



Jerusalem 4:48 Toronto 5:33

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

the Oslo accord signing, gave up the desire to destroy Israel. I don't believe that happened. I believe that has yet to happen, and I base that conclusion on a huge amount of material coming out of the Palestinian Authority areas - political speeches, religious sermons, schoolbooks, just all parts of life, and one sees it in surveys, research; one sees it in elections in so far as they take place, that there is an intent to destroy Israel.

Events...

Tuesday February 22, 8:00pm
OAJDS/CIJA-PAC school funding **Evening of Action** at Associated Hebrew Schools, 252 Finch Avenue W.

Quote of the Week...

"I support the decision" - Shimon Fogel, CEO of the Canada-Israel Committee, commenting on Canadian Foreign Minister Pierre Pettigrew's disgusting and despicable decision to lay a wreath on the arch-terrorist and genocidal murderer Arafat's grave, after the Palestinian Authority allegedly made the wreath-laying a condition for Pettigrew's meeting with their officials.

Commentary...

An Interview With Daniel Pipes

TONY JONES: Joining us now is Dr Daniel Pipes, the Director of the Philadelphia-based Middle East Forum. 18 months ago, President Bush appointed him to the board of the US Institute for Peace. Dr Pipes was a scathing critic of Yasser Arafat, and he recently claimed that the new Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, is potentially a far more formidable enemy and remains intent on eliminating Israel. Daniel Pipes, thanks for joining us.

DANIEL PIPES (DIRECTOR, MIDDLE EAST FORUM): Thank you, Tony. JONES: It's time, isn't it, to put aside that sort of skepticism and, as Condoleezza Rice says, seize the chance for the best opportunity we may see for peace for years?

PIPES: Is that an order?

JONES: (Laughs) Well, do you think it's time?

PIPES: Well, I certainly welcome the so-called cease-fire. I like the idea that everybody's saying the violence has to stop. But there are two significant impediments. The first is that, as you noted earlier, there are important elements on the Palestinian side who don't want this, who want the fighting to go on, and so one has to doubt whether it's going to actually take place.

Secondly, and perhaps more profoundly, Mahmoud Abbas has made it clear, now for two and half years, that he thinks that Palestinian violence against Israelis is counterproductive and he wants it stopped, but he doesn't want to stop it because he wants to end the war against Israel, because he has given up the goal of destroying Israel. It's because he sees that tactically at this time, violence is counterproductive.

JONES: Would you agree, though, that if Ariel Sharon took the same view as you, that Mahmoud Abbas has ulterior motives and is still bent on eliminating Israel, he wouldn't be shaking his hand, he wouldn't be offering him a truce?

PIPES: I would agree with you that the Israeli Government and particularly the prime minister doesn't agree with me. But I've often disagreed with Israeli prime ministers.

JONES: Seriously, wouldn't they be in a much better position than you to judge him?

PIPES: They've made mistakes before. The whole of the Oslo diplomacy, which lasted for seven years from 1993 to 2000, was something I was skeptical about. They went full speed ahead, and they were wrong and I was right. I'm modest in my self-appraisal, but there are times when one can be at a distance and see things which somebody who's right there doesn't see.

JONES: What is it exactly that you are seeing that the Israeli Government is not?

PIPES: The consensus - Israeli Government, Australian Government, virtually every government, most annotators, commentators and academics, journalists - believe that in September 1993, the Palestinians, on the White House lawn at

JONES: But they hardly have the means to do that, do they, whereas Israel certainly has the means to destroy the Palestinian Authority, should it choose to.

PIPES: Israel certainly could, but the Palestinians, because they don't have a grand arsenal and a great economy, are doing it through violence, through terrorism, through debilitation of the Israeli will, and that was working quite well, and the Israelis are prone to despair that "this will never end; let's give them something more."

JONES: But you say this as if all Palestinians were the same.

PIPES: No, of course not. Eighty per cent, I'd say, of Palestinians believe that the destruction of Israel is a worthy goal. Some 20 per cent say, "No, let's just live our own lives apart." What we need to do is focus on getting that 20 per cent to be 30, 40, 50 and 60 per cent, rather than focusing on negotiations.

JONES: Point to us, if you can, where Mahmoud Abbas has made any public statement to his own people suggesting that Israel should still be eliminated.

PIPES: He has done so in a variety of ways. He has celebrated the elements in, for example, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade who have clearly called for the destruction of Israel and he has associated with them. He has used terms like "the Zionist enemy". He has notably been unwilling to say that the war is over; he has simply said violence has to cease. His record as an aide to Yasser Arafat for 40 years. I need to ask you: what evidence do you have that he has actually given this up, because everything, I think, points to his still holding onto this goal.

JONES: (Laughs) It would be possible if you were the interviewer. Under these circumstances, I must ask you the questions. Don't you believe it's possible that Mahmoud Abbas, as many other men faced with the option of having either permanent war or peace for their people, could change fundamentally?

PIPES: It is conceivably possible. I see no reason to think that has happened.

JONES: All right. We have heard tonight that spokesmen for Hamas and Islamic Jihad have claimed their members are not bound by this truce. What will happen if they continue - those two groups of militants continue to take action in Israel?

PIPES: What we've seen over the last year, really specifically since February 2004, is growing anarchy in the Palestinian Authority areas - criminal gangs, warlords, extremist elements, security services - and the PA authority has eroded as a result. So, not only is Mahmoud Abbas not as powerful a figure as Yasser Arafat but also he has a greater problem of chaos on his hands. With the best of intentions, it's going to be very hard for him to control Hamas, Islamic Jihad and all these other elements from engaging in violence. It's going to be a real, real challenge. I have to say that I'll be surprised if he manages it.

JONES: But if he can't, will he be held to account for the violence of others? That's the point. Because they're not under his control, as you've just pointed out.

PIPES: But what's the point in making an agreement with someone who can't control the forces that operate from his territory?

JONES: But what would be expected of him? What would Israel expect him to do in order to prove that he's at least holding up his side of the bargain, because otherwise, the whole process will be in the hands of a very small group - potentially, a very small group of terrorists.

PIPES: What you're pointing to is a debate within Israel, whether they're looking for 100 per cent results or 100 per cent intention - or, anyway, intention versus results - and one finds Israelis arguing that out very intensely, for the reasons you've suggested.

JONES: What do you think they'll decide, though, because intention versus results are pretty critical when there are groups, as you pointed out, outside of his control.

PIPES: I suspect they'll go for intention.

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JONES: So the peace process may still hold, even if there are suicide bombings by Hamas or Islamic Jihad?

PIPES: I'd prefer to say diplomacy will still hold. Whether it actually leads to peace or not is an open question.

JONES: The question, though, is whether Israel would continue to cease all military activity against all Palestinians, which are the terms of the truce.

PIPES: But we've seen in the past, for example, in the Oslo diplomacy, that a lot of diplomacy took place but in fact in 2000, they were further from peace than in 1993. Diplomacy in itself is not a guarantee of success, of leading to harmony and goodwill.

JONES: Let's talk about the other debate that's going on between diplomacy and action, and that is in Iran. What do you think should happen if Iran continues with its program, its secret program, to develop nuclear weapons? Do you believe the United States could or will take military action against Iran, or that Israel may?

PIPES: I don't think the Israelis have the capabilities. The Iranians have learned the lesson of Osirak in 1981 when the Israelis came in and bombed the one installation, and that was that for the Iraqi nuclear weapons program; and the Iraqis and then the Iranians and others have learned that you put it all around and put it underground. So it would be much more difficult. I don't think at this point the Israelis could do it.

The United States Air Force could do it, and the goal of the US government these days is, in conjunction with the Europeans, to send a signal to the Iranians: "Don't do this." It's an attempt to establish a deterrent: "Please don't do this. You won't like the results. We don't want to do this." The Iranians appear not to be listening, but that could be a bluff. I'm not on the inside; I don't know actually what's going on, but from what we can tell from that side, US and European efforts have so far not had great success.

JONES: But could the US threats also be a bluff? I mean, do you believe the United States would be willing to take this tremendous risk, and consider the potential results of that risk on a Shi'ite-controlled government in Iraq which America is relying on, which has close links to Iran?

PIPES: There are many, many implications of taking out the Irani nuclear facilities. It would be a dangerous act. But I do think that the Bush administration has kept that as a possibility, and I would not be shocked if things came to that.

JONES: Very briefly, on another matter: Kim Beazley, the leader of the federal Opposition, is calling for debate in this country on whether the US troops in Iraq should withdraw from Sunni areas, potentially to western enclaves, to avoid being drawn inevitably into the vortex of civil war. What do you think of that idea?

PIPES: I'm sympathetic to it. Since April 2003 I've been calling for foreign troops, coalition troops, to be outside the cities, not have boots on the ground; be in the desert, keep an eye on the borders, keep an eye on the oil and gas, make sure there are no humanitarian disasters, but not be there in the cities, not be putting together electricity grids, not be keeping control of streets. So I'm sympathetic.

JONES: There's merit to the idea?

PIPES: I believe so.

JONES: Daniel Pipes, we'll have to leave it there. We thank you very much once again for coming to join us tonight.

PIPES: Thank you, Tony. (Lateline - Australian Broadcasting Corporation / danielpipes.org Feb 9)

Israel's Auschwitz Borders By Joseph Farah

Condoleezza Rice may know a lot about the old Soviet Union, but she sure doesn't know squat about the Middle East.

The secretary of state recently explained how it is necessary for Israel to give up more land to help fashion a viable, contiguous Palestinian state – from Gaza through Judea and Samaria.

Perhaps if you don't understand the geography, this might seem like a perfectly reasonable demand. After all, how can we expect the new Palestinian state to function normally if its people are divided by artificial barriers?

What I trust Rice does not understand – in fact, what I hope she simply fails to comprehend – is that Israel has no more land to give. Israel has no moral obligation to give any land. Israel will be jeopardizing its own security in doing so.

Let me make this crystal clear. Look at a map of the Middle East. After glancing at it for a few minutes, can anyone honestly tell me they believe the problems of violence and terrorism there have to do with the fact that Israel has too much land?

This is apparently what we are to believe.

There's lots of land in the Middle East. Most of it is populated sparsely by Arabic-speaking people, culturally, linguistically, religiously and ethnically at one with the so-called "Palestinians," a people who have never had a country of their own in the history of the world. Why then is it Israel's obligation to carve itself up to create this Palestinian state?

The tiny sliver of land that represents the current state of Israel is only about one-tenth the size of the original United Nations mandate that created the

Jewish state in 1947.

Now, I'm not a Jew. I'm a Christian Arab-American journalist who believes in freedom first, peace second. And I've got to tell you that the demands on Israel right now are demands for the nation to commit political, military and cultural suicide.

Do you know what the new borders of Israel would be under the plans being drawn up now for a "viable, contiguous Palestine"? I call them Auschwitz borders. I don't know why the Jews don't see it.

They are willingly helping to build a national concentration camp of half the world's Jewry surrounded by hostile maniacs who want to eradicate them. Israel's new borders under a Rice plan will be indefensible. Creating a new Palestinian state with contiguous borders and relying on Israel to come up with all the necessary real estate requires cutting Israel in half from north to south.

It might create a "viable" Palestinian state, but it will destroy the viability of Israel.

If Adolf Hitler had been a little smarter, he would have helped recreate a Jewish state in the Middle East and squeezed it the way the Arabs, the Europeans and now the United States are squeezing Israel. Hitler could never have dreamed of a more expedient "final solution."

Now I am not going to suggest that Rice or the Bush administration are intentionally trying to destroy Israel or the Jews. I will give them the benefit of the doubt and assume they are ill-informed, that they are making profoundly bad decisions based on bad data and bad analysis.

But I will make no such assumptions about the leadership of the Palestinian Authority and the Arab states that back it. They are not promoting a Palestinian state because they believe in freedom and self-determination for the Arab people who live there. Instead, they are doing so to create a permanent staging ground from which they will continue their war of attrition against the Jewish infidels who have the audacity to live in what they consider to be Dar al-Islam.

It's that simple. I wish Rice and Bush and even the Israeli government could see it.

It is a national disgrace that the U.S. government is spending \$350 million more to subsidize the Palestinian Authority, which holds that no Jews are permitted to live within its territory or future nation. It is a national disgrace that the U.S. government would join with the rest of the anti-Semitic world to force Israel to abandon its own security needs and its own Jewish communities on historically Jewish lands. And it is a national disgrace that the U.S. government, while supposedly fighting a global war against Islamist terrorism, is appeasing them in the Arab-Israeli conflict. (WorldNetDaily.com Feb 11)

Anti-Semitism Evolves By Daniel Pipes

Anti-Semitism may seem to be a static, unchanging phenomenon but in fact the obsessive hatred of Jews has a history that goes back millennia and continues to evolve.

Developments since World War II and the Holocaust have been especially fast-paced and portentous. Here are four of the most significant shifts:

* From right to left: For centuries, anti-Semitism was the hallmark of the right and merely episodic on the left. To take the ultimate examples of these trends, Stalin's Judeophobia was peripheral to his monstrous project, but Hitler's was central to his. Even a decade ago, this pattern still basically held true. But recent years have witnessed a rapid and global realignment, with the mainstream right increasingly sympathetic to Jews and Israel and its leftist counterparts cooler and more hostile.

* From Christian to Muslim: Christians developed the abiding tropes of anti-Semitism, (such as greediness and ambitions to world domination), and historically Christians killed most Jews. Therefore, Jews regularly fled Christendom for Islamdom. In 1945, this pattern abruptly changed. Christians came to terms with Jews, while Muslims adopted both the old Christian themes and murderousness. Today institutional anti-Semitism is overwhelmingly a Muslim affair. One result has been a steady reverse exodus, with Jews now fleeing Islamdom for Christendom.

* From religious to secular: What began as a rejection of the Jewish religion evolved over the centuries into a bias against the supposed Jewish race, (thus, our continued use of the nonsensical term anti-Semitism) and lately has evolved into anti-Zionism, or hatred of the Jewish state. An astonishing 2003 poll in which Europeans found Israel to be the leading threat to world peace indicates the depth of this new sentiment.

* The conflation of anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism: Jews and Americans, Israel and the United States – they have merged in the minds of many around the world, so that one prejudice routinely implies the other one too. The two hatreds also share a basic feature: neither is susceptible to rational argument, so each is better understood as the symptom of a psychological disorder than of some arcane political logic.

Combining these developments prompts several reflections on the parlous future of three major Jewish communities.

Israel faces the most extreme danger, surrounded as it is by enemies who

in the past generation have dehumanized Jews in ways reminiscent of Nazi Germany in the 1930s. In both cases, governments have engaged in a systematic campaign to transform the Jewish next-door neighbor into a beast-like threat that can only be controlled through his destruction. In Nazi Germany, this outlook culminated in the death camps; today, it could, and I stress could - I am not predicting it will - end up in a hail of nuclear bombs descending on Israel, a prospect that one powerful Iranian leader has publicly mused on. This in turn could result in a second Holocaust, again of six million Jews.

European Jewry is next most in danger, though in a more mundane way: Political and social isolation, depredations by Islamists, Palestinian radicals, and other hotheads, and a growing sense that Jews have no future in that continent. An exodus may take place in the near future that replicates the post-World War II exodus of Jews from Muslim countries, where the Jewish population has collapsed from about a million in 1948 to 60,000 today.

And finally, the United States: American Jews may not have been conscious of it, but they have lived these past 60 years in one of Jewry's golden ages, arguably more brilliant than those in Andalusia, Aragon, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, and Prague. But now, in a milder form than in Europe, Jews face similar currents swirling through American life, especially the Islamist surge coddled by leftists. The golden age of American Jewry, therefore, is ending. American Jews have had the relative luxury of worrying about such matters as intermarriage, coreligionists around the world, school prayer, and abortion; if current trends continue, they increasingly will find themselves worrying about personal security, marginalization, and the other symptoms already evident in Europe.

As the 60[th] anniversary of V-E and V-J days approach, it is clear that problems apparently buried in the crematoria of Auschwitz and Birkenau have revived and are increasingly with us. (New York Sun Feb 15)

This article follows the outline of a recent lecture delivered by the writer at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia.

Telling Criminals and Soldiers Apart By Evelyn Gordon

Given that every Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement of the last 12 years has ended in renewed violence, one would think both sides would be seeking a new, more effective way to manage the process. Instead, they are slavishly adhering to the very model that has failed repeatedly in the past - and nowhere is this more evident than with regard to prisoner releases.

Prisoner releases are a normal part of ending hostilities and, properly handled, they can indeed foster reconciliation. Yet both sides are currently pulling forth the same positions that so dismally failed to produce reconciliation in previous rounds: The Palestinian Authority is demanding the release of every last prisoner involved in any form of anti-Israel violence, whereas Israel is declaring that anyone who killed an Israeli is off-limits, but everyone else is negotiable.

Neither position addresses the distinctions necessary to make this process succeed. And of these, the most important is the distinction between people who attacked soldiers and those who deliberately targeted civilians.

The nature of war is that each side's fighters try to kill the other side's fighters. That is why all wars, regardless of which side "started it," end with both sides releasing their prisoners. The soldiers are not criminals, but people doing their jobs; they were detained merely to impair the other side's fighting capabilities. Once the war ends, the justification for holding them disappears.

And since the PA and Israel have effectively been at war for the last four years, the PA can plausibly argue that Palestinians who attacked Israeli servicemen should be treated as soldiers: They were doing precisely what soldiers are supposed to do.

Normally, prisoner exchanges occur at the end of hostilities, not at the outset of a fragile truce that could easily dissolve into renewed fighting. Thus Israel is correct to release only limited numbers of relatively unimportant prisoners as "confidence-building" measures now. However, it should state openly that if a final peace accord is ever signed, all Palestinians involved in attacks on Israeli soldiers - including fatal ones - will be freed, with the exceptions outlined below.

Deliberate attacks on civilians, however, are not a normal part of warfare: According to every international convention on the subject, such attacks are war crimes, and their perpetrators may be tried and sentenced instead of being freed at the close of hostilities.

Nor do such attacks become "acceptable" just because they happen not to succeed: Someone who attempts to bomb a bus is a criminal even if the explosives fail to detonate. So is anyone who plans, organizes or wittingly abets such an attack. And nothing in the laws and customs of warfare mandates freeing common criminals upon the end of hostilities.

By demanding the release of such people the PA is essentially declaring that it views the deliberate targeting of civilians as legitimate: Those who did so are not criminals, but heroes who deserve to return home in triumph. And by agreeing to free anyone except actual murderers, Israel is tacitly acquiescing in this claim: It, too, is treating people who deliberately targeted civilians as honorable fighters rather than criminals.

QUITE ASIDE from the inherent immorality of this position, it effectively precludes any chance of peace. Since even countries with peace treaties often have disputes, lasting peace will be impossible unless the PA eschews terrorism - deliberate attacks on civilians - as a legitimate means of getting its way in such disputes.

In other words, it must start treating terrorists as criminals rather than war heroes. And that is unlikely to happen unless Israel insists on it.

Two other distinctions are also vital. First, even granting that Israel and the PA have been at war for the last four years, this claim cannot be made about the period between September 13, 1993 and September 29, 2000. Thus anyone involved in anti-Israel violence during this period, even if he targeted soldiers rather than civilians, cannot be considered a soldier fighting for his country. Like anyone else who engages in peacetime violence, he is simply a criminal.

Again, this distinction is important not only morally, but because of its ramifications for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The PA, by demanding the release of such prisoners, is essentially insisting that anti-Israel violence is legitimate even during peacetime: Otherwise, there would be no justification for their release. That is clearly an untenable position if peace is to endure - yet Israel, by agreeing to free such prisoners, would be tacitly endorsing it.

The second distinction relates to recidivists. Under the Oslo Accords Israel released most Palestinian prisoners jailed before September 1993. All such prisoners, however, were required to sign a pledge to refrain from violence thenceforth. Since anyone who violated this pledge once will obviously have no compunction about doing so again, no such person, however trivial the crime for which he was rearrested, should be released as a "goodwill gesture": He clearly fails to meet the basic criterion of being unlikely to reengage in violence should the truce collapse.

Yet even under a final-status agreement, it is questionable whether such people should be released. It may be unfair, given the PA's blatant violation of its own repeated pledges to renounce violence, to penalize individual Palestinians for following their government's lead. Yet by demanding the release of such people, the PA is essentially declaring that it still sees nothing wrong with violating pledges to refrain from violence - and Israel, by acquiescing, would be tacitly agreeing that such pledges may be violated with impunity.

Once again, both attitudes bode ill for peace.

Unless Israel and the PA formulate criteria for prisoner releases that nourish peace rather than sabotaging it, no lasting peace will ever be possible. Unfortunately, it seems that neither side is yet ready to engage in the drastic rethinking that this would entail. (Jerusalem Post Feb 15)

Legitimizing Abbas By Caroline Glick

The government's decision to release 500 terrorists from prison raises a number of profound concerns about the direction the newfound friendship between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas - the democratically elected legitimate leader of the reformed, democratic and anti-terrorist Palestinian Authority - is taking.

Abbas is well regarded because he has made a number of statements saying the time of the so-called armed intifada has passed. His call for a temporary cease-fire by Palestinian terror groups in exchange for a general amnesty of terror commanders from Israel has been greeted with exultation by breathless diplomats yearning for a return to the days when "historic" summits and secret talks in European five-star hotels were a routine occurrence.

The government has defended its decision to free 500 terrorists and to stop chasing down terrorist fugitives by claiming that these policies are needed to shore up Abbas's legitimacy among the Palestinian rank and file.

But this raises an obvious question. Why does Abbas, who (according to the so-called international community) was legitimately and overwhelmingly elected in a free and open and democratic election, need legitimacy? Isn't the 66 percent of the vote he garnered in a more or less uncontested race legitimacy enough?

Sharon said last week that Israel will, for the first time, be crossing one of the only remaining "red lines" that has been maintained since the days when we could still refer to red lines without cynicism. Sharon has agreed to release terrorists found guilty of murdering Israeli citizens.

Speaking to his favorite radical left-wing "reporter" Yoel Marcus from Haaretz, Sharon explained that the issue of releasing murderers is of "decisive importance" to Abbas and his deputies and that Israel just has to do this for them to ensure the stability of their new legitimate, democratically elected, anti-terror, reformed regime.

But something is amiss here. If Abbas is supposed to be convincing the Palestinians that they have to reject terrorism, it seems odd for him to be insisting that Israel conduct a mass release of convicted terrorists, let alone murderers. Abbas justifies this demand by claiming that these men and women are Palestinian heroes and that his people won't accept their remaining in prison.

Yet his acceptance of the notion that these war criminals are heroes of the Palestinian people makes it hard to imagine that he has anything but admiration for the crimes they committed – namely acts of terrorism against Israelis. Far from opposing terrorism and being poised to purge the scourge from Palestinian society, in his first act as the legitimate, democratically elected, anti-terror, reform leader, Abbas is sticking out his neck to support terrorism.

Sharon, like IDF Chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. I Moshe Ya'alon, further defends his support for releasing murderers by espousing the Abbasian (nee Arafatian) contention that it is inconsistent and therefore unjustifiable for Israel to agree to meet with these inmates' "commanders" – that is, Abbas and his deputies – while continuing to punish these "poor things" who were merely the foot soldiers of the revolution.

One senior military official warned last week that an Israeli refusal to accept this contention could lead to a "symmetric" Palestinian demand that Israeli soldiers be tried for murder for having killed Palestinians.

These views are disturbing for two reasons. First, they are morally reprehensible and mark a stunning abandonment of self-respect and national honor by Sharon and his followers. Comparing Israel's right to bring terrorists to justice to the malicious Palestinian libels against IDF soldiers' conduct in fighting Palestinian terrorists is morally bankrupt and represents an abandonment of Israel's inherent right to defend its citizens from perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

The second reason why Sharon and Ya'alon's support for the release of terrorists is jarring is because it constitutes an Israeli acceptance of the Palestinian claim that the use of terror against Israel is legitimate. This point is made even more abundantly clear by Israel's mute acceptance of Abbas's plan to integrate Hamas, Fatah and Islamic Jihad into the official PA militias and bureaucracies.

Abbas justifies his refusal to destroy the terror groups and infrastructures by claiming that he does not have the power to do so. Given that in the Gaza municipal elections three weeks ago Hamas beat Abbas's Fatah party with 70 percent of the vote, he may be right. But then, if he is incapable of fighting terrorism, what good is he?

If the results of the vote – which mark the first time that Hamas has ever openly competed with Fatah – reflect the sentiments of the Palestinian people, it is clear that they have no interest in either purging themselves of terror or of living peacefully with Israel – and therefore Israel should be giving them nothing.

On the sidelines of the government's decision to release the 500 terrorists was a separate decision to allow the terrorists deported from Bethlehem in 2002 – after they took over, desecrated and laid siege to the Church of the Nativity for 39 days – to return to the city and face no charges for their crimes. This decision has the Christians of Bethlehem in a blind panic.

Back in 2002, the members of this gang summarily executed more than a dozen Christians, including children. They raped Christian girls, took over Christian homes in Beit Jala to fire at Israelis in Jerusalem, extorted money from Christian businessmen and expropriated Christian-owned farmlands.

As one Christian put it at the time of their deportation, "They hate us Christians more than they love Palestine."

Yet, at Abbas' insistence, and in the interest of bucking up his legitimate, democratically elected, anti-terror, reform minded regime, Israel has decided to let these war criminals come home to a hero's welcome.

After two years of rest and relaxation in Europe, they will no doubt resume their campaign to destroy all vestiges of Christianity in Bethlehem in no time at all.

It isn't that the government has completely abandoned the fight against Israel's enemies. After all, today everyone from Sharon to Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra is calling for the state to place those who oppose the newfound friendship with Abbas too loudly or obnoxiously in administrative detention... if they're Jews, that is. (Jerusalem Post Feb 15)

Time to Leave 'Natbag' Behind By Calev Ben-David

The street where I live in Jerusalem is called Mapu, after a noted pioneer novelist of modern Hebrew literature, Avraham Mapu. Unlike its better-known counterpart in Tel Aviv, it's a small street of only a few buildings. But despite its diminutive size, it's still blessed with no fewer than three names – Mapu, Mapo and Mapou. Or at least, that's the variety of English spellings on its handful of street signs, which all sit pretty much in sight of each other.

And it's hardly unique in this regard. The French Hill neighborhood, for example, boasts a street named after a foreign volunteers unit that fought in the War of Independence, which appears on signs transliterated into English variously as Ha-Haiell, Ha-Kha'il, and Ha-Hayil. This is a common enough phenomenon in Israel, best called "The Natbag problem."

"Natbag" was for years the inexplicable English sign prominently displayed on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway, a name only Hebrew speakers could recognize as the local abbreviation of Nemat Te'ufa Ben-Gurion, Ben-Gurion Airport. Israelis have a hard enough time with the correct spelling of proper English; when it comes to transliterating Hebrew into Latin letters, well, as they say in my native Brooklyn, fuhgeddaboutit.

(This is, in particular, a nightmare for English journalists here, as sharp-eyed readers of this newspaper know when it comes to Israeli name spellings. Our general rule is to utilize, when possible, the spellings offered by the subjects themselves – though this often turns out to be different than the spelling we've used in the past according to our own transliteration style rules; it sometimes even differs from the spelling that later turns up on the subject's own business card.)

Although all this is well known to Anglo-Israelis, I'm moved to bring it up again by two recent incidents. The first actually has to do with the opposite process to the one I've been discussing, namely, the transliteration into Hebrew of a street name that was originally English. This, if anything, is even worse than the reverse, both because of carelessness and the difficulty of finding Hebrew letters to exactly match the Latin alphabet.

To take one of the best-known examples, my home on Mapu is just one block away from the Hebrew intersection of "Vashington and Lincoln" streets.

Another is the large exit sign off Tel Aviv's Ayalon Freeway that in Hebrew directs drivers to the exit for "Rehov Lagardia," named after Depression-era New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, a strong supporter of the Zionist cause. Although the English spelling of La Guardia is correct on the sign, the Tel Aviv municipal street sign committee apparently decided that after years of Israelis mispronouncing the name of the legendary "Little Flower," they would – at great expense – put up a new sign with a transliterated Hebrew that more closely approximates the original.

Unfortunately, the new sign for La Guardia unveiled this week utilizes the double vav formulation that, while formally supposed to serve as the local version of the English "w" sound (a letter with no direct Hebrew equivalent), is still pronounced by many Israelis simply as a single vav. The result is not La Guardia, but "La Gvardia" – which at least has a nice Yiddishy ring to it, so I guess it counts as some kind of improvement.

The other incident worth mentioning in this regard was the uproar last week over an ill-fated soccer game between the Israeli and Croatian national teams, the first international match held in Jerusalem in five years.

Among the mishaps were a sound-system breakdown that delayed the playing of both national anthems until halftime, the booing and cursing of an Israeli Arab player and, as reported by this newspaper: "Israel Football Association chairman Itche Menahem also expressed regret over the misspelling of Israel on the accreditation for press and VIPs. The passes, printed by a business hired by the IFA, referred to 'Isreal' in English, while getting the Hebrew correct. 'It's inconceivable that something like this should happen,' he said. 'Really inconceivable. Apparently there was a mistake, some kind of human error.'"

Really inconceivable? The only thing really inconceivable is that Menahem would think that such an error is really inconceivable. Some kind of human error? Let me guess: Shlomo at the ticket-printing shop didn't think it worth asking anybody to check his spelling of "Isreal" because, after all, he speaks English as well as... well, that guy we sent over to England to be our ambassador.

In fact, the only thing that really surprised me about this incident was the fact that, for once, an English misspelling in Israel actually did generate some kind of fuss. Perhaps this reflects the fact that thanks to the increased presence of English here in the past decade, due to the cable TV channels and the Internet, the spoken English of Israelis has generally improved.

Unfortunately, that hasn't been matched by a commensurate upgrade in English spelling, even if Israelis seem to think it has.

Had it been, I doubt the Government Press Office would have sent out photos to the foreign press this week that have Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom meeting "French President Chirac." (Zot iz funny, no?) Nor would the government have issued a glossy brochure this week promoting the "Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labore." Nor would the Eilat hotel my family stayed at earlier this winter have distributed to its foreign guests an English schedule for its "Snek Bar" and "Drugstor."

No doubt this column will generate letters that will, unmercifully, point out the misspellings that also appear from time to time in The Jerusalem Post. But, believe me, there is a big difference between putting out a daily newspaper with limited resources under tremendous deadline pressure and the somewhat more leisurely process of putting up street signs.

My point here is that in an age when, thanks to global telecommunication advances and the growth of the Internet, English has truly become the lingua franca of the world, the "Natbag problem" has moved from being a cute local quirk into a national – make that international – embarrassment.

So rather than worrying about how Israelis pronounce "La Guardia," perhaps our various street sign committees should first decide on one English spelling for "Mapu" – or at least "Israel." (Jerusalem Post Feb 16)
