

## Commentary...

### The Real Issue in Hebron By Moshe Arens

Incongruously named Beit Hashalom (House of Peace), that building on the road from Kiryat Arba to the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron has become a source of confrontation and altercations between the Defense Ministry and Israel Defense Forces, on the one hand, and the local settlers and their supporters, on the other. What is this all about? Is it about the right of Jews to have access to one of the holiest sites of Judaism, or is it about the IDF's duty to prevent the occupation by settlers of a building that, it is claimed, has been purchased from its Arab owner under legally questionable circumstances?

Since under the military law prevailing in Judea and Samaria, the acquisition of real estate there requires the approval of the commanding general of the area - in other words, of the minister of defense - and since that approval has not been granted at this point, the purchase, even if it was properly executed, is not considered legal. Hence, the government considers the Jewish occupants of the building as being in violation of the law and has declared its intention of forcibly expelling them from it.

The first question that arises, then, is what is the government's policy regarding access of Jews to the Cave of the Patriarchs (or Machpelah, in Hebrew), and what is the reason for the defense minister's not having approved the purchase of Beit Hashalom?

Next to Jerusalem, Hebron, the city of our forefathers, is the city to which Jews have the greatest historical and religious attachment. Next to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron is Judaism's holiest site. Nevertheless, following the massacre of the Jewish community in Hebron in 1929, Jewish access to the city was severely limited, and from then until the end of the British Mandate, Jews were denied entry to the Cave and were not permitted to ascend beyond the seventh step on the stairs leading to it. During the days of Jordanian occupation the city was closed to Jews altogether.

Only after the Six-Day War could Jews pray again at the Cave of the Patriarchs, and the Jewish Quarter in Hebron was reestablished. Were it not for the presence of Jewish settlers in the city, in the Jewish Quarter and in nearby Kiryat Arba, access for Jews to the Cave would probably not have been possible in recent years.

In other words, Jewish access to the Cave of the Patriarchs is dependent on the presence of the settlers in the Hebron area. This will probably be true in future years as well, regardless of any agreements that might be reached with the Palestinians or the Jordanians. Seen in this light, the acquisition of Beit Hashalom, on the road leading to the Machpelah, is a significant contribution to that end. If it is the government's policy to assure the right of Jews to pray in the Cave, the defense minister should have instructed the commanding general to grant approval of the purchase of the building. In the absence of such an instruction, the impression is created that the defense minister and presumably the government in general have no interest in assuring this access. On the contrary, it seems they would like the settlers to leave the area, and are reconciled to Jews in the future being denied access to the Cave of the Patriarchs and the city of Hebron in general.

If that is the government's intention, then its tactics in recent days are certainly succeeding. Provocative statements, daily threats of imminent forcible evacuation, and the use of invectives like a "cancerous growth" to describe the settlers are provoking the expected reaction. The fringe element of youngsters from the settlement movement are drawn to the site, engage in acts of hooliganism, and promote antagonism to the settlement movement that is likely to provide support for a forcible evacuation of Beit Shalom in the days to come.

The government has to make a clear decision on whether it considers Jewish access to the Cave of the Patriarchs an inherent and legitimate right of the Jewish people, one that the State of Israel must guarantee now and in the

## ISRAEL NEWS

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future, or whether it ד"ס  
considers it to be of no particular importance and is prepared to take steps that will lead to conditions that will make it difficult to exercise this right. That is the real issue in Hebron today. (Haaretz Nov 25)

### Crossing All the Lines

By Nadav Shragai

Hebron in the eyes of the state prosecutors and the High Court of Justice is an Arab city where a few hundred Jews reside until "the final status agreement" is struck. Hebron in the eyes of the settlers is the city of our forefathers in which Jewish settlement has existed "from time immemorial" and will exist "forever."

Hebron, where David established his kingdom before the conquest of Jerusalem, is also a true reflection of the fault line that divides Israeli society between political and secular Zionists - for whom this country is first and foremost a refuge and a national home - and religious Zionists, whose existence is obviously rooted primarily in Judaism; between those for whom "the future of our sons is more important than the graves of our forefathers" - and those who are convinced that there is no future for our sons in a place that is without the graves of our forefathers, no physical-existential future, and most of all no spiritual future.

For years, these two streams fed off one another. David Ben-Gurion, who was the main figure who merged these two worldviews, thought that "we will make a huge, tremendous error if we do not settle Hebron, Jerusalem's neighbor and predecessor, with an ever-expanding Jewish settlement in the shortest amount of time." Even the 51 members of Knesset who signed a letter opposing the evacuation of Hebron's "House of Peace" are in their own way merging these two worldviews, as is Morris Abraham of New York, a descendant of Jews who were banished from Hebron following the 1929 massacre, who gave up his retirement funds to buy the building in Hebron, to link Kiryat Arba with the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

Now, however, in the case of that Hebron building, also known as the "House of Contention," all lines have been crossed by both sides. On the one hand, Jewish fanatics from the fringes of the settler camp whose place is in prison vandalize Muslim tombstones, and harm Arabs and Israel Defense Forces soldiers; a former member of Knesset says Kadima is worse than Hamas; and a rabbi says the State of Israel is the enemy of the nation (although he later recants).

On the other hand, and we are not talking here about the fringes, our nation's government is developing its own fanaticism whereby the ends - the banishment of Jews from Hebron - justify nearly all the means, to the point where that government and its mouthpieces become mute, deaf and blind. Even in the face of the facts and from a moral standpoint.

Here is a "minor" matter: the death sentence which the Palestinian Authority hands down to anyone who "commits the crime" of selling land to Jews. In any properly functioning state, the government, its attorney general and its Supreme Court would cry out to the heavens against such a punishment, which more or less constitutes a license to murder. But this law is accepted with near indifference, perhaps because the champions of human rights who were supposed to rise up in protest are themselves of the mind that a Palestinian who sells land to a Jew is a criminal.

Anyone who has listened to the tape that the settlers presented to the High Court of Justice cannot comprehend how the justices did not do the minimum that is required, and ask the state to reconsider its position in relation to the House of Contention. This audiotape includes everything. The supposed seller recalls how he sold the property, received the money, made renovations at the request of the buyer and even resisted serious pressure from the PA. Remarkably, the High Court and the prosecutors do not question the authenticity of the tape, but the latter - due to some bizarre, procedural considerations - simply refuse to heed it.

In addition, Faid Rajbi, the ostensible seller, who in his first interrogation by Hebron police claimed that he never sold the house, but is later seen in a video tape counting his money, repeatedly changed his version of events - a serious mistake in the best-case scenario, and at worst an obstruction of justice which serves a political agenda.

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There is no doubt that a case on a similar scale within tiny Israel proper would have been heard in a District or Magistrate's Court. There the facts and the evidence would have come into clear focus for their approval. But when dealing with Hebron and the House of Contention case, one gets the impression that the facts are not so relevant, and that someone here has decided that he will not let the evidence confuse him.

Even retired District Court judge Uri Shtruzman, perhaps by dint of the fact that he was the one who presided over one of the cases cited by Ayala Procaccia in her decision, was under the impression that the High Court erred in its legal interpretation of "his" case, noting that "there's no surprise in the settlers' forceful protests that it wasn't a fair trial that guided the High Court's considerations, but a political perspective."

Defense Minister Ehud Barak needs to take this into account. The High Court, contrary to misleading media reports and of which Barak has been made aware by his advisers, did not require the state to evacuate the settlers from the House of Contention, but simply enabled it to do so. The appointment of an impartial investigative panel or a deferment of a final decision until the facts have been sorted out in district court is the proper, measured way to handle this affair. (Haaretz Nov 24)

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### **Time for the Real Bush to Stand up** By Caroline Glick

US President George W. Bush has six weeks left in power. If he acts fast, that may be enough time to secure his place in history - at least in terms of the Middle East. Bush's initial reactions to the Sept. 11 attacks were a rare display of political and intellectual courage. Gazing at the rubble of the World Trade Center, Bush recognized that the primary failure of US policy towards the Arab and Islamic world until that day was found in the predisposition of his predecessors to slavishly maintain a Faustian bargain with tyrannical Arab regimes in the interest of maintaining "stability." That bargain committed the US to providing military assistance and political backing to authoritarian regimes throughout the Arab and Islamic world in exchange for cheap oil for the West.

What Sept. 11 showed Bush was that the "stability" the US had purchased was an illusion. As the US propped up dictators, their subjects fumed under the chains of state terror and economic privation. For millions of frustrated young men, the only outlet for resistance open to them is the mosque. There they are indoctrinated in the ways of jihad and mobilized to fight for Islamic global domination. In the months that followed the attacks, Bush radically changed the course of US Middle East policy by pledging American support for the democratization of the Arab and Islamic world. Bush announced that from then on, the US would no longer blindly follow its duplicitous client states but would support voices of democracy and freedom in the Middle East no matter where they came from.

Bush's message did nothing to endear him to the likes of the Saudis and the Egyptians. The Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference attacked Bush's freedom agenda and indignantly argued that it would be impossible for them to reform their ways for as long as the US maintained its support for Israel - the sole democracy in the region.

THEN THERE was Europe. Until Bush came around, Europeans had delighted in showing off their false multicultural and humanitarian credentials built on buying off terrorists, attacking Israel and giving the Palestinians billions of euros in foreign aid. Bush's freedom agenda exposed their deceit and their cowardice. They were appalled.

Implicit in Bush's view was the understanding that the US's most stable allies - and indeed only stable allies - are fellow democracies. And this understanding necessarily led Bush to the conclusion that Israel is the US's most dependable and valuable ally in the Middle East.

Bush's views were nothing short of sacrilege not only for the Arabs and the Europeans, but for Washington's foreign policy establishment, headquartered at the State Department and the CIA. For the men and women of these bureaucracies, Bush's recognition that the Arab regimes they championed were the primary source of regional instability and anti-Americanism was a repudiation of everything they worked for. More disgraceful, in their view, was his open embrace of Israel - the mortal foe of all their Arab friends - as the US's most trustworthy and strategically vital ally in the region.

All these forces joined together almost immediately to scuttle Bush's freedom agenda for the Arab world. In country after country, Bush's message of democracy was watered down to nothingness.

In post-Saddam Iraq, rather than embrace democratic champions like Ahmed Chalabi, the foreign policy bureaucracy in Washington foisted strongman and former Ba'athist Ayad Allawi on the newly liberated country. The State Department and the CIA allowed Iran and Syria to freely subvert Bush's freedom agenda by buying politicians, building militias and fomenting the insurgency.

Iraq was Bush's central foreign policy initiative. And it is for his work in

Iraq that he will chiefly be remembered. Today the battle for Iraq is all but won. But it was only won after Bush realized in 2006 that if he continued following the advice of those who rejected his goal of a free Middle East, the US would be forced from Iraq in defeat.

IN LEBANON in March 2005, when more than a million pro-democracy Lebanese citizens staged the Cedar Revolution and ousted Syrian forces from their country, Bush's battle for freedom was finally joined by the Arabs themselves. To secure the gains of the Cedar Revolution, Bush needed to work with Israel to protect the pro-Western Siniora government.

As Israel's failure to defeat Hizbullah in 2006, and as the US's championing of the UN ceasefire resolution which facilitated Hizbullah's takeover of Lebanon showed, neither Israel nor the US was willing to protect Lebanon's democrats. Today, with the forces of democracy defeated after Hizbullah's violent takeover of the government in May, rather than decry this state of affairs and work to undo it, Bush has chosen to deny it. And not only does he deny it, he exacerbates it. Bush welcomed the "stability" that Hizbullah's takeover has facilitated. And today he is arming the Hizbullah-dominated Lebanese army with tanks and other heavy arms. That is, in Lebanon, Bush has adopted the very same Faustian bargain he rejected in the aftermath of Sept. 11.

Bush's confused and self-defeating policies towards Lebanon are a direct consequence of his policies towards Israel and the Palestinians. In 2002, Bush recognized that the root of the Palestinian conflict with Israel is not Israel's continued control over Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem but the absence of Palestinian leadership willing to live at peace with Israel. Moreover, he recognized that the US's primary role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was not to mediate a dispute the Palestinians are unwilling to reconcile, but to stand by Israel as America's main ally in the region.

Bush's views earned him the enmity of the Arabs, the Europeans, the Washington elites and the Israeli Left. And together they undermined his policies and isolated him until less than a year later, he abandoned his positions. In mid-2003 he set aside his demand for a reordering of Palestinian society and his decision to side with Israel. In their place, Bush joined the Arabs, the Europeans, the UN and the Israeli Left in making the establishment of a Palestinian state the centerpiece of his Middle East agenda. As with Lebanon, here too Bush's acceptance of the establishment's position came at the cost of eschewing Israel as a US ally.

BUSH'S UNWILLINGNESS to carry through on his freedom agenda in the face of unrelenting opposition from Europe, the Arabs and his foreign policy establishment is what has prevented him throughout his presidency from contending with the greatest source of volatility and danger in the region - Iran. Largely as a consequence of the ambiguity and weakness of his policies on Iran, it is likely that one of the most prominent legacies of Bush's Middle East policies will be a nuclear-armed Iran.

With just six weeks remaining to his tenure in office, much of what Bush will leave behind him has already been determined. But there are two things he can still do that will impact greatly both the world he leaves behind and how he is judged by history: He can take action against Iran's nuclear program, and he can embrace Israel as an ally by pardoning four men who have been persecuted for assuming the alliance exists.

On the surface, these two agenda items couldn't be more disparate. By neutralizing Iran's nuclear installations Bush would save the lives of millions of people. By pardoning Jonathan Pollard, Larry Franklin, Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman, he would save the lives of four people.

But the fact of the matter is that the two issues present Bush with the same challenge. They both require him to find the courage to embrace the vision that he tried but failed to realize in the early years of his presidency.

By attacking Iran's nuclear installations - or by permitting Israel to fly over Iraq to attack Iran's nuclear installations - Bush will do two things. He will bolster the US-Israel alliance. And he will demonstrate that the stability engendered by the status quo is antithetical to US interests. Until now, Bush has been prevented from taking action in Iran by those who insist that the status quo in Iran and throughout the region is preferable to every other alternative. This was the view that propelled Washington's foreign policy establishment to oppose Israel's independence 60 years ago and has caused them to continue to oppose accepting Israel as an ally to this day.

To maintain the predominance of this view, over the years its proponents have persecuted individuals who reject it. In 1985, when Jonathan Pollard was arrested for transferring classified information to Israel, he was not treated like a man who had transferred secrets to a US ally. He was treated like a man who had transferred secrets to al-Qaida. His sentence of life in prison was meant to serve as a deterrent for anyone who dared question the view that Israel is nothing more than an albatross placed around the US's neck by a powerful American Jewish lobby and by dimwitted politicians.

Whereas Pollard's fate was sealed long before Bush entered the White House, Franklin, Rosen and Weissman's nightmare began under his watch.

In 2006, former Pentagon analyst Larry Franklin was sentenced to 12

years in prison for seeking the assistance of two AIPAC lobbyists - Rosen and Weissman - in bringing the threat posed by Iran's nuclear weapons program to Bush's attention. By speaking with Rosen and Weissman, Franklin was behaving as countless government employees behave. He was prosecuted not for sharing information with the men, but for mistakenly assuming that his view of Israel as a US ally was shared by the powers-that-be in Washington.

Weissman and Rosen are in the midst of a long, costly, drawn-out trial and stand charged with mishandling classified information under a statute that has not been enforced since World War I. For more than four years they have been treated as criminals for doing nothing more than their job as lobbyists - for a lobby that was founded on the understanding that the US and Israel are strategic allies.

The Bush who understood that a stable tyranny is a threat to a vibrant democracy knew that Iran had to be defeated and its regime overthrown. The Bush who celebrated the shared values on which both the US and Israel are founded knew that those who seek Israel's destruction will also never peacefully coexist with the US. If that Bush is still around, the time has come for him to act on those understandings. Before he leaves office he should embrace Israel as an ally and prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Not only will he secure the lives of millions of people. He will also secure his place in history. (Jerusalem Post Nov. 24)

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### **Don't Flatter Your Enemies, Protect Your Friends** By Barry Rubin

In explaining why he was too fearful to vote in Jerusalem's mayoral election, an east Jerusalem Palestinian shopkeeper, Issam Abu Rmaileh, said, "I would have liked to vote because it's in our interest, but who's going to protect me and my family afterwards?" Let's call it the Abu Rmaileh principle; it is extraordinarily important in the Middle East. Why should someone support you if you cannot protect them? If they cannot depend on you to be tough, they might as well play it safe by doing nothing or make their own deal through appeasement and shout radical slogans.

Here is the Abu Rmaileh principle at a higher pay grade. Jordan's Foreign Minister Salah Bashir stated in a closed meeting, "For us the Iranian surge for hegemony has become a crisis," according to a participant who asked not to be named.

And here's the flip side from a frustrated American colonel fighting in Iraq, "All these guys we rounded up, they're saying in the interrogation, if we don't torture them, we're not going to get the information."

How important is popularity? According to the school enthusiastic about President-elect Barack Obama in the United States, it is everything. One journalist explained that al-Qaida is afraid of Obama because, presumably, he will win away Muslims from supporting radical Islamism. It is written in the Washington Post: "Even among the followers of radical groups, such as Hamas and the Taliban, Obama has inspired a sense of change and opportunity."

That last statement - intended to imply that even extremists like Obama - is worded with a shocking, though unintentional, ambiguity. It is sure true that Hamas, the Taliban, Hizbullah, Iran, Syria, and al-Qaida view this "change" as an "opportunity." Unfortunately, they view it as an opportunity for being more aggressive.

Here's how Iranian Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami put it, in words typical of the reaction from Iran and these other groups. He sees Obama's slogan of "change" as a retreat caused by Iran's revolution, which brought down American power, and says the United States is continuing to decline.

For them, Barack the creator of a more popular America and a figure of weakness. Should there be any doubt that his flexibility will be interpreted as retreat, no matter how well-intentioned he is?

The debate in Washington is far away from the debate in the Middle East. In America's capital, the talk is of how the radicals are more moderate than thought, how they will be won over by Obama's charisma and changed American policies. The disconnect between the region and the rationalizers is frightening.

There is no policy change in Washington that will appease the radicals. And there are no concessions that will make an American president popular in a meaningful way among Middle Easterners. Even more worrisome, such steps are not going to make moderates feel more secure.

Here the al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri gets it just right. He tells Obama: "It appears that you don't know anything about the Muslim world and its history... You are neither facing individuals nor organizations, but are facing a jihadi awakening and renaissance which is shaking the pillars of the entire Islamic world; and this is the fact which you and your government and country refuse to recognize and pretend not to see."

Zawahiri even invokes the Abu Rmaileh principle: "It appears that you don't know anything about... the fate of the traitors who cooperated with the invaders against it." In other words, anyone who cooperates with the United States or fights the Islamists will die.

Al-Qaida is not a very important group nowadays. But the rise of Islamist

forces is clear, even though some of them are hostile to each other. It is Iran, not Ayman, who is the main beneficiary of this phenomenon, though Muslim Brotherhood groups - most notably Hamas - are also advancing.

In which way are President George Bush and his successor identical? Both believe that being liked in the Middle East will bring victory. Bush thought that by gifting the locals with a non-dictatorial Iraq and democracy they would come to love him. The opposite happened. Obama's strategy of being a nice guy and making concessions is likely to be less costly in direct terms for the United States but will also be used by the radicals for their own benefit.

One problem with the belief that Obama's popularity and flexibility will succeed is the Abu Rmaileh principle: Don't tell me who is nice; tell me who is going to protect me. Being feared and respected, as Syrian dictator Bashar Assad rightly put it, is more important than being liked. Osama bin Ladin noted that people understandably prefer to put their money on the horse that seems more certain to win the race. A second problem is how people in the Middle East are going to find out that you are such a great guy. They don't follow the American or European media but local sources, including both government and radical Islamist propaganda.

The frustrated American colonel in Iraq quoted above was bewildered by the fact that "We poured a lot of our heart and soul into trying to help the people" only to hear them say the most inaccurate things about the United States stealing their oil, taking their land, and "turning our country over to Israel." A US pull-out may well be the right policy, but it will not bring gratitude.

What's needed is not a president who can work with Iran or Syria but a president who can work with Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Lebanese forces who want their country to be free, and so on, along with Israel and Europe in a grand alignment. Yes, it is in large part a zero-sum game: What makes Teheran or Damascus happy is going to damage their intended victims. Alas, just because something isn't true doesn't mean people can't believe it. That's a truism applicable both to the Middle East and to Washington DC. (Jerusalem Post Nov. 23)

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### **'Islamophobia'** By Isi Leibler

The interfaith conference of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia which took place under the auspices of the United Nations received wide acclamation. President Shimon Peres went to the lengths of telling the Assembly that he wished that "King Abdullah's voice would become the prevailing voice of the whole region, of all people". The World Jewish Congress published a full page advertisement in The New York Times praising the monarch who leads one of the most oppressive and anti-Semitic regimes in the world.

To their credit, the Saudis were upfront about Israel, stressing that Peres and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni were present by virtue of their UN membership and not by Saudi invitation, and that the King would not engage in any contact with them. And, despite his somewhat servile remarks in praise of Abdullah, Peres was strongly criticized by the Saudi foreign minister.

As a reward for groveling to King Abdullah, the World Jewish Congress was invited to the conference after the Saudis had the chutzpa to brazenly inform them that major Jewish organizations - including the American Jewish Committee, the Presidents Conference, and the Anti Defamation League - were "too political" and would thus be excluded! It was shameful and unprecedented for a reputable Jewish organization to participate at an interfaith conference at which outsiders like the Saudis were able to veto who represents the Jewish people.

It was even more outrageous that the Jews who did participate in the event failed to challenge the behavior of the Saudi regime or even relate to the vicious anti-Semitism which dominates Saudi society. After all, it was Wahhabi preachers from Saudi Arabia who initially provided the inspiration for al Qaeda, until the latter turned on the Saudi leaders, accusing them of corruption and collusion with the US and Western world. To this day, Saudi money is utilized to promote global jihad.

THIS INTERFAITH activity must also be viewed in the context of the global campaign launched by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the umbrella body representing 57 Moslem states, to criminalize any criticism of Islam - including Shar'ia law.

The members of the OIC include the most tyrannical and repressive states in the world. Many deny human rights to their own citizens and brutally persecute non-Islamic religious minorities, denying them freedom of worship. Even purportedly moderate Islamic countries such as Egypt endorse domestic campaigns inciting their citizens to hatred of non-Islamic minorities, concentrating in particular on promoting the crudest forms of anti-Semitism.

Some of these countries, like Saudi Arabia, also seek to globally extend the application of Shar'ia law, which incorporates barbaric practices such as

stoning adulterous women to death, decapitating blasphemers, homosexuals and apostates, and cutting off limbs as punishment for petty theft.

The OIC bitterly complains that Islamophobia in Western countries is rampant and escalating. Yet taking into account that global terrorism today emanates overwhelmingly from Islamic fundamentalists - including those born and bred in the societies hosting them - it is surely a tribute to Western communities that they continue to peacefully co-exist with their Moslem minorities.

Without detracting from the obligation to combat hatred against Moslems and all minorities, the reality is that despite protestations to the contrary from liberals, Moslems residing in Europe face far less institutionalized discrimination than what other migrant groups, including Jews, underwent in the past. Moreover, they are not targeted by terrorists - in contrast to European Jews, their mosques and schools do not require round the clock security guards. It is also astonishing that some Moslem organizations have the impudence to demand an end to security profiling, though over 95 percent of global terrorist acts originate from radical jihadists. Profiling is undertaken exclusively as a pragmatic means to maximize security and is not related to racist bias. If red-headed individuals committed the bulk of terrorist acts it would surely not be unreasonable to profile redheads for security screening. It is even more bizarre that demands to ban profiling are frequently supported by liberals, including paradoxically, Jews who themselves represent the prime targets for acts of terror.

The OIC campaign has made considerable inroads, with the UN Secretary General recently boasting that "in confronting the Danish cartoons [caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad] and the Dutch film FITNA, we sent a clear message to the West regarding the red lines that should not be breached." In other words, violence, murder and blackmail have succeeded in forcing impotent Western governments to appease radical Islamist forces, even at the price of compromising hitherto sacrosanct commitments to freedom of expression.

Resolutions calling for criminal prosecution of anyone criticizing Islam or Islamic practices have already been formally adopted by the inappropriately named UN Human Rights Council and subsequently by the UN General Assembly. The discredited UN Human Rights Council, which concentrates the bulk of its efforts on delegitimizing Israel, has now formally endorsed a resolution prohibiting any discussion during its proceedings that could be deemed to be critical of Islam, Moslem practice or Shar'ia law. Yet this same body has shamelessly avoided condemning human rights violations including the genocidal killings by the barbaric Islamic Sudanese government at Darfur.

The Current priority for the Human Rights Council is to ensure that the forthcoming Durban II conference is transformed into a launching pad for resurrecting the previous Durban anti-Semitic hate fest demonizing Israel.

The structure of the Durban 2 Preparatory Committee says it all. The chairman is a former Libyan ambassador who described Israel as "the most tyrannical regime in the world," and he is backed by an Iranian deputy chairman. The Committee held one of its most important meetings on Yom Kippur to ensure that Israelis and Jews would not participate. In its recently released Final Document for Discussions, undisguised bias is reflected in the language employed. It refers to "Israeli apartheid," the "racist Israeli Law of Return", Palestinians as "victims of Israeli racism," and so on.

This abominable body is simultaneously proclaiming that "the most serious manifestations of the defamation of religion are the increase in Islamophobia and the worsening situation of Moslem minorities throughout the world."

It is incomprehensible why it took until now for Israel to recognize that Durban 2 is controlled by our most venomous enemies and is intended to serve as a global platform for promoting anti-Semitism and Israel bashing. Had we from the outset supported the Canadian decision to boycott this bogus conference, the Americans and many other democratic nations might also have resolved to distance themselves from these hate mongers.

To offset these challenges, Israel must seek to create alliances with democratic nations and NGOs. Likewise, where possible, Diaspora Jewish organizations should seek out moderate Moslem groups with whom to promote genuine interfaith relationships. But such activity must be transparent. Those who accept as a precondition to dialogue the exclusion of Israeli participants or restrictions on discussion relating to Israel are harming the Jewish cause, providing respectability to extremists and marginalizing moderate Moslems.

Without diminishing our ongoing efforts to outlaw hate crimes or incitement against all minorities, including Moslems, we must resist OIC attempts to pressure Western countries into criminalizing criticism of religion which, aside from being an unprecedented restriction of freedom of expression, would also deny us the opportunity of exposing Islamic extremism.

(Jerusalem Post Nov 26)

## **An Israeli-Palestinian Agreement: Forget about it**

By Aaron David Miller

I've been a Palestinian firster for most of my professional life. I believe that the Palestinian issue is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the key to regional peace, and the sine qua non for preserving Israel as a Jewish democratic state.

These arguments remain valid. What's changed is that a conflict-ending agreement between Israelis and Palestinians may no longer be possible. I choose my words carefully here. Varying kinds of accommodations cease fires, informal cooperation and temporary arrangements may still be possible. But an agreement now or perhaps for the foreseeable future that revolves conclusively the four core issues (borders, Jerusalem, refugees and security) isn't. Three realities drive my pessimism and should force experts, politicians and would be mediators to keep their enthusiasm for quick or easy solutions under control.

First, there are the issues. There is a myth out there driven by the Clinton parameters of December 2000, the Taba talks in 2001, the Geneva accord a year later, and the hundreds of hours of post Annapolis talks between Israelis and Palestinians that the two sides are "this close" (thumb and index finger a sixteenth of an inch apart) to an agreement. The gaps have now narrowed, perhaps impressively, but closing them, particularly on the identity issues such as Jerusalem and refugees, is still beyond the reach of negotiators and leaders.

It's not that there are metaphysical or magical reasons why these core issues can't be resolved; it's that the political will is lacking among leaders to reach an agreement and that the current situation on the ground between Israelis and Palestinians makes it impossible for them to do to. That everyone knows what the ultimate solution will look like (an intriguing notion that is supposed to make people feel better) is irrelevant if the circumstances for an agreement don't exist.

THIS BRINGS me to my second point. The dysfunction and confusion in Palestine make a conflict-ending agreement almost impossible. The divisions between Hamas (itself divided) and Fatah (even more divided) are now geographic, political and hard to bridge. Until the Palestinian national movement finds a way to impose a monopoly over the forces of violence in Palestinian society, it cannot move to statehood. The hallmark of any state's credibility (from Sweden, to Egypt, to Poland) is its control over all the guns. Criminal activity is one thing; allowing political groups to challenge the state, or its neighbors, with violence is quite another. What Palestinian leader can claim to speak for all Palestinians or negotiate an agreement against the backdrop of a separate entity which controls 1.3 million Palestinians, possesses a different view of governance and nation-building and often attacks its neighbor? And what Israeli prime minister could ever make concessions to a Palestinian leader who doesn't control all of the guns? There is no solution to this problem now. Only by restoring unity to the Palestinian house will a conflict-ending agreement be possible. And that agreement will have to take into account the needs of both Israel and a unified Fatah-Hamas negotiating position which doesn't reflect Hamas's extreme views and irredentism.

Third, there is serious dysfunction at the political level in Israel as well. Israel has its own leadership crisis. The state is in transition from a generation of founding leaders with moral authority, historic legitimacy and competency to a younger generation of middle age pols who have not quite measured up to their predecessors or to the challenges their nation faces. The leadership deficit is a global phenomenon, but not all states are sitting in a dangerous neighborhood on top of a political volcano. Is there an Israeli leader today who has the authority and skill to make and sell the tough choices required for Israeli-Palestinian peace?

So what to do? My days of giving advice to Israelis and Palestinians are over. I would, however, respectfully suggest to President-elect Barack Obama, in my capacity as an American who doesn't want to see America fail again, that he recognize there's no deal in this negotiation now. Manage it as best you can: help support an Israeli-Hamas ceasefire, train PA security forces, pour economic aid into the West Bank and Gaza, even nurture Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on the big issues, but don't think you can solve it; you can't.

Instead, go all-out for an Israeli-Syrian agreement which is doable and will enhance American credibility to confront Hamas, Hizbullah and Iran over time with tough choices, and improve America's regional standing. Then, perhaps, your chances on the Israeli-Palestinian track may be better. In the interim, I'm afraid sadly that the bottom line for Israelis and Palestinians is not a good one: Israelis will have their state, but Palestinians will never let them completely enjoy it. (Jerusalem Post Nov 23)

*The writer was an advisor on the Middle East for six secretaries of state. He is the author of The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive search for Arab-Israeli Peace.*