

 Jerusalem 4:35 Toronto 5:15

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

became a "sacrifice to peace," as if their deaths somehow advanced peace.

Something of the sort is happening today. The almost nonexistent press coverage of Shin Bet head Avi Dichter's testimony that the trickle of weapons into Gaza would become a river after withdrawal is one example.

The impact of new developments that undercut the original logic of withdrawal are ignored. For instance, the entry of the more supple Mahmoud

Abbas in place of Arafat virtually ensures that withdrawal will become a very temporary first step, not a long-term interim solution, as originally envisioned by Sharon.

The entire Gaza withdrawal plan, as Hillel Halkin explains, was predicated on the assumption that a security fence, including within it the major settlement blocs and Jordan Valley settlements, would constitute a long-term de facto border. Yet today the Supreme Court, not the political and security echelons, is drawing the route of the fence, and it is doubtful it will be completed at all.

Even before last summer's Supreme Court decision on the route of the security fence around Jerusalem, construction was proceeding at a snail's pace. It has now ground to a virtual halt. Moreover, the court's insistence that the government respond to the International Court of Justice ruling that a security fence beyond the 1949 armistice lines violates international law suggests that the court will look askance at deviations from those lines.

The failure to proceed on the fence is crucial. As Haaretz reported last week, car thieves have already found ways to get around the completed sections of the fence, and the security forces are afraid that terrorists will soon follow. And this week's Haaretz quotes security officials as saying, "We may have missed our chance to build the fence, especially in Jerusalem," in light of possible American pressure to stop building.

The failure to build the security fence close to the original route would knock out one of the major predicates of the entire Gaza withdrawal plan. Refusal to acknowledge this dramatic change in circumstances is in some ways more troubling than specific security concerns, for it suggests that messianic furies are once again loose in Israel. (Jerusalem Post Jan 28)

Events...

Tuesday February 8, 8:00pm

Rav Mordechai Elon, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat HaKotel, will lecture in Hebrew on Parshat Hashavua at **B'nai Torah**.

Wednesday February 9, 10:30am

Rav Mordechai Elon, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat HaKotel, will lecture at **York University**, Ross Building room N836.

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Commentary...

Messianic Furies Again? By Jonathan Rosenblum

On its face, the proposed Gaza withdrawal reflects a clear-eyed recognition that peace with the Palestinians is not currently in the cards. As Hillel Halkin states in the June issue of Commentary: "Israel cannot swallow the Palestinians. It cannot drive them out. It cannot arrive at a peaceful settlement with them. All it can do is disengage itself from them."

According to this view, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided to take advantage of the favorably disposed Bush administration to separate on the best possible terms for Israel.

Yet from the beginning there were indications that the Gaza pullout plan was something of a tabula rasa upon which everyone could project his own fondest hopes. Last June, Sharon promoted the plan to the Jewish Agency Board of Governors in precisely those terms: "Above all, it gives the people of Israel hope for a better future."

The prime minister offered only the sketchiest outline of his strategic and tactical thinking (perhaps to keep from embarrassing his American partners). And security concerns raised by opponents of the withdrawal have been consistently ignored. The prime minister prefers portraying opposition to the plan as based on a Greater Israel theology - a tactic ably abetted by those who counsel soldiers to refuse to uproot settlements on halachic grounds.

Yet those security concerns are hardly trivial. Ashdod and Ashkelon, home to nearly 300,000 Israelis, Israel's major port and crucial oil refineries, might soon find themselves in the same position as Sderot today.

Withdrawal poses a difficult conundrum for Israel. Only by giving up control of Gaza's borders - air, sea, and overland from Egypt - will the international community recognize that Israel is no longer responsible for the fate of Gaza's residents.

But renouncing the security envelope raises the likelihood of the entry of sophisticated munitions, such as those seized on the Karine A ship. There is nothing to suggest that international or Egyptian forces patrolling Gaza's borders would prove effective in interdicting weapons smuggling. At the same time, their presence would vastly complicate any IDF reentry into Gaza should circumstances necessitate.

The absence of a ground presence in Gaza will dramatically lessen Israel's ability to disrupt terrorist networks. Crucial human intelligence gathering will be much less effective. The IDF will no longer be able to destroy munitions factories. The effectiveness of the security fence around Gaza will be reduced by the loss of the sanitized zone adjacent to the fence. Most importantly, argues Gen. Yaacov Amidror, Israel's deterrent capability will be severely compromised by the widespread Palestinian perception of Israeli flight.

OF LATE, the Gaza withdrawal has begun to transmute in the public mind into an end in itself, much as the Oslo process did. Under Oslo, the "peace process" required a continuous stream of new signed agreements to preserve the illusion of forward momentum. Uncomfortable facts - such as continued incitement in the Palestinian media and textbooks, or Arafat's statements in Arabic reiterating the strategy of slices - were ignored; each terror victim

Europe - Thy Name Is Cowardice By Mathias Dapfner

A few days ago Henry Broder wrote in Welt am Sonntag, "Europe - your family name is appeasement." It's a phrase you can't get out of your head because it's so terribly true.

Appeasement cost millions of Jews and non-Jews their lives as England and France, allies at the time, negotiated and hesitated too long before they noticed that Hitler had to be fought, not bound to toothless agreements.

Appeasement legitimized and stabilized Communism in the Soviet Union, then East Germany, then all the rest of Eastern Europe where for decades, inhuman, suppressive, murderous governments were glorified as the ideologically correct alternative to all other possibilities.

Appeasement crippled Europe when genocide ran rampant in Kosovo, and even though we had absolute proof of ongoing mass-murder, we Europeans debated and debated and debated, and were still debating when finally the Americans had to come from halfway around the world, into Europe yet again, and do our work for us.

Rather than protecting democracy in the Middle East, European appeasement, camouflaged behind the fuzzy word "equidistance," now countenances suicide bombings in Israel by fundamentalist Palestinians.

Appeasement generates a mentality that allows Europe to ignore nearly 500,000 victims of Saddam's torture and murder machinery and, motivated by the self-righteousness of the peace-movement, has the gall to issue bad grades to George Bush.. Even as it is uncovered that the loudest critics of the American action in Iraq made illicit billions, no, TENS of billions, in the corrupt U. N Oil-for-Food program.

And now we are faced with a particularly grotesque form of appeasement.. How is Germany reacting to the escalating violence by Islamic fundamentalists in Holland and elsewhere? By suggesting that we really should have a "Muslim Holiday" in Germany.

I wish I were joking, but I am not. A substantial fraction of our (German) Government, and if the polls are to be believed, the German people, actually believe that creating an Official State "Muslim Holiday" will somehow spare us from the wrath of the fanatical Islamists.

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One cannot help but recall Britain's Neville Chamberlain waving the laughable treaty signed by Adolf Hitler, and declaring European "Peace in our time".

What else has to happen before the European public and its political leadership get it? There is a sort of crusade underway, an especially perfidious crusade consisting of systematic attacks by fanatic Muslims, focused on civilians, directed against our free, open Western societies, and intent upon Western Civilization's utter destruction.

It is a conflict that will most likely last longer than any of the great military conflicts of the last century - a conflict conducted by an enemy that cannot be tamed by "tolerance" and "accommodation" but is actually spurred on by such gestures, which have proven to be, and will always be taken by the Islamists for signs of weakness.

Only two recent American Presidents had the courage needed for anti-appeasement: Reagan and Bush.

His American critics may quibble over the details, but we Europeans know the truth. We saw it first hand: Ronald Reagan ended the Cold War, freeing half of the German people from nearly 50 years of terror and virtual slavery. And Bush, supported only by the Social Democrat Blair, acting on moral conviction, recognized the danger in the Islamic War against democracy. His place in history will have to be evaluated after a number of years have passed.

In the meantime, Europe sits back with charismatic self-confidence in the multicultural corner, instead of defending liberal society's values and being an attractive center of power on the same playing field as the true great powers, America and China.

On the contrary - we Europeans present ourselves, in contrast to those "arrogant Americans", as the World Champions of "tolerance", which even (Germany's Interior Minister) Otto Schily justifiably criticizes. Why? Because we're so moral? I fear it's more because we're so materialistic, so devoid of a moral compass.

For his policies, Bush risks the fall of the dollar, huge amounts of additional national debt, and a massive and persistent burden on the American economy - because unlike almost all of Europe, Bush realizes what is at stake - literally everything.

While we criticize the "capitalistic robber barons" of America because they seem too sure of their priorities, we timidly defend our Social Welfare systems. Stay out of it! It could get expensive! We'd rather discuss reducing our 35-hour workweek or our dental coverage, or our 4 weeks of paid vacation... Or listen to TV pastors preach about the need to "reach out to terrorists. To understand and forgive".

These days, Europe reminds me of an old woman who, with shaking hands, frantically hides her last pieces of jewelry when she notices a robber breaking into a neighbor's house.

Appeasement? Europe, thy name is Cowardice. (Die Welt Jan 2005)
The writer is CEO of Axel Springer, AG, a major German publisher.

You Can Count on Them By Aluf Benn

A new study purports to defuse the demographic issue by giving smaller estimates of the Palestinian population. But is it accurate?

Bennett (Ben) Zimmerman couldn't believe his eyes as he looked down from the settlement of Har Bracha at the city of Nablus, which lies at the foot of the hill. "When I visited the West Bank and saw Nablus, I asked myself, 'Is that the whole thing?' I thought it would be a lot bigger," he relates. Zimmerman once saw a Palestinian spokesman being interviewed on CNN and talking about an Arab majority in the Land of Israel. The visit to the territories convinced him that it's inconceivable, that the numbers just don't add up. Where are all these Palestinians? He smelled a plot. When he got back to Los Angeles he wrote an article for the Internet site of Arutz Sheva, the settlers' pirate radio station, entitled "Time for a Recount."

The article, which appeared in November 2003, warned about a Palestinian campaign for the establishment of one state with equal voting rights for all, like the struggle that was conducted against South Africa in the 1980s. The Palestinians, he maintained, were trying to inflate the number of residents in the territories in order to undercut Israel's image. The best way to deprive the Palestinians of this tactic, he wrote, is to challenge the accuracy of their exaggerated numbers. He adds that if the data of the Palestinian Authority were accepted without proper checking, Israel's existence would be based on an Arab lie.

Zimmerman, who supports Jewish sovereignty west of the Jordan River, decided to investigate the subject and to show that the public debate over the "demographic problem" is being conducted on the basis of mistaken data that inflates the number of Palestinians and diminishes the scale of the Jewish majority in the country. He contacted Yoram Ettinger, a former Israeli diplomat who is a strategic adviser and a well-known extra-parliamentary right-wing activist. Ettinger had previously published articles casting doubt on the severity of the demographic threat.

"Ben called me and said, let's seize the initiative; I would invite a few people in Israel, he would invite a few people abroad, and we would see if we were right and they were wrong," Ettinger said this week. "I deliberately chose a range of people who would bring me back to earth in case I let ideology take

control."

Their efforts were presented this month at think tanks in Washington and Jerusalem and in the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Security Committee. Their findings purport to undermine the conventional verities and show that there are a lot fewer Arabs in the territories than is generally thought. According to their calculations, there are 2.4 million Arabs in the territories and not 3.8 million, which is the number usually accepted by politicians and researchers and is based on data of the Palestinian Authority's Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). The "million-and-a-half person gap," they call it.

These statistics are political dynamite. The "demographic problem" is the cardinal justification for supporters of Israeli separation from the territories. It has become a truism of the public and political discourse that within a few years the Jews will become a minority "between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean" and that if the Israeli occupation continues, Israel will find itself in the midst of an unavoidable explosion between its Jewish identity and its democracy. Either it will become a binational state with an Arab majority or it will be reviled, like South Africa in the apartheid period.

During the years of the intifada, this approach trickled from the left into the political center, and even Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who in the past denied the existence of a "demographic threat" now cites it as justification for withdrawing from the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians are aware of this Israeli anxiety and are trying to intensify it. Saeb Erekat, a Palestinian cabinet minister, who this week spoke at a conference held by the Pares Center for Peace, warned his listeners, "Every additional house you add in the settlements prevents a solution of two states for two peoples. And then there will be one state, but you will be a minority in it." However, if the Jewish majority is large and stable, and there really is no demographic problem, there is also no rush to get out of the territories.

The findings of the study (which can be found at www.pademographics.com) are generating doubt about the previous assumptions. The study's authors cleverly used official Palestinian data in order to undermine the familiar numbers. Cross-matching of figures issued by the Palestinian Health Ministry, which counts the number of births and deaths in the territories, with the data of Israeli Border Control, which monitor the entrances to and departures from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, showed that the estimate of the PCBS was exaggerated. The birthrate in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was lower than expected and the Palestinian balance of immigration was negative in recent years, in contrast to the forecast. The PCBS also counted Palestinians who are residents of East Jerusalem, who also appear in the official statistics of Israeli residents. After these adjustments, the number of Palestinians in the territories is put at 3.06 million, which is hundreds of thousands lower than the accepted figure.

But the group did not stop there. They maintain that the Palestinian Health Ministry exaggerated the number of births, perhaps as a result of political pressure. Therefore, they cross-matched those figures with the data of the Israeli Civil Administration in the pre-Oslo years and with a press announcement by the Palestinian Elections Committee, according to which 200,000 Palestinians are living abroad. By this means they succeeded in reducing the number by another 650,000. Subsequently they tried to refute the claims that the Palestinian birthrate is the highest in the world, and to remove from the count Palestinians who moved from the territories to inside the Green Line and received Israeli ID cards. Those figures, though, are more controversial.

The project leader, Ben Zimmerman, is a businessman who runs a small fund for investing in shares of Israeli high-tech companies. He votes Republican and loves the old songs of Elton John. He got into politics a few years ago when he established American Friends of the Golan and fought against the withdrawal plan of former prime minister Ehud Barak.

"I love being on the Golan Heights," he said this week. "They have a special way of life there, which has to be preserved for future generations. And there is no demographic issue, either." Zimmerman lived in the Golan Heights for a few months and ran his business affairs from there, but did not consider immigrating to Israel, he says. "I am an American and I don't even use the title 'Zionist,' because that means moving to Israel."

Zimmerman is part of a group of Jewish activists from the West Coast who bypassed the traditional Jewish establishment and launched aggressive pro-Israel activity during the intifada. Historian Roberta Seid, who took part in the demographic study, is the author of a book on the slim image among women. In recent years she has been active in the organization "Stand With Us," which demonstrated in favor of the separation wall in front of the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Yoram Ettinger, the Israeli partner in the study, enlisted for his team Brigadier General (res.) David Shahaf, a former head of the Civil Administration in the West Bank, who is not politically involved. After examining birth rate data in neighboring countries and trying to infer from them the trends in the Palestinian society, Shahaf succeeded in obtaining the reports of the Palestinian Health Ministry. That was the breakthrough. According to Ettinger, getting the data from the Israeli authorities, and especially from the Interior Ministry, was more complicated. The work went on for about nine months.

Zimmerman raised the funds, about \$15,000, donating a third himself,

getting another third from a person named Peter Mander, and the rest from a few donors in Los Angeles. The research team included only one demographic expert, Avraham Shvout, as well as several historians and mathematicians. Publication of the findings was delayed, Ettinger says, until professional confirmation was received from another demographer, Nick Eberstadt, from the American Enterprise Institute, the bastion of Washington neoconservatives.

Objections to the new study have been voiced by Prof. Sergio DellaPergola, one of Israel's leading demographers and a researcher at the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute in Jerusalem. In a report he published last year, DellaPergola estimated that the Jewish majority in the Land of Israel would reach an end around 2010. His conclusion was that the country should be divided on a demographic-ethnic basis, with exchanges of populated areas: The Palestinians would get the Arab towns and villages in the Triangle area in return for the settlements adjacent to Jerusalem and those in western Samaria: Ma'aleh Adumim in exchange for Umm al-Fahm.

According to DellaPergola's calculations, there are 3.4 million Palestinians in the territories. After reading the Zimmerman-Ettinger study, he says he did not take into account the emigration of Palestinians and thinks this has to be examined, as well as examining the birth and mortality statistics of the Palestinian Authority.

"The emigration question requires investigation, and we also need to understand the difference in number of births between the PCBS and the Palestinian Health Ministry," he says. But he disputes both the view that the birthrate among Muslims in the territories and inside the Green Line can be expected to decline significantly, and the optimistic forecasts about an increase in the number of Jews.

According to DellaPergola, "Even if we make the unreasonable assumption that the Arab fertility rate will fall immediately to the Jewish level, without taking emigration into account, there will be erosion in the Jewish majority. It will be slower, but in the end we reach the day of a tie, and the day on which the Jews will be a minority between the sea and the river. In the light of far more reasonable fertility assumptions, the Jewish majority will end very quickly." Zimmerman, in contrast, says that if 50,000 Jews immigrate to Israel every year it will be possible to preserve the 60:40 Jewish majority over time.

So who's right? Both sides show in their reports that demographic forecasts tend to be proved wrong, especially in unstable areas such as the Land of Israel. But despite the crucial importance of demography to the political debate and the shaping of Israeli policy, the government has flinched from undertaking a thorough examination of the data.

Zimmerman says he was surprised to discover that since the Oslo accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, no Israeli government department has conducted an orderly monitoring of the Palestinians' natural rate of increase and of emigration from the territories. Discussions held last year in the National Security Council produced no clear conclusions. The new study, even if its findings are controversial, will undoubtedly generate a reexamination. (Ha'aretz Jan 28)

Unilateral Withdrawal Is Irresponsible By Michael Rubin

The Baghdad restaurant grew silent, all eyes on the television. It was January 29, 2004. Every Arabic news channel had its cameras trained on a Beirut runway, where a German transport plane was due to land. Israel had just released Sheikh Abdel Karim Obeid, once leader of Hezbollah's southern Lebanon operations, after almost 15 years in an Israeli prison. The group of largely pro-Western Iraqis had tears in their eyes. "The first Arab victory over Israel was [the withdrawal from Lebanon] in May 2000. This is the second," an Iraqi professor explained.

Six weeks earlier, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had announced plans to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip. A broad range of Israeli politicians cautiously endorsed the move. While European diplomats wrung their hands nervously, President George W. Bush called Sharon's plan "historic and courageous."

Nothing could be more untrue. While Israelis might fear civil and political strife if settlers are forced from their homes, Sharon's plan will reinvigorate terrorism not only in Israel, but as an international tactic of choice.

The power of television is tremendous across the Middle East. Arabic satellite stations like the Qatar-based Al Jazeera, Hezbollah's Al-Manar, and Iran's Al-Alam deluge their audiences with images of American defeat: the 1983 U.S. withdrawal from Beirut, and the flight from Mogadishu a decade later. Watching television on any Baghdad evening, I would see American diplomats fleeing Vietnam. To the Iraqi audience the message was clear: Bush may say America has staying power, but it is weak. Al Jazeera mastered has information warfare. On days without American casualties, the station simply rebroadcasts images of the previous day's roadside bomb.

The Iranian government primes its audience with similar messages. While critics rave about the latest Iranian art films, the normal fare for ordinary Iranians is far different. Sitting among Iranian soldiers packed into a Shiraz movie theater, I watched a Rambo-type film pitting Hezbollah characters against hapless Israeli soldiers. I tried to be inconspicuous as the crowd began to shout "kill the Jew" in anticipation of events on screen. The message to the soldiers was clear: Violence works.

Imagery can be equally powerful on Israeli television. More than 20 years later, older Israelis remember television pictures of residents of Yamit battling soldiers during that settlement's 1982 evacuation. But while such images will have a profound impact on the Israeli electorate and their replication may cause some government ministers to reconsider their support for Sharon's plan, far more damaging to Israel and the United States would be the subsequent pictures. Images of Hezbollah and Hamas flags flying over Jewish settlements like Netzarim and Kfar Yam will torpedo hope not only of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, but also of an end to terrorism in Iraq, Turkey, Kashmir and against the West in general.

Israelis and some in the Palestinian Authority may be sincere in a desire for peace, but rejectionists abound, not only in Lebanese and Syrian refugee camps, but also in Iraq's Sunni Triangle, Iran's Revolutionary Guard bases and Pakistani seminaries. A Hamas flag over Netzarim will justify 37 years of terrorism. The reasons for Israel's withdrawal will be irrelevant on the streets of the Islamic world. If terrorism can free Gaza, why not the West Bank, the Galilee, Indian Kashmir or democratic Iraq? Why compromise if terrorism obviates the need for concession? There is a limit to the West's stamina. Neither Israelis nor Americans should assume their opponents would be unwilling to pay the price of continued violence. As the Shi'ite commemoration of Ashura approaches, millions will commemorate the 680 martyrdom of Imam Husayn, ritually cursing Sunni leaders of the day, as if Husayn's death was yesterday.

The price of continued terrorism and insurgency might be high, but terror masters themselves often do not pay the price. Earlier this month in Baghdad, I interviewed Iraqis fleeing violence in the northern city of Mosul. Without exception, each said that the insurgents who invaded the city were in their mid to late teens; they complained that the insurgent leaders were using impressionable youth as cannon fodder. But so long as oil-rich Arab states and Iran are willing to subsidize incitement on television, in schools and in mosques, there will be no shortage of recruits. Not only Israelis, but also Iraqis, Indians, Turks, Americans and Europeans will pay the price.

Seeking peace is honorable, but Sharon is gambling. Whether motivated by a sincere desire for peace or for an egotistical need to rewrite his place in history is irrelevant. Unilateral withdrawal is irresponsible. Should Gaza be part of a comprehensive deal, pictures of Hamas flags over Gaza will be immaterial, for they can be counterbalanced with images of Israeli embassies hoisting flags in Damascus, Riyadh and Tehran. But if Sharon goes ahead with Gaza disengagement, generations both inside and outside Israel will be sacrificed upon the altar of his legacy. (Ha'aretz Jan 28)

The writer, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, is editor of the Middle East Quarterly.

Never Again? By Anne Bayefsky

The U.N. gets a P.R. boost.

On Monday, the United Nations marked the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp with a day-long special session of the U.N. General Assembly, followed by the opening of an exhibition. Throughout the event, the words "never again" were repeated many times. But what exactly did they mean to U.N. members and officials?

Here is the cynical response: They meant that the secretary-general has been seriously weakened by the Oil-for-Food scandal and ongoing congressional and criminal investigations, as well as the sexual abuse of refugees in the Congo by U.N. peacekeepers and the mishandling of sexual-harassment charges in-house. A secretary-general seeking to serve out his remaining two years in office finds throwing something toward the Jews, in the form of commemorating a 60-year-old catastrophe, a relatively inexpensive means of redemption.

The scope of the exercise was strictly controlled. The Europeans agreed to promote the special session on the condition that there were no resolutions and no final declaration — in other words no lasting statement of purpose or resolve. They were not prepared to do battle with Arab and Muslim states over texts or outcomes. Not a single substantive U.N. document was distributed. The ground rules for the special sessions of the General Assembly for the previous decade were completely different — this one would be "commemorative" only.

One hundred thirty-eight U.N. members agreed with the proposition to hold the special session, and one more decided to speak at the actual event. Of the remaining 50 U.N. members, half were from the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

U.N. member states delivered 41 speeches over the course of the day. Only five of those speeches mentioned Israel. Even the speeches of the United States, the European Union, Canada, and Australia failed to refer to Israel. Nobel-laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Weisel, who spoke at the outset, mentioned Israel once; citing a number of examples of steps that the allies might have taken, he added "if Britain had allowed more Jews to return to Palestine, now Israel, their ancestral land...it would have prevented or reduced the scope of the tragedy." Weisel also called for condemnation and prosecution of suicide-terrorism as a crime against humanity (without mentioning the context).

An evening reception brought hundreds of Jews to the public entrance of the U.N. where an exhibit containing photographs and artwork from Yad Vashem was unveiled. Walking through it, one comes across the word "Israel" on one occasion, in the last sentence, which reads: "Most of the Holocaust survivors immigrated to the state of Israel after its establishment in 1945 following a resolution of the United Nations." When the exhibit was opened, the assembled crowd sang Hatikva, the Israeli national anthem — although this breach of U.N. protocol is said to have been approved on the grounds that the song was for all victims of the Holocaust.

The rules of the game were articulated by U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz while speaking on behalf of the United States: "We have agreed today to set aside contemporary political issues, in order to reflect on those events of 60 years ago in a spirit of unanimity." And except for an indirect comment by Jordan and a direct reference to Palestinians by Venezuela during the day's speeches, the game plan was followed.

The upshot? The United Nations looks better in the eyes of many. The secretary-general improved his image. Israel, the perpetual U.N.-loser, was queen-for-a-day.

But the nagging question is, where does this leave "never again"?

Widening the lens, we notice that last month the U.N. adopted 22 resolutions condemning the state of Israel, and four country-specific resolutions criticizing the human-rights records of the other 190 U.N. member states. Also in December the public entrance of the U.N. sported the annual solidarity with the Palestinian people exhibit, featuring a display about Palestinian humiliation at having to bare midribs at Israeli checkpoints. (No mention was made of the purpose of the checkpoints or the Israelis who have died from suicide belts on Palestinians who circumvent them.) On exactly the same day that the secretary-general announced the holding of the commemorative session, January 11, 2005, he also pushed forward the U.N. plan to create a register of the Palestinian victims of Israel's non-violent security fence. (There are no plans to create a register of Israeli victims of Palestinian terrorism.) In March the U.N. will begin its annual session of the U.N. Human Rights Commission, at which Israel will be the only U.N. member state not allowed to participate in full because U.N. states continue to prevent it from gaining equal membership in a regional group. The U.N. remains without a definition of terrorism, never having transformed the names of Palestinian terrorists from abstract entities into the targets of specific U.N. condemnation or consequences of any kind. And any day now we can expect the secretary-general to continue his pattern of denouncing Israel's lawful exercise of self-defense as "extrajudicial killing" or as a morally reprehensible contribution to "a cycle of violence." In other words, U.N. demonization of Israel and the green light to the killers of Israelis that such demonization portends will not skip a beat. This is the face of modern anti-Semitism.

Jews everywhere are indebted to the willingness and ability of Israelis to live and breathe self-determination. When contemporary political issues are set aside, and an affirmation of the centrality of the Jewish state's well-being to the Jewish people's well-being is not key to a commemoration of the Holocaust, "never again" is an empty phrase. Worse, situated in a place where a U.N. General Assembly resolution said Zionism was racism until 1991 and the 2001 U.N. Durban Declaration delivers the same message, it plays into the hands of those who would separate Jews from Israel for no other reason than to divide and conquer.

The speaker of the Italian senate, Marcello Pera, was the only non-Israeli participant who was prepared to stand against the wheeling and dealing in the backrooms, telling the General Assembly that the anti-Semitism of "today...feeds on...insidious distinctions...made between Israel and the Jewish state, Israel and its governments, Zionism and Semitism. Or...when the struggle for life led by...Israelis is labelled 'state terrorism.'"

The less-cynical response to our original question — about the meaning of "never again"? Some Holocaust survivors such as Nesse Godin and Congressman Tom Lantos were able to speak directly — during the unofficial lunchtime break organized by Bnai Brith, in a room far from the General Assembly. Some people listened. Some people heard. The pictures of Auschwitz are still in the front hall of the U.N. for a little while longer. A blow was struck against Holocaust deniers. And for one day, the democratic state of Israel was not the most reviled member of the U.N. (less than half of whose members can be called "free" according to Freedom House).

When all was said and done, however, the U.N. got a lot more than it gave. Improving the image of the U.N. and its secretary-general could prove more costly than Israelis have bargained. (National Review Jan 27)

The writer is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and a visiting professor at Touro and Metropolitan Colleges in New York.

Keep Their Army Units Intact By Michael M. Rosen

January has not been kind to Israeli yeshivot, nor to Americans studying within their walls.

First came the tragic news that 19-year-old American at a yeshiva on Jerusalem's outskirts had been found dead of a drug overdose. Close on the heels of that, four American students at Jerusalem yeshivot were arrested for selling drugs to other students.

Then came word that the Israeli Ministry of Education would no longer recognize degrees from institutions that award students credit for time spent in Israeli yeshivot. This policy change would significantly impact Yeshiva University (YU), as many as 80% of whose students receive credit for post-high-school yeshiva study in Israel.

YU's president noted the absurdity that the school's degrees are acceptable to Harvard University but not to the Education Ministry. The decision has reportedly been reversed, but that such a mistake could have been made in the first place is indicative of an attitude and an ignorance.

Close on the heels of these developments, the IDF decided to disband its units of hesder yeshiva students. According to the decades-long hesder (literally "arrangement") between the religious-Zionist community and the government, students combine yeshiva study with army service over a five-year period.

Hesder historically provided this community with an avenue for blending Torah ve'avoda: studying divine texts coupled with serving the Jewish people.

Generally, after studying for one year following high school, students head off to the IDF, where they train in special units comprising soldiers from other yeshivot. They are then assigned to general, integrated units.

But Maj.-Gen. Elazar Stern, the IDF's chief of human resources, wants to shake things up. Over the opposition of the hesder yeshivot, Stern announced on Tuesday that hesder students would be integrated into regular units from the start of their service to the finish. Stern's justification is that sectarian cadres damage the army's ability to unify Israelis.

The decision provoked immediate reactions from the religious-Zionist community's rabbis and politicians.

Rabbi David Stav, spokesman for the national hesder program, said he was considering appealing Stern's decision to the defense minister, the chief of staff, and even the Supreme Court. MK Effi Eitam of the National Union declared that the move "threatens to seriously harm the delicate fabric of religious Zionism and its integration in the army."

To be fair to Stern, the details of the plan have not yet become clear. It is still uncertain, for instance, whether hesder units will be disbanded at the company or platoon level.

But the decision at first glance is nevertheless problematic, for several reasons.

FIRST, THE timing stinks. The decision comes in the midst of furious debate over Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan and the response it has elicited from the religious-Zionist community. While Stern denies any connection, it defies belief to claim that the disbanding has nothing to do with the recent "inappropriate" calls for religious soldiers to refuse to evacuate Jews from Gaza.

Second, the decision targets only the hesder units but leaves intact comparably homogeneous cadres of Beduin and haredi soldiers.

If it believes in social unity, the IDF should shelve its piecemeal approach to integrating the army in favor of comprehensive reform of an army composed of sub-communities. Focusing on one such group undermines the unity Stern seeks.

To be sure, religious soldiers are highly regarded in the army and disbanding hesder units appears to reflect their great success on the battlefield and in becoming a dedicated part of the army; perhaps the IDF believes that by spreading out talented religious soldiers their effectiveness will inspire others. But it is equally possible that by diffusing them across the army, lowered morale will harm their effectiveness.

Third, religious soldiers face serious practical challenges. Any 18-year-old transitioning from the relative freedom of life in high school to the confinement of the military must confront adversity.

Religious soldiers compound the normal difficulties with the delicate task of maintaining their commitment to religious practice while assimilating the routines of army life.

The first months of this transition are crucial, and the current hesder units offer a platform for observant soldiers to pray in a minyan, ensure kashrut standards, and even, as an American friend who served in a hesder unit informed me, build an eruv - a symbolic enclosure permitting carrying in open spaces on Shabbat.

Dispersing this community will render such observance much more difficult. Worse, Stern appears not to have consulted with hesder administrators about these issues before announcing the decision.

Finally, the new policy will hurt the recruitment efforts of hesder yeshivot in Israel, and among Americans looking to study in Israel. The move may encourage yeshiva students who wish to serve in the IDF to enlist in the haredi units instead. It will also provide further ammunition to congregational and day school rabbis in the US, who are increasingly steering students away from hesder yeshivot.

The effects of the decision may not be felt for some time and many in the hesder world, including my friend, think they won't be dramatic.

But there can be no question that the yeshivot have had a rough January. *The writer, an attorney in San Diego, studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion, a hesder yeshiva, from 1994 to 1995.* (Jerusalem Post Feb 1)