



Jerusalem 6:18 Toronto 7:27

Events...

Sunday September 7, 8pm

The BAYT Bet El Twinning/Israel Action Committee and Canadian Friends of Bar Ilan University sponsor a lecture by **Professor Gerald Steinberg** on "Paying for the Propaganda War Against Israel: Europe, Canada and Jewish Organisations" at BAYT.

Commentary...

A Zionist Earthquake By Michael Freund

If you listened carefully on Sunday, you could hear the ground shake under the corner of King George Avenue and Rehov Keren Kayemet in Jerusalem. It was there, at the headquarters of the Jewish Agency, that a revolution took place, one that could prove to be a milestone in the history of aliya and absorption.

After years of dispute, the Agency finally agreed to cede control over the promotion of aliya from the United States and Canada to the wildly-successful private organization Nefesh B'Nefesh. The group, headed by a dynamic young rabbi named Yehoshua Fass, has single-handedly transformed the aliya experience for thousands of North Americans in recent years, making it more accessible, user friendly and comprehensible.

Harnessing the Internet, advanced marketing techniques and some good, old fashioned Zionist enthusiasm, Nefesh B'Nefesh long ago outstripped the aliya bureaucracy, making much of it painfully obsolete.

As a result, after nearly 80 years in which the Jewish Agency has essentially been the one and only address for Jewish immigration, the monopoly has now been broken. If there were a Richter scale to measure earthquakes in the Jewish world, this one would surely have sent the needle flying off the seismograph.

Under the new arrangement, the Jewish Agency will still retain control over determining the eligibility of prospective new immigrants and the opening of files with the relevant government ministries. But nearly all other aspects of the process will be handled by Nefesh B'Nefesh, making it the main interface for American and Canadian Jews interested in moving to the Jewish state.

This constitutes a remarkable blow to the Jewish Agency and signifies that the body is fast undergoing a historic makeover, one that will forever change the face of the "national institutions" of the Jewish people.

Interestingly, the deal was publicized precisely one year to the day since the cabinet approved a precedent-setting decision granting funds to private, independently-run organizations that promote aliya. In retrospect, that decision, which benefited groups such as Nefesh B'Nefesh and its French equivalent, AMI, signified the beginning of the end for the traditional role of the Jewish Agency, a process that gained further steam with the latest announcement.

But it would be wrong to think that we are necessarily witnessing the demise of the Agency or its degeneration into irrelevance. It is simply undergoing major changes as priorities shift and funds become tighter, and it will have to reinvent itself to endure.

No doubt there are those who cringe at the thought that the Agency will lose its exclusivity in the realm of aliya, and in the days to come we are likely to see much hand-wringing over this development. But times have changed, and bureaucracies are notoriously bad at keeping up. And that is what has

ISRAEL NEWS

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From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee
of Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

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enabled Nefesh B'Nefesh to be so successful at what it does, because it is an ideologically-motivated entrepreneur rather than a staid branch of the establishment.

Like any private sector initiative, its newness and freshness is its strength, as it is not burdened by mounds of red tape, political infighting or any of the other elements so common at long-standing institutions.

This latest earthquake may have shaken the Jewish Agency building, but it didn't knock it down. Out of adversity comes opportunity, and this tremor is no different. With its brand name and decades of experience, the Jewish Agency is perfectly positioned to serve as the umbrella body uniting all aliya-oriented groups while continuing to provide a range of critical services.

If the Agency seizes upon this niche and embraces it, forging additional arrangements and working hand-in-hand with private Jewish groups across a range of fields, it could emerge as a leaner, more focused and more effective force.

INDEED, WHAT makes this development so exciting is that it could prove to be a test case for other key fields of government responsibility. Just consider the possibilities. Areas from hasbara abroad to promoting road safety at home would benefit immensely if they too were semi- or fully-privatized while continuing to operate under official direction and guidance.

This would bring new savings, and new energy, to a range of moribund efforts and boost their effectiveness beyond recognition.

As Ronald Reagan once pointed out, "Public servants say, always with the best of intentions, 'What greater service we could render if only we had a little more money and a little more power.' But the truth is that outside of its legitimate function, government does nothing as well or as economically as the private sector." That is true of trade and industry, and it is no less true for aliya or Jewish education. So let's hope that the Zionist earthquake now under way will continue to shake things up, and that in its wake will come a new, more exciting order. (Jerusalem Post Sep 2)

This week's issue is dedicated
in honour of the Bar Mitzvah of
Andrew Tebbi.
Mazel Tov!

With Biden On Board, Can Obama Be Trusted?

By Caroline Glick

Many American Jewish observers welcomed Barack Obama's selection of Sen. Joseph Biden as his vice-presidential running mate. As a member of the Senate since 1973, and the serving chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Biden is a seasoned political player and foreign policy heavyweight. His experience, it is argued, will make up for Obama's inexperience; his moderate liberal views will make up for Obama's radical liberal views.

Biden has a track record of often supporting Israel. And as he entered the Democratic presidential primaries last year, he stepped up his pro-Israel pronouncements. In an interview with the Forward for instance, Biden rejected the anti-Israel call to distance the U.S. from Israel in a bid to ratchet up Arab support for the U.S. As he put it, "In my 34-year career, I have never wavered from the notion that the only time progress has ever been made in the Middle East is when the Arab nations have known that there is no daylight between us and Israel. So the idea of being an 'honest broker' is not, as some of my Democratic colleagues call for, the answer. It is being the smart broker, it is being the smart partner.

But while Biden's rhetoric on America's relationship with Israel is firm, his positions on issues critically important to Israel's national security call into question his willingness to stand by Israel. He is a staunch supporter of an Israeli transfer of the strategically critical Golan Heights to Syria and has harshly criticized the Bush administration for its refusal to support Israeli negotiations with Syria. At the same time, he downplays the significance of Syria's strategic alliance with Iran and its sponsorship of terrorists in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority. Belittling those ties, Biden has claimed repeatedly and without a shred of evidence that the Syrians really want to put all of that behind them.

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Biden's positions on Iran are even more troubling. Over the past decade, since Iran's ballistic missile program and its nuclear program came into full view, Biden has distinguished himself both for his refusal to support tough U.S. diplomatic moves against Iran and for his absolute opposition to the notion of a U.S. military strike on Iran's nuclear installations. In 1998, Biden was one of only four senators to vote against the Iran Missile Proliferation Sanctions Act, a bill that punished foreign companies and other entities that sent Iran sensitive missile technology or expertise.

In February 2005, at a speech before the global Davos Conference, Biden said that Iran's quest for nuclear capabilities is understandable and called on the U.S. to address Iran's "emotional needs" by signing a non-aggression pact with the mullocracy.

In September 2007, Biden was one of just a handful of senators who voted against a Senate resolution calling on the State Department to classify Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps a terrorist organization. The Revolutionary Guards is responsible for the insurgency in Iraq and for commanding, financing, arming, and training Hizbullah, Hamas and other international terrorist groups. It is also responsible for securing and developing Iran's nuclear weapons project and its ballistic missile arsenal.

For his part, Obama managed to be absent from the Senate during the vote last year, though he stated his objection to the resolution referring to it as "excessively provocative."

As to attacking Iran's nuclear installations, though Biden has claimed he would not take the military option "off the table," he has spoken of impeaching President Bush if he attacks Iran's nuclear installations. Late last year the New Hampshire Seacoast Online reported, "Biden said that the best deterrent to prevent pre-emptive military action in Iran is to make it clear, even if it is at the end of [Bush's] final term, action will be taken against Bush to ensure 'his legacy will be marred for all time.'"

In the weeks after the September 11 attacks, Biden was already thinking about appeasing Iran. In a New Republic profile in October 2001, Biden was quoted raising the following suggestion to his Senate staffers: "Seems to me this would be a good time to send, no strings attached, a check for \$200 million to Iran."

Yet for all of Biden's naivete regarding Syrian intentions, Iranian ambitions and the scope and significance of both countries' hatred of the U.S., Obama's selection of Biden as his running mate does moderate his ticket. While Biden's prescriptions for contending with the forces of global jihad by appeasing them are little different from Obama's, Biden at least tends to view Islamic jihadists as a negative force in international affairs. It is not at all clear that Obama shares his views.

Similarly, by all accounts, Biden -- though wrong on policy preferences -- is extremely proud of America and devoted to securing the country. Here too, it is not at all clear that Obama shares his views.

In an op-ed in his local Chicago neighborhood newspaper The Hyde Park Herald published on Sept. 19, 2001, Obama blamed the 9/11 attacks on al Qaeda's "lack of empathy for its victims." He argued that the terrorists' hatred was not unique and it "most often grows out of a climate of poverty and ignorance, helplessness and despair." Obama then drew moral equivalence between the U.S. and al Qaeda by warning that in any future fight with its enemies the U.S. military must "take into account the lives of innocent civilians abroad." He ascribed the bigotry and hatred that he couldn't find in al Qaeda's murderers to his fellow countrymen warning that Americans must not discriminate against Americans "of Middle Eastern descent."

Obama's apparent disdain for the U.S. was similarly on display in a quip he made about Russia's invasion of Georgia which implied it was morally and legally indistinguishable from the American invasion of Iraq. As he put it, "We've got to send a clear message to Russia and unify our allies. They can't charge into other countries. Of course it helps if we are leading by example on that point."

Obama launched his political career in 1995 when he announced his candidacy for the Illinois State Senate. This most significant turning point in his until then undistinguished career took place at the home of unrepentant Weather Underground terrorists Bill Ayres and Bernadine Dohrn. Ayres and Dohrn were leaders of the Weather Underground when it conducted bombings of numerous government and private facilities in the 1960s and 1970s.

While Obama once dismissed Ayres as "just a guy from my neighborhood," it has since been revealed that the two men worked closely with one another from 1995 to 2001 as directors of a leftist group called the Chicago Annenberg Challenge or the CAC, which sought to undermine the independence of public school principals and teachers in Chicago by compelling them to adopt radical teaching methods.

Obama is currently receiving the support of some 57 percent of American Jews. Although this is less than any Democratic presidential nominee in recent memory, it is still disturbing that a large majority of American Jews support him. The Obama campaign no doubt hopes the Biden selection will shore up

Jewish support. It can only be hoped that despite their party loyalty and what they're telling pollsters, American Jews (indeed, American voters generally) will judge Biden and Obama by their records and positions.

Biden has consistently denied the threat emanating from Iran and Syria not only for Israel but for the U.S. as well. And Obama's statements and actions expose him as a man ill disposed not only toward Israel but America itself. (Jewish Press Aug 28)

Calling Israel's Bluff By Caroline Glick

Hamas and its international collaborators have a new plan. To forcibly end Israel's embargo of Gaza's seacoast, they intend to operate a "ferry" service that will sail from Cyprus to Gaza every couple of weeks. The plan was announced on Friday by American Hamas collaborator Paul Larudee. Larudee and 32 other Hamas collaborators from North America and Europe disguised themselves as "peace activists" last week as they ran the gauntlet of Israel's naval blockade in a bid to facilitate Hamas's unfettered access to the high seas.

Israel is fully cognizant of what these Hamas collaborators are up to. It knows they are trying to force the country to concede its vital interest in maintaining the blockade to prevent massive quantities of heavy weaponry from being brought into Iran's Hamas-controlled enclave. Israel understands what is at stake. But it has absolutely no idea how to contend with this new challenge. Speaking to The Jerusalem Post over the weekend, defense officials said that they have no policy for contending with additional ships in international waters that set sail for Gaza with the declared aim of ending Israel's blockade of the coastline.

The Olmert-Livni-Barak-Yishai government claims that its handling of last week's blockade runners was successful. By allowing the ships to sail to Gaza and then return to Cyprus, the government argues that it averted a public relations trap that Hamas and its collaborators set for it. Had Israel interdicted the ships, they argue, Hamas and its allies on board would have been able to demonize Israel by accusing it of preventing humanitarian aid from getting through to suffering Hamas supporters and regime officials in Gaza.

While Israel's decision to capitulate rather than defend its interests did in fact avert bad headlines, that success should be a comfort to no one. For Israel's decision to permit the ships to sail to and from Gaza exposed two of the government's most egregious and devastating strategic failings.

IN STANDING down in the face of Hamas's high seas challenge, Israel demonstrated yet again that it prefers to capitulate rather than pay a price to defend its vital interests. And Israel's readiness to surrender came as no surprise to either Hamas or its European and North American agents. They have watched for three years as Israel has taken no action to end Hamas's use of Gaza's border with Egypt to smuggle sufficient quantities of advanced weaponry into the area to transform Gaza from a tactical nuisance into a strategic threat to southern Israel. Through its refusal to launch a military operation to retake control over Gaza's international border, Israel has daily demonstrated its unwillingness to fight to secure its vital interests of ending Iranian encroachment on its borders, and weakening with the intent of overthrowing the Hamas regime in Gaza. Knowing this, Hamas and its international collaborators rightly assumed that Israel would similarly take no action to prevent their access to the high seas.

The blockade runners were also quick to capitalize on was Israel's other major failing: Its consistent refusal to recognize and contend with the role of international collaborators in advancing the Palestinian war effort against it. Hamas's international allies knew that Israel would take no action against the ships because they have watched for years as Israel has capitulated to their colleagues who challenge the IDF in support of Palestinian terrorists in Judea and Samaria. They saw for instance in the weeks leading up to their decision to set sail to Gaza that the Olmert-Livni-Barak-Yishai government has preferred to humiliate and court martial IDF commanders operating against terror collaborators in Ni'ilin rather than formulate a coherent information and law enforcement strategy against them.

Since 2001, international groups posing as peace activists and human rights champions have enjoyed generous funding of European governments as they have violently challenged IDF counter-terror operations in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Operating under the aegis of groups like the International Solidarity Movement, the Israel Committee Against House Demolitions, Anarchists Against the Wall, Rabbis for Human Rights and other EU-funded anti-Israel groups, these terror collaborators have actively engaged in criminal behavior to thwart lawful IDF actions.

They have illegally entered closed military zones. They have illegally interfered with IDF operations. They have worked openly with Palestinian terror masters including Marwan Barghouti and Ismail Haniyeh. In so doing, these groups have been fully integrated into the Palestinian information war

against Israel which itself is a vital component of the overall Palestinian war effort against Israel.

Far from acting to expose these criminals as terror collaborators, and then targeting their European governmental financiers, outlawing them, and arresting, imprisoning or deporting their members, Israel has not even tried to challenge their false self-identification as "peace activists." In surrendering the war of words to its adversaries, Israel has facilitated their war efforts against it. In legitimizing Hamas's international allies, Israel has ensured that as they have promised, they will expand their use of blockade running ships to enable Hamas's free access to the high seas.

The terror-enabling ships' successful challenge of the government demonstrated once again that under the Olmert-Livni-Barak-Yishai government, Israel's deterrent capacity has utterly collapsed. In international affairs, deterrence is the only truly effective way to prevent war. Deterrence is predicated on a state's ability and willingness to credibly threaten its adversaries' vital interests if its own are endangered. Under the Olmert-Livni-Barak-Yishai government, Israel's deterrence has collapsed because the government freely dispenses threats that it has no intention of carrying through. Rather than frighten its enemies and so convince them to relent in their attacks against the country, Israel's reckless recourse to empty threats under the current government has emboldened them and so placed the country in ever greater jeopardy.

This abysmal and dangerous state of affairs was fully in evidence with the government's decision last week to tell the local media that it had just "reached a strategic decision" not to permit Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Showing again its contempt for Israel's empty sloganeering, Iran announced it has finished installing 4,000 uranium enriching centrifuges at its Natanz nuclear facility, that it is preparing an additional 3,000 centrifuges for use, and that it has armed Hizbullah with long range missiles.

In light of our enemies' open contempt for the government's continued use of empty threats it is clear that far from preventing war, the government's continued utilization of threats actually increases the likelihood of war. The question that necessarily arises then is why is the government still making threats that its enemies do not believe?

THE ANSWER to that central question was provided on Sunday morning at the government's weekly meeting. That meeting was dominated by statements by Kadima ministers who are running to replace Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in this month's party leadership race. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz, and Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter all outdid one another in their criticisms of Olmert's last ditch bid to conclude and accord with Palestinian Authority figurehead Mahmoud Abbas that will commit Israel to surrender Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria to the Hamas-dominated PA before he leaves office.

Their criticisms of Olmert were shocking for what they say about the fundamental cynicism of Kadima's would-be leaders. After all, in his feverish attempts to strike his deal with Abbas, Olmert is simply discharging the policies that all of them have repeatedly signed off on. Indeed, Livni has chaired Israel's negotiating team, and Mofaz and Dichter, like Shas leader Eli Yishai have repeatedly supported Olmert's and Livni's efforts in the face of outspoken criticism from Likud.

The cynicism of Kadima's would-be leaders exposes the actual target audience of the government's wholly discredited threats against Israel's enemies. That audience is not Israel's enemies, but the Israeli people. The government knows full well that none of Israel's enemies take its threats seriously. Between Iran, Hizbullah, Hamas, Fatah and their international collaborators, not a day goes by when Israel's bluff isn't called. The government makes those threats not because it actually intends to defend the country, but because it wants us all to believe that it will defend the country despite mountains of evidence to the contrary.

But beyond that, the criticisms that Olmert's own Kadima colleagues launched Sunday against the policies he is advancing with their full support and participation tells us two fundamental truths about the nature of the Israeli public.

First, it shows us that Kadima's leaders understand that in advancing the cause of capitulation to the Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem, they are acting against the wishes not only of the general public, but of their own party members. Livni, Mofaz and Dichter are vying for the support of some 70,000 Kadima members who alone have the right to vote in their primaries. By attacking Olmert for carrying out capitulationist policies they themselves have supported, they are signaling that they understand that those policies are opposed not only by their political opponents, but by their political supporters.

The second fundamental fact that their condemnations of Olmert exposes is a troubling one. While Livni, Mofaz and Dichter - like Yishai - understand that Israel's enemies are unmoved by their protestations of readiness to protect the country - they all believe that Kadima members and the Israeli public as a whole are willing to believe their cynical lies. And the polls seem to back

them up. Despite the Kadima-Labor-Shas government's systematic destruction of Israel's deterrent capacity, public opinion polls show that one in five Israelis still intend to vote for Kadima in the next elections. Shas's support has not been significantly degraded since the last elections. As for the Labor party, its recent fall in the polls is due to the exposure of a new corruption scandal surrounding Defense Minister Ehud Barak and his wife, not to Barak's facilitation of Hamas's entrenchment in Gaza. Although Likud still leads Kadima in the polls, the Right's projected parliamentary majority is a narrow one.

The Kadima ministers' cynical manipulation of public opinion so prominently on display on Sunday morning together with the utter collapse of Israel's deterrent capacity makes clear the Right's central political challenge today. Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu and his allies must convince the public to call the government's bluff, just as Israel's enemies have. Until the public stops its habit of believing wholly discredited threats and declarations on the part of the government, the incompetent politicians scuttling Israel's national security will continue their failed policies. Moreover, they will stand a chance of winning the public's trust to continue on this disastrous course for years to come. (Jerusalem Post Sep 1)

False Oaths of Allegiance By Nadav Shragai

All of a sudden, everyone is swearing allegiance to Jerusalem: Tzipi Livni, who has already discussed dividing Jerusalem with the Palestinians every which way; Shaul Mofaz, who has known about it for more than a year but is still clinging to his cabinet seat; and Eli Yishai, too. But what is really irritating is that both those whose conduct is dictated by devotion to power rather than to Jerusalem and those who understand that dividing Jerusalem is an unparalleled risk, one that will melt the glue that has held the Jewish people together for generations, are relying on formalistic arguments.

Ehud Olmert lacks any legitimacy to negotiate over Jerusalem, not only because of the heavy cloud of criminal suspicions that hangs over him and because his days in office are numbered, but mainly because no one ever authorized him to hand over the treasure of the Jewish people and smash one of the foundation stones of the Zionist movement.

This bunch understands that Mahmoud Abbas is not the sole custodian of Jerusalem on the Arab side, and that Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and perhaps Saudi Arabia also need to be brought into the picture. However, it does not understand that it is not the sole custodian of Jerusalem for the Jewish people. This group is "democratic" when it comes to Arab countries, but would never dream of bringing representatives of the Jewish people and the Jewish religion into the talks, not to mention taking the most elementary step - a referendum that would make clear the significance of dividing the city.

The implications of such a move are completely lacking from the discourse over the historic snatch Olmert is now trying to bring about. His willingness to bring the members of the Quartet into the negotiations over Jerusalem (even as "advisors") opens the door to internationalizing the conflict over the city, and that is tantamount to public suicide.

In the Middle East, internationalization does not work - and when it does, it usually works against us. That is the case in Lebanon, where Hezbollah's strength has grown to that of a small army under the umbrella of international "monitoring" in recent years; that was the case in 1948, when the United Nations, despite having ostensibly internationalized Jerusalem and defined it as a corpus separatum in UN General Assembly Resolution 181, did not respond when the Jewish population of the city was besieged; and that was the case in Gaza, where observers from the international force that Condoleezza Rice made us station at the Rafah crossing fled when Hamas took over the strip. Need we even mention the attacks on multinational forces in Beirut and Iraq?

No fertile imagination is needed to picture, for example, what the "internationals" will do when the Waqf excavates the Temple Mount and damages Jewish archaeological remains - or how they will act when Israel reinforces the Western Wall.

Dori Gold, Israel's former ambassador to the UN, recently noted that the more Israel concedes in Jerusalem, the more the American position regarding our status in the city erodes. He still remembers how the U.S. used its veto power in the Security Council to reject Palestinian initiatives to condemn Israeli construction in neighborhoods like Har Homa. Today, not only is it difficult to conceive of such a veto, but the Americans are those who initiate complaints over Israeli construction in Jerusalem.

Almost no one is warning the public of the likelihood that those who give away East Jerusalem will pay with compound interest in West Jerusalem: that abandoning the eastern part of the city might result in large-scale migration to West Jerusalem by tens of thousands of Palestinians who refuse to give up their rights as permanent residents (this is already happening in East Jerusalem, after construction of the separation fence left parts of the city

outside the barrier); or that, just as after the forced division of the city in 1948, tens of thousands of Jews might get up and leave. They will do so because Jerusalem, as in 1948, will go back to being a frontier city, vulnerable to small-arms attacks from across a border only dozens or hundreds of meters away from where 250,000 Jews currently live.

There are not many differences left between Netanyahu's Likud and Kadima and Labor. But one of these is Jerusalem. If Netanyahu wants to prove to his potential voters that on this issue, he says what he means and means what he says, at the very least he should announce that he does not intend to honor any agreement that would lead to the division of Jerusalem - that Jerusalem is a red line, which will not go back to being a green one. (Haaretz Sep 3)

Debate Policies, Not Personalities By Isi Leibler

Much of the nihilism surrounding our government these past years is related to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's insistence that "a prime minister does not require an agenda."

Few of us harbor the illusion that Olmert's departure will, overnight, usher in a new era of stability and good leadership. Nevertheless the time has come to demand that politicians engaged in the current leadership campaign stop abusing and bad-mouthing one another and focus instead on policies, providing the nation with a genuine opportunity of debating the security and societal issues.

Politics remains at the lowest level it has ever been. True, at least in the short term, the trials and pending indictments of so many key politicians are likely to deter new leaders from indulging in questionable practices. But even Tzipi Livni, one of the front runners to be the next prime minister, whose principal electoral asset is that she has never been accused of indulging in corrupt practices, seems relaxed about associating politically with Tzahi Hanegbi, the former minister who to this day cannot appreciate the inappropriateness of his having won a high place in the Likud primaries by being best at providing "jobs for the boys."

Today, more than ever, there is greater awareness of the need to overhaul the electoral system. But there is scant likelihood that structural reform which would enable the public to reward and punish politicians according to their performance will be realized any time soon. The sectoral, one-dimensional parties most threatened by such reform - in particular the haredim - are being courted by all the prime ministerial candidates and are, regrettably, likely to occupy a pivotal role in the formation of a future government.

THE MANNER in which the primaries in Kadima are playing out exemplifies everything that is rotten in our politics.

Kadima is a "virtual" party based primarily on the disastrous policies of unilateral disengagement, which its leaders would prefer to forget. Nobody is able to define what the party represents because most of the Kadima MKs defected from other parties - not out of ideological motivation but simply to enhance their personal ambitions. Genuine political discussions are rarely expressed. Instead we are continuously subjected to ongoing personality conflicts and attempts by candidates to demolish the characters of their opponents.

On the rare occasions when policies do intrude, they are often manifested in an extremely primitive and even harmful manner - as when Shaul Mofaz got on the soapbox and, to promote his credentials as a hard-liner, irresponsibly called for all-out war with Iran.

Livni, the frontrunner for the Kadima leadership, assures us that she would make the ideal prime minister. But beyond pontificating about Kadima being a moderate centrist party purporting to reflect the views of the bulk of Israelis, she still declines to provide the nation with a report on the negotiations she has been conducting behind closed doors with the Palestinians. Nor is she even willing to enlighten her own party members about what she proposes to concede to the Palestinians in the "shelf agreement."

Livni has also failed to provide any indication of how she intends to deal with the Hamas or Hizbullah threats. In fact, all the signals suggest that she lacks any kind of long-term strategic plan and would simply continue responding to situations as they arise.

Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, whose political standing has plummeted over the past weeks, has released a wide range of contradictory security policies alternating between dovish and hawkish and guaranteeing that nobody knows what he really thinks. This gives him the opportunity to zigzag according to his perception of the opinion polls. His only consistent theme has been the personal demonization of all his political opponents.

THE OPPOSITION has until now also failed to have a major impact on policy debates. Binyamin Netanyahu is aware that he faces an overwhelmingly hostile and heavily biased media undoubtedly poised to launch yet another hysterical "anyone but Bibi" campaign. His advisers appear to have convinced him to maintain a relatively low profile and avoid providing the press with any

pretext to demonize him.

But the time has now surely arrived for him to emerge, outline his policy platform and establish the framework for a genuine national policy debate.

Unlike all the other aspirants to the premiership, Netanyahu does have a genuinely coherent strategic outlook relating to the Palestinian Authority, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and the Iranian threat. By outlining his policies and simultaneously resisting efforts by his opponents to drag him into mudslinging matches, he could ensure that, for the first time in 20 years, we will have an election in which the core issues facing the nation are debated.

Nor should Netanyahu limit himself to security issues, which are understandably the main preoccupation of the nation. He must also aggressively promote his platform on other areas such as the fragile economy, education, water and the various long-term infrastructure issues that have been neglected by politicians concerned only about immediate problems.

If Netanyahu succeeds in reviving the first serious national political debate about our future since the Oslo Accords, he will have made an important contribution to the well-being of the nation, and probably also advanced himself to the premiership. (Jerusalem Post Aug 31)

Menachem Begin versus Joseph Biden By Yisrael Medad

Twenty-five years after his retirement from political life and sixteen years after his death, Menachem Begin is suddenly a factor in the upcoming US Presidential election. His name has appeared in reports and numerous websites describing a June 1982 confrontation Begin had while visiting Washington, DC, with then-Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware and now Vice Presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket. The report circulating quotes a major article by Moshe Zak, a leading Israeli journalist and one-time editor of Ma'ariv, who wrote in the week of Begin's death in 1992 that:

During that committee hearing, at the height of the Lebanon War, Sen. John [sic, Joseph] Biden (Delaware) had attacked Israeli settlements in Judea and Samaria and threatened that if Israel did not immediately cease this activity, the US would have to cut economic aid to Israel. When the senator raised his voice and banged twice on the table with his fist, Begin commented to him: "This desk is designed for writing, not for fists. Don't threaten us with slashing aid. Do you think that because the US lends us money it is entitled to impose on us what we must do? We are grateful for the assistance we have received, but we are not to be threatened. I am a proud Jew. Three thousand years of culture are behind me, and you will not frighten me with threats. Take note: we do not want a single soldier of yours to die for us."

When that report appeared last week, the Begin Center in Jerusalem received numerous inquiries from people asking for verification from official sources that such a conference had actually taken place. The Information Resources team at the Begin Center searched for relevant documents and found the official report of a press conference that Begin gave on his return from that particular visit to the US on 23 June 1982 in which he enumerated various important meetings he had with the President and other personalities and House of Representatives and Senate Foreign Relations Committees. Begin said that in the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate:

A young senator rose and delivered a very impassioned speech - I must say that it's been a while since I've heard such a talented speaker - and he actually supported Operation "Peace for the Galilee". He even went further, and said that if someone from Canada were to infiltrate into the United States, and kill its citizens all of us (and thus he indicated a circle) would demand attacking them, and we wouldn't pay attention as to whether men, women or children were killed. That's what he said. I disassociated myself from these remarks. I said to him: No, sir; attention must be paid. According to our values, it is forbidden to hurt women and children, even in war. ...

And thus the argument went. But, as I said before, the same senator supported our operation in Lebanon - with all his heart, he said. What he doesn't like are our settlements in Judea and Samaria. I regret that I could not agree with him. He hinted - more than hinted - that if we continue with this policy, it is possible that he will propose cutting our financial aid. And to this I gave him a clear answer: Sir, do not threaten us with cutting aid. First of all, you should know that this is not a one-way street. You help us, and we are very grateful for your help; but this is a two-way street: We do a lot for you. And also in recent battles we did a lot for the United States; and I gave some examples, but this is not the place to go into them. Therefore, do not threaten us with cuts in aid, but take note: That if at any time you demand of us to yield on a principle in which we believe, while threatening to cut aid, we will not abandon the principle in which we believe - and propose cutting aid.

Moshe Zak wrote that "after the meeting, Sen. [Daniel] Moynihan approached Begin and praised him for his cutting reply. To which Begin answered with thanks, defining his stand against threats." Menachem (Begin Heritage Center Sep 3)