

Commentary...

A Monumental Mistake:

The Baghdad-Ramallah connection.

By Michael Freund

Just when it appeared as if he could do no wrong, President George W. Bush this week reminded us all that even great leaders can make monumental mistakes.

Addressing the American Enterprise Institute on Wednesday, Bush spoke of his "personal commitment" to the idea of establishing a Palestinian state, despite Yasser Arafat's 30-month-long campaign of lethal error against Israel.

The president even went so far as to say that the new Israeli government "will be expected to support the creation" of such a state, sounding more like he was issuing an order to a servant than referring to one of America's closest friends and allies.

Even more inexplicable, though, was the linkage Bush chose to make between the war in Iraq and the Palestinian issue. "Success in Iraq," he argued, "could also begin a new stage for Middle Eastern peace, and set in motion progress towards a truly democratic Palestinian state."

Huh?

Now, there are plenty of good reasons already to take down Saddam, ranging from those vials of VX, bottles of botulin and sacks of smallpox that he is known to be hiding from Hans Blix. Not to mention his nasty little habit of murdering his own civilians, threatening Iraq's neighbors and his frenzied efforts to join the nuclear club.

But why did Bush feel the need to make this rather specious connection between Baghdad and Ramallah?

It would be easy to dismiss the president's remarks as just another attempt to appease Arab public opinion before the start of the impending war with Baghdad. After all, much of the Arab world will be less than thrilled to see U.S. Marines hauling Saddam Hussein off in handcuffs, so Bush likely feels he must offer them some sort of verbal "quid pro quo" to keep them happy.

But if Bush truly means what he says, and there is every reason to believe that he does, then it amounts to a dangerous misreading of the situation in the region, one that is likely to boomerang against both the United States and Israel.

It is not Saddam who is preventing the Palestinians from achieving statehood - it is the Palestinians themselves who have done so.

They rejected then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak's proposed concessions at the July 2000 Camp David Summit, and they have been on the warpath ever since. In just the past three weeks alone, there have been 193 Palestinian terror attacks against Israelis, including stabbings, shootings, rocket attacks, and attempted suicide bombings.

By resorting to violence and terror on such a grand scale, the Palestinians have singlehandedly undermined any claim they might have had to being worthy of statehood alongside Israel. For Bush to speak out now about granting them independence, at a time when they are engrossed in trying to kill Jews, is remarkably ill-conceived and astonishingly inappropriate.

Moreover, it becomes even more difficult to understand the president's statement in light of the fact that the Palestinians are currently standing firmly behind America's number one enemy: Saddam Hussein himself.

Rank-and-file Palestinians make no effort to conceal their backing for the Iraqi dictator. A public-opinion poll conducted last month by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion found that 65.6 percent of Palestinians, or nearly two-thirds, said they would support Iraq if it came under attack by the U.S.

Mass rallies were held by Palestinians in Gaza and Nablus on January 17 as part of "Iraq Solidarity Week" in the Palestinian-controlled areas. Demonstrators held aloft photographs of Yasser Arafat alongside Saddam Hussein, and chanted anti-American slogans. The marches were organized jointly by Hamas and Arafat's Fatah faction of the PLO.

The Palestinian leadership has also made no bones about its support for the beleaguered Butcher of Baghdad. On February 5, Arafat sent a telegraph to Saddam, extending his "heartiest brotherly wishes" and expressing the hope that "Allah will protect Iraq from the great dangers and evils that loom over it."

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*

Last Friday, on **ט"ו**
February 21, Arafat's official radio and television station broadcast a weekly prayer sermon delivered at a mosque in Gaza, in which the Palestinian preacher described America as "the primary enemy of the people of Palestine and the Arab and Islamic nation." He added that the U.S. aim is to "control Iraq's oil," hence President Bush is determined to go to war.

A second sermon, broadcast the same day from Ramallah on Palestinian radio and television, concluded with the words, "O God, protect Iraq and its People."

It should therefore be apparent that the linkage suggested by President Bush between Baghdad and Ramallah is way off the mark. Palestinians will not view the removal of Saddam as an act of liberation, but as an assault on their hero, one whom they have enthusiastically idolized for more than a decade.

And what's more, by suggesting that the liberation of Iraqis will be followed by freedom for the Palestinians, Bush is unwittingly suggesting a moral equivalence between the two, as if Israel and Saddam were in the same category.

From the outset of the current war on terror, Bush made clear that the world would have to choose which side it was on, that of good or that of evil. The Palestinians have made their choice, siding with Saddam and engaging in terror against Israel. It is time for President Bush to start treating them accordingly. (National Review Feb 28)

The writer served from 1996 to 1999 as deputy director of communications and policy planning under Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He is now an editorial writer and syndicated columnist at The Jerusalem Post.

Al-Arian Nation By David Tell, for the Editors of The Weekly Standard

Five months ago, on September 24, 2002, an FBI electronic surveillance team recorded a telephone conversation between two Tampa, Florida, residents: a woman named Fedaa Al-Najjar and her friend Hatim Naji Fariz, the manager of a local medical clinic. The subject was Al-Najjar's husband, Mazen, a long-detained illegal alien--a prisoner of conscience, according to Amnesty International and a great many like-minded people here in the States--who just weeks before, after a multi-year legal battle, had finally been deported by the INS. Not surprisingly, Mrs. Al-Najjar, left behind in Tampa with the couple's children, was bitter. Her family and its circle of acquaintances were being persecuted because of their Palestinian heritage, she complained to Fariz. And Fariz was sympathetic--to a point.

Right, he replied, this is what they should always say in public--that they'd been targeted for official harassment by an American government hostile to their Muslim faith and irritated at their vocal campaign against Israeli human rights abuses. But it wasn't actually true, Fariz reminded his friend: The real reason her husband had been deported was that the FBI correctly suspected him of membership in an underground terrorist cell. And the full scope and nature of that cell remained a closely guarded secret, Fariz went on. So she needed to be more discreet; she was creating a security risk merely by alluding to the matter on an open phone line. After all, Fariz explained, the FBI did not yet know enough to arrest Mrs. Al-Najjar's brother-in-law, the group's clandestine ber-operative: University of South Florida computer science professor Sami Al-Arian--global chief financial officer, governing "Shura Council" secretary, and senior North American representative of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Yes, him. The same Sami Al-Arian, our regular readers will remember, who, at the time this conversation took place, was enjoying an ongoing, twelve-month run as the world's favorite victim-symbol of neo-McCarthyite political repression in post-9/11 America. Through an improvident network television appearance shortly after the attacks, Prof. Al-Arian had resuscitated, and drawn national attention to, persistent charges that he was running a radical Palestinian propaganda campaign--or worse--out of his publicly funded campus office. And the president and trustees of that publicly funded campus, embroiled in unwanted controversy, had been threatening to fire him ever since. Which threat had served only to win the university still more severe, whiplash criticism from an entire galaxy of

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influential journalists, academics, and civil rights advocates. All of whom proclaimed the historical record devoid of evidence that Al-Arian had genuine "terrorist connections," or any such malarkey, and all of whom therefore felt free, as well, to proclaim it an outrage--against both the Constitution and Our Schools--that the good professor was being punished "just for his ideas."

For quite some time now, we have been arguing that Sami Al-Arian's defenders were misguided about all this--naive, or simply ignorant, about their would-be hero's true character, intentions, activities, and "ideas." But we do not feel the need to argue it any longer. Two weeks ago, on February 20, Al-Arian was indeed, at last, arrested by the FBI, having been named, along with Hatim Naji Fariz and six other confederates, in a massive, fifty-count federal terrorism-conspiracy indictment that promises to send him to prison for the rest of his life. That result is not guaranteed, to be sure, and he will have a full and fair trial before it arrives--ours being a sweet land of liberty, the professor's loyalists to the contrary notwithstanding. But one crucial judgment about Sami Al-Arian need not await an ultimate adjudication of his criminal guilt or innocence. That judgment, it seems to us, is already inescapable: The man has made an abject fool out of every non-terrorist friend he has ever had.

The FBI's wiretaps, it develops, have not been restricted to Fedaa Al-Najjar and Hatim Naji Fariz. As specified in extraordinary, 121-page detail by the Al-Arian indictment, the FBI has been bugging every telephone and fax machine remotely connected to the man for close to a decade. And Justice Department prosecutors have consequently accumulated a definitive, intimate biography of their principal defendant, straight from his own mouth. They have him in constant communication with his Middle East-based peers in the Palestinian Islamic Jihad command council. They have him redrafting the last wills and testaments of soon-to-be PIJ suicide bombers--and making after-the-fact bank transfers to those "martyred" bombers' wives and children. They have him attempting to arrange ocean shipments of explosive precursor chemicals--pelletized urea fertilizer--from Saudi Arabia. They have him editing and circulating a 1995 PIJ press release boasting of responsibility for a bus bombing that killed seven Israelis and a 20-year-old American girl.

In short, they have him dead to rights, covered in blood. Al-Arian denies everything, of course. He calls himself a "crucified" innocent, like "Jesus," and not-so-subtly intimates that Jews--as on Calvary, one supposes--have secretly engineered his downfall: "There are very powerful political groups which are thirsty for my blood." Al-Arian's above-ground Jihadist comrades deny everything, too: They do not know this Sami fellow, the PIJ's Gaza City representatives rather weirdly claim--at an 800-mujahedeen protest rally organized specifically in Al-Arian's defense. What serious person, having read through the charges filed against him, could possibly believe such nonsense? Sami Al-Arian is a very, very bad man.

It is with considerable amazement, then, that we note the fact that the very, very bad man has somehow managed to retain a significant body of institutional support in the United States. Granted, there've been a few defections. Confirming their profession's reputation for vanity and cowardice, opinion journalists who not so many months ago were pounding their chests on Al-Arian's behalf--New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof and that paper's editorial board, most prominently--have suddenly retreated, herd-like, into total, embarrassed silence. One honest gentleman formerly associated with Al-Arian's defense--but only one, so far as we can tell--has publicly and angrily repudiated their friendship. "He duped people like me" and "I feel personally betrayed," says retired Foreign Service Officer Arthur Lowrie. "It's just irrefutable. . . . All the wiretaps, all the telephone calls, all the faxes."

Nevertheless, two particularly important sets of backers have stuck by Al-Arian like glue. And their continued advancement of this altogether loathsome creature's interests poses an ironic but real and alarming threat, we think, to precisely those principles they imagine they are vindicating: academic freedom, on the one hand, and equal rights for Arab and Muslim Americans, on the other.

Early last week, the president and provost of the University of South Florida, citing his indictment and arrest as additional justification for the move, finally made good their threat and summarily invalidated Al-Arian's employment contract. Al-Arian's lawyer then announced an intention to challenge the decision in a formal grievance procedure. Whereupon the school's faculty union and the American Association of University Professors reaffirmed their willingness to defend the tenure privileges of an undercover assassin. Each organization seems badly confused about the facts of the case. Faculty union president Roy Weatherford, who earlier dismissed all terrorism charges against Al-Arian as "vague," "fantastic," and "irrelevant," now dismisses the grand jury indictment, too: "We haven't seen this evidence before and a lot of us won't take John Ashcroft's word for it." The AAUP, for its part, declines to retract its previous, "interim" conclusion that the allegations are "too insubstantial to warrant serious consideration as adequate cause for dismissal." And both groups, in any case, stubbornly insist that no university may properly fire a faculty member like Sami Al-Arian unless and until the courts have found him guilty of a crime.

Thus does the cause of academic freedom in the United States commit reputational and theoretical suicide. By willfully associating itself with a man who ought to be beneath the contempt of any self-respecting intellectual. And

by surrendering--to the government, no less!--the academic community's authority to police its own ranks.

Then, worse perhaps, there are the multiple advocacy outfits that routinely pretend to speak for America's Islamic faithful, and just as routinely wind up slandering them. This time, especially, our Muslim neighbors' self-appointed representatives have done them a political and moral disservice above and beyond the farthest boundaries of decency. For this time, they have sanctified a murderous anti-Semite as prototypically One of Us--and explicitly suggested that the Semites are behind his troubles.

Ibrahim Hooper of the Council on American-Islamic Relations says "nothing has been brought forward to indicate any criminal activity" by Al-Arian. What we're seeing, instead, is the "Israelization of American policy and procedures," a police-state frame-up manufactured top to bottom by the "attack dogs of the pro-Israel lobby." The American Muslim Political Coordination Council thinks it a "disturbing" sign of sectarian bigotry that federal prosecutors have "inserted religious expressions like Jihad and martyrdom" in the indictment of . . . a Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader accused of financing martyrdom attacks. The Arab American Institute calls the charges against Al-Arian "specious." The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee reports that there is "no evidence" against him whatsoever.

And all of these groups decry the Justice Department for conducting a "terrorists among us" smear campaign against Muslims generally--while simultaneously embracing, as a representative American Muslim, a man who really is a terrorist among us. American Muslims surely deserve better. As do we all.

Even from a jail cell, it seems, Sami Al-Arian's poison spreads.
(The Weekly Standard Mar 10)

Auditing Arafat By Nathan Vardi

The Palestinian leader has more than Israeli tanks to worry about. He may be brought to heel by, of all things, honest financial accounting.

Frozen out by the Bush Administration and hemmed in by the Israeli military, Yasir Arafat is now facing a new threat: the cutoff of funds from his very own Palestinian Authority. Financial reforms might succeed in hampering the flow of money to terrorists--might even end up toppling Arafat himself.

Money keeps Arafat in power. With a tight grip on much of the \$5.5 billion in international aid that has flowed into the PA since 1994, he appears to have overseen virtually all disbursements, from \$600 payments to alleged terrorists and \$1,500 in "tuition" for security officers, to \$10 million, reportedly paid by a company controlled by friends of Arafat, for a 50-ton shipment of weapons from Iran.

Take the money out of his hands, reform a corrupt financial system and you could reduce the violence. That's the thinking of U.S. and European officials who insisted on the appointment of a new finance minister for the PA. Salam Fayyad, 50, is the chain-smoking Palestinian technocrat armed with little more than a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Texas who got the finance job last June. Israel has responded by resuming the transfer of \$30 million or more per month in tax revenues to the PA, disbursements that were frozen in December 2000 following an outbreak of terrorist bombings. Israel may even release the \$500 million-plus that piled up during the freeze.

"I am here to tell you it's not Arafat's money anymore," says Fayyad, sitting in his office in Ramallah, three miles from the Arafat base that Israeli tanks have all but destroyed. A portrait of the Palestinian leader looms above him. "I'm not going to accept anything but total transparency."

He is using standard accounting to take control of the PA's mysterious finances and open them up for all to see. Arafat's three main sources of cash: foreign aid, Israeli tax transfers and profits from PA-controlled companies. Fayyad's first move was to consolidate the PA's funds into a single treasury account under his control. That change ended the autonomy wielded by ministerial fiefs that were free to collect their own revenues and redistribute the funds as they saw fit.

It amounts to a direct attack on Arafat's elaborate patronage system, which ensures the loyalty of the Palestinians' fractious factions. "He is always ready to pull money out of his pocket to buy people," says Said Aburish, an Arafat biographer. An Israeli intelligence report pegs Arafat's personal holdings at \$1.3 billion (a claim dubbed "ridiculous" by the Arafat camp), but Israeli officials say Arafat uses his largesse mainly to buy friendships.

"Until the last six months PA money was a power instrument for Arafat," says Eran Lerman, a retired colonel in Israel's military intelligence. "Calling what Fayyad is doing a threat to Arafat is an understatement." Fayyad, for his part, dismisses any such notion. Arafat, he says, "is the person who appointed me, and I am confident in a few months we will have one of the most accountable systems around."

In late December Fayyad took another step toward that goal. He submitted the first publicly disclosed PA budget, a \$1.3 billion plan approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council. Auditing of the spending is being supervised by Ernst & Young, hired by the United Nations, and Deloitte & Touche, hired by the U.S. His latest move: the February delivery of the first meaningful annual report, conducted by Standard & Poor's, on the finances of ten PA-owned businesses once controlled by Arafat. Fayyad has lumped these and other interests together in the Palestine Investment Fund, of which he now is chairman, though the fund is managed by Arafat's trusted financial adviser, Mohammed Rachid.

The businesses include a 23% stake in the Jericho casino (worth \$28.5 million) and 20% of a Tunisian telecom company (\$50 million), as well as a \$55 million firm that controls most of the cement imported into the territories and 13 accounts holding an estimated \$73 million. At Fayyad's behest S&P is now valuing the fund's other 50 or so holdings, including a gasoline monopoly that is believed to net \$1 million a month.

Israeli officials began releasing tax proceeds in July, beginning with a trickle of \$14 million payments, rising to \$58 million in February. The money, which is deposited into the central account Fayyad controls, includes excise taxes of up to \$8 million a month collected by Israel on oil sold to Palestinian-controlled areas. The oil-tax collections--some \$500 million from 1996 to 2000--previously flowed into a separate account controlled by Arafat and Rachid. (Forbes Mar 17)

A Little Advice About Peace and War from an Israeli By Naomi Ragen

For all those of you who think that only war poses risks for innocent people, I would like to tell you of our experiences here in Israel.

Nine years ago, we in Israel, encouraged by our own Peace-Nowers, signed a Peace Accord with a known terrorist, pulled our army out, handed him land and then sat around singing songs and painting doves because we were tired of fighting. And this is what happened: he brought in thousands of weapons, taught children to kill and be killed, set up bomb factories, and encouraged religious leaders to preach suicide bombing as a way to reach paradise. And we looked on and said: He doesn't mean it. It's just talk. And anyone who said out loud: 'There is no peace, just preparation for war from one side,' was drowned out and vilified, called a war-monger and a traitor, told they had killed Yitzhak Rabin and told to shut up and let the party continue.

And then our buses started blowing up, and our discos, and our wedding halls, and our Seder nights, and our Bar Mitzvahs and restaurants. Babies were blown up or shot in their carriages along with their grandmothers. Our country dug hundreds of graves. Thousands wound up injured, crippled for life, sitting in wheelchairs, and burn units, brain damaged on life-support; their lives destroyed.

And still the peace-nowers continued to preach: War is not the answer. There is no military solution.

At that point, we understood we'd been had. We started to speak out against them, to vote them out, to pick up our guns, and retake the areas we'd left, uproot the arms caches, the bomb factories, hunt down the terrorists...And then the bombings got less...and less...and less. Every day, our soldiers fought the war, and every single day, new innocent lives were saved.

But because we didn't have courage to speak out at the beginning, our lives were forever changed. Every place we go is now under armed guards. Half our restaurants closed down. The center of Jerusalem is like a ghost town. Our people are unemployed. No tourists come. Our children live with fears no child should have to endure. Thousands of families are in mourning. All because we listened to the appeasers, the peace-nowers. All because we let ourselves be intimidated.

We let them make us think we were wrong, and they were right, because we let them hijack the word "Peace" until it became meaningless. Ten million British citizens signed a petition for 'peace' in 1941. As a result Neville Chamberlain signed a pact with Hitler. He declared it meant "Peace in our time." And ten million people turned out to be wrongheaded idiots. And these ten million idiots brought disaster down not only on the heads of their own children but also on the heads of children whose parents understood the truth, but had lacked the courage to fight for it.

And this is what I learned from living in Israel and I would like to share with you, to prevent your countries from suffering as mine has: Anyone who tries to prevent a just war against terrorism, is on the side of the terrorists, an accomplice. No, they don't have an opinion that needs to be respected. No, they don't have an equally valuable point of view. No, no, no. They are as dangerous as the terrorists themselves, and will get you and your children killed just as fast.

As for the morality of war, the Bible tells us when someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill him first. As King Solomon said: "To every thing, there is a season, a time for peace, and a time for war."

And one more piece of wisdom. Those who condemn the war against terror aren't in favor of peace. They are in favor of a one-sided war in which the innocent can't defend themselves cleverly enough to win. (NaomiRagen.com Mar 3)

With a Son on the Front Line By David Bedein

This past Shabbat, our son Noam, who serves in the commander's course in the reconnaissance corps of the IDF artillery, was sent with a squad of IDF soldiers to lie in wait at a freezing mud bank overlooking two Arab villages just to the north of Efrat, donning infrared glasses to spot any potential infiltrators into Efrat to the South, or into Jerusalem to the North.

Sara and I and our other five children sat down to Shabbat dinner, knowing where Noam was.

Suddenly, after the kiddush, our family dog barked wildly and rushed to the door. Noam was approaching.

Noam was allowed off for 90 minutes, from 7:00 PM until 8:30 PM, to come to our home with three of the soldiers under his command to eat Shabbat dinner with us. This time, Noam was not in the spiffy uniform that he usually appears in at our home for his biweekly Shabbat furlough. Noam's boots were caked with mud and his face was decked in camouflage.

Noam and his buddies appreciated the only hot meal that he had eaten in a few days, and they ate with eyes gaping at every serving. For two of Noam's troops, this was their first Shabbat dinner with an observant Jewish family.

At exactly 8:30 PM, Noam and company put down their forks and turned into an IDF pumpkin, and they rushed to return to their jeep.

Noam would could not take an extra pair of dry socks back with him.

That would be carrying on Shabbat beyond the "eruv", which is not permitted, and that is not in the category of "Saving a life to break the Shabbat".

Noam and his buddies ascended their hill crest embankment, sitting in improvised foxholes where they would stay on guard until 8AM the next morning. After three nights of snow in these hills, this was a cold night. And Noam and his men shivered through the night. It was hard for me to sleep.

I walked outside of the house at 3:30 AM and felt how cold it was for five minutes and tried to imagine what it must be like to endure the cold air for ten hours.

From where Noam and his company stood guard, they could see the sun rise over walls of the Old City of Jerusalem to the north, from which an Arab terrorist could have traipsed into the Holy City to kill some more Jews.

Had it not been for Noam and his friends who stood guard over our family, our city and over Jerusalem, some Jews may have paid a heavy price.

In the Psalms it is written, "He shall not sleep, the Guardian over Jerusalem".

And an air force manual at West Point says: "It is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us the freedom of the press. It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us the freedom of speech. It is the soldier, not the campus organizer, who gives us the freedom to demonstrate. It is the soldier who salutes the flag, who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who allows the protester to burn the flag".

Sharon's Real Focus By Evelyn Gordon

When he presented his new government to the Knesset last Thursday, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared that its top priority would be the economic crisis. And the government's composition lends credence to this statement. Indeed, though both religious and secular commentators have declared its defining characteristic to be a revolutionary approach to matters of religion and state, a closer look reveals a coalition driven more by economic concerns than a desire to redefine the state's relationship to religion.

The new government comprises all the parties that backed Sharon's economic initiatives last year while excluding those that obstructed these initiatives. Both Shinui and National Union were in opposition last year, yet National Union supported both the June 2002 Economic Emergency Plan and the 2003 budget, while Shinui supported the latter and abstained on the former. In contrast, Shas and United Torah Judaism were in the government, yet both voted against the Emergency Plan; Shas threatened to do the same to the 2003 budget, while UTJ used its chairmanship of the Knesset Finance Committee to hold numerous government economic initiatives hostage until its own demands were met.

The economic focus also helps to explain Sharon's courtship of the Labor Party. Though Sharon and Labor Chairman Amram Mitzna have widely divergent diplomatic approaches, their economic platforms are similar. Mitzna even took the unprecedented step of ordering his party, then in opposition, to abstain on the 2003 budget, thereby ensuring its passage even if Shas carried out its threat to vote against. For a government focused on economics, Mitzna's Labor would be a useful ally.

Economics also explains the seemingly bizarre last-minute decision to move Benjamin Netanyahu from the Foreign to the Finance Ministry. If economic rehabilitation is the goal, the Finance Ministry must be filled by someone who inspires public confidence. That is why Sharon originally tried to persuade former Bank of Israel governor Jacob Frenkel to take the job. Frenkel's sterling reputation made him ideal economically, but his diplomatic

conditions (he reportedly refused to accept the job unless Sharon agreed to negotiate under fire) were untenable.

Thus Sharon was left with candidates from his own party - and of these, Netanyahu was the only one with any public credibility. One poll conducted last Monday, for instance, found that while 45 percent of the public preferred Frenkel as finance minister, Netanyahu came in a strong second with 19 percent support. In contrast, only 7 percent favored outgoing finance minister Silvan Shalom, while a mere 5 percent backed Sharon's reported favorite, MK Ehud Olmert. This poll data is confirmed by the stock market's 4.4 percent surge last Thursday following Netanyahu's appointment.

THE ONE weak link in all this is the fourth coalition faction, the National Religious Party - which bills itself as a "social welfare" party and even signed a surplus vote agreement in the last elections with Histadrut Chairman Amir Peretz's One Nation. Since Shinui and National Union are sufficient for a government, why did Sharon nevertheless insist on having NRP? The answer is that Sharon was not interested in redefining the state's attitude toward religion. He therefore had to have an Orthodox party in the coalition, and he chose the only one that, despite its reservations, supported his economic initiatives in 2002.

Sharon's disinterest in redefining religion-state relations was evident from the moment he began coalition negotiations: He told the militantly secular Shinui that he refused to even discuss such issues; it must discuss them with NRP, and he would back any agreement they reached. The implication was clear: If Shinui could not agree with NRP, it would not be in the government.

And indeed, the Shinui-NRP agreements leave religion-state relations virtually unchanged. In fact, their primary significance is economic rather than religious:

*Abolishing the Religious Affairs Ministry. This has zero religious significance, since the state will continue to fund religious services. It will merely do so through the Interior Ministry instead, thereby eliminating the costs of a separate ministry. Indeed, Sharon announced his plan to abolish this ministry as a cost-cutting measure even before the elections - and it was supported by some leading religious figures, including Sephardi Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, the hand-picked appointee of Shas spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.

*Equalizing child allowances. This, too, is something Sharon has advocated as a cost-cutting measure since last year. But the state will continue to encourage large families by paying monthly stipends for each child; equalization merely acknowledges that the fifth child, who currently merits a larger allowance, actually costs no more than the first.

*The Tal Law. This is perhaps the clearest proof of the government's non-revolutionary nature. Both Sharon and NRP, despite representing publics where everyone does army service, told Shinui that out of sensitivity to haredi concerns, they refused to forcibly conscript yeshiva students. Instead, the new government will replace the Tal Law with a different law aimed at encouraging, but not forcing, yeshiva students to serve.

In short, a similar law with beefed-up incentives and sanctions is being termed a "replacement" rather than an "amendment" primarily to allow Shinui to claim an achievement.

The only truly revolutionary proposal is the creation of some kind of marriage registration for people unable to marry under Jewish law - and even this will apply to at most a few thousand couples, while ensuring that most marriages continue to be conducted by the rabbinate.

In short, this is a government focused on economics, not on radical revisions of the state's relationship to religion. And for the country's sake, we can only hope that it succeeds. (Jerusalem Post Mar 4)

Experts in Tragedy By Barbara Sofer

A month before September 11, Jerusalem trauma surgeon Avi Rivkind was lecturing about terror medicine in Belgium, of all places, at an international medical conference. "When they heard the topic, the Americans walked out to grab a cup of coffee," says Rivkind, his pugilist's face lighting up with its familiar ironic smile. "To them, our subject was irrelevant. Left in the room were doctors from Belfast, from India and us Israelis."

Ironically, over the last year and a half, Rivkind, chief of surgery at Hadassah University Hospital has since been interviewed on tens of television shows in America and Europe, describing treatment of terror victims and how he has treated terrorists themselves. The latest, CBS History Channel's "Inside the mind of a suicide bomber," traces suicide attacks from Japanese kamikaze planes which killed five thousand American sailors to today's disease-infected human bombs usually aimed at Israeli civilians. It's with these that Rivkind has had such up close and personal acquaintance.

"We're ahead of 99 percent of the medical centers in the world simply because we've made an effort to prepare," said Shmuel Chaim Shapira, the avuncular professor of medicine specializing in such nasty subjects such attacks of plague and nerve gas. Shapira serves as deputy director general of Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem and is a reserve lieutenant colonel in the IDF.

"From Zion will go forth Torah." This isn't exactly what we meant.

Nonetheless, we should feel satisfaction in being primed for what we may

have to face any day now.

Preparation means planning and practice and more planning and practice. "Who is wise? He who can foresee the end product," says the Talmud. The end product, no matter how grisly. According to Shapira, there are protocols for "every conceivable threat and a few that are inconceivable. We have to remember that that a terrorist's imagination is more ghoulish and diabolical than ours."

Elements of potential attacks are biological, (anthrax, plague, smallpox, Ebola and tularemia, an animal disease transmitted to humans by insects and ticks), chemical (nerve gas, mustard gas and paralyzing botulinum toxin,) and radiation (so-called dirty bombs having radioactive substances mixed in) and combinations of the above. All of these may be added to our continued struggle with conventional warfare. Nails and bolts soaked in rat poison, terrorists' blood found to be infected with hepatitis B and AIDS; these are still considered "conventional."

As those of us at home have stockpiled drinking water, Magen David Adom has been putting aside extra blood. Hospitals have purchased walkie-talkies, (back to basics if other communications fail), ventilators, outdoor showers, antidotes, antibiotics and disposable IV's. First response medical staff have quietly been vaccinated for smallpox. In Jerusalem, there are checklists and flow charts and color codes for each type of demonic attack.

"In such a mass casualty, God forbid, medical and paramedical staff will be reassigned quickly according to specific plan," says Prof. Shapira.

There have been multiple drills for managers and full-scale simulation for the full staff.

I was present for one of those trials a few weeks ago. The imaginary scenario was a wedding hall attacked by terrorists. The make-believe guests rubbed their eyes. Could be nerve gas, said Shapira. Could be ammonia.

Picture it. Kennedy Square at Jerusalem's Hadassah Ein Kerem hospital is very crowded in normal times. Since June, the usual flow of patients and staff and taxis has been complicated by the construction of a \$28 million dollar new emergency room equipped for nonconventional warfare. In the last couple of weeks, the pavement has been dug up to beef hospital's prodigious security.

Could the hospital really be a target, we might ask with incredulity. Remember that the highest casualty tragedy in modern Israel history remains the attack on the Hadassah medical convoy on April 13, 1948. Seventy eight men and women were murdered, including the hospital's director general Prof. Haim Yassky. After the Six Day War Jacques Chagall was asked to repair his famous windows in the hospital's Abell Synagogue after the originals were bombed.

Add to the busy scene, a simulated attack, with medical and support staff gathered outside, ambulances and soldiers in jeeps. Because of the bitter cold, soldiers were excused from using the outdoor showers.

On one hand, the scene felt surrealistic. On the other hand, my shivers went beyond the chill of the icy southwest wind. Like every Israeli, I know that the unbelievable has a way of fast become reality here.

During the exercise, the younger doctors had a hard time keeping a straight face, as dummies were lifted out of the ambulance. After all, they've had two and half years of genuine mass casualties to improve their skills. Nonetheless, they all did their jobs.

Practice, we know, might not make perfect, but it does help. Hadassah doctors and nurses say that an unsettling part of dealing with terror attacks is how calmly and quickly they slip into their routines.

Unsettling or not, that composed professionalism has resulted in the saving of many lives.

In the early morning of November 21, an Egged bus carrying students to school was blown up in Kiryat Menachem. Eleven people were murdered, and tens of others seriously injured. That night, the terrorist's father went on TV and praised his son. The following day, two things happened.

The terrorist's father was brought to the very same emergency room with chest pains. He was cared for by the same medical staff who had labored over his son's victims the day before.

On the same day, 70 physicians arrived in Israel from the US to take part in a medical conference. Standing in the hospital lobby the American experts listened as a cardiac thoracic surgeon explained how a young woman, 23, with a wristwatch lodged in her throat and both carotid arteries severed has survived the bus bombing. Silence.

"We all realized that in our own medical centers, that patient would likely have died," explained Harvard Prof. Ben Sacks. "We were humbled. The Israelis have moved far ahead of us in preparedness."

I don't underrate faith and prayer. We recite Psalm 121: "The Guardian of Israel will neither slumber of sleep." But our efforts, what is called "hishtadlut" are required, too. In our preparation for one of the most critical periods in modern history, we have to let the coffee breaks wait. (Jerusalem Post Mar 3)