

Events...

Monday, March 10, 8:00pm
Raanan Gissin, Senior Advisor to PM Ariel Sharon, will be speaking at BAYT for Laniado Hospital. Tickets \$18.

Commentary...

The Strange Case of Sami Al-Arian By David Frum

The arrest of Sami al-Arian on terrorism charges marks an epoch not only in the War on Terror, but in the history of the Bush administration. But let's rewind:

Al-Arian, of course, is the professor at the University of South Florida who was yesterday charged with financially masterminding Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian terror group responsible for dozens of murders. He's now probably best known for his television confrontation with Bill O'Reilly - which ended with O'Reilly telling al-Arian that if he (O'Reilly) were the CIA, he'd follow al-Arian everywhere he (al-Arian) went.

Well it looks as if the FBI has been following O'Reilly's advice.

For at least a decade, the FBI kept al-Arian under surveillance, and thanks to the Bush administration's Patriot Act, the information it obtained is now at last admissible in court. According to press reports, intercepts and other information reveal al-Arian inciting others to kill and then gloating over his successes.

But if it is only now that the case against al-Arian has become strong enough for federal prosecutors to proceed with it, suspicions about his activities - and those of his brother-in-law, illegal immigrant Mazen al-Najjar - have circulated for more than a decade. You'll find a very detailed account of those suspicions in terrorism expert's Steve Emerson book, American Jihad, the best introduction to Islamic extremism's infiltration into the United States. There may not have been enough hard proof to justify an arrest - but there were certainly plenty of indicators to warn prudent people that the al-Arians were folks to be avoided.

Here now is where the story gets painful for us Bush Republicans. Not only were the al-Arians not avoided by the Bush White House - they were actively courted. Candidate Bush allowed himself to be photographed with the al-Arian family while campaigning in Florida. Candidate Bush denounced the immigration laws that detained - and ultimately deported - Mazen al-Najjar. In May 2001, Sami al-Arian was invited into the White House complex for a political briefing for Muslim-American leaders. The next month his son, Abdullah, who was then an intern in the office of Congressman David Bonior, joined a delegation of Muslim leaders at a meeting with John DiIulio, head of the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives. After the group entered the complex, a red flag belatedly popped up over the al-Arian name, and the Secret Service ordered him out of the complex. The entire delegation marched out with young al-Arian - and soon afterward, President Bush personally apologized to the young man and ordered the deputy director of the Secret Service to apologize as well.

(Young al-Arian published a strikingly disingenuous account of this experience in the online edition of Newsweek on - note the date - September 14, 2001. Newsweek - a magazine normally celebrated for its rigorous fact-checking-permitted young al-Arian to claim on its site that he had been "singled out" only because of his "name and physical features." Now in one sense that's true - had Abdullah al-Arian been named Abdullah al-Shmariyan, nobody at the Secret Service would have troubled him. But al-Arian and Newsweek cooperated in leaving the reader with a very false impression that he had been the victim of some kind of bigoted anti-Muslim dragnet.)

The al-Arian case was not a solitary lapse. The Bush campaign in 2000 very determinedly reached out to Muslim voters. Indeed, Muslim-Americans may have tipped the election to George Bush. One survey suggests that the 50,000 Muslim voters of Florida, normally staunch Democrats, reacted to Al Gore's selection of Joe Lieberman as his running mate by voting 80% for Bush. That outreach campaign opened relationships between the Bush campaign and some

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very disturbing persons in the Muslim-American community. Many of those disturbing persons were invited to stand beside the president at post-9/11 events, like his meeting with Muslim community leaders at the Massachusetts Avenue mosque.

Over the past year, the White House has become much more selective about its invitations. More selective - but still far from selective enough.

There is one way that we Republicans are very lucky - we face political opponents too crippled by political correctness to make an issue of these kinds of security lapses. At least - so far. But who knows? The day may come when some Democrat decides he cares more about winning elections than he does about liberal pieties. Against the day, is it too much to ask a wartime White House - please, please choose your friends more prudently! (National Review Feb 21)

Enemies in Our Midst By Stephen Flatow

The news yesterday that a federal grand jury in Tampa has charged eight members of the terrorist organization Palestinian Islamic Jihad with the 1995 death of my daughter Alisa provides no real sense of satisfaction or vindication or closure.

Alisa was a student at Brandeis University when she was killed riding a bus in Israel. That's not a crime in my book - but the fact that she was in Israel studying her religion was intolerable to others.

Among the terrorists indicted was a tenured Palestinian professor of the University of South Florida, 45-year-old Sami Al-Arian, described as the Islamic Jihad's U.S. leader and secretary of its worldwide council.

I thought yesterday afternoon about the parents of those students who might have been in Al-Arian's classes in semesters past. Their precious offspring needn't travel to the Middle East to come face to face with a hardhearted terrorist. Rather, he or she is right in our own backyard. He might be teaching a class at your daughter's university, he might be working in the building next-door to yours.

Up until the horrors of 9/11, I would often receive strange looks when I talked with friends about the threat of terror within America's borders. Those days are past; there is no more mistaking it: My fears and those of people who have their ear to the street are not idle anxieties, but based on something real. Now we know the consequences are cruel if we ignore the enemy in our midst.

Terrorists who blow themselves up don't act alone. They act in concert with others who provide the money and resources. The Islamic Republic of Iran, successfully sued by my family for its role as a state sponsor of Islamic Jihad, is one example. Those indicted yesterday might not have driven the truck that blew up Alisa's bus, but they may as well have because they (allegedly) provided the means to do so.

These indictments should send a clear message to terrorists and their sponsors and supporters. Attorney General John Ashcroft has made it clear: There will be no more turning a blind eye to the terrorism's exporters, whether it be Sami al-Arian or the Islamic Republic of Iran or elsewhere. Make no mistake.

Ramadan Shallah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad's secretary-general and one of the eight men indicted today, is said to be in Damascus. Syrian President Bashar Assad now has to make a decision: Do you extradite Shallah to the United States, or do you give him sanctuary?

As Attorney General Ashcroft said yesterday, "We make no distinction between those who carry out terrorist attacks and those who knowingly finance, manage or supervise terrorist organizations." I hope the United States continues to live up to those words.

I am left with two thoughts after yesterday's events:

First, I have an abiding faith in the American justice system. While the wheels of justice grind slowly, they grind exceedingly fine. I believe this adage applies here, working to protect our democratic freedoms, reining in those who perpetrate violence for the sake of a hateful political worldview.

Second, as I hold fast to that faith in this great nation, we must understand that we are no longer waiting for the other shoe to drop. It already has. (New York Post Feb 21)

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The Fall of Pacifism By Saul Singer

Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness. - George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 1945

These are words to live by, if there ever were. But they are equally true regarding peace as they are about happiness. Peace, in a way, is a form of happiness; a positive state of being that paradoxically becomes more remote the more it is set up as an absolute.

There is a related paradox. The masterfully synchronized demonstrations last weekend seemed, particularly after the floundering of the anti-globalization movement, to be a show of strength for the "peace movement." In reality, this dramatic attempt to prevent the liberation of Iraq could end up being the greatest blow to pacifism since World War II.

Pacifism has a long and distinguished history. "The Spirit of Christ ... will never move us to fight war against any man with outward weapons," declared the Quakers' Peace Testimony in 1661. The Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace was founded in London in 1816, in response to mass conscription during the Napoleonic Wars.

Pre-20th century peace activists were true pioneers in an uphill struggle against the positive, almost ecstatic, elite attitudes towards war. Rudolf Eucken, a German Nobel Prize for Literature laureate, wrote of the pro-war "Spirit of 1914" in his country: "An exultation took place, a transformation of an ethical nature ... We experienced a powerful upswing in our souls ... everything stale was swept away, new fountains of life opened themselves up."

The subsequent wholesale slaughter of World War I gave war a bad name and pacifism its first break toward respectability. But while that war was about defending indefensible monarchies, in the next world war, pacifism itself became indefensible in the face of Nazi tyranny and the Holocaust.

To this day, the overwhelming justice of the fight to defeat Nazism remains the most powerful proof-text against pacifism. The pendulum swung around again due to the Vietnam War, which, like World War I, boosted pacifism because it was portrayed as a futile war in defense of a corrupt tyranny.

But as generals tend to fight the last war, so do pacifists. World War I pacifism made no sense in the face of Hitler; Vietnam-era pacifism rings equally hollow in the face of Saddam. Pacifism is about to be discredited more thoroughly than it has been for over half a century.

The liberation of Baghdad will make the jubilation at the fall of the Taliban pale by comparison. Since the Soviet bloc collapsed, those who ridiculed Ronald Reagan's characterization of the "evil empire" have themselves been discredited. It will be difficult to disassociate the horrors revealed in Saddam's wake from the Western masses who, intentionally or not, helped protect his rule at such a critical moment.

Indeed, we can only hope that the fall of Baghdad will do to pacifism what the fall of the Soviet Union did to socialism. Today those who cling to socialism, with the tautological claim that wherever it has failed it has been misapplied, sound somewhat pathetic.

Socialism is down for the count and pacifism may follow. Yet, so far, the champions of freedom have failed to capture the vacated high moral ground. The pursuit of freedom, like pacifism, can become whacky or dangerous when turned into an absolute. But the absence of a "freedom movement" analogous to the "peace movement" is a telling sign that it is the remnants of the leftist zeitgeist that still holds moral sway.

The ethos of pacifism deserves credit for the fact that today, unlike in 1914, the reluctance to go to war is, fortunately, almost universal. Those who care about freedom feel as Abraham Lincoln described the North's attitude toward the Civil War: "Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came." It is good that war has been discredited and that the burden of proof lies on those who would wage it. What is missing is for tyranny to be as abhorrent as war, and for the burden of proof to be on those who defend tyrants.

Now, both parties deprecate tyranny, but one would rather block a war and let tyranny survive, and the other would rather accept war to ensure that tyranny perishes.

In this dichotomy, it is those who care about freedom who are the real altruists. The pacifists, while claiming to care most about preventing the suffering of war, care more about saving themselves the need to fight. Those pressing for liberation are willing to support the sacrifice that war entails; partly for their own security, but largely for the freedom of others.

The world is still recovering or suffering from the follies of pacifism and socialism. The key to human well-being, including the desired victory over war and poverty that those ideologies claimed they would deliver, lies in the ascent of the value of freedom. When we see more rallies demanding freedom than demanding peace, the world will be on a better track, and we will have more of both. (Jerusalem Post Feb 21)

What Are Spies For? By Amotz Asa-El

It could hardly have been more ironic. At the very time that Mossad founder and legend Isser Harel was being laid to rest this week, Israel was also hosting German-dispatched and -manned anti-missile batteries, in anticipation of possible Arab attacks.

It had been exactly four decades since the austere and controversial Israeli version of J. Edgar Hoover left David Ben-Gurion fuming after spreading panic concerning German scientists' involvement in an Egyptian missile program. Back then, Germany and anything that had to do with it were viewed in Israel with enormous suspicion, so much so that even selling Uzi sub-machine guns to West Germany was so fiercely opposed that one faction (the National Religious Party) threatened to dissolve the coalition over it.

Still, Ben-Gurion saw things differently, and in a typical display of vision, resolve, and ruthlessness summarily fired the man who had built Israel's secret services, and for a straight 15 years personified all that was good, bad, and ugly about the Shin Bet and the Mossad.

Like so many other things done those days in Ben-Gurion's vicinity, Harel's actions were initially cumbersome but ultimately groundbreaking. At first, the

balding, stocky ex-farmer combined the leadership of foreign, domestic, and counter espionage. During those embryonic years of statehood he habitually spied on Israeli politicians and foreign diplomats, particularly communists and other Marxists, and sought ways to help Ben-Gurion's economically ignorant administration fight the black market that thrived alongside its emergency food-rationing system.

By the mid-1950s, however, Harel made some very wise, effective and lasting moves. Most notable among these were his clever deployment of immigrants from Central Europe and the Middle East, who mingled naturally in their regions of origin, and his unabashed recruitment of Etzel and Lehi veterans (including Yitzhak Shamir) at a time when they were ostracized by all other state agencies.

In all, the Mossad of those years was so abundantly supplied with capable, multi-lingual, and highly motivated agents that it soon emerged with spectacular results, such as obtaining Nikita Khrushchev's secretly delivered diatribe-speech against Joseph Stalin, and the capture of Adolf Eichmann in Argentina and his clandestine delivery to Israel.

Still, Harel's role as head of the Mossad ended abruptly and sadly.

Thrilled by extravagant operations and obsessed with hunting down Nazi war criminals, he was blamed in 1962 by newly appointed Military Intelligence head Meir Amit for failing to deliver what the state needed from him most: information about the Arab regimes and their plans. Initially this seemed like an inter-agency rivalry of the sort that routinely plagues any government, but when Harel began terrorizing Egypt's German scientists he finally placed the straw that broke the camel's back.

For Ben-Gurion, the nurturing of West Germany as an avowed ally of the Jewish state was a long-term investment and a diplomatic cornerstone. Harel evidently failed to share that view. Four decades later Ben-Gurion emerges vindicated for belittling the significance of German individuals' role in Egypt's missile plans, while Harel emerges condemned for failing the masterspy's ultimate test: to see the forest for the trees.

Espionage has come a long way in our history since Moses sent the 12 spies into Canaan. Yet between their experience and that of the pair dispatched to Jericho by Joshua we can glean the spying basics that have since benefited, and haunted, numerous armies and nations.

Undoubtedly, the more famous difference between these two precedents is that the 12 spies' mission was a failure, while the Jericho pair's was a success. Yet far more important is the difference in their missions: the 12, whether or not mandated to do so, delivered (Joshua's and Caleb's opposition notwithstanding) a strategic statement that questioned the entire plan to conquer Canaan. The two Jericho spies' much narrower assignment boiled down to tactical intelligence, namely to explore the vulnerability of one city in the face of prospective attack.

Historically, spies were always much better at tactical intelligence. That is how the otherwise efficient Harel failed to see through the German horizon; how the CIA didn't see the imminent downfall of the Shah's regime in 1979 and the Eastern bloc's disintegration in 1989; and how Hitler miscalculated Stalin's ability, and resolve, to withstand a German invasion.

Set against this backdrop, it has long been accepted that the Israeli intelligence community's grand failure was the Yom Kippur War, in which it saw neither the forest, which was the enemy's intention to attack, nor the trees, which were the anti-aircraft missiles that initially crippled the air force's ability to deflect the invasion.

Now, in the aftermath of the Oslo saga, it is time to revise that conventional wisdom, and concede that Israel's worst-ever intelligence fiasco was its spy agencies' failure to detect in time Yasser Arafat's ploy in striking his deal with Yitzhak Rabin.

It remains unclear to what extent anyone, somewhere between the Mossad and Military Intelligence, questioned the Peres-Rabin

administration's adoption in 1993 of the European Union's theorem that the conflict with the Palestinians had effectively ceased to be about recognition, that it could be narrowed down to a border dispute, that Arafat could be pacified, and that Arab dictators were ready to integrate, emancipate, and privatize their region's diplomacy, politics, and business.

One thing is clear:

Even if someone did say anything, it wasn't forceful enough to impact the situation, or even to trigger his own dismissal or resignation.

That might have been different had Israel's spies been led at the time by someone with Meir Amit's resolve to know what Arab leaders were really up to. It also might have been good to have someone with better animal instincts, and less personal calculations; someone like Isser Harel. (Jerusalem Post Feb 21)

Urban fight: Military takes lessons from Mogadishu, Chechnya, Jenin

By Seth Gitell

The rule is, not to besiege walled cities if it can possibly be avoided.

- Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War*

America's war to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq will likely begin within the month. Barring a last-minute change of heart from President George Bush or a last-minute change of leadership in Iraq ("Welcome to Paris, Saddam"), American bombs will probably be falling on Baghdad by St. Patrick's Day - at the latest.

And after that? There are scores of optimists (mainly in the Pentagon) who believe the Iraqi army will evaporate into the ether. According to this optimistic scenario, the American entry into Baghdad will resemble the Allied liberation of Paris in 1944. Most experts believe US forces will quickly take control of the countryside, an event, they figure, that will have a demoralizing effect on the rest of the Iraqi military. "When an army loses the countryside and finds itself reduced to just defending a couple key cities, they tend to just melt away," says retired Marine Corps general Bernard Trainor, a senior MSNBC military analyst.

But what if that doesn't happen? Baghdad is a city of almost five million people; it's roughly the size of Chicago. While most military experts don't think the ordinary citizenry will take up arms (if they even have them) in Hussein's defense, the dense urban environment could provide formidable cover for members of Iraq's Special units, including its Special Republican Guard and various intelligence services. The prospect of urban warfare is a key element of Hussein's defense strategy, and it's certainly something we're going to hear a lot more about in the coming weeks. On Sunday, in a story headlined Iraq strategy seen as delay and urban battle, the New York Times, for one, reported that Hussein's war plan includes a major urban component. Adding fuel to the fire is Osama bin Laden, who has urged Iraqis to take to the streets. "What the enemy fears most is the war of cities and streets, that war that the enemy expects tremendous, grave losses in," bin Laden pronounced in his taped message on February 11.

The US has good reason to fear city battles. The last time American soldiers fought in a city, in 1993, in Mogadishu, Somalia, the US lost 18 servicemen, in a battle that saw some of their bodies dragged through the streets. Even though they were ultimately victorious, the difficulty American troops had in securing the Vietnamese city of Hue during the Tet Offensive in 1968 (remember the combat scenes in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*?) helped the public lose confidence in the war in Vietnam. And US military planners are still mindful of the final European engagement of World War II, the Battle of Berlin, which resulted in 305,000 Russian casualties. In that bloodbath, German soldiers, some of them teenagers, forced the Russians to fight building-to-building.

As much as nobody relishes the prospect of fighting in Baghdad, American military planners believe this battle will be different. The Pentagon claims to have several tricks up its sleeve to avert a disastrous urban scenario. "We've prepared for that contingency, have trained for it, and will succeed in it," says Navy lieutenant Dan Hetlage, a spokesman for the Pentagon.

The Army was initially reluctant to make too much of what happened in Somalia. But prompted, in part, by Mark Bowden's study of the battle, *Black Hawk Down*, the Army brass eventually came to grips with the experience, which went as follows. In October 1993, members of the Rangers and Delta Force, who were in Somalia to provide military cover for a humanitarian mission, launched a raid to capture two henchmen for Somali strongman Mohammed Farrah Aidid. The Americans apprehended their targets, but became ensnared in a giant ambush in the narrow streets. The Somalis used shoulder-operated missiles to knock down two Black Hawk helicopters.

Looking back, military analysts attribute the debacle partly to the decision not to provide the troops with M1 Abrams tanks and armored Bradley Fighting Vehicles - a political decision made by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, apparently in the hope of keeping the engagement under the public's radar. While tanks alone can't win a battle in a city, they are an integral part of an invasion force. "Ideally, in urban combat you have a combined group of armored units and infantry," says one American veteran of the Mogadishu operation, who declined to give his name. "Tanks by themselves are very vulnerable to people on foot," who can attack the armored vehicles from the side, he says. "And foot soldiers

by themselves are very vulnerable to people in vehicles."

The battle most frequently coupled with Mogadishu in the annals of modern urban warfare, however, did involve the use of tanks: the 1994 Russian routing in Grozny, Chechnya. In that battle, the Russians deployed more than 38,000 troops, including 230 tanks, against the Chechen rebels. The Russians confidently launched a three-pronged attack to retake the city, which had attempted to secede. (Chechnya, which had been an autonomous republic within Russia during the Soviet Union, declared its independence from Russia in 1991, and outright war began in 1994.) The Chechens - aided, like the enemy forces in Somalia, by allies of Osama bin Laden - repulsed the attack. The Chechens permitted the armored columns to penetrate deep into the dense areas of the city, where small groups of defenders could shelter themselves within buildings. Then they used shoulder-fired rockets to destroy the Russian tanks.

Learning from these experiences, military officials began crafting plans in the late 1990s for urban warfare, called "Military Operations on Urban Terrain" or MOUT, in Pentagon parlance. As part of the initiative, in 1996 the Army constructed a 29-building mock-up of a city - named Shugart-Gordon, reportedly in honor of two soldiers killed in Mogadishu - in which to train at Fort Polk, Louisiana. The Marine Corps has a similar facility outside Little Rock, Arkansas.

The American plan for city warfare combines a several equally important elements:

- * getting good intelligence about the city
- * sealing the city off
- * using infantry, tanks, and helicopters to secure control of enemy areas
- * minimizing civilian casualties.

For all the careful strategizing that has gone into these plans, however, the US hasn't yet had reason to implement them. But Israel has. After a string of unusually bloody terror attacks in March 2001, Israeli officials entered numerous Palestinian towns to locate terrorists and weapons factories. The bloodiest combat took place in Jenin, where the Palestinians lost more than 100 fighters, many of them resisting to the death, and the Israelis lost 23. While at the time considerable debate surrounded Israel's decision to use force, as well as the false allegation that Israeli troops massacred Palestinians, military planners took something else away from the battle: lessons on how to wage urban warfare.

Even prior to the attack, the Israelis knew they could get mired in an urban quagmire, and they sought to avoid it. For a whole month before the incursion, members of the Israeli Defense Forces trained exclusively in urban combat. To begin with, they studied the results of the American urban-war games in Louisiana and Arkansas; a handful even took part in them. Each day, the Israelis would immerse themselves in case studies of urban warfare - their relatively unsuccessful experiences in Beirut in the early 1980s, their more successful fighting in Suez City in 1973. Officers were prepped in more detail. As the attack grew closer, Israeli officers brought in a military historian who had examined the Russian experience in Chechnya. The Russians, the Israelis learned, had failed to perform essential intelligence (they didn't know what was waiting for them); brought in inexperienced, untrained troops; and entered the city riding on armored personnel carriers. "The Chechen rebels waited with RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades], and it was like duck hunting," says one Israeli officer who commanded troops in the West Bank during the 2001 campaign. They also learned that when the Russians attempted to take the city again in 1996, they employed different tactics: the Russians spirited sniper squads into the city, they fought building-to-building, and they did a lot of reconnaissance.

Textbook learning was not enough. The Israeli forces quietly ran numerous exercises in urban combat, mixing infantry troops and armored troops. (Unlike US forces, Israel's soldiers practice fighting in real cities. They don't have the funds to build stage sets.) When the battle began, Israel had relied heavily on aerial photos and on-the-ground intelligence - not just to figure out where their enemies were, but to communicate. If, for example, a commander wanted to tell a soldier to go to a specific location, he had to make sure that the soldier was heading in the right location. "It's not enough to tell somebody to go to a house with a window," says the Israeli officer. "You need a common language. Aerial photos provide a common location." This was one way the American effort had failed in Mogadishu. One American who fought in the battle recalled a helicopter pilot giving directions to a vehicle racing to a helicopter-crash site, but it was the wrong crash site, a mistake that resulted in more fighting in enemy territory.

Another important element in Jenin was that the Israelis took "unconventional routes" from one location to another. Instead of traveling on the streets, for instance, the Israelis made their way through town by smashing through walls and buildings. Remembering what happened to the Russians in Grozny, the Israelis acted as though "the street is a killing zone."

Not everything in the Israeli experience in Jenin augurs well for an American attack on Baghdad. Again, as the battle raged, Israel came under fire from Palestinian groups and human-rights advocates for allegedly committing

a massacre. Eventually, the Israelis were cleared, but only after days of negative stories in the press, particularly in the European media. Given the tremendous opposition to US efforts in Iraq from Europe and others around the world, the outcry that emerged after Jenin offers only a hint of the world fury likely to be unleashed on the US if troops have to fight building-to-building in Baghdad. This fear may have influenced the Pentagon's decision to allow 600 journalists - including 100 from the foreign press - to accompany combat troops and supply units.

And, that said, Israel avoided worse civilian casualties only by exercising extreme care in the house-to-house fighting. For example, Israeli forces relied heavily on Arabic-speaking soldiers to allay civilians' fears and to move them out of buildings safely. "You have to get used to this notion that you are going to fight it very slow," says the Israeli officer. "It is the only way to do it successfully. There are many citizens there. You must do psychological warfare. We used very big speakers to convince the citizens. If you take out the citizens from a certain sector of the city, then the fighting becomes much easier - and without all kinds of ethical problems."

Here, American forces could face a real problem. Israel has an unusually high number of Arabic speakers, both because all their fighting - and much of their civilian life - takes place in and among Palestinians and because demographically a large number of Sephardic Israelis come from Arabic-speaking families. But the US has a dearth of native-Arabic speakers. This problem has plagued the FBI's intelligence-gathering in the war on terrorism against Al Qaeda.

It's possible that US troops will be able to rely on members of the Iraqi opposition, such as the Iraqi National Congress, to communicate with Baghdad's citizens. It certainly would make sense to use the opposition in this way. Yet that, too, poses practical difficulties. One of the most important things for military units is unit cohesion, something opposition members could unwittingly or even intentionally disrupt. It's not yet clear how much training ordinary units - aside from Special Operations Forces, Navy SEALs, Green Berets, and so on - have had with members of the opposition. If the Battle of Baghdad gets to the point where less-well-trained military units are fighting building-to-building, the lack of Arabic speakers or the lack of training with Arabic speakers will be a problem.

That's not all. In Jenin, Israel had to secure only an area of 600 square meters. Baghdad is a much larger, much more complex city - and, some believe, rife in some neighborhoods with chemical or biological weapons. So, while all American units have at least some training in urban fighting, it is important that American troops - infantry, armored units, and helicopters - train together right now for urban fighting. "There is no conceptual problem in going to Baghdad and knowing what to do," says the Israeli officer. "Implementation is another issue. I don't know whether the troops have really prepared for this kind of warfare."

Still, the US is in a position to compensate for these weaknesses. Brigadier General (Retired) John Reppert, who is executive director for research at the Belfer Center at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, says the US has advantages that Israel did not have in the West Bank campaign. "The other thing we have that is even superior to the Israelis is technological intelligence," says Reppert. "Helicopters and drones will be everywhere over that city. Anybody carrying weapons, anybody moving from building to building will be seen."

Just days away from war in Iraq, Americans are jittery and apprehensive about what lies ahead. But predictions that American troops will face the equivalent of what the Germans faced in Stalingrad or what the Russians faced in the Battle for Berlin are overblown. That said, practical problems will surely complicate a US armed invasion of Baghdad.

Diplomats who are following the prospects of war with Iraq know that the war's outcome will be determined by fear. When the Iraqis fear America more than they fear Hussein, the war will be over. If the Iraqis acknowledge the seriousness of the American effort, there may not be a Battle for Baghdad, which would be a welcome development. As Sun-Tzu stated more than two millennia ago: "The skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them; he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field."

(Jewish World Review Feb 21)

The writer is the political writer of the Boston Phoenix.

Toronto Community Notice...

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Worshipping Golden Calves By Avraham Feder

There are all kinds of golden calves. Even ideas can be held to with an allegiance so blindly absolute that despite cogent contrary arguments they become petrified objects of worship.

Two such golden calves are being worshipped by the Reform Movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations as they feel compelled at this time to push for a resolution at the Jewish Council for Public Affairs calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state and for a freeze on Jewish settlements in Eretz Yisrael.

The idea of a second Palestinian state west of the Jordan River living in peace with the State of Israel was aborted by the Arabs in 1948. Ever since, the Arabs have conspired to sabotage any possibility of a two-state solution by seeking through war, terror and cunning diplomacy to destroy the Jewish state.

Yet there are Jews and Jewish organizations who, obsessed with an idea fixe, keep insisting that now the two-state solution is a necessity.

The bloody disaster that has followed in the wake of the Oslo Accords was predictable in that Yasser Arafat had been murdering Jewish civilians for 30 years and would not relent unless Israel as a state disappeared.

Why then must Jews, of all people, be advancing today the establishment of a state for a people whose leaders have defiled the noble idea of self-determination, preoccupying themselves with terror, suicide-murder and the indoctrination of hatred instead of social reconstruction and education-for-peace?

As for the settlements, how many times must Jews and Jewish organizations be reminded that those parts of Eretz Yisrael which Jewish tradition calls Judea and Samaria are, legally speaking, not "conquered" or "occupied" territory?

According to international convention they are territories currently in dispute. Israel has every right to populate these territories with as many Jews as possible in the interest of fulfilling what the Jewish people perceive as Zionist destiny.

If some day a peace agreement is reached between the Jews and the Arabs, why should Jews of all people prejudge today the number of Jews or Jewish communities which should be permitted to live anywhere they choose to live in Eretz Yisrael?

Diaspora organizations like the UAHC which prognosticate about what Israel ought to do are undoubtedly driven by what they would insist are moral, religious and realpolitik considerations. They claim "sincerely" that they don't wish to see Israel causing a rift over these issues with President George W. Bush; and that even Prime Minister Ariel Sharon appears to favor the establishment of a Palestinian state and the limiting of settlement expansion.

What then is wrong with committed Diaspora Zionists like the UAHC expressing similar views?

Bush and especially Sharon have conditioned their support for a Palestinian "state" on Arab acceptance of Israeli legitimacy, the end of Arab terrorism, the demilitarization of such a state, the relinquishing of the Palestinian demand for the "return" of refugees, and Arab acceptance of Jewish claims on Jerusalem.

If these are the conditions, then the appearance of a Palestinian state in any form may not be as imminent as the UAHC would like to believe.

Why the UAHC anxieties? Is it "moral" pressure urged on by abstract Kantian principles of justice and fairness associated traditionally with Reform Judaism, but which have been relegated to irrelevancy in the face of the 100-year Arab campaign against all Jewish settlement in Israel?

Is it "religious" pressure in the name of a utopian, universalistic neo-Judaism spawned by the European Emancipation but totally discredited by the Holocaust which stubbornly refuses to recognize that authentic biblical-rabbinic-Zionist Judaism insists on the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in any understanding of what Judaism is and should be for Jews?

With the American attack on Iraq imminent, no one can predict with certainty where realpolitik diplomacy vis-à-vis the Middle East will be heading after the war. It may very well be that Israel will be forced by US policy to make compromises it would otherwise be reluctant to make.

On the other hand, the volatile elements that make up the Middle East cauldron may still allow Israel to gain some well-earned strategic advantages. For Jews Diaspora Jews no less to foreclose such advantageous possibilities for the fulfillment of Jewish and Zionist visions by publicly pressing now for the surrender of Judea and Samaria in favor of a rogue state is naive to the point of being pernicious.

The golden calves in the Bible were ground to dust and made to be swallowed by the idolaters. Hamevin yavin! Let those who are willing to understand draw the appropriate conclusion. (Jerusalem Post Feb 24)

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