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Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

sources were feeding the media the line that Hizbullah or Syria or Iran was responsible for the latest massacre.

There is no doubt that Hizbullah plays a significant role in fomenting, directing and financing Palestinian terrorism. And there is no doubt that Hizbullah's patrons - Iran and Syria - have vastly increased their involvement in Palestinian terrorism in recent years.

But, it is also true that all the Palestinian terror groups and the Palestinian Authority - which itself has received weapons from Syria, Hizbullah and Iran - have welcomed this involvement. In the last few years Fatah cells have exceeded both Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the amount of direct payments and direction they have received from Hizbullah.

And the truth is that since the Palestinians began their terror war in September 2000, the various terror organizations have been working together in the open.

Indeed, since Arafat ordered Fatah chief Marwan Barghouti to form the "Unified Command of the Intifada" with Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the separation of the various terror groups has been more theoretical than real.

Case in point is Friday's bomber Abdullah Badran. While Badran apparently acted as an agent of Islamic Jihad, Palestinians in Tulkarm say that he was a longtime member of Fatah.

TODAY, BOTH Israel and the US believe that Arafat's replacement, Mahmoud Abbas, must be strengthened. Sharon has released terrorists from jail and severely restricted all Israeli counterterror operations in a bid to strengthen Abbas.

Both Israel and the US have placed their faith in Abbas despite his coddling of terrorists during his election campaign; his decision two weeks ago to unfreeze Hamas's bank accounts; his refusal to take action against any terrorists or their support networks; and his plan to bring terrorists into his "reformed" security services.

As was the case with the 1996 finger-pointing at Iran, the government's accusations against Hizbullah, Syria and Iran today are both illuminating and misleading. It is true that all three are actively fomenting Palestinian terrorism. But that does not mean that we no longer need to focus most on Hamas, Fatah, Islamic Jihad and the PA whose forces are on the ground attacking us.

It is hard to escape the feeling that, as was the case in 1996, at least in part, the government's emphasis on distant enemies is aimed at distracting the public from the dangers closer to home.

Just last week Abbas requested that the nations of the world provide him with offensive weaponry. Russia has already responded that it will give armored personnel carriers to the PA. So far, the government has given no indication that it has a problem with this state of affairs.

This, in spite of the fact that such Palestinian offensive armament is in total contravention of the Oslo agreements and, more importantly, flies in the face of Israel's security doctrine since the founding of the state. This doctrine has completely ruled out the introduction of offensive weapons systems to the territories. But then, if the government goes through with vacating Gaza, it will have no ability to sustain this doctrine.

Syria, Iran and Hizbullah are all formidable enemies of Israel. But this fact must not obscure the serious terror problem posed by the PA and its terror allies right here. And this problem will only grow if Israel vacates Gaza, providing them with a secure base of operations where Syria, Iran and Hizbullah will be able to arm and train them to attack at will. (Jerusalem Post Mar 1)

Events...

Friday, March 11, 9:15pm

Oneg Shabbat with Rav Binyamin Elon, MK, Chairman of the National Union party, at BAYT.

Saturday, March 12, 8:30pm

Reception with Sara Weinreb, Director of the Aliyah Desk of the Gush Etzion Regional Council, for those considering Aliyah in the next few years, at the home of Ruth & Darrell Sherman, 68 Thornbrook Court, Thornhill. RSVP 905-738-1627 / ruthanddarrell@rogers.com

Commentary...

Convenient Culprits By Caroline Glick

"The terrorism is not anonymous. It has a name, it has an address.... It is spearheaded by a country - Iran. Teheran has become the capital of terror. A conclusion must be drawn on how to contain it."

So said then prime minister Shimon Peres in March 1996 after Hamas and Islamic Jihad went on an eight-day murder spree that left 62 Israelis dead in the streets of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ashkelon. Peres's words were echoed by then US president Bill Clinton.

Back then it was well-known that Iran supported Palestinian terrorists. Islamic Jihad is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Teheran. Hamas, while receiving the bulk of its funding from Saudi Arabia and from Arabs in the West, also received funding from Iran.

One of the main pieces of evidence used to prove that Teheran ordered the attacks was the fact that two days before the last bombing the Iranian vice president met with the heads of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Damascus.

Peres and Clinton played up the terror parley, but played down its location. Syria's role in sponsoring Palestinian terrorists was a source of political embarrassment because at the time Peres was carrying out intense negotiations with the Syrians at Wye Plantation, and secretary of state Warren Christopher had just rounded out his 18th trip to president Hafez Assad's house.

Likewise, the fact that Yasser Arafat had been coddling Hamas ahead of the bombing spree was ignored. Six weeks before the offensive, Arafat paid a televised visit to Hamas terror chieftain Yihye Ayyash's family after he was killed by Israel. Arafat had PA security forces hail the felled mass murderer with a 21-gun salute at his funeral.

Ayyash's replacement as Hamas bombmaker, Muhammad Deif, who engineered the February and March attacks, was under the personal protection of Arafat's security chief Muhammad Dahlan.

Neither Peres nor Clinton could acknowledge the role played by the PA and Syria in enabling the bombings. Doing so would have been tantamount to admitting that their entire policy of peace processing was based on flawed assumptions. So rather than admit the truth, both men called for Arafat to be strengthened.

The US pledged to step up its training and equipping of the PA security services and Clinton paid a historic visit to Gaza. Peres allowed Arafat to complete the construction of the Gaza airport in spite of the fact that it had been built without an agreement and Palestinian security forces had threatened to open fire on IDF forces who came to stop its construction.

Today we see an almost exact repeat of this history. On Friday night, immediately after the suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, both Israeli and Palestinian

Saboteur or Shahid? By Itamar Marcus & Barbara Crook

One of the most striking – and effective – strategies of the Palestinian Authority under Yasser Arafat was its policy of presenting one message in English to the mainstream media while delivering a separate, often

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contradictory, message to the Palestinian people in Arabic.

In the aftermath of Friday night's terror attack on a beachfront Tel Aviv night club – the first since the tenure of Mahmoud Abbas began – it is clear that the Palestinian media under Abbas's control is continuing Arafat's standard policies.

While the foreign media accept at face value the PA's official condemnation of Friday's suicide bombing, the PA-controlled media are glorifying the bomber as a shahid (martyr who died for Allah) – the highest level of human achievement for a Muslim. By granting shahid status to the murderer, the PA media are portraying bombing as a positive religious act.

Within this context the official condemnations need to be understood not as deploring the act, but its consequences – damaging the Palestinian cause.

Sunday's front-page coverage of the story in the official PA daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda features a giant color photo of the terrorist at the top of the page, with the caption: "The executor of the Tel Aviv operation, the shahid Abdullah Badran." Another photograph shows his mother holding a picture of her son, and is captioned: "The mother of the Shahid."

The daily newspaper Al-Ayyam refers to "the family of the Shahid."

Al-Quds refers to "the family of the shahid Abdullah," and to the arrest of "the shahid's two brothers" and to a "mourning tent in memory of the shahid."

An earlier story in Al-Ayyam refers to the bomber as Istish-hadi – a shahid who actively sought death for Allah and succeeded. To get a sense of the status the Palestinian media is granting Friday's terrorist by defining him as a shahid, here are the rewards awaiting the shahid, as described earlier by a Palestinian religious leader on Palestinian TV:

"When the Shahid meets his Maker, all his sins are forgiven from the first gush of blood, and he is exempted from the torments of the grave. He sees his place in Paradise. He is shielded from the Great Shock and marries 72 Dark-Eyed [Maidens]. He is a heavenly advocate for 70 members of his family. On his head is placed a crown of honor, one stone of which is worth more than all there is in this world." (Dr. Isma'il al-Raduan, PATV, August 17, 2001)

Accordingly, the use of the terms "shahid" and "Istish-hadi" for the terrorist leaves no question about the message the Palestinian media is sending its people about this terror attack: This murder and death for Allah, like those in recent years, is the supreme positive act for a Muslim.

Given this ultimate veneration of the act of murder, condemnations of the suicide attack within the Palestinian-controlled media have focused on the "poor timing" and the fact that the attack was a violation of the agreement between Abbas and Hamas to stop killing civilians during the cease-fire. The killings were detrimental to PA policy – nothing more. As in the Arafat years, the act itself was not portrayed as immoral or wrong.

On Monday, Hassan Asfour, a member of the PA parliament, put it this way on Palestinian TV: "This is the first action that no one is happy about. Everyone felt that the timing is not [right] and there is absolutely no need for it... It is not because the resistance against the occupation is a mistake, but because the nature, location and timing of the action are a mistake."

In his condemnation too, Abbas was careful not to criticize the action itself but the damage to the Palestinians:

"President Mahmoud Abbas described the operation... as a condemned sabotage attack, blaming a third party for the execution in order to jeopardize the peace process and to damage the reputation or the Palestinian people."

"Presidential adviser Nabil Abu Rudeineh [said the PA] 'condemns this operation especially coming after the hudna and the calming, which were achieved with the factions... the Authority opposes any action, which targets civilians. This is a part of the hudna which was declared in Sharm e-Sheikh. We oppose any violation of this hudna.' He also clarified that this sort of action harms the supreme national interests of the Palestinian people."

Under the new leadership of Mahmoud Abbas, the message to Palestinian society remains essentially unchanged from that of the Arafat era. PA leaders condemn the timing and potentially negative ramifications of a terror attack, but not the act itself. (Jerusalem Post Mar 2)

Marcus is founder and director, and Crook is associate director and North American representative, of Palestinian Media Watch.

But in the Middle East, such hopes die quickly. Friday's terrorist attack in Tel Aviv that took the lives of four Israelis, put the idea of a lasting cease-fire in perspective.

Up until that moment, despite all of the very serious reasons to doubt the ultimate intentions of the Palestinians and their president, Mahmoud Abbas, the four-year-old war of attrition against Israel appeared to have ended. And, as Israeli Prime Minister Sharon stated, in such a context, dialogue was once again possible, and hope for a peace settlement was no longer merely a pipe dream.

There will be those who will say the Tel Aviv attack means nothing. That so long as Abbas keeps saying he is a peace partner, Israel and its friends abroad must trust him and keep supporting the process. In particular, the Bush administration which is heavily invested in Abbas may feel it has no choice but to take this position.

But if we merely sympathize with Abbas and concede that he can't take on Islamic Jihad and Hamas despite the very considerable military forces at his disposal, then nothing will have changed from the regime of Yasser Arafat.

Yet even if were to accept the dubious thesis that Abbas can be trusted to stop terrorism, before we start celebrating, supporters of Israel must not forget: The war against Israel's existence still isn't over.

Acting with the full support of the Bush administration, Sharon has made it clear that if the Palestinians keep the peace, the return to the pre-intifada status quo, with the Palestinian Authority in control of their own cities, will be possible. From there, even if the cease-fire held, you might think it is a short, hop, skip and a jump to Gaza withdrawal and negotiations on a final-status treaty. But such negotiations would involve issues on which there is little indication that either side will give in.

They include the future of Jerusalem that Sharon has promised he will not divide in order to hand over part of Israel's capital to the Palestinians. While cynics believe that, having given in on Gaza, Sharon will cave in on Jerusalem, as well as on the future of Israel's major settlement blocks on the West Bank (which President Bush indicated last year that Israel ought to be allowed to keep in any peace agreement), that appears unlikely. Indeed, Sharon has made it clear that he conceded on Gaza so as to strengthen Israel's hold on Jerusalem, not to weaken it.

Sharon has long since conceded Palestinian statehood as inevitable. He is right to do so. But he, with the support of the overwhelming majority of Israelis and Americans, is willing to do so only in exchange for peace and secure borders for Israel.

There are other factors that should impel supporters of Israel not to let their guard down. That's because the international campaign of delegitimization of Israel and Zionism hasn't ceased.

The agenda of Israel's critics in the United Nations, the European Union, and the rest of the Arab and Muslim world remains unchanged, despite the shifts in policy that Sharon and Abbas have made. And even if the Palestinian terror groups observe the cease-fire, the killers of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah almost certainly will not.

Nor will Sharon's concessions convince those Americans who would wage economic warfare on Israel via economic divestment plans to halt their incitement. In fact, just this past week, the World Council of Churches, a Geneva-based group of 347 Protestant and Orthodox denominations, recommended to members that they give "serious consideration" to divesting from companies that aid Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Presbyterian Church USA made a similar decision last summer.

That these churches should be attacking Israel precisely at a time when progress towards peace is being made shows just how deep the hatred for the Jewish state runs. What this means for Americans is that far from being a signal to lessen our pro-Israel advocacy, recent events ought to be an incentive to work harder and speak up even more strongly.

One key point of contention, among many sticking points that may ultimately derail the peace train, remains Israel's security fence. Along with ratifying compensation for the settlers who will be evicted from their homes, the Cabinet also voted this week to complete the barrier. The fence is crucial to the debate in the coming months - not merely because its existence will continue to be a pretext for a continued barrage of unfair abuse of Israel and its government, but because its success was key to the Palestinians decision to admit defeat and stop their terror offensive. But that means nothing to Israel's opponents, who will use the fence to hammer the Jewish state as an "oppressor." That's not a minor point, because accepting Israel's existence is meaningless if it is not accompanied by a similar acquiescence to its right of self-defense, something no other nation is denied.

Put the Celebrations on Hold

By Jonathan Tobin

The war against Israel isn't over

Last week's vote by Israel's Cabinet to proceed with the withdrawal from Gaza and four settlements in the West Bank solidified a trend that seemed to confirm our greatest hopes. Combined with the decision by Palestinian terror groups to observe a cease-fire, progress toward peace in the Middle East seemed suddenly real.

As we learned to our sorrow after the euphoria of the 1993 Oslo accords - and after the Palestinians decision to reject peace and launch a war in the fall of 2000 - just because Israel is in the right doesn't mean it won't be unfairly pilloried. Indeed, the more Israel gives, the more it seems to embolden those who hate Jews and their right to self-determination in their own land.

The death of Yasser Arafat - coupled with Israel's military victory over terrorism, and Sharon and Abbas' moves toward peace - were truly milestones. But the latest attack combined with all the reasons why negotiations may still fail should show us that this is no time to relax. Advocacy for Israel must continue without abatement. (Jewish World Review Mar 1)
The writer is executive editor of the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent.

Sharon's Unilateral Ceasefire By Steven Plaut

Middle East ceasefires are always unilateral ceasefires, whereby the Jews stop shooting back. They usually morph into one of those "controlled carnage" agreements that Israeli politicians so love, whereby the Arabs continue to murder Jews, and as long as the rate of murder is "reasonable", the Jews do not retaliate. Such deals obtained in the past in Lebanon and with the PLO.

And now, Ariel Sharon's ceasefire has been revealed to be just another in this series, as the massacre Friday night outside a Tel Aviv nightclub showed. The one-sided violence is no surprise. And it is being accompanied by all the same nonsensical Oslo Pollyanna. The leftist newspapers in Israel are sighing in ecstasy about how Abu Shlimazen's new government is now going to crack down on the terror. Danny Rubinstein, Haaretz's commentator on Palestinian affairs - the leftist who always seems to be convinced that all Palestinians think exactly what he is thinking this week, a guy who is acknowledged as an expert on Palestinians by himself - insists the Palestinian "street" is horrified by the atrocity in Tel Aviv Friday night.

It is Oslo deja vu all over again. All we are missing is Shimon Peres telling us about how the threat of infiltration into Israel by cable TV is much worse than the threat of infiltration by terrorists.

But one question is nagging at everyone's mind. What was the role of the International Solidarity Movement, the pro-terror group of Mall Marxists and Designer-Jean Anarchists, in Friday night's attack?

Why would anyone think the ISM is involved? Because it already was involved in the last identical bombing of a Tel Aviv nightclub, where the bombers used the identical modus operandi as this week's atrocity.

The International Solidarity Movement openly endorses Palestinian terror and candidly declares its belief that Israel and its people should be annihilated. It's martyr and Mother Teresa is Rachel Corrie, a young American girl who died while trying to prevent an Israeli bulldozer from destroying a tunnel in which explosives used to murder Jewish civilians were being smuggled.

ISM members who come to Israel have been arrested for vandalizing and destroying Israeli security fences and equipment. On March 27, 2003, fugitive Islamic Jihad terrorist Shadi Sukiya was arrested in a house in Jenin rented by the ISM. In the most serious incident, on April 30, 2003, two British Muslims tried to blow themselves up at a popular Tel Aviv nightspot, Mike's Place; one of them succeeded, killing three and wounding 50. At least one of the terrorists had spent the weeks before the attack living with the ISM in Gaza. They entered Israel in the first place by pretending to be part of an entourage of "peace protesters" and fact-seekers.

So, we have ample reason to suspect that the same ISM accomplices of terror could be again involved. Were they? Inquiring minds want to know. (Israel National News Feb 27)

Religious Zionism's Bright Future By Michael Freund

These are difficult times for religious Zionists. On the ideological front, the sovereign government of the Jewish state is poised to retreat from parts of the Land of Israel, uprooting dozens of communities and expelling thousands of Jews from their homes. On the political front, the National Religious Party (NRP), long the movement's standard-bearer, has formally come apart at the seams. Two former NRP chairmen, Effi Eitam and Rabbi Yitzhak Levy, quit the party last week and set up a competing Knesset faction, underlining the growing split within the movement's ranks.

Even on the religious front, there are signs of division. Take, for example, the explosive issue of soldiers refusing orders to evacuate Jewish settlements. Former chief rabbis Avraham Shapira and Mordechai Eliahu have both come out forcefully in favor of refusal.

But just two weeks ago, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner of Beit El issued a strongly worded denunciation of refusing orders, arguing that it would endanger the

future of the army as a cohesive fighting force in defense of the state.

So wherever one seems to look, Religious Zionism appears mired in ideological crisis, political discord and deep-seated theological disputes, simultaneously contending with an array of challenges that is both daunting and unprecedented.

That, however, is precisely why I am so optimistic about the movement and its future.

It may sound trite, but the fact is that the impassioned debate taking place within Religious Zionism today is a sign of its vibrancy and strength. After all, if people did not care about the ideological nuances of various issues, there would be no dispute.

How many other movements can still generate a similar level of intellectual zeal and rhetorical enthusiasm?

The disagreement among leading Religious Zionist rabbis over issues such as refusing orders or ascending the Temple Mount is also no cause for shame. Many observers often seem to forget that Judaism does not have the equivalent of a pope who lays down the final doctrinal word.

As even a cursory glance at a page of Talmud makes clear, the process of debate and deliberation is an essential part of man's quest for truth. Whatever one may think regarding whether a soldier should follow orders to evacuate settlements, no one can dispute that both Rabbi Shapira and Rabbi Aviner represent legitimate Torah viewpoints, even if they disagree.

The split within the NRP, while certainly less dignified, will nonetheless prove beneficial in the long run, injecting some much-needed competition for religious Zionist voters into the political marketplace. It will force the rival parties to sharpen their positions and better formulate their stances in order to win over an electorate that previously had few options.

Rather than resting on its laurels, as the NRP has done for far too long, the party will instead have to dust off its cobwebs and fight the good fight at the ballot box for fear of being wiped off the parliamentary map.

Even with regard to the planned withdrawal from Gaza and northern Samaria, the crisis said to be confronting religious Zionism has been blown out of all proportion. Indeed, every philosophical or ideological movement inevitably endures ups and downs over the course of history.

The real test of a movement's strength lies not in whether it can forestall such crises, but in its ability to get up after a fall and continue marching forward.

Of course, should the withdrawal from Gaza come to pass, it would certainly be a blow, particularly since religious Zionism has carried the banner of settling the land, as part of Israel's redemption.

But anyone familiar with Jewish history knows that such setbacks are not without precedent. Jews have been expelled from Gaza six times in the past two millennia. The first to expel them was the Roman emperor Gavinius, in the year 61 CE, followed by the Crusaders, Napoleon, the Ottoman Turks, Arab rioters in 1929 and the Egyptian army in 1948.

Each of these expulsions was a crisis, undoubtedly leading many to doubt the future of a Jewish presence in the area. Nonetheless, the Jews returned, guided each time by their resilient faith. They rebuilt Jewish Gaza, the land of their ancestors; and if it proves necessary, they will do so again when the situation permits.

Perhaps the most telling sign of religious Zionism's potency can be found in the televised scenes of some recent protest rallies against the Gaza withdrawal plan. Take a closer look at the faces and you will see that many of the participants are young people, especially in their teens and early twenties.

In many other Western countries their peers often gather en masse for far less lofty purposes.

Religious Zionists can look on proudly and see that they have raised thousands of young men and women willing to forgo their free time in order to stand up and speak out for their fellow Jews.

Their dedication to the cause, the idealism and fervor that they generate, are unique and exceptional. They are the surest indicators that religious Zionism has a future, and a bright one at that. (Jerusalem Post Mar 1)
The writer served as an aide to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

The Negev's Radical Oasis By P. David Hornik

Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, was a fervent nationalist who would turn in his grave to hear some of the things being said by academics at the Israeli university that bears his name.

There are, of course, radicals at other Israeli universities as well, but they are particularly well represented at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

Dr. Neve Gordon of BGU's political science department, for example, has written: "Israel's gravest danger today is not the PA or even Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, but the one it faces from within: fascism." And in a column on the far-Left Counterpunch Web site, he accused General Aviv Kohavi, currently IDF commander in the Gaza Strip, of "blatant violations of human rights" and of being a "war criminal."

Not surprisingly, Gordon's articles have been posted on anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi sites.

Not far behind Gordon in anti-Israeli vilification is Jeff Halper of BGU's anthropology department, who has written: "'Fortress Israel,' as we call it, is by necessity based on a culture of strength, violence and crudity. In the final analysis, it will be the bulldozer that razes the structure that once was Israel."

Other pearls by this author include: "[Israel is using] state terrorism on a scale we have not seen before"; and "A just and lasting peace will not emerge from within Israel; only international pressure can save the Palestinians from being crushed by the iron wall."

Halper heads IACHD (the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions), which openly calls for international sanctions against Israel even at a time when it is preparing for major land concessions.

Then there's Lev Greenberg, director of BGU's Humphrey Institute for Social Research, who has written: "There is a difference between Israeli and Palestinian acts of aggression – the difference is that Israeli aggression is the responsibility of Ariel Sharon, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, Shimon Peres, and Shaul Mofaz, while individual terrorist acts are done by individuals in despair, usually against Arafat's will"; "Suicide bombings killing innocent civilians must be condemned unequivocally; they are immoral acts, and their perpetrators should be sent to jail. But they cannot be compared to state terrorism carried out by the Israeli government"; "The murder of [Hamas leader] Sheik Ahmad Yassin by the government of Israel is part of a major move... which can be described as symbolic genocide."

Other BGU academics portray Israel – which has already made massive land concessions and offered further ones in a quest for peace, while creating the Palestinian Authority and helping it become the most generously assisted entity on earth – as a brutal oppressor and call for its dissolution as a Jewish state.

Oren Yiftachel of the Department of Geography and Environmental Development writes: "The actual existence of an Israeli state... can be viewed as an illusion... Israel has created a colonial setting, held through violent control"; "The establishment of a binational democratic state... appears more attractive than ever."

For Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, who teaches Jewish history, "the Zionist historical consciousness is based on suppression and the erasure of history"; "there really are Arabs who accuse me of supporting binationalism in order to preserve the Jewish people" – a charge that, apparently, stings.

A 2004 article called "Genocide by Public Policy," BGU's Michael Dahan with Palestinian-American businessman Sam Bahour, asserted that: "Deliberate and systematic destruction, as the definition of genocide illustrates, does not necessarily mean physical killing of people, albeit Israel is having no problem, and is facing no international outcry, in doing just that."

The value of academic freedom, and the need for expression of a wide variety of views on the problems Israeli faces, is not in question. It is a different matter whether the taxpayers and donors who fund BGU should remain indifferent when this university, responsible for educating its young people, becomes a nest for academics who deny Israel's legitimacy, advocate its dissolution, call its people Nazis, and accuse it of genocide.

Even if academic freedom is construed as being unbound by minimal notions of truth or loyalty, this should not prevent donors from conditioning their contributions carefully, and potential students and their parents from taking heed. (Jerusalem Post Feb 28)

The writer is a freelance journalist and translator living in Jerusalem.

Sniping from the Ivory Tower By Daniel Doron

Intellectuals are generally known to inhabit ivory towers – far from the madding crowd, cordoned off from the tough realities of life and insulated from the dangerous partisanship of dogmatic faith, religious or secular.

But ever since intellectuals assumed the mantle of their nations' conscience, their isolation from life and love for abstractions and utopias have become dangerous. This is especially true in light of their conviction that their judgments are informed by a higher wisdom – when, in fact, they often defy common sense and are marred by a terrible naiveté.

A recent debate in London on a motion asserting that "Zionism today is the real enemy of the Jews" saw radical Israeli leftists and their fellow intellectuals

leading the attack, illustrating the infection of many intellectuals with nihilistic post-modernism and neo-Marxist fantasies.

Many intellectuals nowadays perversely criticize their own countries for failing to observe some abstract utopian notions of ideal justice while supporting the most horrendous tyrannies simply because these "represent" an aggrieved Third World.

So it is not surprising that many intellectuals have chosen to ignore the genocidal wars in Africa or the Balkans, focusing exclusively on the least bloody ethnic conflict, the Arab-Israeli one.

Israel has come to represent the West, or America, in their eyes. They have become so obsessed with anti-Israel sentiment that in trying to help the Palestinian people they have come to support a Palestinian terrorist regime that in actuality oppresses Palestinians in a worse manner than Israel ever would.

To sustain such perversity, intellectuals from Noam Chomsky down resort to misrepresentations and distortions.

Thus Avi Shlaim, a former Israeli, condemns Zionism by building his case against it beginning with Israel's 1967 "illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories." Oxford historian Shlaim omits to mention that murderous Arab attacks on Zionism preceded 1967 by a century, when no settlements existed, and Zionism, as even he admits, was a legitimate liberation movement.

Sneakily ignoring what transpired prior to 1967 helps Shlaim invent a false narrative: that in 1967 an expansionist Israel suddenly and capriciously decided to wage a "savage war against the Palestinian people."

Shlaim does not disclose that the 1967 war was caused by the Arabs and their threats to destroy Israel; this at a time when there were no Arab lands to be "liberated," no "occupation" to be fought. Indeed, the notion of "occupation" is a figment of Arab propaganda because since Oslo most Palestinian Arabs live under the sovereignty of the Palestinian Authority.

Yes, Israel periodically exercises its right to defend itself from terrorism by temporarily entering Palestinian territory. But to call this an occupation, and to claim that the "occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967 is the underlying problem" is a lie.

Shlaim calls Israeli nationalism "a liability and a moral burden for the liberal segment of the Jewish community."

He even claims it explains anti-Semitism. But he, and his "liberal segment," apparently have no qualms about supporting a most aggressively jingoistic Arab nationalism or its xenophobia and oppression of women. He is not bothered that by attacking Israel he helps military dictatorships that have not only fomented massacres, suicide bombings and other atrocities against their own minorities, but have exploited nationalism in order to oppress their own people in the most horrendous ways.

In this, of course, he follows the tradition of his intellectual mentors who supported dictators from Stalin and Mao to Castro and Arafat. Shlaim, who ought to know better, helps peddle the big lie of Arab propaganda about Israel stealing "Palestinian lands." This lie took root by dint of being constantly reiterated by Arab propaganda, and Israel has foolishly failed to challenge it.

But the disputed West Bank territories were never "Palestinian," either by habitation or by private or national ownership. Less than four percent of the land was ever occupied by Arabs or privately owned by them; nor was there ever, historically or legally, a Palestinian entity of any sort with claim to this land.

The lands of Palestine, as well as all the lands which Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq occupy, belonged for centuries, until the end of World War I, to the Turkish Empire. They were taken from Turkey in the post-World War I peace agreement.

Ninety-nine percent of them were allotted to the Arabs, while the 1 percent that made up Palestine (including what is now Jordan) was entrusted by international agreement to Britain because it undertook to build a Jewish national home there. It was agreed then that the Jews had an overwhelming claim to this territory.

So if anyone has a residual legal claim to then essentially empty government-owned West Bank lands, it is the Jews, not the Arabs. The Arabs received their part of the bargain and then some, and now they demand the rest.

We cannot, of course, expect leftists like Shlaim and his coterie to respect Jews' legal rights. All that counts for them are the "rights" that derive from being an oppressed inhabitant of the Third World. These rights, they seem to believe, justify all the horrors Third World rulers have committed, and lying on their behalf to boot. (Jerusalem Post Feb 25)