

## Commentary...

### Are Settlers Human?

Jerusalem Post Editorial

St.-Sgt. Noam Apter's last act was to lock himself inside a kitchen with two Palestinian terrorists, thereby saving the lives of many fellow students eating Shabbat dinner in the adjoining dining room. To Apter, 22, defending those students was worth sacrificing his own life. Listening to some Israelis, Europeans, and Americans, one might gain the impression that settlers do not deserve to live at all.

Relatively early on in the current Palestinian offensive, Hebrew University Prof. Ze'ev Sternhell wrote in Ha'aretz that "many in Israel, perhaps even the majority of the voters, do not doubt the legitimacy of the armed resistance in the territories themselves. The Palestinians would be wise to concentrate their struggle against the settlements, avoid harming women and children, and strictly refrain from firing on Gilo, Nahal Oz, or Sderot."

If a respected Israeli academic, writing in a prominent Israeli newspaper, can advise the Palestinians to concentrate their "armed resistance" against settlers, it is not surprising that this has become the European and American position too, with different degrees of candor.

The Europeans have openly thrown their weight behind "cease-fire" talks between the PLO and Hamas in Cairo, even though no one expects the latter to agree to ending attacks on settlements. The goal of these talks seems to be to pursue Sternhell's solution: no more ugly suicide bombings, just "legitimate" attacks like the one that just took the life of Noam Apter and the three other young men in a kitchen in Otniel.

The Palestinian Authority not only failed to condemn the Otniel attack, but a Fatah spokesman, Hatam Abed el-Kadar, stated the attack does not negatively affect the Cairo talks, whose purpose is to calm the situation only within the 1948 borders. As a senior Islamic Jihad figure, Sheik Abdullah Shami, said dryly, "The operation was carried out within the natural parameters of armed conflict."

The US has been less involved in the Cairo talks, but is reportedly giving Egypt credit for hosting them, and therefore does not see any particular problem with treating Hamas as a legitimate negotiating partner, rather than a terrorist group to be dismembered and crushed. This too is not so surprising, given the American drumbeat against the legitimacy of settlements, at times labeled "obstacles to peace." Even Sen. Joseph Lieberman, on his recent trip, warned Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that settlements would be an increasing irritant in US-Israel relations, without suggesting that he had a contrary point of view. Indeed, according to the latest draft of the US road map, Israel must commit to ending even the natural growth of settlements - a requirement not included in the Oslo Accords - in exchange for which the Palestinians "begin" to take concrete actions against terrorism.

What is behind this obsession with settlements? Having kindly offered the Palestinians his preferred war strategy, Sternhell also spelled out the impeccable logic of throwing the settlers to the wolves: "By adopting such an approach, the Palestinians would be sketching the profile of a solution that is the only inevitable one: The amended Green Line will be an international border and territory will be handed over to compensate the Palestinians for land that has already been or will be annexed to Israel." In other words, settlements matter because the Arab-Israeli conflict is a border conflict. Settlements block a territorial compromise, so they are, in this thinking, a strategic obstacle to peace, perhaps more so than terrorism itself, which can in theory be stopped at any time.

Now it is true that the settlement enterprise is a hybrid phenomenon: Some were founded more with an eye to bolstering national security, others more to prevent a Palestinian state from ever coming into being. It is possible to debate the validity of either or both of these goals with respect to the past, present, and future. What should not be debatable today is that the basic premise of Oslo, and in fact of all post-1967 Western and Israeli diplomacy - that the conflict was essentially a border conflict - has been disproved. In the summer and winter of 2000, the Palestinians first rejected a near total territorial capitulation by Israel, and followed with a war, in case the point had not been made clearly enough.

The premise that the Arabs were ready for peace and the only question was terms was a false one. If there were no settlements, there would still have been

## ISRAEL NEWS

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אברהם יוסף  
a war over what even the West's current great moderate hope, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), is unwilling to concede: the "right of return." The stubborn focus on settlements, including by the Labor Party, is a distraction from confronting the real source of the conflict, which is the refusal to accept the legitimacy of Israel as a permanent Jewish state.

The settlers are Jews, Israelis, and human beings. The Palestinian terrorists, whether or not they follow

Sternhell's tactical advice, make no distinction between Israelis living in Otniel or in Tel Aviv, and Palestinian Authority statements routinely refer to our cities and towns as "settlements." So long as people who care about peace play into the settlement distraction, they shift the spotlight away from where it belongs: on those Arabs who reject a sovereign and Jewish Israel under any circumstances. (Jerusalem Post Dec 30)

### The People I Live Amongst By Naomi Ragen

I once lived in what shall remain an unnamed city in the Western world, in which one of the most prominent organizations was called: Parents of Murdered Children. In this place, the kidnapping and molestation and murder of children was endemic, so much so that I wouldn't let my children go out of the house alone. Ever.

In this city, a woman's car once broke down on the highway. Within ten minutes, a car picked her up, and she was subsequently raped and murdered. And I wondered: What kind of people live in this place that within a ten minute period a rapist-murderer would be passing by?

And now I live in a place where all around me, every minute of the day, in every part of this land, there is a hidden saint and hero.

I want to start with the latest story, the story of Noam in Otniel. Otniel is a yeshiva in which boys add two years to their regular army service so that they can continue their religious studies. My son went there. And his friends. And the son of one of my neighbors, a remarkable young man, the kind that regularly visits a family because they lost one of their sons in the army. And now he visits them, and comforts them, every week. People he didn't know.

Last weekend in Otniel, the boys went home for Shabbat, and the yeshiva was open to visitors.

Friday night. The white tablecloths. A hundred boys wearing knitted skullcaps just returned from Sabbath prayers. They formed a circle and danced, waiting for the first course of the Sabbath meal to be served. In the kitchen. Gabriel, 17, Tvika, 18, Yehuda 20, and Noam 23, were getting the first course on to the serving plates.

Outside, two terrorists, members of the Islamic Jihad organization, cut the useless wire fence around the yeshiva, and entered the kitchen wearing IDF army uniforms and toting M 16's, 12 rounds of ammunition, and ten hand grenades. They started shooting immediately. Under fire, Noam Apfter ran towards the door separating the kitchen from the dining room where a hundred unsuspecting young boys were welcoming the Sabbath. Wounded, with his last strength, he locked both locks and threw the key away. He locked himself in with the terrorists, and locked them out from harming his fellow students.

Noam Apfter paid for this act of heroism with his life. He, and the other three boys were murdered by the terrorists.

Now, I don't know if I can explain this to you, those of you who have never been in a terrorist attack. Faced with such harm, every single fibre of your being screams to open the door and escape. To think of others in such a situation is remarkable. To deliberately lock yourself in with terrorists to save others, is beyond my capacity to understand. It takes a large soul, and more courage than is given to any human being.

These are the people I live amongst: Shlomo Harel: who pushed a suicide bomber to the ground when he tried to explode himself in a Jerusalem coffee shop, pinning his arms to the floor.

Mikhail Sarkisov, 31, a new immigrant from Turkmenistan, living in a trailer with no bathroom or refrigerator, who as a guard on Tel Aviv's beachfront Café Tayelet, armed with a fake pistol, threw himself bodily on a suicide bomber to prevent him from detonating, saving dozens of lives.

Rami Mahmoud Mahameed, 17, a young Arab Israeli, who asked a suicide bomber waiting at a bus stop for his cell phone, and calmly called the police, who prevented the bomber from boarding a bus, but not from exploding.

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Rami was badly injured.

Eli Federman, who, guarding a Tel Aviv disco, faced the speeding car of a suicide bomber heading straight for him, and the club, and coolly fired, blowing up the car before it could enter.

Bus driver Baruch Neuman, who got off the bus to check a passenger who had fallen trying to board the bus from the back, only to find he was wired. He and another passenger held the bomber's hands down until the rest of the bus passengers could flee to safety.

Others who paid for their heroism with their lives include Yossef Twitto, head of the response team in Itamar, who ran to save a family whose home had been entered by terrorists, terrorists who killed three sisters and brothers, wounded another two, before killing Yossef Twitto.

And Mordechai Tomer, 19, who stopped a car from going into downtown Jerusalem and was blown up. And Tamir Matan, who helped stop a suicide bomber in a gas station from entering a busy cafeteria. He and two young soldiers who helped him, were blown up.

This is the face of Israel. These are the people I live amongst. I live among them humbly, knowing that in any place, or time, in a random ten minute period, there are heroes cruising around, ready to give their precious lives for mine.

This is our human landscape, what the land of Israel, its values, its education, its mothers and fathers, have produced. This land, and its people.

God bless them and keep them. (NaomiRagen.com Dec 30)

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### Sharon Means What He Says By Gabriel Danzig

*It is obvious why Sharon wants to create a Palestinian state. If he doesn't do it, someone else will and that someone will undoubtedly do it on worse terms.*

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's recent statements on his commitment to a Palestinian state have put to rest all speculation that he is using the issue as an election gimmick. He recently said that members of the Likud who oppose a Palestinian state will not be welcome in his government. Such a statement would not be necessary if Sharon's goal were to convince moderate voters, or a skeptical Bush, that he is pragmatic and willing to compromise. Such statements place traditional Likud members in an uncomfortable position, pressurize the more ambitious members to begin adopting Sharon's line, and gradually create an atmosphere in which no one in a position to do anything will be opposed to a Palestinian state. If Sharon's secret plan is to oppose such a state, he will have made it impossible to do so. Clearly he is going ahead with the plan. As usual, he means exactly what he says.

But why? If there is anything that we have learned from the Oslo process it is that it was a mistake. Likud opponents of the process were proved right and in spades. Sharon himself was opposed to the process and his words have proven prophetically true. Rather than leading to a building up of trust between Israel and the Palestinians, the Oslo process made it clearer than ever that Arafat, and the Palestinian people as a whole, are completely opposed to peace with Israel. If Oslo was a test, it has proven the unworkability of a two-state solution within the borders of the present-day State of Israel.

Following the resulting catastrophe, a huge majority of Israelis abandoned the discredited political positions that brought on this disaster. An overwhelming majority then voted for Sharon, known to everyone as a hard-liner.

Why adopt the wrong policies just now? Sharon is known for his willingness to behave pragmatically when he is part of the decision-making process. He was eager to join the Wye negotiations, and even signed the agreement that was reached because he was part of it. If he had not been, it is easy to see that he would have opposed it fiercely.

So, too, now that he is prime minister, and virtually assured of a second term, he will prove willing to compromise. But why?

It would be fair to brand Sharon as a cynical political maneuverer. There are reasons why he feels it so important to be part of the process. He is one of the last of the country's genuine statesmen. He was raised at a time when being Israeli was something to be very proud of.

But he is also aware of the great gap that exists between leaders of his generation - whether Likud or Labor - and the newer members of the political game. He is scared of the immaturity, the lack of perspective, the lack of knowledge and experience, the lack of an all-encompassing commitment to the Jewish state that characterized our early leaders. He sees himself, perhaps rightly, as the last reliable Israeli leader. And given that, it is up to him to throw the die.

In Sharon's view there will be a Palestinian state one day, sooner or later. That is a fact. When Sharon confronts facts, he gives way. He learned that as a general, when ignoring the facts means death for one's troops.

But he also learned that as a politician. When prior to the 1999 election he came to the conclusion that the Likud would be better without Netanyahu at the helm, he says that he pursued every avenue in order to remove him. But when he realized that he could not do it, he became instead Netanyahu's one real supporter in the party, and the only man that Netanyahu thanked in his resignation speech. Sharon does not fight reality. He makes the best of it.

Given all this, it is obvious why Sharon wants to create a Palestinian state.

If he doesn't do it, someone else will, and that someone will undoubtedly do it on worse terms, with less thought and circumspection, with more damage to Israel than anything he would do. Sharon will make a Palestinian state that we can live with, or so he hopes. If someone has to do it, it had better be someone

like Sharon. I couldn't agree more. But does someone have to do it?

Here there is room for uncertainty. Sharon may be wrong that it is impossible to prevent such a state. Unprecedented voices have been heard from important congressional leaders in the US from both sides of the political divide opposing the creation of a Palestinian state. We do not know what the contours of our region will look like after the Arab-Western conflict plays itself out. And Sharon may underestimate the spiritual and ideological strength of our future leaders.

There are newer voices on the right which make a lot of sense, voices such as those of Avigdor Lieberman, Benny Elon and Michael Kleiner. These voices represent a continuation of traditional Likud ideology, and may succeed in cementing a new national consensus. This ideology was frequently the ideology of an opposition, and it has proven difficult for political leaders to maintain it in office. But that doesn't mean that it is the wrong view. It has proved itself right over and over in the past, and it may do so again.

The question is whether such an ideology can become so dominant that it will become impossible for Oslo to make a repeat performance. On that there is reason for doubt. And if not, then Sharon may just be right.

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**Would a Jewish President Be Good for Israel?** By Shmuley Boteach  
*The writer, a rabbi and best-selling author, hosts a daily radio show syndicated across the United States on the Talk America radio network.*

As a Jewish boy growing up in Los Angeles, I can still remember my mother telling me that there would never be a Jewish president. America still wasn't ready for it. So you can imagine the surprise, shock, and euphoria I experienced, along with so many other American Jews, when Al Gore announced that he had chosen Joseph Lieberman as his vice-presidential running mate. All across the land editorials praised the breakthrough of this seemingly impenetrable barrier. I was part of the jubilation, giddily publishing an op-ed praising the choice, and walked on air in the days that followed. The fact that Lieberman was not just a Jew but an observant one at that, and a man of impeccable moral character, added to the sense of triumph.

It wasn't long before we all came down to earth. Just days after the announcement, Senator Lieberman, who had previously led the charge in Congress to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, sat down with Larry King for a nationally televised interview and suddenly reversed his position, saying the time was not ripe. That initial alarm was followed by some others, most notably his remark about having "respect" for Minister Louis Farrakhan, even though, in response, Farrakhan asserted, just days later on NBC's Meet the Press, that Lieberman has dual loyalties and charged that Jews have a "master-slave" relationship with blacks.

But Lieberman's position on Farrakhan is the least of my concerns. It is his position on Israel that continues to disturb me, now that he is actively seeking the presidency.

Would a Jewish president be an unmitigated blessing? Is this what American Jewry most needs at this time? Since our chief foreign-policy consideration is Israel, especially when it is fighting a war to the death against terrorism, wouldn't an American Jewish president have to bend over backward to show that he doesn't show Israel favoritism? It is sad that Lieberman continues to play that sorry game.

Just days ago, while touring the West Bank, Lieberman was quoted as saying, "There are desperate humanitarian conditions here." Of course there are. We all know that. The suffering of the Palestinian people is horrible. But the fault lies squarely in the hands of the Palestinians who have repeatedly broken their Oslo agreements and resorted to violence.

Would Lieberman have gone to Berlin in June 1945 and similarly decried the horrible humanitarian conditions, after years of Allied bombing, without squarely laying the blame at the feet of the Nazi government? No one told the Germans to follow Hitler into the inhuman abyss. They did so of their own volition. And the Palestinians have followed Yasser Arafat into the same black hole.

But what I found most troubling was Lieberman's criticism of the Bush administration's Mideast policies, contrasting them with the "tremendous regard" he held for the devotion former president Bill Clinton showed for creating peace in the Middle East, and for the "enormous effort" he put into trying to solve the conflict.

Let us be clear. For all his good intentions, and for all his genuine love for Israel and the Jewish people, Clinton brought incalculable, even irreparable harm to the Jewish state. His misguided meddling, which involved, among other outrages, inviting Arafat to the White House more than any other world leader, pushed Israel into unending concessions with a partner who was never accepting of Israel's existence. The result, as we now know, is thousands of Israeli civilians murdered and maimed by Palestinian terrorists.

Rather than praise Clinton's disastrous efforts, one would think that Lieberman would be scratching his head and wondering how a man who invested so much in the Middle East ultimately managed to wreak such havoc.

The only time I ever met Clinton face to face was in November 2000,

when he was already a lame-duck president with five weeks left in office. I was in a receiving line, with one of the world's most distinguished Jewish personalities ahead of me. Clinton recognized him, and they embraced. I overheard their conversation, as Clinton said to him, "I'm pretty sure we'll have a final peace deal in Israel before I leave office." This while incessant terror attacks shook Israel daily. My Jewish friend turned to me incredulously and said, "A fine man, but on this he's a meshuggener." And still, until the very end, Clinton tried to close his deal.

The harm that Clinton brought to Israel is best understood through the analogy of an obsessive mother who will do anything to marry off her daughter. In Clinton's eyes, Israel was better off married to an imperfect partner than left isolated and alone in the Middle East.

He was going to force a marriage between the Israelis and the Palestinians no matter how much hatred was taught about Israel in the Palestinian schools, no matter how many times Arafat praised suicide bombers as martyrs, and no matter how much evidence there was linking Arafat directly to terror against Israel. Clinton was hell-bent on wedding bells, even if there were some blood stains on the wedding canopy. Better Israel have a bad peace than a continued state of war. In his own matriarchal way, he just wanted his daughter to be happy, even with an abusive husband.

As a Jew, I feel like a daughter stuck in that awful marriage. Almost daily, I read stories of my Jewish brothers and sisters in Israel being blown to smithereens. Of course, the abusive husband is never held accountable by the world community, but rather the wife who provoked him. But Clinton shut his eyes to all the beatings and simply pushed ahead for this horrible marriage to take place. What he never learned was that even divorce is better than to be divorced from reality.

I am a man who believes in peace, just as I am a man who believes in marriage. But as a counselor, I would never pressure a woman to return to a man who repeatedly assaulted her, and Clinton pushing a peace on Israel with a partner that repeatedly murdered innocent civilians was depraved and indefensible.

In assessing his Middle Eastern legacy, we may judge Clinton on two things - his intentions and his actions. While his intentions may have been honorable, his actions were horrible. Compare Clinton, best friend of the Jews, who pursued a neutral policy on Israel, to Richard Nixon, a man who made many crude and loathsome anti-Semitic comments.

Yet, when Israel was on the verge of annihilation during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Nixon forced the military airlift that helped save Israel. Against the counsel of many of his advisers who urged neutrality, he came down resolutely on Israel's side and, at the height of the airlift, every nine minutes an American supply plane was landing with much-needed ammunition.

As an American Jew, I prefer a president who is a closet anti-Semite like Nixon but who helps Israel in its hour of need to a Jew-lover like Clinton who takes down Israel's defenses, making it vulnerable to attack.

And I would also prefer a born-again Christian president like George W. Bush, who has shown phenomenal support for Israel and exceptional moral clarity on the war against terror, than a Jewish president who continues the offensive lie that Israel and the Palestinian Authority are moral equals. (Jerusalem Post Dec 31)

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### **A Perfect Example** By David Wilder

These days it's not difficult to be upset. We have a Prime Minister who's talking about a Palestinian State. The other candidate for Prime Minister is talking about uprooting over 30,000 people the first year of his premiership, including all of the Gaza-Gush Katif communities, as well as Hebron and Kiryat Arba. The killing continues, and, as happened here in Hebron, rather than punish the terrorists, a new neighborhood, the most suitable response to the deaths of 14 people, is destroyed.

But things are not all bad. Sometime perhaps, we put the wrong emphasis on various activities, or even miss what is going on around us. Tonight I'd like to give you one example of what's good, what can pick our spirits up.

Hebron's Avraham Avinu neighborhood originated in the middle fifteen hundreds when a group of Jews made their way from Spain and Turkey to Hebron. The Jewish Quarter, as it was known, housed Jews for almost four hundred years, until the 1929 riots and massacre.\*

The Jewish Quarter was fully destroyed by Hebron Arabs with the assistance of the Jordanians in the late 1950s. When we arrived back in Hebron following the Six Day War, the neighborhood was in total ruins.

Outside the neighborhood, Arabs built a market. Several buildings were constructed on Jewish land, and transformed into the city's vegetable shuk. And so it remained, even after the Israeli return to Hebron.

For years the market place was a serious thorn in the side of Hebron's renewed Jewish community. It posed a great security risk, as the area was full of cars and trucks, and a daily mass of Arabs.

About eight years ago the wholesale market was closed for security reasons, but the retail market remained open until about two years ago when Arab terrorists threw a booby-trapped teddy bear into the market, hoping that a child would pick it up to play with. Fortunately soldiers in area discovered it before anyone else. When they saw the wires coming out of the teddy bear they realized it was a bomb and it was soon dismantled. That's when the army finally closed the market.

To ensure that these buildings, built on Jewish land, would never be returned to our enemy, we began transforming the vegetable stalls into apartments, and over a year ago young couples began moving into these tiny homes. This was true redemption of the land.

In one of the market structures the community decided to build a couple of apartments for larger families. The work took quite a while but slowly the apartments started to take shape. A few weeks ago the Schlissel family, with eight children moved into their new home, in the former Arab market.

Rabbi Yisrael and Tzippy Schlissel are not newcomers to Hebron. Tzippy is the great grand daughter of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, and the daughter of\* Rabbi Shlomo Ra'an an who was killed by Arab terrorists in his Tel Rumeida home four and a half years ago. His wife Chaya remained in their caravan house, while giving one room of her dwelling for establishment of a Torah Study Center in memory of her murdered husband. The dean of that study center, called "Ohr Shlomo," or "The Lights of Shlomo" is Tzippy's husband, Rabbi Yisrael Schlissel.

For several years Rabbi Schlissel drove back and forth from his home in the Horesh community in Binyamin, north of Jerusalem. Not too long ago, on his way to Hebron, an Arab terrorist opened fire on his car. Miraculously one of the bullets ricocheted off the side-view mirror and only scratched him. The fact that he wasn't badly hurt or even worse was an act of Divine providence.

The Schlissel family waited for a long time to move into their new apartment in Hebron. Rabbi Schlissel was even willing to forgo his position as Rabbi of his community in order to live here. This year one of their daughters began school in Kiryat Arba, living with her grandmother in Tel Rumeida. Finally, even though construction wasn't 100% complete, they decided that the time had come. During the Hanukkah vacation they moved to their new apartment in the one-time 'banana market' outside the Avraham Avinu neighborhood in Hebron. Incidentally, or perhaps not so incidentally, the site of their apartment was once a famous Yeshiva initiated by Hebron Torah scholar, Rabbi Eliyahu Manni.

When it started raining heavily a couple of weeks ago, water started dripping from the Schlissel's ceiling. The stairs leading from the ground floor to the upstairs bedrooms are still makeshift. When they moved in, the water and electricity had yet to be hooked up. But when I visited their new home, I didn't find any dejected children. I didn't find Tzippy or Rabbi Yisrael sitting around griping about the raindrops falling inside their house. Rather, I found a radiating happiness and warmth, the kind of which cannot be counterfeited. I found a family exalting in the joy of living in Hebron.

One might ask, following such tragedy, as was the murder of Tzippy's father, Rabbi Shlomo Ra'an an, why would the family still want to come live here? Why wouldn't they take Rebbetzin\* Chaya and flee? The answer is very simple. The most fitting way to commemorate Rabbi Ra'an an's memory is to carry on where he left off, to follow in his footsteps. Rabbi Yisrael and Tzippy Schlissel waited over four years to finally have a house to live in, in Hebron, but now, here they are. The Oslo war didn't scare them away. Two years of shooting at Hebron's apartments and residents didn't keep them from fulfilling a dream.

And so, my friends, even when events around us are liable to drag us down into the dumps, it's important to know that, in reality, the ideals haven't faded or disappeared. There are those who like us to believe otherwise, but as the saying goes, 'it just ain't so.' And Rabbi Yisrael and Tzippy Schlissel and their eight children and the perfect example. (Jewish Community of Hebron Dec 23)

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### **Yasser's Vote Snub** By John Podhoretz

Last week, Colin Powell and a bunch of Europeans introduced their "road map" to a Palestinian state in three years' time. Then, as ever and always, Yasser Arafat embarrassed and humiliated them. Arafat canceled the Palestinian elections scheduled for January. He called them last summer only after President George W. Bush declared that reforms and new leadership were necessary preconditions of US support for a Palestinian state.

But it looks like Arafat heard the roadmappers' plan and decided that he didn't

need no stinking elections. Needless to say, his lackey Saeb Erekat went before the international press and said the election cancellation was entirely the fault of Israel. The continuing Israeli presence on the West Bank and Gaza would make an election impossible, Erekat said.

Oh? There were Israeli soldiers present in the West Bank and Gaza when the Palestinians went to the polls in 1996 and voted overwhelmingly for Arafat. Could it be that Arafat fears the results of the January election? Could it be that with America closely watching an election its president said was necessary, Arafat cannot easily rig the results exactly the way he wants them?

More striking still was the tone of Erekat's remarks. He made it sound as though having the Palestinian election was somehow a favor to Israel, and that the Palestinian Authority was canceling the favor.

Doubtless, there are many people in the world who will buy this torn and tattered rug from Erekat and Arafat. There always are. And doubtless, the Europeans who were so enthusiastic about their "road map" will not have

enough sense to feel the humiliation Arafat has heaped upon them.

But Colin Powell will. For the umpteenth time, Powell has taken a step towards Arafat and the PA in the hope that they will take a step toward him. The secretary of state must still deal daily with world leaders who confuse their sympathy for the Palestinian people with sympathy for the murderous thug who has tyrannized them for decades.

Powell suffers from no such confusion, as he has made repeatedly clear. But he has been assigned the task of convincing the leaders of the democracies that our efforts in Iraq are just and right. They continue to suffer from the delusion that things throughout the Middle East can somehow be made right by rewarding the Palestinians and punishing the Israelis.

But still, canceling the election just after world leaders have set a three-year timetable for a Palestinian state is a bit much, even for Arafat.

Now consider this: In the midst of all the strife and turmoil in the Middle East, Israel is in the midst of a vibrant election season. The election will take place on January 28. A vote-buying scandal has been uncovered in Ariel Sharon's Likud party, and the newspapers and TV news reporters are all over the story. Meanwhile, in Israeli schools, children are being taught how to use gas masks to prepare them in case of Iraqi attack.

As it happens, the ultimate and totally final deadline for Iraqi compliance with the United Nations is January 27, one day before the Israeli elections. Israel knows this. And yet not a word is said about canceling, postponing or otherwise calling off this election - even though the day of voting may be a date of great physical peril for the Israeli people.

That's what happens in a country whose citizens hold democracy precious. (The New York Post Dec 29)

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### **Liar, Liar** By Bret Stephens

"Every word she says is a lie, including 'and,' 'but' and 'if.'" What Mary McCarthy said of Lillian Hellman, so one could say about Saeb Erekat. Among Palestinians, the 46-year-old Jericho boss and chief PA negotiator is the single most widely quoted person in the English-language press, with 11,382 citations since 1988. (By contrast, runner-up Hanan Ashrawi comes in at 8,062 for the same time period and Sari Nusseibeh gets fewer than 2,000).

Erekat gets kid-glove treatment from ordinarily hard-fisted reporters: an admiring 1998 Wall Street Journal profile reads like a memo on why he should succeed Yasser Arafat. On TV, he remains the go-to man for all the major networks. That he was chief mouthpiece of the Jenin massacre myth, bandying about figures of 500 Palestinian deaths as though it were incontrovertible fact, hasn't noticeably dimmed his credibility.

Especially, it would seem, at The New York Times, where Erekat's byline appeared last week under an op-ed called "Saving the Two-State Solution."

To get a sense of how extraordinary this is - not just anybody gets published in the Times - first consider the case of Anne Bayefsky, a leading human-rights scholar and a visiting professor at Columbia University. In May, Bayefsky published an op-ed in the Times titled "Ending Bias in the Human Rights System." Pegged to the appointment of a new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the article called for reform of the treaty system and bureaucratic mechanisms governing international human-rights law.

"A United Nations high commissioner for human rights will always need to withstand political pressure from member states to engage in a highly selective application of human rights norms," she wrote.

"To succeed, a high commissioner must be guided by the principle of universality, yet root his or her work in the rights of the individual person."

There was, however, more to this supremely anodyne piece of writing than meets the eye. According to Bayefsky, the article went through "six new drafts, four additional drafts with smaller changes and corrections, seven drafts from the editors and six hours of editing by telephone." Why? It wasn't a matter of prose style. Times editors objected to a line about the need "to confront the UN's internal resistance to professionalism and transparency" as well as the fact that human-rights violators such as Libya "prefer devoting UN funds... to criticizing Israel, lest attention wander too close to home." The Times also wanted it explained that Israel "is both politically offensive to many member states and very weak at the United Nations," a line to which Bayefsky refused to put her name. Indeed, the published version was so diluted, the editing job so censorious, that Bayefsky went public with her saga in the pages of Justice, the journal of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists.

From the look of it, Erekat requires no similar recourse. His op-ed begins with a lie - "Palestinians are committed to two equal states for two equal peoples" - and ends with a veiled threat - "If the international community and the Israeli public miss these opportunities they will have only themselves to blame for the consequences we will all suffer." In between, one canard follows upon another. Yet none of this seems to inspire anything remotely like the kind of scrutiny Bayefsky endured simply for putting facts to paper.

Begin with Line One: "Palestinians are committed to two equal states for two equal peoples." Already, one must discount the sizable body of Palestinian opinion - between 40 and 50 percent, according to Palestinian polls - that rejects the claim outright. But grant Erekat a declarative statement: Still, how does it square with Arafat's absolute refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state? Or his call to Israeli Arab leaders to join his intifada: "Yes, we will still write in blood the map of the one homeland and one nation." This doesn't sound like two equal

states for two equal peoples.

Now fast forward to Line Two: "Israel's insatiable appetite for constructing settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, however, is making a two-state solution impossible, in the process frustrating all efforts to resolve the conflict peacefully." Reasonable people disagree about the justice or wisdom of settlement activity; personally my feelings are mixed.

But let's dispatch with the notion that the existence of settlements simply propels Palestinians to violence, as if they were incapable of mature moral reflection, or that anything less than complete acquiescence to Palestinian demands can make for a peaceful settlement or a two-state solution. There is also this nagging issue of terrorism, a word Erekat utters nowhere in an article ostensibly about "saving" the two-state solution.

Moving right along, we learn that Israeli settlers number 400,000, including those in east Jerusalem, that Sharon has built 60 new settlements since taking office, and that settlements "control almost 42% of the West Bank, not including Palestinian East Jerusalem." Erekat ascribes some of these figures to Israeli advocacy groups such as Peace Now. Yet this is a highly tendentious tactic, somewhat akin to a Canadian foreign minister scoring George Bush by citing Anthony Lewis as the ultimate authority on US affairs.

A better source is the Times itself, whose own news reporting speaks of about 200,000 settlers in areas outside of east and greater Jerusalem - which is to say, those settlers whose presence might in some meaningful way prevent a territorially contiguous "Palestine" from coming into being. In doubling the traditional count of "settlers," Erekat stakes a Palestinian claim not just to outlying settlements such as Itamar and Netzarim, but to integral Jerusalem neighborhoods such as French Hill.

Does anyone notice?

The notion that 60 new settlements have been built since Sharon took office is also a piece with this kind of casual statistical manipulation. Do these "settlements" have names? Streets? Stores? Schools? While the tenacity of the settler movement in setting up new outposts and having them grow cannot be denied, and while the legality of some of these outposts is often questionable (two dozen of them were dismantled by the Sharon government), it is not remotely accurate to call some empty mobile home standing 500 meters down the road from Ariel or Itamar a "settlement."

Then there's Erekat's claim that settlements "control" 42% of the West Bank. In fact, settlements make up some 5% of the West Bank land mass. Where do the other 37% come from? Erekat writes about the Palestinian lands seized to construct bypass roads, security zones, the security fence and so on, which together presumably make up the difference.

But hang on. Why do these settlements require security zones? Why are bypass roads built in the first place? Erekat's logic here reminds me of Abba Eban's quip about "the child who, after killing his parents, pleads for mercy as an orphan." If Palestinians have lost land to security zones and bypass roads, doesn't it have something to do with Palestinian attacks on settlements and drivers? One might fairly agree to Erekat's figure of 42% rather than my 5%. What cannot be fairly said is that Jews are to blame for the difference.

Much the same goes for Erekat's musings on the security fence. "Israel's so-called security wall, parts of which are nearly 25 feet high and are topped with watch towers and barbed wire, has more to do with seizing Palestinian land than it does with security... It has become clear to many Palestinians that what Mr. Sharon and many others have in mind for the Palestinians is a ghetto 'state.'"

Three things to note here. First, if there's a 25-foot wall separating Netanya from Tulkarm, or my neighborhood from Ramallah, I'd like to see it. Otherwise, it's another piece of Erekat make believe. Second, if Israelis of both the Right and Left feel they have no choice but to build a security fence, it is only because the Palestinian Authority has made it plain that they will neither negotiate in good faith nor make a good faith effort to rein in terrorism. Third, Israelis who expect the security fence to take care of their problems had best get ready for the next phase of the propaganda war, in which Palestinians go from being "occupied" to "ghettoized" - and no less intent on doing something about it.

I'm afraid I could go on almost endlessly. But let's go through this quickly.

Erekat says settlers are stealing Palestinian water resources. Yet almost all settlers are linked to the central Israeli water grid and do not use local wells. Erekat says that Israeli settlement activity violates international law. Read Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva convention and you know that it doesn't. Erekat says that Israel plans to deprive Palestinians of everything but "an insignificant presence in Jerusalem." Yet at Camp David, much of east Jerusalem was theirs for the taking. They refused it. Erekat urges Israelis to elect "a leadership committed to evacuating settlements" in order to "undermine Palestinian extremists and help bring an end to the horrors of the past two years." Yet that's precisely what Israelis did in 1999, which helped bring on the horrors of the past two years.

Hitler - or was it Stalin? - said something to the effect that people will sooner believe one big lie than many small ones. Saeb Erekat proves him wrong. Lie habitually, lie shamelessly, lie unnecessarily, lie about small things and big things, lie about the past, lie about the future, lie about lies, lie with every "and," "but" and "if," and some of your lies are bound to be believed. Of course, it helps if they are printed in The New York Times. *The writer is Editor-in-Chief of the Jerusalem Post.* (Jerusalem Post Dec 27)