

Commentary...

The Gaza Pullout By Cal Thomas

What is so difficult to understand about the Middle East that Western diplomats and politicians continue to play with scenarios that have no hope of succeeding? The so-called "road map" created out of wishful thinking by the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations states there must be two prerequisites before Israel relinquishes more land. One is that the Palestinian side must forswear violence, and the other is that the infrastructure that produces the violence must be dismantled. Neither has even begun to happen.

Quite the opposite. This does not deter the wishful thinkers, however, including Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Sharon has announced a unilateral withdrawal of forces protecting Jewish "settlers" in Gaza, a strip of land Israel seized from Egypt when Egyptian forces used it to invade Israel during the Six-Day War in 1967. Partly, the announcement is for domestic political reasons. Sharon is involved in a bribery scandal investigation. Some believe a withdrawal might "pressure" Yasser Arafat and his band of serial killers to respond by eschewing terror.

Those who believe such things haven't been paying attention to history. Arafat doesn't give. He takes. That's because his objective differs mightily from everyone else's. The West thinks a formula can be constructed that will, in the words of Secretary of State Colin Powell, help the Palestinians realize the "legitimate aspirations" of a state of their own. What Powell and so many others will not recognize is that Palestinian aspirations are for a state that replaces Israel, not one that co-exists with it.

Reaction to the wall Israel is building to protect itself from encroachment by homicide bombers and others interested in its destruction is only the latest evidence that Arafat and company remain a threat and have no intention of modifying their objectives. If their plans have changed from regular incursions into Israeli territory for the purpose of killing civilians, why would they oppose a wall?

A Palestinian state without proof that Palestinian intentions have changed would assure an unprecedented base for terrorism that currently does not exist. It would be a threat not only to the entire Middle East and U.S. objectives to democratize the region, but to the United States itself. Such a nation-state would serve as a breeding ground and launching pad for terrorism worldwide. As a sovereign nation, a Palestinian state would be difficult for the United States and the toothless United Nations to control as it exports terror throughout the world. The Palestinian Authority (PA) already is the largest anti-American terrorist entity and enjoys diplomatic protection from much of the world. Imagine what it would be like as a full-fledged state, absent a change in purpose and direction. These people are playing for keeps because they claim a mandate from their "god." "Infidel" diplomats are not likely to deter such fanatics from their divinely ordained rounds.

President Bush is right in his assertion that the United States is fighting a war with worldwide terrorism. The Palestinian Authority is part of that war. The PA's allies have included Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein (whom Yasser Arafat praised for sending Scud missiles into Israel during the Persian Gulf War), the late Ayatollah Khomeini and other rogue nations in the region and beyond. Ideological mentors of the PA allied themselves with the Nazis and their goal of exterminating Jews (a goal that remains unchanged if one considers sermons, Palestinian TV and textbooks that are training a new generation of haters and terrorists). Arafat was trained by the Soviet Union's KGB.

Any progress toward peace and stability in the Middle East begins with abandoning the fantasy that what America and Israel do or don't do affects the actions and goals of Arafat and company. Anti-democratic forces understand only two things - power and resolve. A memo recently seized in a coalition raid in Iraq proves the point. It indicates growing frustration by Al Qaeda operatives in Iraq at America's resolve to remain in Baghdad until the stated objectives of free elections and a stable society are achieved.

Such resolve - and not unilateral measures by Israel and the West, or "confidence-building acts" - is more likely to protect American and Israeli interests and create conditions under which Palestinians and Israelis can have better lives - together. (TownHall.com Feb 12)

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*

Hawks of Different Feathers

By Shlomo Avineri
Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's announcement that he is planning to dismantle the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip, as well as some settlements in the West Bank, has come to many observers as a surprise. It shouldn't.

Despite the way it may look to outsiders, the debate in Israel about the future of the occupied territories has never been just between hawks and

doves. Like everything in Israel, it is more complicated, especially when it comes to the hawks.

Basically, there are two kinds of hawks in Israel: For simplicity's sake let us call one kind ideological, the other strategic.

The ideological hawks view the territories as an integral part of the historical Land of Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people. For them these are part of the Jewish patrimony - that's why they insist on referring to the West Bank by its Hebrew historical appellation - Judea and Samaria.

Not all ideological hawks are religious, though some are, and the latter base their claim on divine promises and prophecies. But many of the ideological hawks are secular nationalists, and their jargon is similar to that of typical central and eastern European nationalists. Former prime ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir belonged to that category.

Ideological hawks usually come from the National-Religious Party and from those members of the Likud inspired by the nationalist ideology connected with Vladimir Jabotinsky, who founded "Revisionist" Zionism as a challenge to the more moderate version of Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion.

And then there are the strategic hawks. For them, given Israel's narrow and vulnerable shape and continuing Arab enmity, controlling the West Bank and Gaza is not an ideological imperative, but one driven by security considerations.

For them Jewish settlements in the territories are not a return to historical lands, but security outposts, aimed at preventing, or repelling from a better strategic position, an attack on the Israeli heartland.

They may right or wrong in this assessment, but it is not an ideological one. Ariel Sharon, coming from a military background - and growing up in a social milieu much nearer to Labor than to Jabotinsky's ideas - is a strategic hawk.

For ideological hawks compromises are treason: How can you jeopardize the historical patrimony of the Jewish people, let alone God's promise to Abraham? Strategic hawks, on the other hand, are open to practical bargains and compromises - if the circumstances are right and if the security considerations justify it in their eyes.

IT IS in this context that Sharon's moves have to be seen. He was elected on the promise that he would bring peace and security. He brought none. With the defeat and demise of Saddam, the danger of an "eastern front" has diminished.

Absent a Palestinian partner, and amid continuing Palestinian terrorism which Israel's harsh responses fail to quell, what Sharon appears to be doing now follows from his strategic-oriented thinking: Set up an effective barrier, move some isolated and strategically untenable settlements - and wait for another day.

Follow Sharon's statements in the last year, and a clear pattern emerges. First he admitted that "eventually" a Palestinian state would emerge, breaking a taboo for dyed-in-the-wool ideological hawks. A few months later he scandalized his own party conference by stating that occupation was wrong and untenable - another shock for those who always spoke of "liberated" rather than "occupied" territories.

Last December, at the Herzliya conference, he explicitly stated that Israel was headed toward unilateral disengagement and that this would entail the "relocation" of some settlements.

While still merely verbiage, it was novel language for a Likud prime minister. Sharon's latest statements, though, specified the settlements to be evacuated; the director of the National Security Council, Gen. Giora Eiland, was appointed to chair an interministerial committee to work out the modalities of an evacuation, including compensation for the relocated settlers.

All this, though still only at the planning stage, has already changed the political map of the country.

Some ideological hawks in Sharon's government have threatened to resign; Shimon Peres has announced that Labor will offer Sharon a parliamentary security net; there has even been talk about Labor joining a

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

national unity government.

The test of all this will, of course, lie in implementation, and the road is long and bumpy. Sharon's timing may have been determined by his problems with police investigations into alleged corruption.

Yet anyone who would like to predict Sharon's future behavior should remember that, unlike Begin and Shamir, Sharon comes from the military, and for him security – not ideology – is supreme. Hence his apparent pragmatism should not come as a surprise.

The writer, a professor of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was director-general of Israel's Foreign Ministry in the government of Yitzhak Rabin. (Jerusalem Post Feb 15)

Two Rays of Light By Jonathan Rosenblum

Last year, the New York Times ran a long piece describing the latest in American Jewish bar and bat mitzvahs, a subject long thought to be beyond parody -- "gyrating[non-Jewish] dance wonders" to serve as "party motivators." And this year, the Wall Street Journal reports that blow-out bar mitzvahs have made young Jews the envy of their upscale non-Jewish classmates, who are now pressuring their parents their own 13th birthday bashes, which can run up to \$75,000, including the DJs and dancers.

One suspects that the Torah had something other than such conspicuous consumption in mind when we were singled out to be a "light to the nations."

The truth is that there are still plenty of Jewish kids who could fulfill that role. They just don't happen to be the ones written up in the Times or WJS. Take six-year-old Naftali, who is currently undergoing chemotherapy in Jerusalem.

One day the non-religious hospital social worker approached Naftali's bed and asked him whether he would like one of his chocolates used to bribe him to go to the hospital. "No," Naftali told her. "I plan to sell them." Surprised by Naftali's entrepreneurial spirit, the social worker asked him what he intended to do with the proceeds. "I'm going to give the money to poor people," Naftali replied.

Later the same social worker asked Naftali whether he wanted to play with one of the many toys sent by well-wishers. Again, "No." This time Naftali explained, with the air used when speaking to the slightly dense, he intended to sell the toys, unplayed with, so he could give money to tzedakah. Naftali does not think of himself, despite sharing a smallish Jerusalem flat with a dozen or so siblings and suffering a life-threatening disease, to be a proper recipient of "tzedakah."

Mikey Butler, whose 24-year battle first with cystic fibrosis, and then, after a double-lung transplant, with lymphoma ended two weeks ago in Pittsburgh, was another beacon of light. Mikey's doctor told his parents when he was still an infant that he had turned blue and had less than an hour to live. By the time he was twelve, he directed his own treatment on the many occasions when he was rushed to the hospital emergency room. Twice he went into septic shock during his rounds of chemotherapy; once all his vital signs flat-lined before he was brought back to life.

But what was ultimately most remarkable about Mikey was not his survival against all odds, but his attitude. As a young boy, Mikey told officials from the Make-A-Wish Foundation that he had everything he needed. (He eventually settled on celebrating his bar mitzvah in Israel.)

A college friend, Mordechai Luchins, summed it up best in an Email to Mikey's parents, "Have you ever watched anyone die? I have . . . No, I never watched someone die. . . . I have, however, had the honor of watching someone live."

Mikey spent over half his life in hospital. Yet he graduated Yeshiva University, despite schlepping an oxygen tank from class to class, and having to return home for frequent hospital tune-ups lasting weeks. Mikey volunteered his summers at a camp for special needs children, at which one of his brothers was a camper. After his double-lung transplant, he still managed to be the lead drummer at the Western region convention of National Council of Synagogue Youth, a group for which he was a frequent inspirational speaker.

I once spent a Shabbos in Pittsburgh with the Butler family. Though have been visited with what seems to the outside observer a modern version of the sufferings of Job, one cannot imagine a happier, more upbeat family. They truly live according to the signature line from the Mikey Updates that his mother Nina sent out to thousands around the globe: Day by glorious day.

Never did the Butler's doubt that there was purpose to Mikey's life. They hoped that the experimental stem cell transplant therapy that Mikey underwent would succeed and become the standard therapy for overcoming.

Mikey's story inspired thousands around the globe, the daughter of one of his doctors celebrated her eighteenth birthday by donating blood for the first time for Mikey. The list of most recent donors in Pittsburgh required four single-spaced pages, and it was said in Pittsburgh that the likeliest place to meet one's friends was at the local blood bank.

"G-d is good," Mikey mouthed to his father two months ago, at a time when he could no longer see, hear, breathe unaided, walk, or talk. He lived with the attitude that even in the hospital he could find opportunities to do chesed for others. To the end, he was in Email contact with hundreds around the globe, often encouraging others undergoing medical crises. Two days before he passed away, Mikey wrote to a woman who had expressed fears of radiation treatment, "If you ever want to talk about it or have any questions, etc. . . , you know I am here."

Despite his suffering, Mikey's life never centered around himself. On a family outing to a movie, he never told anyone that he could not hear the dialogue or see well enough to read lips because "it looked like everyone was enjoying themselves so much." He encouraged his parents to attend a cousin's bat mitzvah in January, and when his younger brother Gavri became engaged two weeks before his passing, he sent out a mass Emailing to express his joy. He wrote of his brother: "I love him and respect him in ways I cannot and will not try to put into words. While I have been on a medical roller coaster, he has had to grow up very fast to fill in gaps no brother should have to."

Mikey never realized his ambition to live a single day as a normal person, without 50-70 doses of medicine. But he achieved something far greater – changing the lives of thousands who knew him or even knew of him.

Now if only Naftali and Mikey were the images of Jewish youth shown to the world. (Baltimore Jewish Times Feb 20)

Sharon's Scream-Machine By Sarah Honig

It seems so distant, maybe even irrelevant, but a year ago we were led to fear the worst. Our powers-that-be whipped us through a gut-churning roller-coaster ride. When our anxieties about Saddam's evil capabilities were sporadically allayed, our spirits accelerated up steep climbs. They were sent plummeting to sheer drops when we were instructed to queue up for gas masks, seal rooms, stock up on bottled water, unscrew mask filters, and carry our readied kits everywhere with us.

Most of us never questioned the wisdom of our leaders, so relieved were we to get off the scream-machine. Few amongst us doubted George W. Bush. Who cares if he took us for a ride? Why complain when we're alright and the wild ride is over?

Besides, Bush may have had good reason to mislead the world on the eve of his Mesopotamian offensive. Conversely, he may have been the one misled.

Incontrovertibly, he's a babe in the Mideast bazaar and so are his intelligence analysts, regardless of who gagged whom.

Babes in bizarre bazaars get bamboozled and make matters worse by swallowing disinformation to feed preconceived agendas. Foreign perfidy and cluelessness aren't new. Why, then, did our head honchos, against their own better judgment, defer with alacrity to the dubious judgment of outsiders?

We have local street smarts. For us to rely on the evaluations of those who didn't struggle and splash in the sands of this region can be ludicrous, even dangerous.

It was ludicrous last year to shorten the shelf life of costly masks while IDF Intelligence doubted any Iraqi WMD existed. Billions we can't afford were squandered by those whose idea of leadership is to cover official rear ends and play follow-the-leader-from-Washington - as if he always knows best and has our best interests at heart.

When our national roller-coaster operators rush abroad to secure foreign approval for unilateral withdrawal (which even foreigners would never dare propose), we enter the extreme-danger zone. Nowadays Washington is consulted before Israel's own elected representatives are briefed. America's seal of approval is the be-all and end-all.

IT WASN'T always so. In 1981 Menachem Begin sent US ambassador Sam Lewis packing after he relayed president Ronald Reagan's threat to put the already initialed Strategic Cooperation Agreement on hold unless the Golan annexation was repealed. Outraged by the ultimatum, Begin told Lewis that Israel would consider the agreement annulled if it was suspended. He added admonishingly that "Israel isn't America's vassal and isn't a banana republic. The Knesset won't accept diktats from outside." Israel's Left shuddered and snickered, but Begin's words registered.

Relations with America weren't wrecked, and the Strategic Cooperation Agreement was subsequently signed with pomp and circumstance.

Israel's Left briefly shuddered and snickered when Sharon once summoned sufficient courage to declare that Israel will not become another Czechoslovakia. But he must have frightened himself because in no time, he devolved from Bush's ally into his lackey. What were means to ingratiate himself became an end unto themselves.

Sharon's die-hard groupies insist he's just being his old sly self. By initiating a limited unilateral pullback, he'll get off the American hook with fewer overall concessions. Yet anyone who's haggled in a Levantine bazaar knows that trying to put one over by yielding a little, merely invites demands for more.

Others suggest that Sharon is leery of making a call. Having burned his fingers in Lebanon two decades ago, he's now wary of risk-taking and leftist tongue-lashings. His legal travails only intensify the trepidation. Currying leftist favor can provide protection and enhance his legitimacy.

Clearing his moves with Washington is the insurance policy of the irresolute. Apprehensive of antagonizing Bush and confronting terror, Sharon banks on half-measures instead of defeating the enemy. His heroic popular image, bulldozer stamina and mulish obstinacy, combined with Likud paralysis, boost the damage-potential of his apparent ideological conversion.

Sharon can sway foolish followers and fickle middle-of-the-roads like no one else. Having scared himself, there's nobody more capable than the

illustrious war hawk to scare the rest of us, as he did last year.

With American backing, his hold on public opinion could be irresistible.

Most Israelis are conditioned to trust in the infallibility of American assessments. Few will ponder whether the current WMD fiasco shouldn't cast doubt on the soundness of American analysis and whether Bush's vision of an idyllically peaceful Palestinian state is any more reliable than his insight into Saddam's arsenal.

It's hard to ponder while being spun dizzily round the upside-down loops of Sharon's latest gravity-defying ultimate thrill ride. Too bad this isn't amusement park fun. With our breath knocked out of us by Sharon's white-knuckle speed and his surprise twists and hairpin turns, we may be tumbling into terminal vertigo, disoriented for keeps. (Jerusalem Post Feb 15)

Terror Unhindered By Barry Rubin

In the midst of a "war against terrorism," three US government employees are murdered in a terrorist attack. The local authorities side with the terrorists, covering up facts, blocking an investigation and helping the perpetrators get away with it. Yet the US continues to give some financial aid and diplomatic support to that regime.

The story of the murder of three US security men in Gaza last October 15 is typical of the bizarre events in the Middle East, events that get taken for granted. Here's the story. Let's examine some broader lessons drawn from it.

On October 15, 2003, a three-vehicle convoy of American SUV mini-vans drove into Gaza carrying US State Department personnel. Their mission was to interview Palestinians for Fulbright scholarships to study or teach in the US. They were escorted by Palestinian Authority police. But explosive charges laid in the road were blown up by terrorists watching from nearby. Three Americans were killed and one injured.

Lesson 1: It would have been reasonable to expect outrage in the Arab world against the terrorists, along with many articles on how the US has helped the Arab world, and so on.

While Jordan's government condemned the attack, there is a general rule in the state-controlled Arab media: Nothing positive can be said about America. By systematically ignoring or distorting US actions that help Arabs or serve Arab interests, the region's dictatorships deliberately construct anti-American attitudes.

The reaction: In highly-publicized actions PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei telephoned condolences to the US government, promising the perpetrators would be caught. PA leader Yasser Arafat condemned the attack as a "terrible crime." At the same time, of course, Arafat has been implementing a terrorist strategy ever since the year 2000, after he rejected a peaceful solution that would have ended the Israeli occupation and created a Palestinian state with its capital in east Jerusalem.

The PA made no perceptible effort to find out who had perpetrated the attack, and how. On the contrary, it let evidence be destroyed at the attack site and sabotaged American investigation attempts.

Lesson 2: The PA's attitude to this case is similar to the treatment of Israel in such matters. There are well-publicized public statements by PA leaders condemning terrorism, while no attempt is made to stop it. Indeed, incitement to commit such acts is daily carried on by schools, the media, preachers in mosques, and even PA officials.

Even Edward Abington, a former US diplomat who became the PA's American lobbyist, admitted American officials "were charging that Arafat is dragging his feet on [this] investigation because the people who did it may get too close to Fatah," the group he heads.

FINALLY, this month, the PA put four men on trial for relatively minor offenses – not first-degree murder – in connection with the attack on the Americans. It was a closed military tribunal, with no evidence made public.

But two points were clear: PA statements showed these were not the main perpetrators; and they tried to excuse the crime by insisting that the attackers' target was an Israeli tank.

How the person triggering the bomb confused a convoy of PA police vehicles and clearly marked diplomatic SUVs with a tank was left to the imagination.

Lesson 3: The trial was a cover-up. The real issues: Who financed and aided these people? Who were the masterminds? What relations do they have with PA officials? Obviously, the PA's main concern has been to hide its own encouragement and involvement in terrorism, as is its practice regarding terrorist attacks on Israelis.

The ultimate outcome may also be the same: Those convicted get quietly released after a few months to return to their terrorist activities.

The US complained, in the words of State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, that "[The PA] have not conducted a full, thorough and genuine investigation."

The people on trial are not all those who were involved, and the proceeding "doesn't really resolve the issue of who killed the Americans, and whether they are being punished."

Lesson 4: US experience during the peace process era as well as afterwards – as in this case – shows that the Palestinian leadership does not seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict even if that would provide them with a state.

President George W. Bush's immediate reaction to the October attack was to say: "Palestinian authorities should have acted long ago to fight terror in all its forms." Secretary of State Colin Powell told Prime Minister Qurei that US help on getting a Palestinian state would come if and when there was a really serious attempt to eliminate terrorism.

Yet even faced with this prize and the relatively simple task of proving their good intentions regarding the Fulbright murders case, the PA did not try to fulfill its commitments.

The bottom line: Like those responsible for murdering 1,000 Israelis since 2000, the murderers of the Americans will go free because the Palestinian leadership helps and protects them. (Jerusalem Post Feb 17) *The writer is a former Fulbright scholar, director of the GLORIA Center, and co-author of the recently published Yasser Arafat: A Political Biography.*

European Union's Moral Bankruptcy By Joel Mowbray

The European Union has finally started doing the right thing by cutting its funding of the hopelessly corrupt Palestinian Authority—but for all the wrong reasons.

Denying that any of its financial support has been diverted to terrorist activity, the EU is reducing its \$120 million annual aid by one-third because of the continued lack of transparency of PA finances.

Not because PA Chairman Yasser Arafat has eschewed any prospect for peace and instead orchestrated a three and a half year terrorist campaign designed to kill as many Israeli citizens as possible, mind you, but because he didn't do so with "transparent" finances.

To the EU—dominated by governments like France and Germany who were content to continue allowing Saddam a free hand in torturing and slaughtering his own people—terrorism is just another form of political expression.

The EU is not reducing its funding because of the over 900 Israelis—most of them civilians—murdered since the start of the intifada in 2000. The EU is also not acting in response to the continued incitement drummed up by the Palestinian media, almost all of which operates, to some degree, under the thumb of Arafat.

If a peaceful two-state solution were the true goal of the bureaucrats in Brussels, the EU could have cut the PA's funding for its refusal to recognize the right of a Jewish state of Israel to exist, either in its official maps—which show one Palestinian state and no Israel—or in Arafat's Arabic-language speeches, where he is far less conciliatory than when he speaks for international consumption in English.

But the unwillingness to agree on a basic tenet of any peace agreement apparently doesn't faze the EU.

The EU likewise is not cutting PA funding in response to a particularly ugly recent terrorist attack, carried out by someone on the PA's payroll. Last month, a 24-year-old Palestinian policeman from Bethlehem stepped on a public bus in Jerusalem and blew himself up, killing eleven and wounding 40.

Claiming responsibility for the attack was the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, which is part of Arafat's Fatah organization. If the EU has any doubt that its taxpayers' money is supporting terrorism, the January 29 attack is but the latest example.

Even when it is one of the other terrorist groups murdering Israeli innocents, Arafat—and thus the PA, which exists largely for propagating his tyranny—is responsible. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, among others, terrorize without fear of reprisal from the PA, which has repeatedly made clear that it will not crack down on terrorism.

Arafat is also responsible for the indoctrination of young Palestinians into the culture of death, one that molds young minds to not just hate Jews, but to kill them. Recalling the most repugnant propaganda from Nazi Germany, every Palestinian child is brainwashed to believe that no Jew is innocent and that "martyrdom" in the name of Jihad is the ultimate achievement.

By any account, this assembly line converting impressionable Palestinian youths into mass murderers is funded by international aid. But that has nothing to do with the EU lowering its financial support of the PA.

Children duped into violating the Quran's prohibition on suicide, though, are not the only Palestinian victims of Arafat's intifada. Each time Palestinian civilians die when Israel is forced to defend itself by taking out the terrorists that the PA protects, Arafat has blood on his hands.

Apparently, though, even that isn't a problem for the EU.

Arafat continues his murderous ways because that is what works. He was receiving from the EU \$10 million monthly (or \$120 million per year) in 2001 and 2002, which is just after he walked away from a peace agreement that gave him almost everything he ever claimed to want—and he instead launched the intifada. In other words, terrorism pays.

At least the EU is withholding some of its support of the EU. The U.S. isn't. According to the State Department, the U.S. has funneled \$175 million in direct and indirect aid to the PA, including \$20 million in cash last summer.

To get back in the EU's good graces—and its cash—Arafat does not need to ditch terrorism; he just needs better accounting. Terrorism doesn't pay, after all, if you can't keep clean books while you're murdering innocent civilians. (TownHall.com Feb 18)

Pride and Prejudice By Hillel Halkin

I was called a racist the other night. I've been thinking about it.

I was sitting at a table at a dinner in Jerusalem of the board of governors of the American Jewish Committee, which was to be followed by a panel

discussion in which I had been asked to participate. On my left was a rabbi, originally English, who lives in Israel, and next to him, a board member of liberal views. The rabbi, whom I knew, has been active for years in interfaith dialoguing with Christian and Muslim clergy. Engaged in conversation with the woman on my right, I wasn't listening to what he and the board member were talking about - not, that is, until, during a lull with the woman, my left ear heard him say that Islam and the Arab world were being blamed these days for so many of the world's problems.

"With justification," I said, turning in his direction. It's a bad habit of mine: I sometimes find it hard to keep my mouth shut.

It wasn't a lengthy comment, but it was enough. The rabbi said something about the foolishness of generalizing about subjects as diverse as Arabs and Islam. I said that, diverse or not, they were depressing subjects. He asked what I meant. I said it was obvious what I meant: Wherever one looked at Arab and Muslim countries, one saw backwardness, fanaticism, and the inability to modernize and democratize.

"You're generalizing," the rabbi repeated.

"Of course I am," I said. "It can't be an accident that nearly all the Arab world is a sink of human misery. Its whole culture is screwed up."

"You're a racist!" the board member exclaimed.

The rabbi nodded. At last he had heard a generalization he agreed with.

Am I?

It would be easy to be indignant. Who, me? Me, who lived for a year in a black neighborhood in the American South and marched in Selma and went to jail with Martin Luther King? Racist?

Too easy. In the first place, that was 40 years ago. And secondly, Arabs and Muslims aren't Afro-Americans. And I really have been having, lately, some not-very-nice thoughts about them. Not about Arabs and Muslims as individuals - I honestly don't think I have a problem there. I've never thought, and don't think today, that, on an individual basis, the Arabs I've known have been any less dependable, intelligent, or honest than Jews, or that Jews are less likely to be scoundrels or idiots.

When it comes to my feelings about someone, his being Arab has nothing to do with it. I've liked and trusted, and disliked and distrusted, Arabs and Jews pretty much equally. I've felt as comfortable in Arab homes as in Jewish ones, and I've been enraged when I've heard Jews say stupid things like "All Arabs are liars," or "Every Arab will stab you in the back." As if we lacked Jewish liars and back-stabbers!

But that's individually. Get a lot of Arabs together, in a crowd or in a country, and something happens to them, something not good. That's my perception, as it is that of many Israelis.

It's also that of many non-Israelis. There is by now a vast literature, much of it written in recent years, about whether Arab and Islamic culture (the two things, of course, are not identical but neither are they easily differentiable) are intrinsically responsible for the authoritarianism, poverty, anger, self-pity, paranoia, lack of freedom, intellectual stagnation, religious fanaticism, repression of women, conformism, mob psychology, and near total absence of self-criticism that characterize most Arab countries today, or whether these things are the product of political and economic circumstances and can change as they do.

The issues are complex and weighted with implications - the possible outcome of the American intervention in Iraq being one of them - and it's silly to pretend that there are simple answers.

BUT WE in Israel have had our own special experience, and it has predisposed us to answers of our own. Many of us, despairing over the behavior of the Palestinians, as well as of their Arab supporters elsewhere, have given up all hope of our two societies being able to coexist - and when you give up hope, it's natural to justify it by deciding that the other side is congenitally incorrigible and constitutionally incapable of changing. That, really, is what support for the security fence is all about. Many Israelis who once thought it was possible to get along with Arabs as a polity, rather than merely as individuals, have lost faith in this. I'm afraid to say I'm on the verge of becoming one of them.

Does this make me prejudiced against Arabs? Perhaps it does. It's certainly a convenient way of telling myself I don't have to change because, no matter what I do, I'll still never be accepted by them. Prejudice is the cheapest form of self-satisfaction. If someone else is worse, you're automatically better.

But on the other hand, it may not be a question of prejudice at all. It may be simple realism. Perhaps Arab and Muslim societies, whatever their past glories and achievements, are maladapted to the modern world. Perhaps it's laughably naive to think that the Arab society I'm embroiled with in a century-old conflict is going to function any better because I'm nice to it.

My ecumenical rabbi and my liberal board member, after all, are also prejudiced - against thinking. It's not as if they're saying, "Well, we'd like to believe that you're wrong about Arabs and Muslims, but it's not our beliefs that matter; it's what history, sociology, and political science can tell us, so let's look at them carefully before drawing any conclusions." What they're saying when they cry "racism" is "Stop! You can't be right about Muslims and Arabs because well, because you can't be. If you are, we'll have to re-examine our basic multicultural assumptions, and that's something we're not prepared to do." There is no small amount of self-satisfaction in such political correctness, too.

The rabbi was correct. Glib generalizations are dangerous. Iraq is not Palestine, and Tunisia is not Yemen, and Islamic Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey are not Arab. Each of these countries has its own features that may make it more or less successful in coping. Yet each also shares common traditions and a common faith - and not to generalize at all about these is equally absurd. It precludes the very possibility of rational thought, and rational is what we need

to be right now.

We shouldn't be afraid to consider the possibility that if Jews adopt friendlier policies toward Arabs and Muslims, then Arabs and Muslims will adopt friendlier policies toward Jews, and we shouldn't be afraid to consider the possibility that this is nonsense. There's nothing racist about having an open mind. (Jerusalem Post Feb 19)

Dirty Little Secrets By Salim Mansur

In the latter half of the 20th century, the struggle for Islam's soul turned most bloody and relentlessly continues that way.

The seeds for this were sown in the first half of the last century, when most Arab-Muslim lands were under European rule.

It was then that many Muslim enthusiasts for reconciling traditional Islam with the scientific and democratic values of the modern world embraced the doctrines of nationalism in their most reactionary form, as found in post-1914 Germany.

The result reduced Islam into a nationalist identity for Arabs and Muslims. Many Muslim fundamentalists later incorporated this reactionary nationalism for their own purpose of constructing totalitarian states.

The pernicious effect of such a fusion of nationalism with religion was to empty Islam of its transcendent message of faith in a supreme God as the common ground of unity among all people.

In India, for instance, Islamic nationalism generated the whirlwind of communal carnage in the 1947 partition of the subcontinent. Wounds of that bloody division remain today.

But it was in the Middle East where nationalism fused with Islam into a political ideology - Islamism - whose effects have brought ruin to the region - and beyond.

The dirty secret apologists for this tragedy in North America and elsewhere refuse to address is how Muslims have suffered as a result of Islamism, have been driven from their homes, tortured and killed across the Arab-Muslim world.

There has been no systematic collection of this horrible data over the past five decades, but the numbers run into millions.

It matters little within the larger context of the struggle for Islam's soul whether Muslims have been primarily the victims of tyrannical authority in Muslim majority states, or of Islamists waging battles against corrupt power elites.

No one in the Arab-Muslim world during this period exceeded the bloody-mindedness of Iraq's fallen despot, Saddam Hussein, who blended a Nazi-type nationalism with his version of Islamism into a sheer hell for Iraqis.

The world also witnessed many Islamists and Muslim apologists rallying to Saddam's defence with contorted arguments of anti-imperialism in all of its variations.

The other dirty secret is the continuing victimization of Palestinians by many of their fellow Arabs, and of their being used as pawns in the war of Islamists against Jews and Israel.

Neither Islam, nor Muslims, have any quarrel with Jews and Israel.

The conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Israelis was, and remains, a nationalist contest over land.

This contest could have been avoided, or settled at any time since the full reality of the Holocaust became known, if Arab Muslims in a position to lead had chosen to live by the principles of Islam.

Instead, they opted for the German model of nationalism in opposing Jewish demands for a homeland in historic Palestine.

Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem, was the leader of the Palestinians during the years between the world wars of the last century.

His embrace of the German fuhrer, Adolf Hitler, during World War II was not a whimsical choice.

Islamists deliberately incorporated the racist doctrine of the Nazis into their thinking and politics, and brazenly propagated anti-Semitic literature as a tool in their war against the Jews and Israel.

Consequently, the damage Islamists have done to the very legitimate grievances of Palestinians is immense.

Moreover, many Muslims, in supporting Palestinian rights without repudiating the rabid anti-Semitism of the Islamists, have contributed to the undermining of Islam as a religion of peace and coexistence and sabotaged their moral authority to speak of justice in Palestine, or elsewhere.

This internal conflict raging among Muslims during the past 50 years was bound to spill over into the outside world with devastating effects on 9/11.

Now America has become involved in the heart of the Arab-Muslim world as never before. Ironically, or by providential design, the future of Islam and of Muslims if they are to be free of the fanaticism of the Islamists, is bound to America's success in this war on terrorism. (Toronto Sun Feb 13)

The writer is a professor of political science at the University of Western Ontario. His column appears in the Toronto Sun on alternate Thursdays.
