

Events...

Sunday February 2, 8:00pm

Boston Globe Columnist Jeff Jacoby
will speak on "Who's Afraid of the Christian Right?" at BAYT.

Commentary...

Shattering the 50-50 Myth By Michael Freund

For the second time in the past two years, Israel's voters went to the polls Tuesday and overwhelmingly repudiated the Left, once again shattering the myth that the country is divided down the middle between Right and Left.

In 2001, Labor prime minister Ehud Barak, the Left's candidate, received just 37.61 percent, or barely more than a third, of the popular vote. And in Tuesday's balloting, Labor and Meretz, the two main left-wing parties, were set to receive a combined total of fewer than 30 seats in the Knesset, signifying the support of less than 25% of the electorate.

Such numbers are hardly consistent with the fabled political or ideological equilibrium that is said to exist in Israel. If anything, it demonstrates just how little support the left wing has among the public.

The results become even more significant when one considers just how vulnerable Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was as a candidate for the top job in the land.

In addition to a string of unsavory allegations about corruption, fraud and sleaze, the Likud-led government headed by Sharon presided over one of the worst 24-month periods in the country's history.

The security situation has not appeared so bleak in decades, as rockets crash into Sderot, suicide bombers target Tel Aviv, and people think twice before boarding the bus to work. In 2002, a total of 453 Israelis were killed in Palestinian terror attacks, the highest toll since the founding of the state.

The economy has also been in decline since Sharon took power, with unemployment soaring to 10.5%, leaving more than 260,000 Israelis out of work. At the end of 2000, by contrast, the rate was 8.8%.

Inflation in 2002 increased significantly too, reaching 6.5%. That was double the government's target rate for the year and more than four times the 1.4% figure of 2001.

By all accounts, then, Amram Mitzna, Yossi Sarid and their colleagues on the Left should have coasted to an easy victory. Amid unprecedented terror and an increasingly painful recession, the situation was ripe for portraying the Likud-led government as one that had failed in virtually every major area.

The leaders of the Left, despite their clear inability to prevail at the ballot box, refuse to believe that they have lost the support of wide swaths of the public in recent years. While campaigning this past weekend, Mitzna said that he was unable to "decipher the genetic code of the voter, whose predicament is so bad, yet he continues to vote for the Likud."

What Mitzna and his comrades do not seem to understand is that this election, like the one before it, had nothing to do with the voters' DNA, and everything to do with their rejection of the Left's failed ideology. After a decade of Oslo, and the disastrous consequences it has wrought, the people of Israel are hardly in the mood to countenance the kind of far-reaching concessions that Labor continues to propose.

Mitzna's talk of dividing Jerusalem, unilateral withdrawal and forcibly removing hundreds of thousands of Jews from their homes, sounded like it was taken straight from Barak's script, which, as we all know, bombed at the box office in the February 2001 election.

By sticking to these ideas, rather than acknowledging their obsolescence, Labor and the Left have painted themselves into a political corner, one that will continue to grow smaller and lonelier with each passing year.

After Barak's downfall, the Left tried to pin it on his personality, pointing to all sorts of perceived character flaws and managerial failings on his part. After Tuesday's defeat, the same process is likely to repeat itself, as Mitzna's persona, rather than his policies, takes much of the blame.

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*

But this election was not about personalities, it was about politics, and it showed just how far Israelis have come in rejecting Oslo and its proponents.

Hopefully, as he puts together a new coalition in the coming weeks, Sharon will bear this important lesson in mind.

For, as much as Israelis may wish for another national-unity government to be formed, they are even more inclined to see a national-survival government, one

that finally abandons the path of Oslo and puts their security first, before any other consideration. (Jerusalem Post Jan 29)

The writer served as deputy director of communications & policy planning in the Prime Minister's Office from 1996 to 1999.

"Palestine" for Dummies by David Perlmutter

I keep a special notebook handy whenever I watch a "Palestinian" spokesperson or leader or advocate speaking or interviewed on C-Span, the evening news or in newsprint. It helps me keep track of many of their inanities, but the one that is most amusing is the recurring line (which must be featured in their spin tutorials) that "we are the only occupied people in the world."

The great poobah Arafat himself has stated this claim in almost every recent interview—including chats with reporters who should know better like Bob Simon and Dan Rather. Alas, in each case, the script is the same. A Palestinian foghorn drops the line, and I lean forward hoping for an honest, studied-up member of our free press to ask: "But what about the Tibetans or the Kurds or the..."

I'm still waiting. As far as I can tell no journalist has ever informed the Palestinians (or the Americans) that the former are but only one folk in a long and mottled line of national, ethnic, regional, religious and political groups who, if they got their wishes and fulfilled their dreams, would be sitting members of the United Nations.

Which leads to a follow-up question, also never asked by the hard-hitting foreign correspondents and news anchors: why exactly do the Palestinians deserve a state ahead of all those others? After all, American and Russian presidents, leaders of Europe, everyone spends late nights worrying about how to give the Palestinians what they want. Who does that for the separatist Christian Blacks of Sudan—against whom oil money has financed a Muslim-executed genocide of several million in the last few decades?

We might ask more pointedly why should the Palestinians, who have no separate religion, culture, history, national identity, ethnicity, or language from other Arabs be given a homeland ahead of say, the Kurds (an independent ethnic nation for thousands of years or for that matter many American aboriginal peoples. Likewise, David Yeagley, a professor who teaches at the University of Oklahoma and is a descendant of the Comanche war-chief Bad Eagle, commented to me, "My people existed as a separate nation before the Ottomans invaded Europe...Why aren't we getting airplay for a homeland while some thug in Jenin is a media-darling?"

The answer is a brutal one: money talks and (as Allan Dershowitz points out in his new book "terrorism works.") The Palestinians are unique among the world's nation wannabes in several ways. First, they have the backing of most of the world's oil wealth and thus the industrial nations that kowtow in lust of it. The Gulf Caliphs caught on long ago that in order to preserve their own corrupt, profligate, illegal regimes they needed some perennial distraction for their ignorant masses—why not the Jews?

Nobody has ever been so calculatingly cruel before, mind you. My grandfather, for example, a Greek Christian, fought in a war with Turkey in the early Twenties. The Greeks lost the war and Turkey expelled 3,000,000 ethnic Greeks (whose ancestors had lived there since the Bronze Age). Greece, an impoverished country, did not torture their compatriots by keeping them in refugee camps: they absorbed them, the only humanitarian option possible for a humane people.

Likewise, ethnic Germans illegally expelled from Poland and the eastern territories at the end of World War II were taken in by West Germany as brothers and citizens. The iron curtain was not lined with fetid camps.

Both sets of refugees weren't happy about their fate, but when was the last time you heard about a former Ost-German hijacking a Russian plane or a displaced Ionian Greek blowing up an Ankara pizza shop?

Yasher Koach and thank you to our supporters. Thank you also to Continental Press for their ongoing support.
Readers are requested to please mail contributions to: BAYT - re: Israel News, 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario, L4J 5V3
Annual Rates: Friend - \$36, Supporter - \$50, Benefactor - \$180. Dedications are welcome at \$120/week.
Call (905) 886-3810 for further info. Israel News can be viewed on the internet at www.bayt.org

No, the Palestinians were the best investment ever made by the Oil Sheiks and it has paid off spectacularly. (But not for the Arab people, of course. A recent report by the U.N. found that the total GDP [including oil] of the Arab world does not exceed that of Spain).

Another reason the Palestinians are on the front-burner is violence. I recall during the Gulf war a Kurdish spokesperson was asked why the world didn't concern itself with the national hopes of his people. His answer was brutally cynical and absolutely correct: "We don't commit terrorism against Europeans." The Palestinians have ignited outrage after outrage, and each time the response of the jelly-kneed world politicians is to pay more attention to them and work harder to help them with cash and diplomatic initiatives. The bloodthirsty wheel gets the grease.

Thus, terrorism pays off and is richly rewarded: His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in contrast, will die in exile because his philosophy does not allow him to consider exponential violence. Finally, the Palestinians are an accessible cause celebre of the Left. No big deal to have your crumpets with your artsy pals in a London teahouse in the morning and then fly down for the afternoon to "express solidarity" with Arafat's brownshirts. Dynamite-throwing Palestinians are chic; Tibetan orphans are not. When was the last time you saw any "human rights" activists rush to the southern Sudan to be human shields between black Christian babies and a Muslim Sudanese army aerial bombardment?

So this journalism professor and historian sits and waits for a brave journalist to ask an obvious, fact-driven question. And I fantasize that perhaps some foolhardy but honest -- apparently none exist -- U.N. administrator will announce that "Frankly, there are hundreds of peoples more deserving of a homeland and we should be helping them and ignoring the Palestinians."

I think I have a long wait ahead of me. (JewishWorldReview Apr 23)

The writer is an associate professor of mass communication at Louisiana State University and a senior fellow at the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs. He is the author of, among others, Visions of War: Picturing Warfare from the Stone Age to the Cyber Age.

EU Funds for PA Terror By Rachel Ehrenfeld and Sarah Zebaida

Time is running out for the European members of Parliament to launch a probe into the longstanding claim that the Palestinian Authority has misused European taxpayers' money to finance terrorist attacks. The British MEP Charles Tannock initiated a petition six months ago to investigate how 540 million euros of aid given to the PA since 2000 have been spent, as a comprehensive account for the funds has yet to be produced from the Palestinian Authority. British Conservative Party leader Iain Duncan Smith made a last-minute plea for MEPs to support an independent investigation on Friday saying, "It is very disturbing to contemplate the possibility that our taxpayers' money could be financing the bombs and explosives used to attack Israeli civilians."

So far, only 140 MEPs have signed the petition calling for an investigation; 17 names short of the number required to schedule a debate in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. If the remaining MEPs do not sign on by next week (Jan. 31) the investigation will be abandoned as it could not be completed before the next European elections in April 2004.

EU Commissioner for External Affairs Chris Patten has successfully persuaded 12 of the MEPs that wanted to sign on to the petition to withdraw their support on the basis that he has seen no evidence of misuse of EU money, and has accused the MEPs supporting the investigation of "flogging a dead horse." MEP Charles Tannock says he is astonished by his fellow Conservative Party colleague's attitude: "My campaign has incurred the wrath of Commissioner Patten, who regards this initiative as a direct challenge to his authority and credibility. The sole purpose of this investigation is to clear the air, and I have always maintained a balanced approach to the Israel/Palestine question, favoring a peaceful settlement based on a two-state solution." Commissioner Patten's response is that he needs an investigation of PA abuse of his funds "like I need a hole in the head."

Patten's unwillingness to investigate how the PA used the money it was given by the EU seems remarkably peculiar considering that the EU Court of Auditors declined last November to approve the EU's budget for the eighth year running, admitting it can only guarantee that 5 percent of taxpayers' money is being spent properly.

Israel has persisted in trying to convince the EU that they should condition and monitor its funding to the PA to prevent misuse of its salary budget - which is partially funded by the EU. Israel presented Chris Patten with volumes of the PA's own documents that were captured by the IDF over the last year, which contained evidence that the PA initiated and paid for terror attacks against Israel and funded the Tanzim, the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and even Hamas operatives. (Both Hamas and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades are recognized by the EU as terrorist organizations.)

Documents discovered by the IDF in 2002 that have been authenticated by the U.S. and German authorities prove that terrorists who carried out attacks on Israeli civilians have been on the Palestinian Authority's payroll and were paid with checks ordered personally by Yasser Arafat and issued by the Ministry of Finance. The EU monthly budgetary assistance of euro 10 million is specifically

designated to cover the salaries of PA civil servants and given to the Ministry of Finance.

A new IDF report due to be published by the end of this week includes letters and documents signed by Arafat ordering to pay the mortgages of the families of Hamas homicide bombers and a grant of \$2,000 to each family; payment of \$17,500 to senior Fatah official Tzafut Udah Rachmi, who also served as the head of Fatah's Popular Resistance Committee - a terror group in Gaza which is supported by the PA's Preventive Security Forces; payment of \$9,000 to the "El-Farouk" rental car company in Gaza for damages incurred when a Hamas activist's rented car was bombed by the IDF. This check provides clear evidence that Arafat and the PA, despite their public denials, also support Hamas' terror activities. Other documents show how the PA's Preventive Security Forces paid \$1,200 to arrange "spontaneous" demonstrations in support of Marwan Barghouti, the former head of the terrorist organization Fatah/Tanzim in the West Bank, who is on trial in Israel for orchestrating attacks that killed 26 Israelis.

While Israel continues to provide aid to needy Palestinians and does not object to the EU's aid, it is calling attention to the PA's misuse of its own salary budget, as well as to the clear link between unmonitored EU aid to the notoriously corrupt Palestinian Authority (a survey taken last year in the West Bank and Gaza found that 70 percent of Palestinians believed there was widespread corruption within the PA) and their own safety, as demonstrated in the horrific double homicide bomb attack in Tel Aviv on Jan. 4. The Fatah-sponsored Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade claimed responsibility, while the Fatah website in Arabic - also funded by the PA - praised the attack in Tel Aviv that killed 23 Israelis and foreign workers and wounded dozens more, boasting "our heroic martyrs broke through blockades to penetrate into the heart of Tel Aviv ... killing many of the Zionist oppressors. We salute all martyr operations against our enemies."

A recent report published by Human Rights Watch, a group not known for its pro-Israel bias, concluded that: The Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades appear to have benefited from the routine misuse of PA funds. Arafat and other senior PA officials, as well as many rank-and-file Fatah members, have overlapping identities as employees or officials of the PA, on the one hand, and as members of Fatah on the other. This dual identity appears to have facilitated the use of PA resources to fund Fatah activities directly and indirectly, including payments to individual Al Aqsa Brigades activists. .

In July 2002, an EU representative stated to Die Ziet that "the EU will not accept that funds fall into the hands of terrorists organizations," and last week Patten's spokesperson Emma Udwin added that "the EU has no wish to take risks with funding terrorism." It is for these very reasons that an EU investigation into this matter is warranted. (WorldNetDaily.com Jan 24)

Rachel Ehrenfeld is the director of the NYC-based American Center for Democracy. Her new book, "Funding Evil" will be published in the spring. Sarah Zebaida is a free-lance journalist based in Jerusalem.

Clarity, at Last By David M. Weinberg

It has become common to describe this election campaign as boring and unnecessary. Little change is expected, and little good will ensue. Nevertheless, I think it has been a very useful campaign, one with a clarifying and illuminating effect on Israeli politics.

For all the talk about corruption of our political system - in the Labor Party too, but especially within the Likud - the polls show that the Likud has barely been hurt by the daily breaking "scandals" and breathless "revelations." Why? Apparently the public instinctively knows that corrupted balloting procedures and possibly illegal debt repayments are not the real scandals that affect the fate of our nation.

The overarching and fundamental scandal of the past decade - the real issue in this election because it still defines our future - is the disastrous Oslo process, brought to us and still advocated by the Labor Party.

No amount of obfuscating, scandalmongering noise can mask this essential reality, and the public isn't easily confused. "The Palestinian issue" - how we got to today's miserable situation and who blindly led us to this "New Middle East," how to best crush Palestinian terrorism and how not to bow to Yasser Arafat's wishes - these are the chief calculations that factor into our voting decisions.

We now have clarity. After years of pulling the wool over our eyes, insisting that it too would never redivide Jerusalem or tolerate terrorism, Labor has finally owned up to the legacy of the Oslo monster it created.

Labor leader Amram Mitzna readily declared he would pick up negotiations - with Arafat! - from the point where Ehud Barak left off; even without a cessation of Palestinian terrorism. Labor's platform no longer calls for a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty, not even on the Temple Mount. Taking down most, if not all, settlements would be a central Labor government priority. Everything is now clear.

Moreover, Labor's heroic new leader has essentially said he prefers a Labor government with the even more radical Left and Arab factions to a national-unity government with the Likud. That is the only possible political interpretation of his public promise not to enter a coalition led by Ariel

Sharon.

Finally, when all the chips are down and it gets desperate, Labor talks of falling back on its truest of true, most representative "asset" - Shimon Peres. Peres's ideology still permeates Labor politics and positions no matter how hard the party tries to move beyond him.

Clarity, indeed. Too bad we don't have Peres in the running to defeat once again. The sad situation of the Labor Party reminds me of the joke published in Makor Rishon after the 1996 vote. "Peres still leads in the polls," ran their sarcastic headline - the day after Peres lost.

The far-far-Left has also solidified and removed any vestiges of vagueness from its platforms. Yossi Beilin and Yael Dayan have moved to Meretz, their more natural home, and now cheerfully acknowledge that they would support the Palestinian right of return, within "acceptable" (sic) limits. They also openly advocate the transformation of Israel into a "state of all its citizens" with undifferentiated, nonreligious, Canaanite criteria for acceptance into the "Jewish people."

What about Ariel Sharon? He too has made plain his newfound fondness for diplomatic solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: solutions that involve "painful compromises," as if we haven't very painfully compromised more than enough already. His affirmed preference for a national-unity government is understandable and laudable in principle.

But given the potential "unity" partners and the expected global pressure on Israel to "compromise" after the coming Gulf War, this preference bespeaks diplomatic weakness and capitulation.

In the meantime our Supreme Court has also made its political preferences crystal clear. It ruled out Shaul Mofaz, while ruling in radical Arab candidates for the Knesset. It allowed Balad to fly the PLO flag in its election commercials, but disallowed Shas from broadcasting parts of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's weekly Torah sermon in its TV advertisements.

And of course, His Royal Highness, Supreme Court Justice Mishael Cheshin obnoxiously pulled the broadcast plug on the prime minister of Israel.

Which leaves Natan Sharansky as just about the only real "centrist" running in this election. He is untainted by corruption or scandal, appropriately yet responsibly hawkish and fearless of confrontation, if necessary, with European and other well-meaning Westerners who wish our surrender in the establishment of a Palestinian terrorist state. He is firm and consistent in his demand for Arab democratization as a necessary condition for peace, respected in Washington, truly centrist on matters of religion and state and refreshingly unpretentious.

Sharansky has all the makings of a national leader. To me the cogent choice, and not just for Russians or other immigrants, is Yisrael B'Aliya.

The writer is director of public affairs at Bar-Ilan University's Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. (Jerusalem Post Jan 26)

Building Mosques on Lies By Ben Shapiro

What is the most common factually incorrect statement used by the mainstream media? It crosses ideological lines. Both CBS and Fox News state it. So do Reuters and the Washington Times. It has so pervaded popular culture that the vast majority of people have no idea that this "fact" is a canard. It is a falsehood with global implications.

What is this lie? That the Western Wall in Jerusalem is the holiest site in Judaism. The holiest site in Judaism is not the Western Wall but the area behind it: the Temple Mount, the site of the now-destroyed Holy Temple.

There were two Holy Temples that stood on that ground. The first, built by King Solomon in 826 BCE, was destroyed in 423 BCE by the Babylonians; most of the Jews were exiled. Seventy years later, the Jews returned and rebuilt the Holy Temple. The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 69 CE; the Jews are still in exile. This exile will not end until the Third Holy Temple is erected on the Temple Mount.

The Temple had two sets of walls: the outer, surrounding wall constructed to guard the Temple and the inner wall, an actual part of the Temple. The Western Wall, a remnant of the Second Holy Temple's outer wall, is the only segment of the Second Temple left standing. It is holy only because of what it used to protect; the Temple Mount is holy because of what it is and will be -- the site of the Third Temple.

Muslims claim the Temple Mount as their own. Almost 1,500 years after the building of the First Temple, they pronounced that the site was holy to them. Then, they plopped the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque on the site and started trashing Jewish artifacts in the hopes of removing any remnant of Jewish presence. The Muslims erected the Dome of the Rock on the ground once occupied by the Holy of Holies, a curtained room in the Temple where the High Priest came face to face with the Divine, a place so holy that even he could enter it only once a year on Yom Kippur.

This is typical. Any site of any value to anyone who is not Muslim will eventually become a "holy site," targeted for mosque construction. Muslims claim as holy sites the Church of the Nativity, Hindu shrines in India, the sites of statues in Afghanistan, the Tomb of Joseph, and the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, among others. In all of these places, Muslims either have razed or seek to raze existing structures and build a mosque.

Why is this distinction between the Western Wall and the Temple Mount

important? The Islamic Waqf now control the activities on the Temple Mount, and the Jews control the Western Wall. Jews are completely barred from visiting the Temple Mount. The Muslims are in the process of destroying Jewish antiquities on the Temple Mount and insist on the Temple Mount as part of any peace settlement.

When the media portray the Temple Mount as the "third holiest site in Islam" and do not mention that it is the holiest site in Judaism, it makes it seem as though a political settlement handing over the Temple Mount to the Muslims could be a real possibility -- and that a failure to reach such a settlement stems from Jewish intransigence.

It doesn't. It stems from deep religious conviction and the knowledge that one day the Third Temple will stand on the Temple Mount. Jews have spilled their blood to defend the Temple Mount for millennia and continue to do so today. In 1967, Moshe Dayan misguidedly handed day-to-day control over the Mount to the Muslims. If any government gave away actual sovereignty over the Temple Mount, there would be civil war in Israel.

Israel's far-left Labor Party furthers the confusion by pretending that handing over the holiest site in Judaism is open to negotiation. Likud does not. That is why Ariel Sharon's 2000 visit to the Temple Mount was not "provocation" -- it was a statement that the Temple Mount will always remain in Jewish hands.

Whether through error or purposeful misrepresentation, the media skew the Middle East situation by calling the Western Wall, and not the Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism. This lie must end. When the Third Temple is built on the Temple Mount, the world must know that it is not Jewish usurpation of a Muslim holy site, but reclamation and redemption of the holiest site in Judaism. (townhall.com Jan 29)

Secretary of Incoherence By Mark Levin

Colin Powell speaks on U.S. Mideast policy.

In his remarks yesterday at the Work Economic Forum in Switzerland, Secretary of State Colin Powell said, in part:

The situation in the Middle East is proving to be among our most challenging, based however on the President's vision, President Bush's vision of two states, living side-by-side, in peace and security. And with the help of the international community, we and our Quartet partners have drawn up a roadmap that shows the way to a lasting peace.

To achieve this vision, the Palestinians must build trust by establishing a new and different leadership and new institutions and by putting an end to all terror, all violence. Israel also will be required to build trust by easing the economic plight of ordinary Palestinians and by putting an end to settlement construction.

With intensive effort by all, the creation of a democratic, viable Palestine is possible in 2005. And the United States will be engaging fully in this prospect, in this effort, in the coming months and years.

With respect to the broader Middle East, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah is right: Arab governments must introduce meaningful political and economic reforms if their people are to realize their potential. Indeed, all of us must work with citizens and governments of the region to close what Jordan's Queen Rania eloquently calls the "Hope Gap."

And in response to a question, Powell said:

My heart grieves when I think about the situation in the Middle East. I've worked very hard on this for two years, and for years before that. But trust is broken down. We have to do everything we can in our power--all of us, the United States, the European Union, any other nation that has the ability to influence the situation in the Middle East--to work with the Palestinians to put in place a leadership that is responsible, with representative institutions of government that will clamp down on terrorism, that will say to its people, "Terrorism is not getting us anywhere. It is not producing what we want: a Palestinian state. It is keeping us away from a Palestinian state."

And we also have to say to our Israeli friends that you have to do more to deal with the humanitarian concerns of the Palestinian people, and you have to understand that a Palestinian state, when it's created, must be a real state, not a phony state that's diced into a thousand different pieces.

And that's what we're going to be concentrating on in the months ahead with the roadmap that's been created.

Powell's grieving heart is no excuse for misguided and even dangerous policies. Yasser Arafat, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah--all of which are funded and supported in varying degrees by, among others, Iran, Syria, Iraq, and, yes, Saudi Arabia--are the reasons why Israel doesn't plunge itself into another round of "peace" talks. Israel is defending itself from the same terrorist entities that despise the West in general, and the U.S. specifically. How can Israel be expected to make more concessions and divest more of its land, when to do so now would weaken its national security? I can think of no other country on which the U.S. imposes such demands.

Powell also absurdly singles out Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah for having urged "political and economic reforms" in the region. The Saudi Wahabib practice an extreme form of Islam, which is the source of much terrorism in the world. The Saudis run an authoritarian regime that brutally represses

Shiites and other groups, with nary a word of condemnation from Powell or his State Department. And its economy, which can best be described as oligopolistic socialism, is the antithesis of economic reform.

Powell's reference to Jordan's Queen Rania's "Hope Gap" is also odd. In the 1970s, Arafat and his Palestinian Liberation Organization were based in Jordan. At one point, a large percentage of Jordanians were Palestinian. Fearing their threat to his kingdom, King Hussein called up his army and launched a bloody war against the Palestinians, killing thousands and driving many of them to other countries. Arafat relocated to Lebanon, once a thriving nation and tolerant society. Civil war broke out there as well, and Israel was compelled to send its military into southern Lebanon to prevent terrorist attacks against its population. Arafat was forced into exile in Tunisia. The Syrians then installed a puppet regime in Lebanon, which remains to this day. Hezbollah forces, backed by Syria and Iran, now freely roam Lebanon, where they're poised to attack northern Israel at any time, and frequently fire artillery rounds into Jewish border towns.

So, what exactly is meant by Queen Rania's "Hope Gap," and why would Powell reference it? Presumably it doesn't include Jordan welcoming back the Palestinians driven from their homes 30-years ago.

And precisely what so-called "homeland" rights do the Palestinians have in Israel? What part of history will be embraced or ignored as a supposed basis for rearranging Israel's borders to meet the changing demands of the Palestinians and her Arab neighbors? It's difficult to see how any modern nation can remain whole if its various parts are carved away in response to demands by so-called indigenous people, and at the urging of hostile surrounding regimes.

Moreover, the current configuration of most Arab states was set only a decade or two prior to Israel's founding. And there are a wide variety of tribal and religious groups with legitimate demands for autonomy or land in these countries. But none of their claims are given serious consideration by the world community.

Of course, among those who would have legitimate claims would be the Jews. In the last century and before, Jews were forced from their homes in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, and other Middle East countries. They were forced from Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary, and other European nations. Yet, there has never been, and never will be, serious consideration to returning these lands to the Jews.

The incoherence of U.S. policy, on display in Powell's statement, is most glaring given our 9/11 experience. Powell says that the Palestinians must do more to stop terrorism, and that he believes a free, viable Palestinian state is possible by 2005. Meanwhile, the Palestinians are inciting terrorism. With whom are the Israelis supposed to negotiate? Surely not Arafat.

It's time for Powell to be intellectually honest about the Israeli-Palestinian situation. Where are the Palestinian moderates? Most of them have been murdered for supposedly collaborating with the enemy. Moreover, there doesn't appear to be popular support for such leaders. But this is the nature of terrorism and terrorist regimes. They rule at the point of a gun. They keep their people hungry, illiterate, and angry.

Like the U.S. and every other nation that faces terrorism, Israel cannot and will not capitulate to terrorists. And apart from urging the Palestinians to control terrorism, which is facile, Powell offers not a single realistic suggestion on how this is to be accomplished. Powell seeks to deny Israel the same response to terrorists that U.S. policy demands, i.e., to hunt down and kill terrorists.

"Land for peace," including a Palestinian state carved out of Israel, will not end terrorism against Israeli citizens. The terrorists themselves have said so. There's no need to look at the "root causes" of terrorism. These people seek Israel's annihilation. Why, then, does Powell persist in this charade? (National Review Jan 27)

Getting to Know You By Judy Lash Balint

Interfaith dialogue is not exactly a top agenda item for most Israeli Jews. With the exception of a few orchestrated and ceremonial occasions, Christians and Jews generally do not sit down together for a frank exchange of views.

That's what made a meeting in Jerusalem last week all the more remarkable. Three international evangelical Christian organizations and a grassroots group of British Jewish immigrants got together to exchange ideas and discuss how best to promote Israel's interests. The event took place at the imposing German Colony villa that serves as headquarters of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ). More than 75 English-speaking Jews and Christians gathered to clear the air about their perceptions of the other in a refreshingly open discussion.

The Christians represented Bridges for Peace, Christian Friends of Israel and the ICEJ. The Jews were all members of the British Israel Group (BIG) – an organization founded nearly two years ago to utilize the talents and connections of British-born Israelis in the media and political hasbara battle. BIG members, Norman and Lola Cohen, were the impetus behind the meeting. The Cohens, who live in the southern Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo, are longtime neighbours of Bridges for Peace director, Clarence Wagner. As members of a tiny Jewish community in their old town of Leamington Spa in England, the Cohens were active in interfaith activities, and have long bemoaned the lack of interchange in Israel. Wagner and his colleagues were eager to have the opportunity to reach out

to the English speaking community in Israel.

Avi Lehrer, founder and president of BIG, opened the evening by reiterating BIG's commitment to a safe and secure Israel living in peace with its neighbours. Members of the press had been invited, but, with the exception of BBC bureau chief Simon Wilson, those who did come mumbled their excuses and left before the speeches.

First to the podium was Bret Stephens, editor in chief of the Jerusalem Post. Stephens, an American who attended graduate school in London, chose to frame his remarks in the context of his personal experiences with Christianity. He spoke of his childhood as the son of secular Jewish parents growing up in Mexico. While his parents chose not to give Stephens any kind of formal Jewish education and no bar mitzvah, they did instill in him an awareness of his Jewishness. While the family never told anyone they were Jewish, relationships with their Catholic neighbours "were not amicable," Stephens divulged. "It was a hostile environment for Jews," he said.

Stephens saw Catholicism as practised in Mexico with its heavy pagan influences as "primitive." Christianity was regarded with fear and contempt, and as a Jew, Stephens felt a sense of superiority over those who practised the primitive faith. His views changed when he moved out of Mexico and began to learn about his Jewish heritage through university courses on Jewish texts. "As I acquired an education in Jewish tradition, my negative attitudes toward Christianity diminished," he said. Stephens met Christians who were thoughtful and serious about their faith. "It was a revelation to me that you could be a sincere Christian and not be a peasant," he asserted. Stephens related that he eventually put aside his "sniggering" about Christianity – a phenomenon endemic to Jewish leftist intellectuals and their admirers. As he became more committed to Israel, it was hard not to notice, he said, that it was Christian conservatives who were amongst the most supportive of Israel. AIPAC (the America Israel Public Affairs Committee) doesn't deliver the votes for Israel, Stephens contended, "it's the Christian Coalition."

Stephens recounted several anecdotes about his encounters with Christian supporters of Israel in the southern United States. He remarked on the turnaround in Christian attitudes toward Jews and Israel in recent years: "It's a huge reservoir of support," he noted, that the Jewish community would be "stupid to spurn, especially when we don't have so many friends and allies." Stephens did caution Jews to make certain terms and conditions clear to pro-Israel Christians. "You may support us as Israelis and Jews, not as cogs in some grand design," he asserted, "then we can have a dialogue."

Responding to Stephen's remarks, ICEJ executive director, Malcom Hedding, an articulate South African who has lived in Israel for seven years, noted that "there's something very genuine in this gathering." Hedding delivered a speech that served to reassure many of the Jews in the audience who harbored lingering doubts about the true agenda of Christian Zionists. He told the audience about the history of Christian Zionism – going back to the time of Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans.

Confronting Jewish discomfort right on, Hedding acknowledged Christian silence during the Holocaust. "We lament that," he said, "but we're here now." Hedding reported that the Christian Zionists endure "considerable hostility" from Jews, despite their efforts to be considered "genuine friends of Israel."

"Christian Zionism is not based on an apocalyptic belief system. We'll let God fill out the agenda," Hedding stated. He says that the core of Christian Zionist belief is that everything connected to Israel is based on God's promises. "God has been faithful to the Jews and Israel is a fulfillment of God's promise. Thus, a central tenet is the belief that God did bequeath the land to Abraham. This was in clear contrast to Stephens, who admitted to a level of discomfort with the notion of Jewish chosenness and rejection of the idea that Israel's claims to the land are predicated on a deed from Abraham. "We take the word of God seriously," Hedding emphasized.

Israel's legitimacy is also based on historical facts, Hedding continued. "No other people have had a 4,000 year engagement with this land," he asserted. Despite their complete support for Israel, all the Christian organizations operate social assistance programs in the Arab sector since they "recognize the suffering of all peoples in this land." But the main agenda of the Christian Zionists operating here "is to comfort and bless Israel," Hedding said.

Theologically, Hedding says Christian Zionist ideas aren't so different from orthodox Jewish ideas. He told of a discussion with the chief rabbi of Australia (sic), who informed an astonished Hedding: "You know the Messiah is coming and the current conflict heralds that."

To sustained applause, Hedding concluded, "Although we turned up late after centuries of anti-Semitism, we are here now, as your friends."

At the catered kosher reception after the formal program, BIG members mingled with their Christian hosts and exchanged ideas for future joint projects. Next time, they won't need an icebreaker. (IsraelNationalNews.com Jan 29)

The writer is author of Jerusalem Diaries: In Tense Times (Gefen).
