies of restraint and conciliation toward the Palestinians — it expects Israel to aggressively pursue the "peace process." Little is being asked right now of the Palestinians. As Washington sees it, the ball is in Israel's court.

For Israel, negotiating with the Palestinians is a dead-end diversion from the existential threat posed by Iran. Split between Hamas and Fatah, and marked by internal violence and weak political institutions, the Palestinians are in no position to forge a lasting agreement with Israel. Prime Minister Netanyahu, along with most other Israel politicians, believes the Palestinian question cannot be solved at the current moment.

Moreover, many Middle Eastern actors have recently reevaluated the Palestinian issue. Across the region, it is a significantly lower priority than curbing Iranian power. Not only is Tehran funding its terrorist clients Hamas and Hezbollah; it is also threatening to foment Islamist unrest that could bring down the regimes of Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, and possibly even Saudi Arabia. For these countries, as for Israel, the Palestinian issue is important, but Iran comes first. This is why Netanyahu decided to visit Egypt and Jordan before visiting Washington: to emphasize that for those living in the region, Iran takes precedence over the Palestinian morass.

On arms control, the United States has already begun to shift its tone, which probably suggests a shift in substance. The Obama administration is pressuring Israel to sign both the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, which could lead to Israeli disarmament. Before the summit, U.S. officials asked Israel to come prepared with ideas on how to implement this dramatic new vision. Again, for Washington, the ball is in Israel's court.

On Iran, the Obama administration signaled before the summit that it would consider an Israeli strike on Iran to be an impetuous and useless act. From the defense secretary to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the message was clear: Do not strike Iran — it will not help and it will inflame the world. Even at the summit, while President Obama suggested that he will give diplomacy a chance until the end of the year, he said the next move after that will be tougher sanctions. Israel, on the other hand, says that time is running out and all options are on the table — which is diplomatic code for "We may strike."

Washington views Israel's mere discussion of striking Iran as an aggressive act that will incite the Middle East and make an Arab-Israeli peace even more remote. Hence the alacrity with which U.S. officials

express their opposition to an Israeli strike — a unique historical spectacle of a nation publicly criticizing an ally over a decision that it has not yet made.

And yet, the Obama administration has offered no clear strategy for preventing a nuclear Iran. Israel — and not just its Likud government — believes it is facing an existential threat from Iran's nuclear ambitions. This sentiment runs deep in Israeli society. The core of Zionism is the principle of Jewish self-defense. A state built by the children of Holocaust survivors, Israel is grounded in the belief that Jews should never again find themselves vulnerable. This is the reason that Israel has developed a strong military: In some ways, the country has created for itself a fortress of protection. But Israel now faces the possibility that a messianic regime in Tehran aspires to annihilate the 6 million Jews of Israel. If Iran develops a nuclear weapon, it will finally have the means to do so. Israelis see no other response but to defend themselves. In Israel, the Iranian question is above partisan politics and not left to chance. The memories of the past resonate too strongly for that. The Israeli prime minister thinks that he faces a Churchill-like moment and that he must defend his nation.

Washington does not see Israel's dilemma so starkly. The Obama administration believes that Iran can be persuaded to give up its nuclear pursuit, or at least be kept at bay. U.S. officials view a negotiated agreement between Israel and the Palestinians as the first step toward resolving some of the region's thorniest questions. And they view strong progress on arms control by Israel as a precondition to winning Iran's compliance with the NPT and its abandonment of a nuclear program.

The West's response to Israel's insistence on defending itself is ironic. Two generations after World War II, Washington is choosing to ignore and diminish the genocidal threat that Israel now faces. Israel is essentially being told that its concerns about Iran are exaggerated. It is being categorized as a nuclear hold-out like North Korea. It is being pressured to make concessions on the Palestinian issue, despite the fact that most in the region believe the Iranian threat is more important.

The message from Washington is becoming clear. Israel is expected to pursue a two-state solution with the Palestinians, to join America's ambitious disarmament agenda, and to refrain from striking Iran. The Obama administration, which is energetically soliciting our enemies' friendship, is at the same time putting the onus on Israel, our strongest regional ally, to prove its worthiness to us.

When in the winter of 1177 the Holy Roman emperor Henry IV visited Pope Gregory VII at his temporary residence in Canossa, Italy, his journey became a symbol of humiliation and degradation. The pope, angered by Henry's attempt to independently appoint bishops, had excommunicated him. When Henry went to seek the pope's forgiveness, he was made to wait outside the city gates for three days, during which time he fasted and prayed for the opportunity to see the pope.

This is the script the Obama administration seems to be bringing to U.S.-Israeli relations. It's time for Washington to change course. Otherwise, the West will have morally and politically failed the Jews once more, as they face another leader bent on their destruction.

*The writer is director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the Hudson Institute. (National Review May 19)*

**The Longest Battle** By Michael Freund

The emperor Vespasian must be rolling over in his grave. Some 19 centuries after the nefarious Roman ruler sent his legions to pillage Jerusalem under the command of his son Titus, the city once again serves as the united capital of a sovereign Jewish state.

It just goes to show what a difference two millennia can make. Back

## יום ירושלים שמח

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then, at the height of the struggle, the Romans were convinced of their own superiority. They looked down on the Jews with contempt, making light of their religious beliefs and military prowess, and confident that they would crush them once and for all.

In his book *The Jewish War*, the historian Josephus records the speech given by Titus to his men as he urged them to press forward in the battle for Jerusalem. "It is unbecoming you, who are Romans and my soldiers," Titus told them, "to be inferior to Jews, either in action of the hand, or in courage of the soul." He did not hesitate to assure them of "a certain and sudden victory," stressing the "immortality of those men who are slain in the midst of their martial bravery."

Interestingly, if you replace the word "Romans" with "jihadists," Titus starts to sound a lot like an ancient version of a Hamas or al-Qaida operative.

The Romans, of course, did eventually prevail, murdering some 1.1 million Jews during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and taking another 97,000 into captivity, many of whom were either sold into slavery or fed to the lions.

The Jewish commonwealth was snuffed out, the long and dark exile began and the Temple and its sacred daily rituals were abruptly taken from us. Nonetheless, despite the devastating blow which the Jewish people were dealt, here we are in 2009, preparing once again to celebrate Yom Yerushalayim.

This Friday marks 42 years on the Hebrew calendar since that wonderful day back in 1967 when Israel liberated the Old City and proudly raised the blue-and-white over the Temple Mount.

What the Romans sought to quash forever has miraculously come back to life, and we must be grateful to God for the mercy He has shown in bringing about our wondrous return.

And yet, even as commemorate this very special day, it is hard not to escape the gnawing feeling that with each passing year, the reunified city of Jerusalem is increasingly coming under siege yet again. Never, it seems, has the pressure been so great, with most of the world demanding that we "share" or "internationalize" the city, and criticizing even the most mundane of governmental actions regarding Jerusalem.

Earlier this month, for example, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs released a special report slamming Israel for demolishing Palestinian homes built without permits in the eastern part of the city. This was followed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon blasting the Jewish state publicly for its policies in this regard. And back in March, during her visit to the region, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also highlighted the issue of house demolitions, saying that they were "not in keeping with the obligations entered into under the road map."

Where else in the world does the enforcement of local building codes generate such condemnation? It is a sign of how obsessed the international community has become with twisting our collective arm to redivide the city in order to make way for a Palestinian state.

Indeed, they want nothing less than to see a Palestinian flag flying over Jerusalem. How will we ever be able to withstand such pressure? In this respect, it is worth recalling an episode that took place more than a century ago here in Jerusalem, one that contains within it the key to ensuring our continued control over the Holy City.

On Lag Ba'omer in 1869, the cornerstone was laid for Nahalat Shiva, the first Jewish neighborhood of Jerusalem built outside the walls of the Old City. Two of the main people behind its establishment were Rabbi Yosef Rivlin and Rabbi Yoel Moshe Salomon, and they were aided in their efforts by Rabbi Meir Auerbach and Rabbi Binyamin Beinisch Salant (who was the son of Jerusalem's chief rabbi at the time, Rabbi Shmuel Salant, a relative of mine).

By 1875, some 50 Jewish families were living in the area. As author Dovid Rossosof recounts in his wonderful book, *Where Heaven Touches Earth: Jewish Life in Jerusalem From Medieval Times to the Present*, the community quickly came under intense pressure from its Arab neighbors. One night, Rivlin was awakened to the sounds of a commotion. When he looked through the window, he saw a group of Arab men mulling about. Their leader exhorted them, "Remember! Slaughter them all and then take their lumber!" Dozens of Arabs armed with clubs, daggers and guns rapidly approached the entrance to the neighborhood, preparing to attack.

Rivlin reached for his gun and his shofar. He stood by the window and concentrated deeply for several seconds, before bringing the shofar to his lips and blowing the notes that are sounded on Rosh Hashana. He took a

breath and then fired a shot out the window, before proceeding to blow the shofar yet again.

Suddenly, the Arabs were struck with terror. "Run for your lives!" one shouted hysterically. "The Jews are killing us!" yelled another, and the group fled in panic and disarray. Later, the residents learned that the Arabs had planned to kill them all and take their possessions.

"This time," Rivlin told his neighbors, "The Lord was with us. Let us pray that the fear which God put into them will keep them away from us forever."

Just as it was over a century ago, Jerusalem is again under siege. And just as our adversaries then sought to remove the Jewish presence from parts of the city, they now seek to do so once more. But like the residents of Nahalat Shiva, we must not be deterred. They continued to build, expanding Jewish Jerusalem whether their foes liked it or not. And that too must be our guide.

Whether it is the E1 project connecting Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim, or the nascent Jewish neighborhoods near the Beit Orot yeshiva and the Tomb of Shimon Hatzaddik, it is essential that Israel continue to develop these areas. They will strengthen our capital and reinforce its Jewish majority, safeguarding the city and preventing it from ever being divided. Even in the face of American and Arab opposition, we must press forward with these important plans.

By doing so, we can ensure that Jerusalem will remain ours, never again to be taken away. The last laugh will belong neither to Vespasian or to Titus, nor even their modern-day surrogates, but rather to the descendants of Judah whom they sought to destroy - which is, after all, as it should be. (Jerusalem Post May 19)

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#### **Iran's Global Reach** By Caroline Glick

US President Barack Obama underestimates the threat Iran poses to global security. Were this not the case, he would not have sent CIA Director Leon Panetta to Israel ahead of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's visit to the White House.

Panetta was reportedly dispatched here to read the government the riot act. Israel, he reportedly told his interlocutors, must not attack Iran without first receiving permission from Washington. Moreover, Israel should keep its mouth shut about attacking Iran. As far as Washington is concerned, Iran's latest threats to destroy Israel were nothing more than payback for statements by Netanyahu and other senior Israeli officials regarding Israel's refusal to countenance a nuclear armed Iran.

Over the past several weeks, we have learned that the administration has made its peace with Iran's nuclear aspirations. Senior administration officials acknowledge as much in off-record briefings. It is true, they say, that Iran may exploit its future talks with the US to run down the clock before they test a nuclear weapon. But, they add, if that happens, the US will simply have to live with a nuclear-armed mullocracy.

The administration's nonchalance about the threat of a nuclear armed Iran explains why the White House is so up in arms about the prospect of Israel acting independently to prevent Iran from building a nuclear arsenal. As far as the administration is concerned, the only reason Iran would threaten US interests is if Israel provokes it. As far as the administration is concerned, if Israel could just leave Iran's nuclear installations alone, Iran would behave itself. But if Israel preemptively takes out Iran's nuclear capabilities, and Iran in turn attacks Israeli and US targets in the region, the Obama administration will hold Israel - not Iran - responsible for whatever losses the US incurs. That was apparently the message Panetta wanted to transmit to Jerusalem during his recent visit.

While largely supported by the US media, the administration's view of the Iranian threat is not without its domestic critics. Opponents of the administration's policy of engagement and appeasement have pointed out that a nuclear armed Iran will surely destabilize the Middle East and as a consequence, will harm US national security interests. And this is true enough. Whether by spurring a regional nuclear arms race; destabilizing with the intent of overthrowing Western-aligned regimes in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Morocco; enabling its terror proxies in Hizbullah and Hamas to operate under its nuclear umbrella; or attacking Israel with nuclear weapons, it is clear that the emergence of Iran as a nuclear power will cause tragedy, grief, chronic war and instability throughout the region. And - as the administration's critics make clear - such a state of affairs would be antithetical to US national interests.

While correct, these warnings miss the mark. Yes, it is true that a nuclear-armed Iran would destabilize the Middle East. But the Obama White House doesn't seem to care about that. What interests the White House apparently, is minimizing Teheran's animosity towards Washington. If it can convince the mullocracy that Washington is not a threat, then - the thinking goes - perhaps, the buck will stop at the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf.

This bit of wishful thinking is wrong both theoretically and practically. It fails to take into account Iran's stated intentions and the consequences of its likely behavior for the Middle East, and it ignores the fact that Iran's intentions and actions for the past two decades have not been limited to the Middle East.

For upwards of 20 years, and at a break-neck pace since 1999, Iran has built up a long strategic arm in America's backyard from which it is fully capable of attacking the US directly with the able and enthusiastic assistance of a network of proxies and allies.

Iran poses a direct threat to US national security through its alliances and military, intelligence and terrorist presence in South and Central America. Today Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Iran's Hizbullah terror cells, and other Iranian agencies operate in open collaboration with anti-US governments throughout the Western Hemisphere. The South American lynchpin of this new and growing Iranian-centered alliance system is Hugo Chavez's regime in Venezuela.

Through Chavez's good offices, Iran has developed a strategic presence in Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Bolivia and warm ties with Cuba. It is exerting growing influence in El Salvador, Brazil, Argentina, Peru and among FARC terrorists in Colombia. And it has highly developed and already proven human smuggling routes to the US in Mexico. It is through this alliance structure with anti-American regimes in Latin America and with sub-national Islamic and narco-terrorist networks in failing states that Iran already constitutes a grave threat to US national security. And it is through this rapidly expanding alliance system that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an acute danger to US national security.

So far, the Obama administration has dealt with the threat posed by Iran's strategic alliance with Venezuela and Chavez's string of allied regimes in the same fashion as it has contended with Iran itself: It has blamed the situation on the Bush administration. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton put it last week, the Bush administration's policy of "isolating leaders who have led the opposition to US policies in Central and Latin America has failed and marginalized Washington's interests."

Clinton's statement makes clear the basic and disturbing consistency of the administration's failure to understand that there are regimes that are inherently hostile to the US and will remain irreconcilably hostile to the US regardless of what it does or who sits in the White House. Just as the administration cannot get its arms around the fact that the Iranian regime can only justify its existence by maintaining its hostility towards America, so it cannot countenance the fact that Chavez is only able to justify his existence through his hatred for Uncle Sam. It has no way of explaining for instance the fact that Iran and Venezuela responded to Obama's attempts last month to extend an open hand to both countries by signing a memorandum upgrading their military alliance.

Were the administration able to understand the basic fact that some countries simply cannot abide by America, it would realize that the Iranian-Venezuelan military alliance itself is cause for a systematic reassessment of the rationale behind the US's Western Hemispheric strategy. As Italy's La Stampa reported last December, every week a Venezuelan airliner takes off from Teheran. It travels on to Syria's Damascus airport before continuing on to Caracas. These flights have no commercial value, and the passenger manifest is kept secret. But as La Stampa reported and as both US officials and Venezuelan dissidents have testified, these flights are used to transfer prohibited military equipment, including missile parts from Teheran to Syria. Iranian, Syrian, Lebanese-Hizbullah and Palestinian terror personnel then board the plane to its final destination in Caracas. Iranian Revolutionary Guards are sent to Venezuela to among other things train Venezuela's security services in methods for repressing internal dissent.

Venezuela's military alliance with Iran places Iranian military personnel and Hizbullah operatives at every level of Venezuela's military, intelligence and law enforcement establishment. For example, as the Washington-based Center for Security Policy's Western Hemispheric Security Project documented in a recent report, Hizbullah agents control Venezuela's passport agency.

In 2003, Chavez appointed Tarek el-Aissami, a known Hizbullah member to head the country's passport agency. Last year Aissami was promoted to serve as Minister of Interior and Justice. Then too, last June, the US Department of Treasury designated Ghazi Nasr al Din, a Venezuelan diplomat who served as the deputy ambassador in Damascus and Beirut as a Hizbullah agent.

Hizbullah has a large and active presence in Venezuela. It operates openly throughout the country through both Lebanese cells and through native Venezuelan operatives who have converted to Islam. In 2006, a Hizbullah cell comprised of local converts staged an attempted bombing against the US embassy in Caracas.

Hizbullah has developed a formidable economic presence in Latin America. Although it has run a web of businesses in the region for decades, since 2005 the economic importance of these businesses has been eclipsed by the terror group's involvement in worldwide cocaine distribution facilitated through its close ties with Chavez and FARC. According to the US military's Southern Command, Hizbullah in Latin America earns between \$300-500 million per year. This dwarfs the \$200 million a year it receives from Iran.

Through Mexico, Hizbullah members and other terror operatives are able to enter the US relatively easily. In 2002 for instance the US arrested a Hizbullah operative in Mexico who admitted that he had facilitated the infiltration of several hundred Hizbullah operatives into the US.

Then there is Nicaragua under the leadership of Chavez's buddy Sandinista chief Daniel Ortega. Since he assumed Nicaragua's presidency in 2007, Ortega has facilitated a massive expansion of Iran's presence in Central America. With more than a hundred accredited diplomats, Iran's embassy in Managua - a massive compound surrounded by four-meter-high concrete walls lined with razor wire - is one of the largest diplomatic compounds in the world.

Even more disturbing than Iran's enormous diplomatic presence in Nicaragua are its massive maritime activities and plans. In 2007 Iran and Venezuela announced that they were investing \$350 million to build a deep water port at Nicaragua's Monkey Point along the Caribbean Sea. Iran also announced its plans to upgrade Nicaragua's Pacific Port of Corinto. Finally, Teheran announced it would build a dry canal connecting the two ports. Such a building scheme would enable Iran to evade the Panama Canal; to build its own military infrastructure within the ports themselves; and to freely camouflage missile ships as civilian maritime traffic and use them to launch short and medium-range missiles against the US. Moreover, with its massive army of Hizbullah operatives on standby, Iran could launch attacks through its proxies - as it did in its 1992 and 1994 attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets in Buenos Aires - and so deny it had anything to do with the attacks.

None of this should suggest that anyone expects the US to attack Iran's nuclear installations. The administration's policies clearly rule out any such contingency. As for Israel, regardless of what the US does, it should be clear that Jerusalem will not stand by idly and allow existential threats to emerge and grow.

What people - and particularly Americans - could have expected is that the administration would take seriously the threat that Iran poses to the US in the Western Hemisphere. Depressingly however, the administration's apparent decision to abdicate America's position and responsibilities as the sole global superpower has led it to also abdicate its position and responsibilities as the most powerful nation in the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, what the administration's refusal to acknowledge the threat that a nuclear-armed Iran - rich with proxies and allies at America's doorstep - poses to America demonstrates is that in its haste to blame its predecessor for the fact that the US has real enemies, the administration is abdicating its responsibility to defend America itself. (Jerusalem Post May 18)

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### **Don't Overestimate The West's Naiveté - Or Its Resolve** By Barry Rubin

April, wrote T.S. Elliott, is the cruelest month of all. But for hopes of peace, freedom and moderation in the Middle East, June will play that role this year.

In Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, backed by the supreme spiritual guide, is about to be reelected. In Lebanon, a regime backed by Iran and Syria, is about to be installed.

It shouldn't be that way. Remember the famous sign in the Clinton for President Headquarters in 1992, which said, "It's the economy, stupid," as the main issue? Well, in the Middle East the equivalent sign would say, "It's the Islamist revolutions, stupid." And yet instead we see strategies based on a desire to believe or do anything to avoid confronting this great challenge, this uninvited battle that is sure to take up the rest of our lifetimes and very possibly much of this century's first half.

The heads are very deep in the sand. For to fit into the mainstream of Western analysis and strategy about the Middle East, you must:

Pretend that a two-state solution is possible with a mostly radical Palestinian Authority and a far more extreme Hamas running Gaza, neither having done any preparation for real compromise and a lasting peace.

Pretend that this solution - which isn't going to happen - will solve all other problems, as if personal and state ambition, ethnic conflict, ideological battles and all sorts of disputes didn't exist in the region which have nothing to do with this. Not to mention that fact that any compromise peace would actually enrage large elements of opinion and galvanize the Islamists into even more violence.

Pretend that Iran's regime will be talked out of having nuclear weapons by either the charm of Western leaders or relatively limited sanctions when Teheran already knows everything is a big bluff.

Pretend that Islamists can be moderated when they think they're winning, believe themselves to be following the will of the deity and see daily proof that their rivals are eager to make concessions.

Pretend that Syria can be wooed into changing course when it is so dependent on its alliance with the Iranian regime, thinks that it's on the winning side and is tightening its control over Lebanon.

Pretend that Hizbullah and Hamas will settle down into moderation disciplined by the task of governing, the same theory discredited by the behavior of the PLO, Fatah and the Palestinian Authority over the last 16 years.

Ironically, much of the Western Left seems to think that empowering the most reactionary forces in the world will somehow contribute to its vision of a better world. Much of the Right appears to believe that this strategy will be pushed far enough to lead to a grand sellout of Israel.

But the West isn't so craven, while its enemies aren't so strategically flexible or tactically clever. After all, both theories expect that the radicals will meet the West partway. It's reminiscent of the expectations for Yasser Arafat and the PLO. One side thinks they'll make a deal and keep it; the other that they'll make a deal and break it. In fact, they see no need to make a deal at all. They'll do what they want and give not an inch.

It would be a mistake to overestimate the naiveté of Western governments, but it might be an equal mistake to overestimate their resolve. Consider the words of the two Obama administration appointees to the highest State Department posts focusing completely on Middle East policy in their confirmation hearings.

Jeffrey Feltman, to be assistant secretary of Near East affairs, explained: "When you traveled around the [Middle East] five, six, seven years ago, almost everywhere you went, the first thing that came up was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When you travel around today, what you are going to hear about is Iran." But then he added: "We want to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to remove one of the tools that Iran uses to distract the region from what Iran is doing,"

From this, it sounds like, by his own testimony, his policy is seven years out of date. Even he acknowledged the paradox that Iran is a "spoiler" on making progress. So if Iran, along with Syria, the Gaza Strip regime (Hamas), the soon-to-be Lebanon regime (Hizbullah) and the main opposition groups seeking power in every Arab country (Islamists) are all spoilers, how are you going to "address" this issue effectively? Especially if your friends - the Saudis, Egyptians and others - won't do much to help?

Meanwhile, the nominee for assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, Robert O. Blake, congratulated the Pakistani government for fighting the Taliban, even while that regime is quite happy to live with them and al-Qaida as long as they stick to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area. "We do think that important progress is being made." Yes, it is: by the enemies of freedom, democracy and Western interests.

Incidentally, Elliot's poem which opens with the line about April is entitled "The Wasteland," which is what the Middle East is going to become unless Western policies really wake up and smell the coffins.

(Jerusalem Post May 17)

## **This Year in Jerusalem** By Stewart Weiss

They call the Jews the "People of the Book." Now, the assumption is that the book referred to is the Holy Bible, and that we are both the protagonists as well as the prize students of said work. But I suggest to you that there are two other books - perhaps less celebrated, but no less important - that Jewishly define who and what we are. They are the checkbook and the date book.

A quick glance at one's checkbook will reveal a pretty fair idea about where our priorities lie: Do we give ample amounts of charity, helping our fellow Jews and improving the world? Do we spend a goodly amount of our paycheck on our children, particularly on their curricular and extracurricular education? Are all the entries devoted to our own pastimes and pursuits, or there is any mention of community organizations to which we belong and support?

And then there is the date book. On a micro level, how we spend our time each and every day is a powerful statement as to the kind of person we are. A date book that is a sea of blue ink, with numerous bits of information jammed into the daily squares, testifies that we are busily committed to utilizing each precious hour of our lives and filling it with purpose, meaning and movement. An uncluttered, all-too-neat daily planner may hint to a life that is mired in routine, one that is unchallenging and even boring.

On a macro level, the date book highlights the rhythm of our lives.

When do we work, and when do we play? When do we run, and when do we relax? To what calendar events do we look forward, so as to add spice and spirit to the seasons? For the world at large, weekends, birthdays and anniversaries are the primary opportunities to escape the hum-drum progression of time, and inject much needed excitement into our lives. For people of faith, especially Jews, it is the holidays of the year which focus and direct us.

Beyond each individual festival or holy day, the rabbis saw a "bigger picture" which grouped the holidays into thematic clusters. For example, the Hebrew months of Elul, Tishrei and Heshvan are all about repentance, respect and renewal. During this quarter of the year, we ask God and our fellow man for forgiveness by intensifying prayer both before and during the 10 Days of Repentance; we celebrate the land and God's guardianship of humanity by moving out of our homes into little succot; and we greet the first drops of rain with sincere gratitude for the opportunity of new growth in both the soil and the soul.

The spring quarter, comprising the months of Adar, Nisan and Iyar, revolve around man's responsibility to take an active, involved role in the workings of history, and the amazing miracles which such involvement can generate. Adar brings us Purim and the stirring saga of how devoted Jewish leadership - with a helping hand from above - can save a nation from destruction. Pessah demonstrates the willingness of God to alter nature and change history for us - if we swear divine allegiance and have the courage to follow Him into uncharted desert territory. And Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim follow suit by vividly reminding us that God is not consigned to age-old legends, but is very much a part of the here and now.

The dramatic resurrection of the Jewish state in 1948, and the miraculous victory over our enemies in 1967 - resulting in the unification of Jerusalem and Jewish control over our holiest sites - are enduring reminders that God is alive, and not abstract.

And herein lays the great challenge which these newest holidays bring to Israel and the entire Jewish people. Will we recognize the hand of God at work in these stunning events? Will we celebrate them no less joyously than the exodus or the escape from Haman's clutches? Or will we adamantly refuse to acknowledge that Jewish history is not static, not fossilized, but dynamic and ever-advancing. To recite Hallel's praises to the Almighty on Jerusalem Day is to affirm belief in a benevolent God who "neither slumbers nor sleeps"; to ignore God's blessing, or worse - to outright deny that God is the prime mover in history, particularly as it affects the Jewish people - is not just cynical, it is downright heretical.

Thus Yom Yerushalayim presents a daunting, dual challenge: To replace the blase apathy of the secular public - half of whom have never spent any significant time in our capital city - and the conscious, even strident noninvolvement of some elements of the religious community, with a sublime appreciation that we - God and His nation Israel - have at long last reclaimed the eternal city that is the heart of civilization and the jewel of the universe. (Jerusalem Post May 20)