



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*

בס"ד
fear that Israel would launch a counter-attack in the event of an Iranian nuclear attack on Israel or a preemptive attack against Iranian nuclear installations.

IN HIS statement Saturday in support of Olmert's announced intention to give Assad the Golan Heights, Halutz said, "For real peace one must be willing to pay a real price." While this is no doubt a true statement, it is completely irrelevant. Everyone knows

Events...

Sunday, June 15, 8:00 PM

*Concert featuring the North American Debut of Israeli Roots/Soul/ Reggae Superstar **Mosh Ben Ari**, at The Mod Club, 722 College St., to benefit Sderot. Tickets available at Israel's.*

Tuesday, June 17, 8:00 PM

Aish Hatorah presents Aaron Klein of WorldNetDaily.com speaking on "Shmoozing with Terrorists" at Shaarei Shomayim.

Commentary...

Utopian Peace Junkies By Caroline Glick

Arguments against an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights are so self-evident that they simply fly off your tongue. But that doesn't mean that it is unnecessary to make them. This is especially the case when supposedly serious people like former IDF chief of general staff Lt. Gen. (ret.) Dan Halutz - co-architect of the strategic disaster which was the Second Lebanon War - advocate withdrawal in exchange for "peace."

So here goes.

Since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Golan Heights has been Israel's quietest, most stable border. This is largely the case because the Syrians know that from the Golan Heights, the road to Damascus is wide open.

An Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights would destabilize the border by removing Israel's offensive deterrent capacity against Syria. Since nature abhors a vacuum, Israel's deterrent capacity would be transferred to the hands of Syrian dictator and Iranian proxy Bashar Assad and his henchmen. Additionally, in the wake of an Israeli surrender of the Golan Heights on the heels of Iran's consolidation of its hold over Lebanon, Assad's regime will be triumphant. His decision to cast his country's lot with Iran will be perceived an act of brilliant statecraft.

While there is no certainty about how long it would take before Syria took advantage of the new situation to initiate aggression against Israel, it is clear that an Israeli withdrawal would raise tensions dramatically. And those tensions would find the remainder of Israeli territory more vulnerable to an Iranian-Syrian attack than ever before.

Today Syria already has the capacity to attack all of Israel with its Scud and Nodong ballistic missiles. But while these missiles can terrorize and kill Israeli civilians, their guidance systems are generally assessed as too primitive to enable them to be successfully deployed against tactical and strategic targets. Possession of the Golan Heights would enable Syria to use more conventional armaments to precisely target IDF positions, arms depots and attack formations throughout Northern Israel. So one of the consequences of Israel's handover of the Golan Heights would be a steep rise in the price in blood that a post-Golan Heights-withdrawal-Israel would be forced to pay to win any future military contest with Iranian proxies Hizbullah or Syria. Indeed it would dwarf the heavy price that Israel paid for victory in 1967 and 1973.

And the cost of an Israeli relinquishment of the Golan would not be paid by Israel alone. With Syria in control of the Golan, Damascus and its allies in the Iranian axis would be even more willing to assert themselves in battlegrounds like Iraq. Their renewed will to fight would limit still further the possibility that the US could remove its forces from Iraq without risking the prospect of Iraq being forced into the Iranian axis.

Moreover, with Israel's strategic options massively curtailed as a result of its surrender of the Golan Heights, the Iranians would have far less cause to

that Israel won't get a "real peace" from Assad. Indeed it won't even get a pretend peace from Assad.

To understand why Israel can expect to receive absolutely nothing from Syria in exchange for the Golan Heights, one needs to look no further than Syria's last big peace treaty with a neighbor. In 1989, Syria agreed to withdraw all its troops from Lebanon under the Taif Accord that ended Lebanon's civil war. Needless to say, Syrian troops continued their illegal occupation Lebanon for the next 15 years and still today continue to block Lebanese independence by arming Hizbullah.

Or consider Israel's "successful" treaty with Egypt, under which Egypt received the entire Sinai Peninsula in exchange for signing a peace treaty with Israel. Due to Egypt's willingness to sign the deal, Hosni Mubarak's dictatorship has been hailed as a moderate and friendly regime by the US and Israel alike. And yet, short of going to war against Israel, since it signed its peace treaty, Egypt has done just about everything in its power to endanger Israel's security.

At the cabinet meeting Sunday, Shin Bet Director Yuval Diskin warned the Olmert-Livni-Barak-Yishai government that Hamas has missiles with ranges long enough to hit Ashdod and Kiryat Gat. Diskin added that with the border between Gaza and Egypt breached, time is working in Hamas's favor. With every passing day of Israeli inaction, Hamas brings in more and more advanced weapons.

Aside from Iran, which is the major source of Hamas's weapons, Egypt has done more than any other country to enable Hamas's missile war against southern Israel and its takeover of Gaza in general. As MK Yuval Steinitz has noted repeatedly over the past several years, those missiles didn't just magically appear at the Egyptian-Gaza border. Those Iranian weapons are transported in ships through Egyptian waters that dock at Egyptian ports. The weapons are then offloaded onto trucks and travel overland across the country before reaching Gaza.

Egyptian security forces could intercept these weapons at any point along the way. But they pass through unmolested because Egypt wants Hamas to have those weapons to attack Israel and to keep the border destabilized.

And if this is what Israel gets from our supposedly moderate Egyptian friends, what can Israel expect to receive from our radical Syrian enemies? Here it bears noting that Syria is still preventing the International Atomic Energy Agency from sending inspectors to check out the site of the North Korean-built nuclear reactor in Syria that Israel destroyed last September 6. And again, if this is how Syria treats the UN, how will it treat Israel after Israel relinquishes its ability to threaten the Syrian capital?

Given all of these self-evident drawbacks of Olmert's proposal to surrender the Golan Heights to Syria, it is obvious that the plan is ridiculous. Similarly, in light of the massive danger such a withdrawal would entail, withdrawal advocates like Halutz are exposed as complete fools.

But the fact that this is true does not diminish the chance that Israel may still give up the Golan Heights if those who advocate this policy remain in power and continue to enjoy public respectability. Reality has counted for little in Israel's political and strategic discourse in recent years.

The lunacy of transferring control over south Lebanon to Hizbullah in 2000 and of giving Gaza to Fatah and Hamas in 2005 was just as obvious as the lunacy of relinquishing the Golan Heights to Syria in 2008. Moreover, the lunacy of transferring control over Gaza and Judea and Samaria to the PLO was obvious to anyone with eyes to see in the 1990s. And yet, even though all the opponents of these strategic fiascos made these arguments until they were blue in the face, Israel still withdrew.

All along and still today, standing against these voices of sane reality were

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voices preaching utopian peace. Men and women like Yossi Beilin, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, Shulamit Aloni, Tzipi Livni, Yuli Tamir, Sheli Yachimovich, Amnon Shahak, Uri Saguy, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert and their chorus of "peace" operatives in the media castigated all proponents of reality-based policymaking as nothing more than fear-mongering fanatics and enemies of peace almost indistinguishable from the likes of Hizbullah, Hamas and all the rest.

And of course the voices of reason were correct every time and never thanked for their wisdom. Indeed, they continue to this day to be condemned as fear-mongering fanatics.

And in spite of the fact that the utopian peace junkies have been wrong every single time, they are still the first to be put on television and the radio to advocate Israel's capitulation on every conceivable front. Even as the cemeteries fill up with the charred corpses of Israelis killed because of their utopian madness, they are still feted as experts and wise men and elder statesmen.

The one hopeful sign of change is found in the Israeli public's reaction to the current malformed public debate about Olmert's new plan to give Assad the Golan Heights. In the past every time a government launched negotiations or simply called for unilateral surrender of land opinion polls showed an immediate jump of some 20 percent in public support for the initiative. Today's polls suggest that public support for a withdrawal from the Golan Heights has decreased since Olmert announced he is negotiating their surrender.

If during past negotiations and planned withdrawals, politicians enjoyed the support of 45 percent of Israelis for their moves, today Olmert has the support of only 22 percent of Israelis for his plan to give up the Golan Heights.

The fact that Israelis are reacting negatively to people like Olmert and Halutz and their advocated withdrawals for "peace," may simply be a consequence of the public's contempt for these men specifically. That is, it is possible that the public would be more supportive of capitulation to Syria if more popular leaders like former prime minister Ariel Sharon were advocating it.

But it is also possible that the public has finally had enough of these utopian gasbags and their capitulation agenda. One can only hope that this is the case. Because while Israel will not be destroyed if its leaders are stupid enough to relinquish the Golan Heights, without the Golan Heights, Israel's chances of survival in the long term will be vastly diminished.

(Jerusalem Post May 26)

The Syrian Talks Aren't Serious By Barry Rubin

Why is Israel negotiating with Syria, and what happened in Lebanon? One of these events may be the Middle East's most important development for 2008. Hint: it isn't the first of them.

Let's consider why the two sides are "negotiating," including the fact that they aren't negotiating.

There isn't going to be a deal. Both sides know it, yet have good reason to be seen talking, indirectly that is.

Start with six factors that account for Israeli government policy:

1. Keep Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in power. It's not the only issue, but it's certainly there. Olmert wants to claim he's involved in such important negotiations that it's a sin to interfere. What's more important, he asks, envelopes filled with cash, or peace?

Olmert has been using this strategy with Palestinian talks for a while, and is now jumping on a different horse. This doesn't mean he's going to give away national security assets to save himself. The beauty of this strategy is that he doesn't have to. Just making headlines achieves this goal.

2. Show everyone Israel wants peace. The country is indeed ready to take chances and make compromises - though only if sufficiently rewarded. By proving this, the government seeks to muster support from Western governments, media and public opinion, as well as secure its base within Israel.

3. Give Syria reason to show restraint. If Syria is gabbing away in contacts that are all-win, no-lose for its dictatorship, it won't want to wreck them by too much terror or another Hizbullah war on Israel. Keeping things quiet in the north lets Israel focus on the south, the Gaza Strip.

4. Keep Turkey happy. Turkey is an important friend of Israel and has tied its prestige to this initiative. This factor is not of real importance, but it should be on the list.

5. Show the Palestinians that Israel has an alternate partner as a way of pressuring them. Israel gains a freer hand for dealing with them (see Point 3, above) by at least momentarily widening the gap between Palestinian and Syrian interests. Many of those backing the Syrian track don't believe progress with the Palestinians is possible.

If Point 1 is most important for Olmert's political calculations, Point 5 is

central for coalition partner Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

6. Media coverage and political statements ignore or misinterpret the fact that Israel isn't negotiating with Syria. It's merely holding more systematic, indirect contacts to establish whether Israeli preconditions for direct negotiations can be met. Even though the answer is no, this means Israel can do this at little cost and no substantive concessions.

What Israel is doing is totally different from the proposals of Senator Barack Obama, which would bring disaster should he become US president. If Syria is ready to move away from Iran, stop backing terrorist groups, be ready to make full peace with Israel and meet other conditions (limiting forces in the Golan Heights, early warning stations, etc.), the talks can advance. When this doesn't happen, the talks will either collapse or enter a long, obviously dead, slow-motion process.

This game is not a good thing since it weakens the struggle against the Iran-led bloc, which is the region's most important issue. Still, it is unlikely to inflict material damage to Israel's strategic position.

WHAT, THEN, are Syria's motives? It, too, has good reasons to play the game:

Syria's main problem is international isolation. Its alliance with Iran, in addition to its sponsoring terror against Lebanon, Iraq and Israel, has brought Syria serious diplomatic and economic costs. Negotiating with Israel bails it out of jail. The precedent is 1991-2000. Without concession or policy shift, the dictatorship survived a decade when it was vulnerable (due to the USSR's collapse and America's Kuwait victory). Understandably, it wants to repeat this triumph.

The Damascus regime argues that if the West and Israel want it to talk peace, they'd better treat Syria right. Forget about investigating Syrian-planned murders in Lebanon; cancel the tribunal trying the regime's highest level for murder.

Ditto forget about punishing Syria for building a secret nuclear weapon installation with the help of North Korea. Ignore Syria's backing for insurgents in Iraq, who kill Iraqis and American soldiers.

Demand more concessions, which might be obtained without any on Syria's part.

Stall for time in the belief that Obama will become president and follow a pro-Syria policy. This is what they're saying in Damascus.

Focus on what Syria really wants: consolidating control over Lebanon without interference from abroad. The world, especially the UN and State Department, did nothing to stop a Hizbullah-Iran-Syria victory in Lebanon; then compounded the betrayal by pretending it was a step toward stability. This probably would have happened without the Israel-Syria drama, but that couldn't hurt, reasoned Syria's rulers.

Of course, the idea that Syria wants real peace, will recognize Israel, move away from Iran, abandon Hamas or Hizbullah, and cease terrorist meddling in Iraq is the purest nonsense. All these steps are against the regime's vital interests. Yet, as demonstrated above, it can play the talks game without doing any of these things.

Meanwhile, Lebanon has fallen to Hizbullah, another state added to Iran's bloc. This catastrophe is intensified by ignoring it. One day, the tragedy might be seen as equivalent to the 1938 sacrifice of Czechoslovakia at Munich to appease Germany. Bashar is no Hitler (perhaps a closer parallel would be to Germany's junior partner, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini), but the United States and Europe, especially France, have acted toward Lebanon as British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain did in Munich.

And this is even without Iran having nuclear weapons, or Obama being in the White House. Unless the West wakes up, what could come next may be far worse. (Jerusalem Post May 25)

Sovereignty Trumps Self-Defense By Shlomo Slonim

News item: "Interpol said its forensic experts had found no signs that Colombia had altered files from computer equipment recovered in a raid on the rebels." - New York Times, May 16

The Andes Mountains are thousands of miles from Israel, and what occurs in Latin America might be thought to have little relevance to events in this part of the world. However, a recent dispute between several states in that remote area has very direct and important implications for Israeli foreign policy and should be carefully noted.

For some 44 years now, Colombia has been subjected to vicious attacks by a guerrilla group known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). This group specializes in drug-trafficking, kidnappings and extortions, besides engaging in terrorist military activity. By way of illustration, it has held captive for six years a woman who was a candidate for the presidency of Colombia, and even now, despite her reportedly failing health, refuses to release her.

This terrorist group has hideout camps in the jungles of Ecuador, from

which it has launched murderous attacks into Colombia. Between 2004 and 2008 no less than 40 terrorist attacks were launched against Colombia from Ecuador.

UNDER international law, Ecuador, and other neighboring countries where the camps are located, are obliged to eliminate these camps and put an end to the terrorist activity. Colombia charges that Ecuador, for one, has failed to fulfill its obligation under international law.

At the beginning of March, Colombia launched an air strike against a rebel camp situated close to its border, just a mile inside Ecuador. The information about the camp was supplied by an informer, and the air strike was unusually successful, killing Raul Reyes, the second-in-command of the terrorist group, in addition to some 20 guerrillas.

Under the circumstances, Ecuador might have been expected to be grateful for the elimination from its territory of a guerrilla camp that was seriously harming relations between the two states. Instead, President Rafael Correa of Ecuador charged Colombia with violating its sovereignty, demanded an apology from the Colombian president, Alvaro Uribe, and a promise that Colombia would never again launch any such cross-border strikes.

THE REGION heated up as Ecuador deployed some 3,000 troops, and President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela deployed no less than 9,000 troops, together with tanks and aircraft. For his part, Colombian President Uribe reported that laptops captured in the Colombian action implicated both the Ecuadorian and Venezuelan presidents as actively aiding the rebel movements, and he threatened to take Chavez to the International Criminal Court and charge him with aiding and financing genocidal schemes.

Subsequently, at a meeting at Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, Uribe apologized to Ecuador and promised that no such action would be undertaken in the future. This was still not enough for the Ecuadorian president, who demanded that the Organization of American States (OAS) condemn Colombia for its violation of Ecuadorian sovereignty.

At an urgently convened meeting in Washington, all member states of the OAS, with the sole exception of the United States and Colombia, endorsed a condemnatory resolution.

The law, as indicated, was on the side of Uribe: Columbia was a victim of international terror, and had acted in self-defense. But none of this helped him in his moment of confrontation. He had violated a neighbor's sovereignty, and was made to eat crow.

THE CREATION of a Palestinian state is, ostensibly, the solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute, which has lasted 60 years. In fact, awarding sovereignty to such a state may be the beginning of a new stage of Arab terror against Israel, without Israel being able to rout terror at will, as it can currently do.

Even if an agreement were to specify that Israel reserved the right to traverse borders and act to protect itself, the provision in practice would be meaningless in the face of a charge that the sovereignty of the Palestinian state was being violated.

The Oslo Agreement specified that movement in the peace process would depend on the cessation of Arab terror. Arab terror never ceased, yet pressures mounted to continue with the peace process. The process had its own inexorable momentum.

The Colombian experience teaches us that for many states, sovereignty is more sacrosanct, and ranks as a greater right, than even self-defense. It is an instructive lesson. (Jerusalem Post May 28)

The writer is the James G. McDonald Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

It's Not the Investigation, Stupid By Evelyn Gordon

After news of the talks with Syria broke last week, several commentators noted the troubling pattern of prime ministers facing legal or political difficulties launching major diplomatic moves: the Washington and Taba negotiations, launched by Ehud Barak after his government collapsed; the disengagement, launched by Ariel Sharon as a police investigation against him gathered steam; and now the Syria talks, launched when Ehud Olmert was already under police investigation and announced soon after a new and potentially more damaging investigation began. This has generated accusations that such initiatives are cynical attempts to extricate the leader from his legal/political difficulties, even at the expense of Israel's true interests: Major diplomatic moves divert media (and public) attention, make coalition allies reluctant to bolt lest they disrupt "progress toward peace," and even make the legal authorities extra cautious, for the same reason.

Yet such accusations miss the point. The problem is not that Barak, Sharon and Olmert all acted after becoming embroiled in difficulties; it is that in each case, their actions directly contradicted their own previously stated views of Israel's interests, with no explanation of their about-face. And that, rather than their legal/political difficulties per se, is what truly enables suspicions that they are sacrificing Israel's well-being to their political survival.

Imagine, for instance, that a diehard dove like Yossi Beilin were a) prime minister and b) under police investigation. Would anyone seriously argue that any diplomatic initiative he launched was aimed at saving his political skin? Of course not - because such initiatives clearly accord with his longstanding view of Israel's fundamental interests. The Barak, Sharon and Olmert initiatives, however, were all repudiations of their previous positions.

Barak, for instance, quit the Camp David summit in July 2000 - despite having staked his career on its success - after concluding that Yasser Arafat's refusal to budge on key issues made further Israeli concessions foolhardy. Yet at Washington and Taba five months later (December 2000-February 2001), he suddenly offered new concessions, on both borders and Jerusalem, that he had previously deemed unacceptable, even though Arafat still refused to concede the "right of return" or any Jewish connection to the Temple Mount - and even though the intifada, which erupted in September 2000, should have made his Camp David demand for defensible borders more pressing rather than less. And he never explained this reversal.

In July, however, Barak's political career still seemed salvageable, as Bill Clinton publicly blamed Arafat for the summit's failure. By December, the intifada had decimated his popularity, and his Knesset support. New elections were imminent, and Barak would be trounced - unless he could regain support from leftists, Arabs and even some peace-hungry centrists by producing an agreement, any agreement, with the Palestinians.

Thus Barak abandoned his own red lines, without explanation, when such concessions promised political salvation. And that, rather than his political troubles per se, is what enabled suspicions that he was sacrificing Israel's interests to his political survival.

SIMILARLY, SHARON won election in January 2003 by running against his opponent's proposal to withdraw unilaterally from Gaza. Sharon claimed unilateral withdrawal would undermine Israel's security: It would bolster support for terrorism, and establish a terrorist entity on Israel's border whose attacks would be unpreventable once the army left.

By autumn 2003, however, Sharon was in trouble: A police investigation was accelerating, the media deemed him corrupt and demanded his ouster, and his public support plummeted. To survive, he needed a distraction, and in December, he produced it: a plan to unilaterally withdraw from Gaza.

The trick worked. Allegations of corruption virtually disappeared from the media, replaced by praise for his statesmanship. From an international pariah, he became the world's darling. The police investigation, which had been spurred by media pressure, stalled once this pressure disappeared. And his popularity soared.

Yet Sharon never explained his about-face, never even tried to refute his own previous arguments for why unilateral withdrawal was dangerous. He simply abandoned his own red lines without explanation, at a time when this eased his legal/political problems. And that, rather than these problems per se, is what enabled suspicions that he was sacrificing Israel's interests to his political survival.

Then there is Olmert, who, in September 2006, declared that while he is premier, "the Golan will remain forever part of Israel." The Golan, he argued, is strategically vital, and Syrian President Bashar Assad is untrustworthy; hence talks aimed at giving Assad the Golan would be foolhardy.

The Golan has not suddenly changed, nor has Assad's behavior. He still hosts Palestinian terrorists in Damascus and funnels terrorists into Iraq; his alliance with Iran has only deepened; and his meddling in Lebanon has intensified: witness Hezbollah's recent military putsch, which secured it veto power over Beirut's government.

Indeed, even as the secret talks progressed, Assad accelerated arms shipments to Hizbullah, thereby tripling its pre-Lebanon War rocket supply. Just days before the talks went public, the Syrian-sponsored PFLP-GC organization claimed responsibility for a rocket strike on an Ashkelon mall. And three days after the talks were announced, Syrian officials went to Iran to discuss a military defense pact - though ending the Syrian-Iranian alliance is a key Israeli demand in the talks. None of this makes Assad a better peace partner than he was two years ago; quite the contrary. Yet Olmert has never explained why his views on Assad and the Golan changed.

Since 2006, however, Olmert's legal troubles have ballooned, as have the media's demands for his head. He needed a distraction to stop the media's hounding, and perhaps also to make the legal authorities fear the diplomatic consequences of indicting him. The Syria talks provide one.

Thus as with Barak and Sharon, the problem is not his legal/political troubles per se; it is that he abandoned his own red lines, without explanation, at a time when doing so could alleviate these troubles. And that is what enables suspicions that he is sacrificing Israel's interests to his political survival.

Such behavior should be unacceptable. But as long as the tactic keeps working, prime ministers will have every reason to continue this troubling pattern. (Jerusalem Post May 28)

Grappling with God and the Holocaust By Joel Mowbray

The long knives are out for Rev. John Hagee, the fiercely pro-Israel evangelical leader who, until recently, was supporting US presidential candidate John McCain. He is being branded not just an anti-Semite, but one tagged by the media with the worst association possible: Hitler.

Granted, Hagee himself raised the specter of Hitler in a sermon reportedly from a decade ago that was recently dredged up by a left-wing blogger, in which he said that God sent Hitler and "allowed" the Holocaust to happen "because God said my top priority for the Jewish people is to get them to come back to the land of Israel."

Far from the ugly media-driven perception that Hagee was justifying - or even somehow praising - the Holocaust as Heaven-sent, he was actually trying to answer the question with which countless rabbis and survivors have grappled ever since: How could there be both an all-powerful God and the unimaginable horrors of the Holocaust?

While anyone could rightly be outraged at his theology or even his apparent hubris in purporting to know God's motives, it cannot be said that he is anti-Semitic. The charge, in fact, is completely counter to what is most beautiful about Rev. Hagee's ministry, that it has been so dedicated to combatting Christian anti-Semitism.

MEDIA ELITES have pounced on this story to help McCain's likely general election opponent, Barack Obama, but Jews in America and Israel alike have been startled by the "Hitler" headlines. If the media coverage were even remotely accurate, the concern would be warranted. But put into context, Hagee's "Hitler" sermon is, at worst, questionable theology - which also happens to have some Jewish adherents.

In a probing and at times challenging one-on-one interview this March at a public gathering in Los Angeles, Hagee talked about how, as a young man, he was profoundly impacted by reading the book *The Anguish of the Jews*, by a Roman Catholic priest named Father Edward H. Flannery. The book chronicles over 2000 years of anti-Semitism, going back to before the time of Jesus. It was, Hagee explained, a dark side of history to which he had not been exposed in all his theological studies.

Hagee was so haunted by the sins committed against Jews in the name of Christianity, he said, that he felt it was his calling to purge anti-Semitism from Christendom. Untold numbers of Christians have felt called by God to do many wonderful things, but it would seem too few have had the same yearning as Hagee. Which is precisely why Hagee has for so long worked to rally other Christians not just to support Israel, but the Jewish people.

A prominent theme in Hagee's ministry, from his sermons to his books, is that the Holocaust was not an historical aberration, but rather merely the largest and most lethal manifestation of hatred against Jews. So the reverend devotes what, compared to other Christian ministers, would be seen as inordinate effort to reminding his followers of the Holocaust, as well as the many other disgraceful actions perpetrated against Jews.

WHICH BRINGS us back to the "Hitler" sermon. Hagee, like millions of other evangelical Christians, believes in an active, all-powerful God. When you preach often about the Holocaust, you had better give your followers an explanation of the Holocaust that jells with a theology revolving around an all-powerful Almighty - not a natural marriage.

The answer Hagee offered his followers in the now-controversial sermon was that it was fulfillment of biblical prophecy, specifically the prophet Jeremiah's about hunters and fishers. This is hardly a commonplace interpretation, but that's all it was. Hagee, like countless rabbis and survivors over the years, was simply trying to offer a reason for how the Holocaust could happen in a world with an omnipotent God. His answer is at odds with the most widespread Orthodox Jewish interpretation, that God's actions are to be accepted, though not necessarily explained.

One rabbi - specifically the one who knows him best, longtime friend Aryeh Scheinberg - believes that Hagee's theology isn't loony at all. "Pastor [Hagee] interpreted a biblical verse in a way not very different from several legitimate Jewish authorities," Rabbi Scheinberg said Friday at a joint press conference with Hagee in San Antonio on Friday. "Viewing Hitler as acting completely outside of God's plan is to suggest that God was powerless to stop the Holocaust, a position quite unacceptable to any religious Jew or Christian."

Scheinberg, who leads a modern Orthodox congregation in Hagee's hometown and has counted the minister as a friend for almost 30 years, defended Hagee by pointing to words written during the Holocaust. "No less an authority than the author of the *Eim Habanim Smecha*, Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal of blessed memory, wrote these words while covering in a Budapest cellar in the very midst of Hitler's Holocaust: 'Furthermore, the sole purpose of all the afflictions that smite us in our exile is to arouse us to return to our Holy Land.'"

TO BE sure, Hagee spoke with a certitude many will understandably find offensive, as the obvious objection is that no man can read the mind of God. Fair enough. But that reasonable theological dispute in no way renders Hagee's

sermon anti-Semitic.

Stripped of context, a sermon claiming that Hitler was sent by God is indeed jarring. McCain heard it and ducked for cover. He's a politician, and it's not his job to know the truth; it merely is to know the perception. Not so for the media. In an ideal world, anyway, journalists should be in search of the truth.

In the real world, sadly, most journalists are too busy - and lazy - to meaningfully research Rev. Hagee's theology and documented teachings. Even given this reality, however, it might seem appropriate that before rushing to reduce 40 years of a man's career down to a convenient Hitler association, the media ought to spend 40 minutes to see if they're actually getting the story right. (Jerusalem Post May 28)

Where Are All the Zionists? By Howard Starr

Many years ago, my father took me on my first trip to Israel as a Bar Mitzvah present. He was a big macher with Israel Bonds, raising substantial sums for them; so, we were given an appointment to meet with David Ben-Gurion privately for a few moments. Ben-Gurion was of advanced age, but he was still sharp as tack.

He told me that the future for Israel depended on three things:

1. Bringing more Jews to Israel.
2. Increasing the agriculture all over Israel.
3. Increasing the area where Jews lived in the land.

Although I am now 50 and, as a frum Jew, I have read much about Ben-Gurion and his life that would persuade me not to quote him, I am struck by how the Left has abandoned his philosophy. G-d has an amazing sense of humour that one can only marvel at. The political Right has taken up the cause of the earliest anti-religious pioneers, whose philosophy is now an anathema to the Left. The Left has abandoned Ben-Gurion's ideas and ideals, leaving only the frum and the political Right to inherit his agenda.

And while most Israelis are now focused on a hi-tech future instead of agriculture, the rising prices of basic foodstuffs is turning grain farmers into oil barons. Although Israel may not yet sense this shift in fortunes, it is certainly apparent here in Canada, especially in the farm province of Saskatchewan.

Gush Katif, now bare and destroyed, would have fed thousands and brought large amounts of foreign exchange dollars into the economy. Instead of increasing agriculture and settling more land, the government of Israel has evicted thousands of Jews from the land and reduced the acreage under cultivation; Ben Gurion would surely not have allowed this under his reign.

This year, I took my own son to Israel for his Bar Mitzvah. On Thursday, he read his parsha, Kedoshim, at the Western Wall. It was Yom HaShoah and when we finished our service, the sirens sounded for a minute of silence. We mentally traveled from the fires of Auschwitz to the sacredness of the Temple Mount wall, and suddenly we were singing VaShuvu Bunim.

We spent Shabbos in Hevron with 85 Torontonians who had previously made Aliyah. Clearly, the singing and praying at the site of our great-great-great-etc. grandparents' tomb was an experience my son would never forget. The spirit at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hevron was so thick you could touch it. Truly, our cup overflowed with joy.

During our stay in Hevron we were able to take a tour of the casbah and see where Jews lived before being evicted by the British in 1927. We saw the doorways of homes where mezuzahs had once lain in carved-out doorpost stones. All these Jewish homes are now occupied by Arabs, not Jews. Jews are forbidden by the government from living in those areas, where there were once mikvehs, shuls and kolels.

There is a waiting list of Jews who want to move into Hevron. The government, however, does not allow Jews to build or to reside in most of the buildings that Jews historically lived in and owned for hundreds of years. And yet, if one glances over to the Arab areas of Hevron, the sounds of construction are unrelenting. Arab houses and office buildings go up quickly and without protest, where Jews can only dream.

Although my son did not have the opportunity to meet with a prime minister, as I once did, I wondered, while he was reading the Torah, if his son would have the chance to read his parsha in Hevron.

Ben-Gurion would most certainly have wanted my grandson to have that opportunity. I pray Prime Minister Ehud Olmert does not take it away.

May HaShem send us a Zionist speedily, in our days.

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The writer is a Toronto businessman who is working toward making Aliyah.

יום ירושלים שמח