



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
A service of the Bet El Twinning Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

Commentary...

Uncommon Ground

By Laura Ben-David

Neveh Daniel is an incredible place to live. Situated 1,000 meters above sea level in the beautiful Judean Hills, it has lovely red-tile-roofed homes with panoramic views of Jordan to the east, Hebron to the south, the Mediterranean

to the west and Jerusalem to the north. Its sunrises and sunsets are almost as unparalleled as the fog it is famous for, which often blocks them. It is populated by amazing people whose first concern is for "the next guy."

Thus it was with shock to learn of our neighbors' plight, and our utter inability to do anything about it. On Wednesday, less than 24 hours after the order to evacuate was received by residents of Neveh Daniel North, known as Sdeh Boaz, more than 100 soldiers and police officers, with bulldozers, converged on the community with the intent of destroying a new home, the foundation for another home and a stable to hold this gentle community's horses and donkeys.

The crime? Why, being there, of course. Though the land was bought and paid for by Jews even before 1948, ownership and legality apparently have no bearing on these decisions. Jews and Arabs have been in a land-grabbing competition in Israel for years. This is nothing new, and we are all guilty of it. But, for some reason, only Jews keep on being expelled.

I LEFT work in a rush after a distraught Lexi, my 14-year-old, called to tell me what had occurred at Sdeh Boaz, she having witnessed it all. As I approached Neveh Daniel I saw a convoy of police and army vehicles at the road leading up to the neighborhood. Tears welled up in my eyes as I realized why they were there.

I unconsciously flashed back to events we had enjoyed at Sdeh Boaz since our aliya three years ago: from our first Tu B'Shevat, when we joined our community in planting trees, to this past Rosh Hashana, when I brought several families to a natural spring at Sdeh Boaz for the tashlich ceremony.

I arrived home and did all I could to comfort my distraught children. Lexi not only saw what had happened but was knocked down and slightly injured in the violence that ensued. She reported that she had been trying to get into Sdeh Boaz, and found the way blocked by several policemen.

She was traumatized when she watched an Israeli bulldozer raze an Israeli home and stable. This gentle, eco-friendly neighborhood of secular and religious Jews living in harmony in the beautiful Judean hills is just a 10-minute walk from my house and a 10-minute drive from Jerusalem.

My 16-year-old, Shira, had been there earlier. Both girls went in the true spirit of Neveh Daniel - to do what they could to prevent a bad thing happening. But what could teenage girls do against an army? What could 250 neighbors and supporters do against their own soldiers and police?

Unfortunately, the soldiers and police had no such reservations. A violent day ensued, with youths being lifted into the air and thrown to the rocky ground; one boy was thrown against a wall so hard that he began bleeding heavily from his head. Another was so violently handled that it is likely his leg was broken.

In fact, tear gas was used on non-violent kids who were in a house trying to prevent its demolition. In all, 12 youths were injured and 11 were arrested.

I am embarrassed to report all this. It should never have happened. Around this time hail started raining down, pelting people. Girls burst into tears as one despondently remarked that it was the heavens crying. I would not be surprised.

For me, the saddest moment of the day was when my sons, 11-year-old Eitan and nine-year-old Ezra, both extremely anxious, wanted to know if the soldiers might one day destroy our home. What could I say? I hope it will never happen. I don't think it will happen. But after the terrible evictions this summer I cannot be certain of anything. The best I could do was hug them and tell them that God only gives people what they can handle.

Life is challenging enough without imposing greater difficulties upon ourselves. Why would we do this to ourselves as a nation? Do we need to have people bombing us in order to remain united? Isn't it possible for us to look out for each other instead of tearing out our souls to appease others? Perhaps the rest of our precious country could look to places like Neveh Daniel and Sdeh Boaz as examples, both of caring one for another and of Jews of diverse backgrounds living in harmony together.

Israel, please don't make an example of Sdeh Boaz; let Sdeh Boaz set an

Events...

Sunday, January 29, 10am-12:30pm

Nefesh B'Nefesh Upcoming Pre-Aliyah Seminar at the Lipa Green Building 4600 Bathurst St. Meet with our professional staff and get practical information and advice on: Employment in Israel; Children, Family and Aliyah; NBN Services and Benefits; Rights ("Zechuyot") as a New Oleh; Pre & Post-Aliyah Guidance and Strategies. For more information, call 1-866-4-ALIYAH.

From the PA Media...

Israel is "The Thieving, Zionist Enemy"

PA TV broadcasts a classic PLO hate speech of a PLO official in Egypt

By Itamar Marcus and Barbara Crook

PA TV recently broadcast a ceremony from Egypt celebrating the founding of the PLO in 1965. Barakat Al-Fara of the PLO, formerly deputy to the Palestinian ambassador to Egypt, spoke in the name of the Palestinian factions. His speech stressed that the origin of the conflict with Israel is not Israel's control of Judea and Samaria (West Bank) but is Israel's existence. His speech included the denying of Israel's right to exist, using the term "Zionist enemy" four times and refusing to say the word "Israel." "The Zionist enemy" he said is "oppressive," the "Zionist oppression and aggression [is] supported by world imperialism," and that "the Zionist enemy ... does not know the language of peace." Israel pre-1967 is called the "thieving enemy" and he glorifies Fatah, who in 1965 planted "hope in the heart of the Palestinian nation" - stressing the basis of conflict was Israel's existence - before Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip were under Israeli administration. Former Egyptian Ambassador Muhammad Basyuni and Usama Al-Baz, political advisor of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, attended the ceremony.

The following is from Barakat Al-Fara's speech at the ceremony:

"Palestine, with its Al-Aqsa Mosque and its church, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher... Palestine, with its significant geographical location, its culture and its history - the Zionist oppression and aggression, supported by world imperialism, succeeded in occupying it and driving out its inhabitants... [in Israel's war of Independence - Ed.]

"[After the 1956 Suez Crisis] there was no choice but to break into the homeland by way of a revolution, armed with faith, justice and strength. The Fatah Revolution of January 1965 is one that created storms that rocked the [foundations of the] thieving, enemy Zionist Entity, lead by the Palestine Liberation Organization "Fatah" and the military wing "Al-Asifa" [The Storm], in order to plant hope in the heart of the Palestinian nation and the Arab nations...

"The June 1967 war took place and emphasized that the Zionist enemy set as a goal not only Palestine, but also set as a goal the Arab nation, from the Ocean to the Gulf, and is planning a Jewish state that will stretch from the Nile to the Euphrates...

"The Oslo accords arrived after the first blessed Intifada, but the Zionist enemy, which knows not the language of peace, did not act according to the accords, and continued to follow its ways of terror and financial siege. More over, Sharon, the leader of terror, dared to defile the Al-Aqsa Mosque on September 28, 2000, and the second Intifada began, which proved to the whole world that the Zionist enemy is not interested in peace, security and stability, but wants the submission of the Palestinian nation to its aggressive plans, while dragging the whole region into a comprehensive war." [PA TV, Jan 1] (Palestinian media Watch Jan 12)

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example for you. (Jerusalem Post Jan 15)
The writer immigrated with her family three years ago from Boca Raton, Florida, to Neveh Daniel.

The Ethos of National Security By Caroline Glick

Since Ariel Sharon coined the term "disengagement," opponents of Israeli territorial withdrawals have complained about the Orwellian nature of the term. And yet, as hard as opponents of the leftist view that Israel's security is enhanced by Israeli land transfers to Palestinian terrorists fought against the withdrawal policy and pointed out its dangers, their warnings were no match for the concept of "disengagement."

In Israel's geographic, ethnic, and military contexts, the term "disengagement" is first and foremost a psychological concept. It is concerned not with reality but with the deep-seated Israeli yearning to escape from our hostile environment. It holds the promise that Israel can determine a border that will separate us from our hostile neighbors.

In an article published immediately after the conclusion of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and northern Samaria last August, Ha'aretz commentator Ari Shavit upheld the notion of the border. He claimed that the significance of the operation was that "after the era of the settlement ethos and after the era of the peace ethos, the turn has now come for the border ethos."

The problem is that a border can only be meaningful if the people on both sides of the divide recognize it and understand its meaning in the same way. Since the Palestinians do not recognize Israel's right to determine its borders, any border that Israel chooses will only operate in one direction. While Israel will honor Palestinian territorial integrity, the Palestinians will insist on their "right" to cross the border at will.

But reality is no match for psychological yearning. Israelis want to disengage.

Israelis are not unique in their desire to cut themselves off from their culturally alien - not to mention hostile - neighbors. The one-way border syndrome has stricken wide swaths of the Western world. For instance, the conflict between the US and Mexico over regulation of their border is becoming increasingly acute as the Mexican government continues to encourage its citizens to illegally migrate to the US.

Similarly, the leaders of the Arab states along the Mediterranean, such as Morocco, Tunis and Algeria, have obstinately refused repeated European requests to take steps to prevent the massive illegal immigration of their citizens into Europe.

These examples illustrate the complexity of the concept of a border when people on its opposite sides differ on their interpretations of its meaning and importance. Yet Israel's border syndrome is even more hazardous than that suffered by the Americans and the Europeans because at least the Mexican, Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian governments accept the fact of American and European sovereignty. Their conflicts are limited to divergent interpretations of what that sovereignty entails. In Israel's case, the Palestinians have never accepted Israel's sovereignty along any borders whatsoever.

The fact of the matter is that in the wake of the global jihad and the increased rejection of assimilation by cultural and ethnic minorities in Western states, among large and growing sectors of the Western societies, citizens yearn to isolate themselves from an increasingly hostile international environment. In Europe as in sectors of America, citizens ignore the war cries of their enemies and focus their energies on debating their rights in their welfare societies.

Like the Europeans, Israelis crave the luxury of ignoring the country's primary need to ensure its security and the preservation of Israel's character as a Jewish state. Sharon's coining of the term "disengagement" enabled this unrealistic desire to be transformed into a socially acceptable world view and an attractive government policy much as the abstract, amorphous concept of "peace" became the only socially acceptable aim of government policy in the 1990s.

Sharon and his political followers sold the public the belief that if Israel "disengages" from its neighborhood, then Israeli society will finally be able to turn its attentions to "truly important" issues like government welfare payments to single mothers and gay marriage.

The Israeli media has played a critical role in advancing the notion that the dream of disengagement is a realistic policy option. The local media coverage of events in the Palestinian Authority is so superficial and indifferent that an Israeli news consumer would be perfectly justified in believing that events in Ramallah, Jenin and Gaza bear little influence on his life and well-being. Newscasters speak in the same breath of missiles falling on Ashkelon, al-Qaida attacking from Lebanon and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom undercutting the authority of his party leader Binyamin Netanyahu. In the best of cases, the three stories are viewed as equally important by our newscasters. In most cases, Silvan's attempts to humiliate Bibi are covered with far greater passion and attention to detail than attempted missile strikes on the Ashkelon-Eilat oil pipeline and the increased activity of al-Qaida in Lebanon and Gaza.

AGAINST THIS backdrop of Israeli societal self-obsession, the elections to the Palestinian legislative council are scheduled to take place in 12 days.

Most of the news coverage and commentary regarding these elections has focused on short-term issues: Will Hamas emerge victorious in the elections? Will Arab residents of Jerusalem be allowed to vote? Although these are interesting issues, they miss the larger reality.

That reality is that regardless of what happens in the elections, and regardless of whether Israel and the Palestinians ever renew negotiations, the contours of the Palestinian state are well known and have been known since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. The anarchy, terror, corruption, poverty and ideological commitment to the destruction of Israel that have been the consistent characteristics of the Palestinian Authority since its inception provide us with a precise description of what the realization of the vision for a two-state solution to the Palestinian conflict with Israel entails.

Regardless of who emerges victorious in the coming elections (if they actually take place), it is absolutely certain that the Palestinian leadership will be comprised of terrorists, terror sympathizers and terrorist organizations - because these are the only people and parties who are running. The Palestinians themselves explain that in everything relating to the desire to destroy Israel (or what the media and the international diplomatic corps refer to as the parties' "diplomatic platforms"), they see no difference between Hamas and Fatah. For Palestinian voters, the principal difference between the two movements is that Fatah is viewed as corrupt and Hamas is viewed as honest. This stark distinction has prompted even Christians to support Hamas.

And so we arrive at the main fact that we have refused to acknowledge since the Palestinian Authority was established. We already know what a Palestinian state is because we have been living next to it for 11 years.

For Israel, that state has four significant attributes. First, the Palestinian state is a failed state comparable to Somalia and will remain a failed state comparable to Somalia. The Palestinian state will never be ruled by law. It will forever be ruled by gangs that thrive on chaos. It will never fight terror, but rather will always enable terror. It will never build the physical, economic or ideological foundations upon which a healthy economy can grow but rather will continue to divert its funds to financing terrorism and will continue to indoctrinate its people in the culture of jihad. The transformation of the former Israeli communities in Gaza into terror training camps is just one example that illustrates this general principle.

Secondly, the Palestinian leadership, whether it comes from Fatah or Hamas, will always speak in two voices. When dealing with Arab and other Third World states, its members will present themselves as the leaders of the sovereign state of "Palestine" and sign accords as the leaders of that state. In their interactions with the West and in the UN, the Palestinians will claim that they cannot accept the status of an independent state because, they will claim, they are still living under "Israeli occupation." Just as on the eve of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip the PA's leaders redefined Gaza's boundaries to include the pre-1967 community of Netiv Ha'asara in order to argue that the "occupation" hadn't ended, so too if Israel were to withdraw from 90 percent of Judea and Samaria the Palestinians would argue that they remain under occupation. Were Israel to vacate east Jerusalem, the Palestinians would turn to the 1947 UN partition plan and claim that the Negev and the Galilee remain "occupied." That is, the Palestinians will claim to live under Israeli occupation for as long as Israel exists in any borders.

Thirdly, as happened in Gaza over the past few months, and as happened after Israel withdrew from the Palestinian population centers in Judea and Samaria in the 1990s, the Palestinians will continue to use all lands that Israel vacates as operational bases for the augmentation of their terror capabilities. This week, Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) Director Yuval Diskin testified in the Knesset that since Israel vacated Gaza, weapons smuggling into Gaza from Egypt has increased by 300 percent. Diskin also noted that from October to December, terror attacks and attempted terror attacks increased nearly sixfold.

In the international arena, the national interests of EU member states - securing the flow of oil imports from Persian Gulf states, placating their increasingly irredentist Muslim minority populations and continuing to challenge US power on convenient diplomatic battlefields - dictate that further Israeli withdrawals will in no way impact their position on Israel or the Palestinians. The Europeans will continue to support the "national rights" of the Palestinians regardless of their actions or Israeli attempts at appeasement. In the absence of a concerted and consistent Israeli diplomatic offensive, the Americans too will continue their current policy of pressuring Israel for further territorial concessions to the Palestinians to buy diplomatic support from the Arabs and the Europeans.

ALL OF this leads to one simple conclusion. Israel's desire for a border cannot be translated into an effective policy. The fact of the matter is that no Israeli security interest is advanced by transferring territory to the Palestinians or by continuing to support the establishment of a Palestinian state that in point of fact already exists and in point of fact will never acknowledge its own existence.

The question then is what is Israel to do? The answer lies in recalling Sharon's actions as premier before his leftist metamorphosis. In March 2002, when Sharon ordered the IDF to carry out Operation Defensive Shield in

Judea and Samaria, he proved one thing. When our leaders uphold Israel's right to defend itself, the Israeli people rally behind them.

Since the Palestinians are not going to cure themselves of their national pathologies any time soon, Israel's national policies must be built not on the dream of a border that will never be recognized, but on the necessity of guaranteeing its security. Happily, Israel has the ability to defend itself.

But in order to realize our abilities, our national leaders have to make the majority of the public recognize the reality in which we live is a reality from which we cannot disengage. The ethos of the border is a false ethos. The only national ethos that we can reasonably unite behind and prosper from for the long haul is the ethos of national security. (Jerusalem Post Jan 13)

Why I am Voting Conservative By Larry Zeifman

I was raised in a home that traditionally voted Liberal. After all, that's what virtually all Jews did. After we moved to Thornhill, I continued to support the Liberal party, and, not so long ago, helped Elinor Caplan's fundraising activities.

That's all changed.

Over the last few years, virtually my entire family has switched teams. It happened because the "liberal" community has betrayed Israel, and the Liberal party has done so as well.

Luckily, at the same time, the Alliance, and now the Conservative party have become truly "conservative", aligning themselves with fellow democracies, including the US, Taiwan, and, yes, Israel. This foreign policy direction has been driven largely by the man I consider our greatest friend in the House of Commons, and perhaps in politics today. That's Stockwell Day, MP.

For the last few years, Stock, as we know him, has served as the Conservative party's Foreign Affairs Critic. In that capacity he has challenged government policy on terrorism, fellow democracies, and similar issues, consistently taking positions that gladden my heart. Like when he introduced draft legislation that would permit Canadians to litigate against terrorists and the Terror States that sponsor terror. Or when he pushed the government to ban Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. Or when he called on the government to take a strong position on Iran's call for Israel's destruction. Or when he challenged the leader of China on human rights.

And Stock is also the one who some years ago introduced the concept of tax credits to assist families paying day school tuition, an indication of his firm belief in the merits of school choice. This directly led to the Provincial Conservative move to legislate such tax credits, only to have them retroactively reversed by the Provincial Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty.

I have had the privilege of getting to know Stock well over the last few years, even hosting him in our Jerusalem home where he lit Chanukah candles with us and joined us in prayer at the Kotel. I have seen that his friendship to the Jewish Community and support of our causes is genuine. It's ideological. That's why I am convinced his support will continue long after this election.

And yet, our communal organizations often remain neutral. Not just, in appearances, which they must do, but they go overboard. Communal leaders faun over Liberal ministers who sell us out repeatedly. They express appreciation for Liberal moves at the UN despite the knowledge that such moves are minimal and wholly inadequate. They even endorse outrageous Liberal moves like the laying of a wreath at the grave of the arch-terrorist and mass murderer Yasser Arafat. There are exceptions in our community's leadership, but those exceptions are usually maligned by the establishment.

Will the community wake up? I certainly hope so.

We today face the possibility that Stock could be Foreign Minister in a week's time. Even if he is not made Foreign Minister, in the now most likely event of a Conservative government, he certainly will be a key cabinet member, along with other good friends of our community and our issues like Jason Kenney, Monte Solberg and Stephen Harper. Canada's foreign policy could change considerably for the better. But this may only happen if this time we step forward and vote Conservative. Are we up to the task? I hope so.

This Monday, I'll be smiling when I vote for my Conservative candidate, Anthony Reale.

I hope the community will join me. The Conservative party deserves our strong support.

The writer is Editor and Publisher of Israel News.

Quebec's Narcissistic Boycotters By Beryl P. Wajsmann

Some of the great "progressive" forces of Quebec have decided to boycott Israeli products and companies because of Israel's "apartheid politics." What unadulterated hypocrisy. By their deeds they have demonstrated, to their shame, the true face of that part of Quebec society that, while boldly declaring its own "distinctiveness," is really haunted by a self-doubt driven by a jealousy of others' self-belief.

The Federation des Femmes du Qu bec (FFQ), the provincial union of CEGEP teachers, Les Artistes pour la Paix, as well as the radical CSN and CSQ unions, have joined a polyglot coalition of the usual Islamist groups and some 170 Palestinian "civil society organizations." These groups are

demanding sanctions against Israel similar to those imposed on the former white supremacist regime in South Africa.

This call for a boycott and divestiture from Israeli companies is not important in and of itself. It is emblematic of that part of Quebec that still cannot face its own failures. This is the remnant of "le noirceur" - that darkest of periods in Quebec history that was supposed to have ended with the fall of former premier Maurice Duplessis.

And how petty their narcissisms are. These groups want to start boycotting Israeli wines and then move on to companies such as Caterpillar that, besides tractors, sells boots, caps, toys and pocketknives to Israel: in other words, nothing that would really cause the boycotters any discomfort.

The cell phone was developed in Israel by Israelis working in the Israeli branch of Motorola. Most of the Windows NT and XP operating systems were developed by Microsoft-Israel. The Pentium microprocessor in your computer was made in Israel. Voice mail technology was developed in Israel.

So why don't these "progressives" boycott all the instruments that allow them to disseminate their hatred and propaganda? But no, that would be too inconvenient. They want to have their cake, and eat it too.

ON A political level, has the FFQ forgotten that women in Israel always had the vote, while in Quebec they fought battles in the streets for it until the end of the World War I? Have the teachers and artists forgotten that the traditions of open Israeli scholarship and artistic freedom have resulted in more Nobel Prizes being awarded to Israelis than to nations five and 10 times its size? Have the unions forgotten that Israel is the only society in the world where much of its population is affiliated with, and organized under, one big union - the dream of the world-wide labor movement - and that its per-capita income of \$17,500 exceeds that of the United Kingdom?

And have all these groups forgotten that Israel is the only established liberal, pluralistic, democracy among the Muslim dictatorships that stretch from the borders of Pakistan to the Atlantic shores of Morocco?

Do they know that some 20% of the student body of Hebrew University are Israeli Arabs? That in Israel, Arabs not only have equal rights but willingly engage in the political process; sit in parliament; represent Israel as diplomats and even serve as judges. Jews on the other hand, from any land, cannot even get visas to most Arab countries.

No, they haven't forgotten. They identify with those Palestinian hatemongers who have made lucrative careers subjugating their own people. They can't stomach the fact that the Palestinian state is a de-facto reality. That Palestinians voted in free elections.

In May 2005 Israeli and Palestinian academics from Jerusalem, Haifa, Hebron and Bethlehem met in Rome and resolved to work together in such vital areas as the natural sciences, economic development and the preservation of cultural heritage. If Israelis and Palestinians can meet and work together on a constructive basis, why are groups from Quebec not supporting them, rather than engaging in mindless boycotts?

SEVERAL YEARS ago, at the first ever conference between leaders of Quebec civil society and Israeli diplomats, FTQ President Henri Mass said that he saw nothing to condemn in Israel's policies and vehemently denounced Palestinian violence and hate. For the sake of the credibility of Quebec's true progressives, it is time to hear this message out in the open, clearly proclaimed and candidly defended.

If this is not done, Quebec's dream of a "national project" will be hijacked by purveyors of parochial prejudice rather than led by those promoting social democracy and truth.

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said: "A society begins to die when it remains silent on injustice." In Quebec today the sound of such silence is deafening. (Jerusalem Post Jan 17)

The writer is president of the Institute for Public Affairs of Montreal (www.tapm.ca).

Keep Your Expectations Low By Jonathan Tobin

Focus on pliability of Sharon's successor ignores the real 'peace process' story

A week into the post-Ariel Sharon era of U.S.-Israeli relations, some things are already clearer than they were just a few days ago.

The first is that although the Bush administration is worried about whether any of the prime minister's possible successors will be as skillful at orchestrating territorial withdrawals as Sharon was, no change in policy toward Israel is imminent or even likely.

That's because acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert looks like he is going to have a good chance of holding on to the top job. And that would suit the Bush administration just fine.

Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu probably has more of a shot to beat Olmert than the experts are giving him, but the Bush team is not eager to have to deal with the testy and unpredictable Bibi. Though he is as likely as Olmert to make concessions, the path Netanyahu followed in his time as prime minister - speaking loudly, but carrying a very small stick - won him few friends in Washington.

As for Labor leader Amir Peretz, it's not too probable that an unreconstructed socialist with poor English skills will bond with the Texan

in the White House.

Which brings us back to Olmert, who will campaign as the true heir of Sharon. Don't be surprised if Bush, who rightly declined to interfere in the 2003 Israeli election (in marked contrast to Bill Clinton's decision to do everything but stump for Labor candidates Shimon Peres in 1996 and Ehud Barak in 1999), takes a different tack in the coming weeks. Not so subtle hints of American favor, such as an invitation to the White House, would be very helpful to Olmert.

Though the Bush-Sharon relationship has not always been the bed of roses that Sharon's P.R. machine often portrayed it as being, it was strong. Most of all, Bush gave Sharon the green light to counterattack and crush the last round of Palestinian terror warfare, and he was perfectly okay with isolating the late and unlamented Yasser Arafat in his hole in Ramallah.

Following Arafat's death, the administration developed a crush on his successor, Mahmoud Abbas. That led to tension with Sharon, who wasn't willing to drop security measures, such as checkpoints, which would have made it easier on Palestinian terrorists and Abbas.

So despite the fact that Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza last summer, the blame-Israel-first crowd in Europe and this country still think Abbas' abject failures are Israel's fault. His inability to govern effectively, let alone honor the Palestinians' road-map obligation to disarm terror groups, is considered to have been the result of Israeli hard-heartedness.

That is, of course, nonsense. The descent of the Palestinian territories into chaos is the Palestinians' fault. The anarchy in Gaza has dampened Washington's daffy expectations that peace is on the horizon. But their real priority is to keep the Israel-Palestinian struggle from interfering with their plans elsewhere in the Middle East, such as the war effort in Iraq.

And that is why they are hopeful that Olmert will follow through on past hints that he's willing to lead future withdrawals from parts of the West Bank. Since "progress" in the peace process is synonymous with Israeli withdrawals, as long as more pullbacks are in the offing, Washington can tell its European and Arab "allies" things are moving in the right direction.

Though Sharon's new Kadima Party was put down as a one-man show, it appears that's not the case. As much as it was created by the force of Sharon's appeal, it looks as if something deeper was at play.

Namely, the thesis - that it was a true "third way" between the illusions about negotiations with the Palestinians championed by Labor and the Likud's rejection of any further concessions - still clicked with the Israeli public.

Can Olmert, a man without Sharon's security credentials or political stature, continue a policy of unilaterally declaring Israel's borders by pullouts from the West Bank and completion of the security fence?

If the answer turns out to be yes, that's because the willingness of the Israeli public to divest itself of as many Palestinian Arabs as possible should not be underestimated.

Abandoning parts of the West Bank will not be as easy as Gaza. These places are the heart of the Jewish homeland and resonate in the Jewish consciousness. We are also talking about a lot more Jews who would have to be displaced in order to accomplish a withdrawal to the security fence that most observers see as Israel's de facto border for the foreseeable future.

But even if we assume that Olmert has the political skills and the backing to accomplish such a traumatic plan, there is still a problem in the offing that could upset both Olmert's and Bush's plans for the region.

The problem is the willingness of the Palestinians to abide by the new terms of engagement between the two sides. Sharon's unilateralism is predicated on the notion that Israel can dictate not merely its borders, but the terms of the conflict.

But what if a strengthened Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade (an affiliate of Abbas' own Fatah Party) decide that it's time to launch a new wave of terror in the coming months. Though the Israelis are right to be confident about their ability to limit their losses, it is not hard to imagine things getting out of hand, especially if Israel is forced to again enter Arab cities to destroy terror bases.

The question that must haunt all of the men who want to be prime minister of Israel is whether or not George Bush will give them the leeway he gave Sharon.

Despite the talk of Sharon changing the paradigm of the conflict, the choice between peace and war, even after unilateral withdrawal, will not be in the hands of any one Israeli leader.

It's always the Palestinians who have that choice. As long as Palestinian leaders can win popularity on the basis of how many Jews they kill - and not on their ability to provide jobs or sewer systems - no plan for regional quiet, let alone peace, is secure. And any hint that the administration wants to hamper Israel's right to defend itself will be an open invitation to bloodshed.

Rather than promoting Olmert as the person who will advance a peace process that doesn't exist, the best thing the administration can do is to lower everyone's expectations about "progress," and concentrate its diplomacy on Palestinian terror. (Jewish World Review Jan 16)

The writer is executive editor of the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent.

Tomorrow's World War Today By Niall Ferguson

Are we living through the origins of the next world war? It's certainly easy to imagine how a future historian would deal with recent events in the Middle East:

"With every passing year after the turn of the century, the instability of the Gulf region grew. By the beginning of 2006, nearly all the combustible ingredients for a conflict - far bigger in scale than the wars of 1991 or 2003 - were in place.

"The first underlying cause of war was, of course, the increase in the region's relative importance as a source of petroleum. The rest of the world's oil supplies were being rapidly exhausted, while the breakneck growth of the Asian economies had caused a huge surge in global demand.

"A second precondition of war was demographic. While European fertility had fallen below the natural replacement rate in the 1970s, the decline in the Islamic world had been much slower. In Iran, the social conservatism of the 1979 revolution conspired with the high mortality of the Iran-Iraq war and the subsequent baby boom to produce, by the first decade of the new century, a quite extraordinary surplus of young men. More than two-fifths of the population of Iran had been aged 14 or younger in 1995. This was the generation that was ready to fight in 2007.

"The third and perhaps most important precondition for war was cultural. Since 1979, not just Iran but the greater part of the Muslim world had been swept by a wave of religious fervor. Although few countries followed Iran down the road to theocracy, the feudal dynasties or military strongmen who had dominated Islamic politics since the 1950s came under intense religious pressure.

"The ideological cocktail that produced 'Islamism' was as potent as either of the ideologies the West had produced in the previous century - communism and fascism. Islamism was anti-Western, anti-capitalist and anti-Semitic. A revealing moment was Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's intemperate attack on Israel in December 2005, when he called the Holocaust a 'myth.' The state of Israel was a 'disgraceful blot,' he had previously declared, to be wiped 'off the map.'

"Prior to 2007 the Islamists had seen no alternative but to wage war against their enemies by means of terrorism. From the Gaza to Manhattan, the hero of 2001 was the suicide bomber. Yet Ahmadinejad, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war, craved a more potent weapon than strapped-on explosives. He aimed to give Iran the kind of power North Korea already wielded in East Asia. The power to defy the United States. The power to obliterate America's closest regional ally.

"Under different circumstances, it would not have been difficult to thwart Ahmadinejad's nuclear weapons program. The Israelis had shown themselves capable of preemptive air strikes against Iraq's nuclear facilities in 1981. Similar strikes against Iran's were urged on President Bush by neoconservative commentators throughout 2006.

"But the president was advised by his secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, to opt instead for diplomacy. Americans did not want to increase their military commitments overseas; they wanted to reduce them. Europeans did not want to hear that Iran was about to build its own WMD. Even if Ahmadinejad had broadcast a nuclear test live on CNN, they would have said it was a CIA trick.

"So history repeated itself. As in the 1930s, an anti-Semitic demagogue broke his country's treaty obligations and armed for war. Having first tried appeasement, offering the Iranians economic incentives to desist, the West appealed to international agencies - the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Security Council. Thanks to China's veto, however, the U.N. produced nothing but empty resolutions and ineffectual sanctions.

"Only one man might have stiffened President Bush's resolve in the crisis. But Ariel Sharon had been struck down by a stroke just as the Iranian crisis came to a head. With Israel leaderless, Ahmadinejad had a free hand.

"As in the 1930s, too, the West fell back on wishful thinking. Perhaps, some said, Ahmadinejad was only saber-rattling because his own domestic position was so weak. Perhaps his political rivals in the Iranian clergy were on the point of getting rid of him. People crossed their fingers, hoping for a homegrown regime change in Tehran.

"This gave the Iranians all the time they needed to produce weapons-grade enriched uranium at Natanz. The dream of nuclear nonproliferation, already half-broken by Israel, Pakistan and India, was now irreparably shattered. Soon Tehran had a nuclear missile pointed at Tel Aviv. And the new Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu had a missile pointed right back at Tehran.

"The devastating thermonuclear exchange of August 2007 represented not only the failure of diplomacy; it marked the end of the oil age. Some even said it marked the twilight of the West. Yet the historian is bound to ask whether or not the true significance of the 2007-11 war was to vindicate the Bush administration's principle of preemption. For, if that principle had only been adhered to in 2006, Iran's nuclear aspirations might have been thwarted at minimal cost. And then - hard though it is to imagine now - the Great Gulf War might never have happened." (Jewish World Review Jan 17)

The writer is a professor of history at Harvard University. He is the author of "Empire" (Basic Books, 2003) and "Colossus" (Penguin, 2004).