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ISRAEL NEWS
A collection of the week's news from Israel
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Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

Commentary..

The Nature of the Protest

By Pinchas Wallerstein

Only the people, through elections or a referendum have the right to decide on disengagement

In the wake of Monday's confrontation between the IDF and residents of Yitzhar, I've been asked: "What are the red lines beyond which the settlement movement will not go in defense of its position?"

The answer is straightforward: Our red line is lifting a hand in violence against another Jew, whether it be a soldier, a policeman or anyone else. Our red line is not calling on soldiers to disobey orders. Those are our red lines.

So how are we responding to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's bulldozing tactics which have destroyed any legitimacy his plans might have held. We've set up a protest camp near the Prime Minister's Office. It's the centerpiece of a determined opposition against Sharon's immoral transfer plan.

Our demand is that the citizens of Israel decide what to do about the disengagement plan; put it to a democratic vote - either by means of a referendum or through national elections. The camp will close only when this goal has been accomplished.

If given the opportunity to speak with the citizens of Israel to clarify the issues, we have no doubt that the majority will vote against disengagement.

Moves critical to Israel's future that threaten the very fabric of society should only be taken with the clear approval of a majority of Israelis.

Were anyone to suggest a transfer of Arabs from the tiniest of villages for the most important of security reasons, there would be an immense outcry that would shake the very heavens. But those who consider themselves the guardians of human rights seem to exempt Jews in Judea, Samaria and Gaza from their patronage.

I've called "The Evacuation and Compensation Law" immoral. Let me explain why.

This Draconian law was pushed through the Knesset using Stalin-like methods. It provides for refusing compensation to any Jew who protests being uprooted from their home; it calls for three years imprisonment for anyone who remains in their home once the evacuation call has been made.

This law is immoral, first and foremost, because it attempts to legalize a crime which should never be repeated: the expulsion of Jews from their homes against their will.

It is part of the Israeli tragedy that not one member of the Left has risen up to protest against this shocking infringement of human rights - who has shouted, "Yes, I am in favor of disengagement, but not in this undemocratic manner." If such a cry were to be heard, it might help prevent the upcoming upheaval in the very firmament of our society.

It is against this irresponsible disregard for human rights that I have called for civil disobedience.

Many thousands, throughout Israel and abroad, Jews and non-Jews, have expressed solidarity and support. Thousands in Israel have already pledged their commitment to the Council of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, to physically and determinedly resist any attempt to evacuate Jews from Gush Katif or Northern Samaria * and to pay the price of going to jail for their resistance. Only in this manner, it seems, will the government comprehend the gravity of its actions.

I have no qualms about going to jail for this pivotal issue in our people's history. Furthermore, it is my fervent prayer that the huge response I've received will further manifest itself in a similar decision among those who believe in their hearts in the rightness of our cause.

It is not by accident that I refrain from calling on soldiers to disobey orders in this matter.

I recognize such action would be too heavy a price to exact on Israeli society. Still, it is over-simplistic to believe that my instructions, or the instructions of the Yesha Council can be the deciding factor in the minds of young men and women serving in the IDF. It is their conscience, and their conscience alone, which we will see play out should they be called upon to force Jews from their homes. It is my opinion that thousands of soldiers will not find it within themselves to be partners in this endeavor. The damage Sharon and his government will have inflicted on Israeli society by placing them in this untenable position will require decades to repair.

Non-violent civil protest to immoral actions on the part of our government

is the democratic right of all those privileged enough to live in a democratic country. It is this right which I fully intend to exercise. And I will continue in my call for others to take their place by my side.

One thing, and one thing alone, can prevent mass arrests, a crippling of the IDF and divisive chaos within Israeli society: letting the people decide.

Should the majority of the citizens of Israel decide on unilateral withdrawal - without an agreement between Israel

and her Arab foes in sight, without any pretense of peace, we will protest in order to provide history with that essential, educational tool, but the entire nature of the protest will be different. (Jerusalem Post Jan 7)

The writer is Mayor of the Binyamin Regional Council and a leader of The Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

NGO Monitor's Guide to Charities in the Tsunami Zone

In response to requests for information on reliable charities and humanitarian organizations responding to the immense tragedy in South East Asia, NGO Monitor has prepared a short guide and ratings. The NGOs that devote their resources exclusively or primarily to humanitarian assistance are at the top of this list, while those who use funds to pursue political and ideological objectives receive lower ratings. (**** Indicates the highest rating; * is the lowest).

Detailed analyses and information sources on which these ratings are based can be found in the Infofiles section of the NGO Monitor website.

******DIRECT RELIEF INTERNATIONAL**

This California based NGO devoted to "improve the health of people...who are victims of natural disasters, war, and civil unrest," is truly a humanitarian and apolitical organization. According the NGO Monitor's assessment, this organization's activities indeed reflect a non-discriminatory approach, "without regard to political affiliation, religious belief, or ethnic identity."

******CARE USA**

CARE implements its stated mission of serving individuals and families in the poorest communities in the world" without attempting to further a political agenda. The activities of CARE provide an example of a humanitarian NGO carrying out its work under difficult circumstances in a professional manner for the benefit of those in need of its assistance programs. In contrast to many other NGOs that promote a political agenda, CARE fulfils its mission, concentrating on practical humanitarian activities.

*****MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES (DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS)**

Although occasionally departing from its apolitical mission, MSF generally provides effective assistance to populations in distress, to victims of natural or man-made disasters and to victims of armed conflict, "without discrimination and irrespective of race, religion, creed or political affiliation." However, in some cases, as documented by NGO Monitor, MSF personnel have violated the pledge to "respect their professional code of ethics and to maintain complete independence from all political, economic and religious powers."

****OXFAM**

Oxfam International (a loose confederation from 12 countries) collects a great deal of money to distribute annually in the effort "to find lasting solutions to poverty, suffering and injustice," and in response to humanitarian disasters. However, some Oxfam branches have engaged in highly politicized and ideological campaigns in the Arab-Israeli field, which have contributed to the conflict.

***SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND**

SCF is a broad international alliance that defines itself as a 'children's rights organization' and works mainly in education, health and trauma counseling. However, some of its activities, including the 'Eye to Eye' project in Gaza, have been exploited as a vehicle for pursuing a highly politicized agenda.

***WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL**

This Christian relief and development organization "conducting child-focused emergency relief, sustainable community development and advocacy" is also very active in politics. World Vision's Jerusalem office has been engaged in anti-Israel propaganda, in violation of its mission statement.

***CARITAS**

CARITAS is a confederation of Catholic relief, development and social service organizations, which uses its activities to promote a biased ideological agenda, particularly in supporting Palestinian attacks on Israel.

***MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE (MCC)**

MCC claims to be the "relief, service, and peace agency of the North

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American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches". However, it also promotes anti-Israel propaganda and hatred through the "Peace Office Newsletter", abusing its humanitarian work for political incitement.

*WAR ON WANT

Claiming to be "Fighting for a world without poverty", this explicitly political organization uses economic issues to further its agenda, including a "Palestine campaign" that promotes the demonization of Israel.

*CHRISTIAN AID

Despite its stated goals "To further charitable purposes, which relieve or combat malnutrition, hunger, disease, sickness or distress throughout the world", Christian Aid's extensive involvement in politics undermines claims to be primarily a charitable and humanitarian organization. The prominence of its political agenda was recently highlighted in the "Child of Bethlehem" campaign. (www.ngo-monitor.org Jan 3)

What Really Happened in 1948 By Sarah El Shazly

Ever since I was a child, I've heard a range of accounts of what happened to the Palestinians and Palestine. Everyone knows the Jewish version and the Arab version. But there is a third side, that of those who lived there and still do -- the Israeli Arabs.

Some Jews want us out of Israel, and some Arabs believe that we are an extension of the Zionists. Yet we Israeli Arabs keep our culture and traditions. Mahshy, or stuffed grape leaves, remains our favorite meal. We love Arabic music; we sing old folk songs, including "Wein aa Ramallah" about a famous Palestinian city, and songs from all over the Arab world. We are unique among the Arabs, though. We have vested interests on both sides -- and are angry at both sides.

Israeli Arabs have lived alongside Jews for as long as this generation can remember. We became Israeli citizens in 1948. Before that, the region wasn't quite as divided. Families lived in an area that includes the West Bank, Gaza, and Amman, and in other Arab cities in areas where borders were created later. We were divided by boundaries set by the Europeans, and those within the boundaries of Israel became "Israeli Arabs". Now, these Arabs are the unwanted, unloved, illegitimate, and have become the biracial step-child of the Middle East conflict. We have to apologize for our very existence.

Misinformation surrounds the story of 1948. Palestinians who fled their homes are angry, bitter and distraught. No one can blame them. Yet they seem to have been taught who they are supposed to hate, who is the guilty party and who should be punished for their problems. People's memories are so short. It is easier to focus on one enemy -- especially an enemy who does not belong to the same "tribe" -- than to analyze a complex situation such as the Palestinian refugee disaster.

It is not my intent to discuss who belongs in that tiny region called Israel, but I will risk being shunned by my own community to set the record straight. The question is: why did Arabs flee the area that became Israel? After all, the ones who remained in their homes still live there today and prosper.

The fact is that the Arab world warned the Palestinians against staying with the Jews. They also warned them that Arabs were going in to fight the Zionists and that the Palestinians should leave to avoid getting hurt.

Many Palestinians trusted these Arab leaders and left as instructed. Those who had lived with Jews for a long time were not as easily convinced of the danger, and these Arabs stayed home. Among them was my family, which saw cars traveling the area. The cars contained Jews. They reassured Arabs that they would not be harmed. Thus, we had a situation where Jews begged Arabs to stay and live with them, while Arabs from foreign countries told them to leave right away.

Palestinians have gotten the short end of the stick in Arab society. It suits Arab leaders to keep this group in a state of poverty and conflict, and to channel all resentment toward the Jews. You don't believe me? Ask yourself why Jordan or Egypt or Syria never gave the Palestinians a country? If I hear another non-Palestinian, especially an American Muslim, repeat the phrase "over 50 years of the Zionist occupation," I'm going to burst. Can no one actually read history? It's not ancient history, just 1948-1967. Who had that land? Even if Arabs want Palestinians to have "all" the land, this is no excuse for denying them an independent state. And yet, we blame Israel!

As a child, I watched a Syrian play about the war of October 1973. A famous Syrian comedian played a young man who fought in the war and was taken prisoner. After his release, he was detained by his own government. At one point, the guards slapped him and he started crying.

"Why are you crying?" asked a fellow prisoner, deeply puzzled. "That was only a slap. I've seen the enemies do much more to you, and you just laughed it off."

The comedian replied, "The enemy is an enemy, and I expect that of them. Yes, a slap is only a slap -- but from a brother, it's a slap in the heart."

Let's take this a step further. The Arab world pretends to care, watching a young Palestinian get killed by Israel on TV, justifying Jew-hatred right before they go to their cozy beds. This is the Arab world that has taught Palestinians to fight, and yet it will not give them citizenship. Where is that love -- or, for that matter, where is the passion used to justify the Palestinian issue?

Let's go to the refugees. Arab governments first used scare tactics, and then took whatever they could get from the United States and Israel. Finally, they stuck Palestinians in camps with deplorable living conditions. Why didn't they leave them alone in their homes? Why promise them refuge and reward them

with nothing more than prison camps? And, most of all, why didn't they provide Palestinians with homes in the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights when Arabs had control over them?

Please do not speak of money. Palestinian refugees receive aid from all over the world, and yet their living conditions don't seem to improve. The "hosting" governments siphon off some money to line their pockets, and the Palestinian Authority -- or lack of it -- siphons off the rest ... and the poor people get nothing.

As a Palestinian, I ask the world to please stop exploiting our issue. If you want a do a good deed, find your own. To the singers romanticizing Palestinian suffering, it is not romantic. There is nothing dreamy about it. Where's the heroism in a small child throwing rocks at a tank? Either warn the child to stay away or just shut up! How dare you do this to our children? Does our suffering give you such good video footage and high ratings?

To the average Arab citizen, stop crying crocodile tears for us. We thank you for your kind feelings, but please, don't offer us your pity. To the Arab and Islamic governments, fix your own problems. Do not use our misery to blind your subjects to domestic problems. Are you afraid that the people will wise up, and stop hating Israel, and turn on you? You, who have condoned so much hatred, may one day pay the price. You've created monsters, and you won't be able to handle them. Worry about creating jobs for your own poor people and educating the children, and leave us alone. In short, to all those invested in driving our children to die, please, stay away from us. (FrontPageMagazine.com Dec 28)

Palestinian Word Games By Daniel Pipes

We read that "Prime Minister" Mahmoud Abbas is running in the elections on Sunday to succeed Yasser Arafat as "president" of "Palestine."

Excuse me, but prime minister, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, means the "head of the executive branch of government in states with a parliamentary system." Despite tens of thousands of references to Mr. Abbas as prime minister, he in not a single way fits this description.

Oh, and there is also the matter of there being no country called Palestine. Arab maps show it in place of Israel. The U.N. recognizes its existence. So too do certain telephone companies -- for example, France's Bouygues Telecom and Bell Canada. Nonetheless, no such place exists.

One can dismiss use of these terms as symptoms of the same unrealism that has undermined Palestinian Arab war efforts since 1948. But they also promote the Palestinian cause (a polite way of saying, "the destruction of Israel") in a vital way.

In an era when the battle for public opinion has an importance that rivals the clash of soldiers, the Palestinian Arabs' success in framing the issues has won them critical support among politicians, editorial writers, academics, street demonstrators, and NGO activists. In the aggregate, these many auxiliaries keep the Palestinian effort alive.

Especially in a long-standing dispute with a static situation on the ground, public opinion has great significance. That's because words reflect ideas -- and ideas motivate people. Weapons in themselves are inert; today, ideas inspire people to pick up arms or sacrifice their lives. Software drives hardware.

Israel is winning on the basic geographic nomenclature. The state is known in English as Israel, not the Zionist entity. Its capital is called Jerusalem, not Al-Quds. Likewise, Temple Mount and Western Wall enjoy far more currency than Al-Haram ash-Sharif or Al-Buraq. The separation barrier is more often called a security fence (keeping out Palestinian suicide bombers) than a separation wall (bringing to mind divided Berlin).

In other ways, however, the Palestinian Arabs' wording dominates English-language usage, helping them win the war for public opinion.

* Collaborator means someone who "cooperates treasonably" and brings to mind the French and Norwegian collaborators who betrayed their countries to the Nazis. Yet this term (rather than informant, mole, or agent) universally describes those Palestinian Arabs providing Israel with information.

* Refugee status normally applies to someone who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted . . . is outside the country of his nationality," but not to that person's descendants. In the Palestinian case, however, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of refugees also merit refugee status. One demographer estimates that more than 95% of so-called Palestinian Arab refugees never fled from anywhere. Nonetheless, the term continues to be used, implying that millions of Palestinian Arabs have a right to move to Israel.

* A settlement is defined as a small community or an establishment in a new region. Although some Jewish towns on the West Bank and in Gaza have tens of thousands of residents and have existed for nearly four decades, settlement, with its overtones of colonialism, is their nearly universal name.

* Occupied territories implies that a Palestinian state existed in 1967, when Israel captured the West Bank and Gaza. That was not the case, making these areas legally disputed territories, not occupied ones.

* Cycle of violence, a term President George W. Bush has adopted ("the cycle of violence has got to end in order for the peace process . . . to begin"), implies a moral equivalence between the killing of Israeli civilians and Palestinian Arab terrorists. It confuses the arsonist with the fire department.

* The peace camp in Israel -- a term that derives from Lenin's usage -- refers to those on the left who believe that appeasing mortal enemies is the only

way to end Palestinian aggression. Those in favor of other approaches (such as deterrence) by implication constitute the "war camp." In fact, all Israelis are in the "peace camp" in the sense that all want to be rid of the conflict; none of them aspires to kill Palestinian Arabs, occupy Cairo, or destroy Syria.

Arabs may have fallen behind Israel in per capita income and advanced weaponry, but they lead by far on the semantic battlefield. Who, a century back, would have imagined Jews making the better soldiers and Arabs the better publicists? (New York Sun Jan 4)

Settler Spirit Is Unbroken By Yehudit Tayar

Many Israelis, especially those of us who live in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza (Yesh'a) are confronting what we see as a perversion of the democratic ideal.

It is somehow deemed "democratic" to undermine our civil liberties – our rights against the government.

As we see it, the human rights of law-abiding, tax-paying citizens are under attack because of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan for unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip and parts of northern Samaria.

Many of us are prepared to protest what we perceive as a "forced exile" from our homes.

Is the protection of family, life and property a basic human right? We hear talk that if we resist we will be incarcerated in actual prisons.

What I am about to write may seem harsh, but many of us feel under siege. What others call "disengagement" we see as a demonic plan – I have no other word for it.

Technically speaking, Prime Minister Sharon may have the votes to carry this plan forward. But we see it as undemocratic and immoral.

It is undemocratic because it goes against the wishes of the constituency that voted for Sharon and against his pro-disengagement Labor opponent. It is undemocratic because when Sharon couldn't get what he wanted, he fired cabinet members and ignored votes in the Likud Party Central Committee (which he himself called).

It is undemocratic because Sharon is now bringing in the very man, Shimon Peres, who was responsible for the Oslo debacle to sit in the cabinet as his government pursues disengagement.

Think how that makes us feel. We find ourselves facing what seems like continuous psychological warfare. We feel alienated from what we read and see in the mainstream media. Official spokespeople talk in a babble of phrases we simply do not understand.

Moreover, the use of veiled – and sometimes not so veiled – threats against us is immensely troubling. If we oppose disengagement we'll lose our "compensation"; if we engage in civil disobedience we'll wind up in jail, and so on. Now we suspect that the government has been issued directives to the IDF which limit the scope of retaliation by our military when Gush Katif communities are attacked.

In a sense, the government is asking the IDF to differentiate between the Jews of Sderot – just a few kilometers away – and the Jews of Gaza.

How do you think that makes us feel? So from where we sit, the government is practically encouraging the enemy to shoot at us.

And yet we have not given up. To combat "disengagement" the grassroots settler movement needs to pursue "engagement." We need to speak to as many of our fellow citizens as possible. We need to awaken support for our position. We need to mobilize against what we see is a horrific plan that could turn Jews into refugees in their own Land. We need to tell people that there is no lasting justification for disengagement. And we will.

We will remind them that disengagement is a reward for terror.

Granted, there are Israelis who give out-and-out support to the plan to destroy Jewish towns and turn Jews into refugees.

But there are many others who, puppet-like, repeat popular phrases from the media or politicians. We keep hearing "but we have to try something," or "this situation cannot go on."

Yet, after speaking with people – even sometimes just for a few minutes – these same knee-jerk pro-disengagement types come around to our position. They say, "I know we cannot trust Palestinian Arab intentions," or "No matter what the enemy gets, they still will want more."

What has happened to good, old-fashioned common sense? Has our national will become wobbly because of continuous terror blows? Are we deluding ourselves because reality is harsh? Israelis need to ask themselves why a country at war should be willing to follow Sharon's disastrous plan. If we continue down his path, our country will be divided and our enemy encouraged.

Disengagement will only give the enemy continued reason to attack additional civilian centers; they'll just come up with new targets.

The end result? More Jews might become refugees in their own land. From where we sit, disengagement has no tangible, lasting benefits whatsoever. So why we are pursuing this policy is ever more impossible for many of us to understand.

If Israel had true leadership, our government would be teaching those who plan, perpetrate and carry out the murder of Jews that Israel will not capitulate to terrorism. The prime minister may have won various political victories thanks to all sorts of machinations. But we are not about to throw in the towel.

We shall show the world that we stand firm and will fight what we see as an evil plan.

Would that Israel had a leadership which was honest with itself, and about what motivates it. Would that we truly had a government of the people, by the

people, and for the people.

We, the Jewish residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza will continue to play our part, to engage with our fellow countrymen. We will do all we can – body and soul – to prevent this catastrophe from happening. Because we do believe in true democracy, and because we want to engage, not disengage. *The writer, a Yesh'a resident, is a veteran spokesperson for the settlement movement.* (Jerusalem Post Jan 4)

Why Christians Leave the Mideast By Joseph Farah

Just before Christmas, the New York Times figured out a way to blame Israel for the exodus of Christians from Bethlehem. This is called journalistic gymnastics.

The story by Greg Myre began: "In the town where Christians believe Christ was born, the Christians are leaving. Four years of violence, an economic free fall and the Israeli separation barrier have all contributed to the hardships facing Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem, one of the largest concentrations of Christians in the region."

There you have it. Why are the Christians leaving Bethlehem? At least partly, according to the New York Times, because of the Israeli security fence. Now, ask yourself a question: Why would the security fence disproportionately affect Christians? If the security fence were contributing to the exodus, it should be causing an exodus of Muslims as well, right?

Why is the New York Times lying?

Because, for the life of this reporter and his editors back home, they can't think of a single legitimate way to blame Israel for the Christian exodus.

In fact, if you read between the lines, as patrons of this column are expected to do, you will notice that the New York Times actually gives away the reason for the exodus. But it requires background knowledge of the situation. It requires context not provided in the story.

Before I give you that context, let me say this is a real problem. Sometimes – often – the New York Times creates problems out of whole cloth. Not this time. As the story points out, Bethlehem, once a majority Christian town, now only claims 21,500 of the 60,000 Arab residents – about 35 percent.

They haven't left for no good reason. They have left for very good reasons. In fact, knowing the conditions these Christians face today, it's surprising there are still 21,500 there.

But does it have anything to do with the Israeli security fence? No.

Four years ago, when this exodus began, the Israelis had not even started construction of the security fence. But the New York Times story correctly shows that's when the mass exodus began.

"Bethlehem was more than 90 percent Christian until the middle of the last century," the story continues. "Then the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, begun by Arab states in response to the founding of Israel, brought an influx of Muslim refugees to the Bethlehem area and signaled the start of a demographic shift. But what began as a steady emigration of Christians accelerated into a relative flood with the onset of violence four years ago."

Here's a key paragraph buried in this story: "In the early days of the uprising, Muslim gunmen in the Bethlehem area took hilltop positions in Beit Jala, which is predominantly Christian. That afforded them a clear firing line at the southernmost part of Jerusalem. When the Israeli military responded, Beit Jala residents found themselves on the front lines of the conflict, and occasionally among its casualties."

Muslim terrorists have intentionally placed Christians in the crossfire between them and Israel. They did that when they seized the Church of the Nativity, nearly destroying it, defecating in the hallways, smashing statues and stealing precious objects. The Israelis, for their part, negotiated an end to the standoff rather than destroy the church that represents so much to the Christian world.

If the Israelis contributed in any way to the exodus of Christians it was by withdrawing from Bethlehem and the so-called "Palestinian territories" in the West Bank. Since they left, the Palestinian Authority has waged a jihad against the Christian community, raping women, extorting businessmen, lynching "collaborators" and seizing homes.

That's why the Christians have left and continue to leave. They enjoyed life while their towns were under the control of Israel. Once they were turned over to the terrorists, there wasn't much left to keep them in the areas in which their families lived for generations. That's the story the New York Times, the "newspaper of record," dares not tell.

The writer is the editor of WorldNetDaily.com. (WorldNetDaily.com Jan 3)

Mahmoud Abbas's Platform By Evelyn Gordon

The Palestinian Authority election campaign has made one thing crystal clear: This election will not be the prelude to an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty.

Both in Israel and abroad the theory had been that elections would give the new PA chairman the public legitimacy needed to make peace with Israel. But thanks to the positions he has adopted during the campaign, even a landslide victory for front-runner Mahmoud Abbas will not be able to provide that.

Rather than constituting a mandate to make concessions for peace, his election will constitute a mandate for positions unacceptable to even the most

dovish Israeli government.

This was first evident in Abbas's insistence on a "right of return" to Israel for Palestinian refugees and their descendants – a demand that would spell the end of the Jewish state.

"We will not rest until the right of our people to return is granted," Abbas told the Palestinian parliament bluntly on November 23.

Usually, as in a Newsweek interview later that month, he uses a more innocuous-sounding formula: "a just and agreed-upon solution for the refugees according to [UN resolution] 194." But while that formulation might mislead foreigners, it is perfectly clear to Palestinians: The Palestinian interpretation of 194 has always been that it grants an unlimited "right of return" to Israel.

And Abbas has been equally uncompromising on other issues.

On borders, for instance, he has eschewed the vague formulation of an agreement "based on" the 1967 lines, which allows for tinkering. Instead, he explicitly told a campaign rally on December 25 that he will not accept any deal that gives the major settlement blocs to Israel.

"We will not accept settlements, and that includes Ma'aleh Adumim, Gush Etzion and Ariel," he declared.

Yet even Yossi Beilin's Geneva Initiative calls for leaving Ma'aleh Adumim and parts of Gush Etzion under Israeli control – and Beilin is the leftmost fringe of Jewish Israeli political opinion.

Thus Abbas has effectively precluded any agreement on borders.

He has also backtracked on ending the violence. Even in mid-December, in his clearest statements on this subject, he could not bring himself to say that blowing up school buses or senior citizens celebrating a seder was morally wrong; he merely insisted that it was bad tactics.

Since then he has abandoned even these halfhearted denunciations.

When the audience at a campaign rally in Tulkarm last Wednesday began a chant calling for "millions of martyrs" to march on Jerusalem, Abbas remained silent; his speech made no mention of anti-Israel violence. He also kept silent when Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei declared on Saturday that "only when there's a real chance for negotiations with Israel will the Palestinians agree to stop the armed struggle."

His earlier insistence that violence hurts the Palestinian cause might never have existed.

EQUALLY DISTURBING, he has explicitly and repeatedly promised not to enforce an end to the violence.

He refers to Hamas terrorists as "brothers" and says the PA will never use arms against them; instead, he advocates integrating them into the PA security services – meaning that the PA will give them weapons instead of obliging them to arm themselves.

In Rafah on Saturday, he called local gunmen "heroes fighting for freedom;" in Dir al-Balah on Sunday, he added: "We say to our fighting brothers that are wanted by Israel, we will not rest until you can enjoy a life of security, peace and dignity, so you can live in your country with total freedom."

In short, terrorists will be honored, not arrested. Moreover, he has coupled this with impossible security-related demands of Israel.

Last Wednesday, for instance, he declared that peace depends on Israel dismantling its security fence.

But expecting Israel to remove the fence while the PA is offering to arm Hamas and guaranteeing "total freedom" to wanted terrorists is a clear nonstarter: As long as the PA refuses to fight terror, the fence will be vital to Israel's security.

The same is true of Abbas's demand that Israel release every last Palestinian prisoner.

After its bitter experience with prisoner releases under the 1993 Oslo Accords – when many freed prisoners promptly resumed anti-Israel terrorism – Israel cannot again release confirmed killers to a PA that offers them arms and protection instead of trying to ensure that they do not kill again.

No less important is the conspicuous omission of Abbas's campaign: He has not even hinted that Palestinians might need to make concessions for peace.

Every Israeli prime ministerial candidate stresses that Israel must make "painful concessions." Yet Abbas, by omission, has sent his voters the message that they need not concede anything for peace: Their role is only to make demands, and wait for Israel to deliver.

This message is reinforced by Abbas's pledge to adhere to Yasser Arafat's platform: "Whatever you [Arafat] said on various occasions... is your will, and it is our duty to carry it out as long as we live," he told the December 25 rally.

And of course, Arafat's "will" is well-known: an utter refusal to make compromises for peace, combined with support for anti-Israel terrorism.

Finally, Abbas has ruled out any interim solution.

"We will not accept a temporary solution," he told reporters in Egypt on November 28. "It's a waste of time. Even a state with interim borders is a waste of time."

But if he rejects an interim solution while simultaneously posing demands that make a permanent solution impossible, what option is left except continued war?

The ever-hopeful international community, and even Abbas's own aides, insist that this is mere campaign rhetoric; his "real" goal remains a negotiated peace.

But campaign rhetoric is far from inconsequential – because even if he truly wishes to make peace, this campaign has ensured that he will have no public mandate for doing so. (Jerusalem Post Jan 4)

At What Cost the Chasuna? By Jonathan Rosenblum

The plaintive cry of a father wondering to what extent he must sacrifice all his Torah learning in order to marry off his children has provoked a flurry of responses in the chareidi press. The poor father described how he gave up one daily shiur when he married off his first child, in order to take on extra hours of work, and now feels pressured to give up his last remaining daily shiur in order to marry off a second child.

Curiously, the letters from older readers have tended to take the position that the father is required to take on whatever debt is necessary. One is tempted to speculate that we are witnessing an example of mass Stockholm syndrome.

Many of the letter writers have focused on the halachic issues involved, such as when a son's learning takes precedence over his father's (Yoreh Deah 245), or whether there is any heter for borrowing money from gemachim, with no plausible plan for repaying.

Such discussions are beyond the province of this page. But since the present system in Israel is justified as a necessity in order to further the study of Torah, we can at least ask whether it is, in fact, doing so.

The father whose letter triggered the avalanche of responses likely has other children at home. What about their Torah? When the father has daily fixed times for Torah learning, the entire tone of the home is different. He brings greater enthusiasm and more divrei Torah to the Shabbos table. Most important, the danger is greatly reduced that younger sons will come to view parental admonitions to learn as exercises in hypocrisy – words that parents feel obligated to say to their children but do not really believe themselves.

The assumption that every newly married couple will be provided with an apartment can foster an attitude on the part of the young couple of magiah li (it's coming to me), which is the very antithesis of the mesirus nefesh that is the necessary condition for any greatness in Torah. So automatic has the apartment for newly married couples become that the young couple frequently fails to appreciate what sacrifices their parents have made on their behalf. Without that awareness, however, the apartment does not even serve as a spur to more intense learning by the chasan.

The destructive education in bad middos begins with the l'chaim, when each side receives a list of gifts that they must ante up within twenty-four hours or risk humiliating their child. The amounts spent often seem more appropriate to the marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II than to two families of modest means. Nor do the presents even serve to bind the young couple, since each is well aware that they were purchased by their future in-laws.

But the ritual exchange of gifts is nothing compared to the apartment. What are we to make of the twenty-year-old shnook who enters your apartment, looks around, and comments, "Nice little apartment you've got here. You could sell it, and with the proceeds, buy one for an excellent bochur I know for your daughter," as happened to a neighbor of mine? What course of study produces such real estate agents?

Why is it that pre-war Europe, with a fraction of the yeshiva students that are found in the Israeli yeshivos today, produced so many more gedolim? At least part of the puzzle surely has to do with the greater mesirus nefesh demanded of that earlier generation. Each yeshiva bochur of that era was going against the tide, in a society in which the yeshiva students were increasingly subjects of ridicule.

Nor were they coddled. As a young rav in Tzitevian, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky and his wife shared one pair of galoshes, without which it was impossible to go out during the winter on the muddy streets. He owned one shirt, which was laundered once a week. When Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gurwitz's father sent his young son across the border to learn in Lithuania, with no expectation of ever seeing him again, he gave him the greatcoat off his back, knowing that his son would be sleeping on a bench in an unheated beis medrash.

Another One pernicious consequence of the apartment syndrome is the emphasis placed on money in shidduchim. One standard part of the teaching of kallos in Eretz Yisrael used to be a letter from a father to his daughter on the eve of the chasanah. He writes that as he thinks about his friends from Yeshiva, and which eventually grew to be talmidei chachamim, the single most important factor was the happiness of their marriages. No study, however, has yet linked the middos necessary for a happy marriage or a bride's commitment to Torah learning to the size of her father's bank account.

On a heartening note, a number of newly marrieds have written to express their pain at the thought of parents killing themselves to provide their newly married children with an apartment. One such writer noted that it is often easier for a young avreich to earn a few extra dollars than for his father or father-in-law – e.g., by tutoring a few hours during the week – and urged his contemporaries to do so to ease the burdens on their parents.

By shouldering part of the mortgage or rental burden, a young couple not only show hakaras hatov to their parents, but they make the husband's Torah learning more precious in their eyes.

At the same time, they gain a degree of independence from their parents, which every young couple should seek – "a man shall therefore leave his father and mother." Only mature, responsible adults can be expected to produce mature Torah. (Mishpacha Magazine Dec 30)