



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*

Events...

March 23-26

Israel Mall 2, at the Bathurst JCC

More than 75 Israeli merchants, featuring all new merchandise from Israel. For information call: 416 - 631 - 5851 Website: www.israelmalltoronto.com

Commentary...

The Faith of Hebron: From Pain and Suffering to Joy and Pride

By Rabbi Eliezer Waldman

We ushered in the first Shabbat of Adar II, the month in which we are commanded to rejoice, "*mi'shenichnas Adar, marbim b'simcha*", "*from the beginning of Adar, we should add to our happiness*". We are accustomed to begin practicing the songs of Purim on this Shabbat, and thus our Friday night meal was accompanied by joyous singing. But as events developed this Shabbat eve, the night served more as preparation for Shabbat Zachor which takes place this coming Shabbat. On Shabbat Zachor, we perform the mitzva of remembering the evil of Amalek and the commandment to destroy and erase his memory from our lives.

Towards the end of the meal, a loud burst of gunfire suddenly shattered the tranquil sanctity of the Shabbat. My daughter, Shulamith and son in law, Naftali and their children were with us at the table. Naftali is a member of the Kiryat Arba emergency force who was wounded three months ago in the previous terror attack and is well again, thank G-d. We immediately ran to the porch and saw people running in different directions, while hearing the shots move closer. Naftali grabbed his gun and turned towards the street just as I saw some of my students from the yeshiva, with guns drawn, racing towards the house on the street opposite us. I followed him, and on the way out we heard more gunfire and understood that our people are waging a battle against terrorists who had infiltrated our settlement and seized control of one of our homes. Naftali joined the battle while I remained near an army jeep standing on the corner. I could clearly hear the army commanders giving orders to their soldiers who in turn were reporting the different stages of the fierce battle. We soon heard that there were casualties whose condition was not yet clear. I ran back home for a minute to make sure that the lights were turned off and the doors locked, in line with security directives in such situations. My wife and I made sure that the children were sitting in areas not exposed to windows. I then returned to the jeep. By this time many more soldiers had arrived and they were positioned on all sides, surrounding the house that had been forcibly entered. The most urgent military objective was to prevent the terrorists from leaving the house and continuing their murderous rampage. It took about two hours until we finally heard that the terrorists were killed by our defense forces, and were shocked by the news that two of our people were ruthlessly shot and killed at the Shabbat table.

Rabbi Eli Horowitz and his wife Dina, close and beloved friends of mine and of many of the residents of Kiryat Arba, were the innocent victims of this week's evil violence. We then found out that the injured were two other friends, Mordechai and Aliza Sayed who were walking along the street, when the terrorists encountered and attacked them. Aliza was severely wounded and Mordechai was shot in the leg. Thank G-d they are both recuperating at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. Army experts examining the dead terrorists' bodies concluded that the amount of explosives and type of devices they were carrying were meant to cause horrific damage in a crowded area and assumed that

their target had been **י"ט** Yeshivat Nir Kiryat Arba, just a short distance away. Thank G-d, a greater tragedy was avoided by the terrorists' encounter with the Sayeds and the Horowitzes, whose sacrifice saved many Jewish lives on this Shabbat. All of us who remained alive in this neighborhood were obligated to bless the Almighty for the life that was granted us, while grieving and lamenting

the barbaric massacre of our dear friends.

On Sunday afternoon, thousands of Jews from all of Eretz Yisrael gathered for the funeral which began at the yeshiva in Hebron where Rabbi Eli was a mentor for hundreds of students. Hundreds of girls who were Dina's past and present students at the Ulpana in Kiryat Arba, gathered to participate in her funeral. In my words of eulogy, I described these two angels as pillars of faith and beacons of joyous light who inspired all of us. The picture I recall of Rabbi Eli and Dina in the streets of Kiryat Arba, always left an impression of their refined souls just hovering and gently touching the holy soil of Hebron. They served as an example of the elevated feeling of what it meant to build Eretz Yisrael and live a complete Torah life therein. The wisdom of Ecclesiastes teaches us, in Chapter 7:2 "*V'Hachai yiten el libo*", "*and the living should take to his heart*". It is our duty to draw our strength and faith from their dedicated lives and continue in their path.

As we are approaching Shabbat Zachor, we are aroused again to face the reality of the evil powers of Amalek that are still bent on destroying the Jewish people, their faith and sanctity of life. We are sure that they will fail today as they have failed in the past. More than ever, we must adhere to the divine directive commanding us to destroy the evil powers of Amalek. The Eternity of Israel cannot be denied, the divine truth of Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael will continue to grow and blossom until it reaches its completion. No power in the world can prevent the Redemption process from reaching its ultimate goals. This is the reality of Jewish life in Kiryat Arba-Hebron as well as in all of Eretz Yisrael. It must be said that this life is being tested by anguish and suffering, but is also being purified and galvanized by these continuous pains. Again, as in many trials of the past, the secret weapon of Jewish life is revealed "*V'Kaasher yaanu oto, ken yirbe.....*" Exodus 1:12. The more the Jewish people are tortured, the more they will flourish and persevere.

In these days of the month of Adar, we are again drawing our inspiration from Mordechai the Jew, who would not yield or bow down before Haman. Thank G-d that we have thousands of Mordechais in Yesha who will not yield or bow down to evil Arab terror. As we praise the G-d of Israel for the miracles he performed during the days of Mordechai and Esther, we have complete faith in the implementation in our time, of the miracle of "*v'nahafoch hu asher yishletu hayehudim hayma b'sonayhem*" Esther 9:1, "*the evil decree was turned over and the Jews came to rule over their enemies*".

Returning home after the funeral of Rabbi Eli and Dina (may G-d avenge their blood) we continue to march in the hills of Hebron in the path of our ancestors, looking forward to the realization of the redemption light of Purim expressed in the Megilla "*Layehudim hayta ora v'simcha v'sason v'ykar*" Esther 8:16 "*The Jews had light and happiness, joy and pride*". So may G-d bless us in our days.

The writer is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Nir Kiryat Arba

We Are All Soldiers in This War By Michael Freund

In a few days time, hundreds of thousands of brave young American servicemen will converge on Iraq, seeking to liberate a beleaguered country and its people from the clutches of a tyrant who threatens the entire civilized world.

They will plunge into battle, putting their lives on the line in one of the

Yasher Koach and thank you to our supporters. Thank you also to Continental Press for their ongoing support. Readers are requested to please mail contributions to: BAYT - re: Israel News, 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario, L4J 5V3 Annual Rates: Friend - \$36, Supporter - \$50, Benefactor - \$180. Dedications are welcome at \$120/week. Call (905) 886-3810 for further info. Israel News can be viewed on the internet at www.bayt.org

most audacious and noble wars to have been fought in the modern era. Despite the prattle from Paris and the blather from Berlin, this impending clash has nothing to do with subjugating the globe, and everything to do with making it a safer and more livable place.

Whatever uniform they might be wearing, the Western soldiers and sailors, pilots and airmen who will do the fighting and the bleeding and the dying are representing far more than just their home countries.

They are, in a sense, "our boys" too.

For by removing Saddam Hussein from power, they will be eliminating one of the gravest existential threats to the State of Israel, making the region a tad bit safer for a permanent Jewish presence.

Shutting down Iraq's pursuit of nuclear arms, and doing away with its chemical and biological arsenals, has long been a top priority for Israeli strategic planners. A US victory will not only get rid of Saddam and his weapons, but will send a strong message of deterrence throughout the region, one that will resonate for years to come. Hence, the battle for the streets of Baghdad will ultimately help to make the streets of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem that much more secure.

Of course, America is acting out of its own self-interest, first and foremost doing what it thinks is best for itself. There is nothing wrong with that, since that is what rational actors on the world stage are supposed to do.

But that in no way should detract from Israel's appreciation toward the US for disarming Saddam and dismantling his regime. A good deed, even if inadvertent, is nevertheless still a good deed.

So, regardless of whether Israel is dragged directly into this conflict or not, we are all soldiers in this war, and it is time we raise our voices in support of America's principled stand against the Iraqi dictator.

Israelis and Jews around the world need to be more outspoken in pressing the case for the upcoming battle, mobilizing to refute the naysayers and critics of an invasion. After all, one of our greatest foes is about to be routed from the scene. That alone should give us reason to cheer.

Even more important, though, is that Israel learn a few lessons from President Bush's handling of the current crisis, and apply them to its own situation. Specifically, they are the three P's of national security - protect your people, punish your adversaries and pray for success.

Throughout the past several months, Bush has shown that as much as he values international public opinion, he realizes that it comes in a distant second to preserving the safety and security of the American people.

During his press conference at the White House last Thursday, Bush made clear that he is willing to defy the UN Security Council, the EU, Russia, China and the Arab world, because all the criticism abroad is not worth the loss of even one American life at home.

"When it comes to our security," the President said, "we really don't need anybody's permission".

Israel - take note. That should become our motto, too. Lesson number one of Bush's approach: Protecting your people must always come first.

Second, the President laid out a fairly convincing argument as to why Baghdad's awful regime could no longer be tolerated. "Saddam Hussein," he said, "has a long history of reckless aggression and terrible crimes. He provides funding and training and safe haven to terrorists."

Noting that Saddam was unlikely to change his mind and "become a gentle soul", Bush forcefully concluded that, "We are determined to confront threats wherever they arise. I will not leave the American people at the mercy of the Iraqi dictator and his weapons."

Those words are no less applicable to Israel's current confrontation with its neighbors. Replace the terms "Saddam Hussein" and "Iraqi" with "Yasser Arafat" and "Palestinian" in Bush's remarks, and substitute "Israelis" for "the American people", and you have an unambiguous policy prescription for ending the terrorist threat. Therein lies the second message contained in Bush's approach: Punish your adversaries until they can no longer do your harm.

But there is another, far more profound, lesson to be learned from Bush's handling of this crisis. For, despite the pressure he is under and the weighty decisions he must face, the President has had no qualms about invoking his abiding sense of faith as he aims to confront the Iraqi threat.

"My faith sustains me because I pray daily," Bush told the American people last Thursday. "I pray for guidance and wisdom and strength. If we were to commit our troops, I would pray for their safety," he added.

When was the last time an Israeli leader voiced such sentiments? Prayer and faith, as Bush pointed out, play an important part in upholding a nation's fortitude, yet can any of us recall a similar statement by our own political leadership?

Praying for success. It may sound cliched, but it too is part of the larger battle

against evil. And if it is good enough for the President of the United States, the Commander in Chief of the US Armed Forces, then it should be good enough for us too.

A great victory is now within our grasp, one that will leave the United States and Israel far stronger and more resolute. But once Saddam is removed, and the post-war era begins, international pressure will quickly mount on Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians.

Now, therefore, is the time to remind Americans that Israel stands by their side, even as others have betrayed them. Hopefully, when Israel's moment of truth comes, the American people will be more than happy to return the favor. (Jerusalem Post Mar 12)

The writer served as Deputy Director of Communications & Policy Planning in the Prime Minister's Office from 1996 to 1999.

Jewish Guilt By Clifford D. May

Proponents of appeasing dictators also scapegoat Jews; so what else is new?

What do Sen. Carl Levin, author Michael Lerner, activist Phyllis Bennis, opinion journalist Bruce Shapiro, and civil-rights advocate Michael Ratner have in common? All are among the veritable phalanx of liberal Jews who are at the forefront of the movement to stop President Bush from using military force to topple dictator Saddam Hussein.

So how is it that Rep. James Moran (D., Va.) can think, much less say: "If it were not for the strong support of the Jewish community for this war with Iraq, we would not be doing this."?

Moran (who has since said he didn't mean to say what he said) is hardly alone. Pundit and perennial candidate Pat Buchanan has long been leveling similar charges. His most recent iteration is that "the neo-con vision is to conscript American blood to make the world safe for Israel." Columnist Robert Novak appears to agree. Herecently insinuated that suspicions about Saudi financing of terrorism had been manufactured by Israel.

Former Sen. Gary Hart criticized "Americans who too often find it hard to distinguish their loyalties to their original homelands from their loyalties to America and its national interests." (Mr. Hart later protested that he wasn't singling out Jews. But if he was referring to Albanian Americans who lobbied Clinton to intervene in Kosovo he hasn't managed to set off much of a debate.)

And this past weekend, the New York Times's Bill Keller wrote a column headlined "Is It Good for the Jews?" Keller dismissed the new Jewish-conspiracy theories, but with so little energy and conviction that the net effect was to lend them legitimacy.

The allegation that any of this springs from anti-Semitism is probably unfair — although the result will be, without doubt, to fuel anti-Semitism's fires. Those flames today burn most hotly on the Left. One recent example: the banning of Michael Lerner as a speaker at an antiwar rally because, though dovish regarding Yasser Arafat and vitriolic toward Israel's Ariel Sharon, Lerner doesn't endorse the delegitimization and eventual annihilation of Israel, doesn't agree with such leftists as Kirkpatrick Sale who recently wrote that Israel "should be abandoned" because "there will continue to be violence as long as Israel exists." (You see the logic: No Israeli existence, no problem. We might call this the Left's "final solution" to the Jewish problem.)

But if raw anti-Semitism is not the primary cause of these peculiar views, what is? To a large extent, the views coming from Moran et al. probably arise from the frustration of the antiwar movement over its inability to gather a head of steam. In the March issue of Vanity Fair, culture critic James Wolcott writes on this theme in a piece entitled "What If They Gave a War and Nobody Cared." Wolcott, to his credit, does not descend to Jew-bashing to explain what he sees as "national apathy" about President's Bush determination to secure regime change in Iraq. Rather, he blames a campaign cleverly orchestrated by "Bush's hawks and their media pigeons." (In the interest of full disclosure, I am among the hawks he singles out, citing in particular my "sliming" of actor/activist Sean Penn in the pages of the Wall Street Journal.)

It is worth pausing for a moment to ask what should be an obvious question: Why wouldn't American Jews support ending Saddam's tyranny? Jews ought to have a sharpened insight into the likely consequences of appeasing ruthless and expansionist dictators. Saddam also funds and encourages terrorism against Israelis. If he gets his hands on a biological bomb or nuclear weapon, he'll no doubt pace his palace floor trying to decide where to instruct his terrorist allies to deploy it. Are Moran, Buchanan, and the

others so sure Saddam will decide on Tel Aviv — not New York or Washington? (And even if the answer is Tel Aviv — shouldn't that matter at least a teeny-tiny bit to Moran and Buchanan?)

American Jews also might be sympathetic to the suffering of the Iraqi people. Here, again, historical memory ought to kick in when hundreds of thousands of people are slaughtered, tortured, raped and ethnically cleansed by a brute who finds inspiration in Hitler's words and deeds.

Yes, it's true that if President Bush leads a successful war to defeat terrorism and the rogue dictators who collude with terrorists that will benefit Israel and it will be "good for the Jews." But that's not because the Jews picked a fight with Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden. That's not because Sharon hopes to place his flag on the highest hill in Baghdad. It's because Saddam and bin Laden declared war on Jews — as well as on Christians and traditional, moderate Muslims.

And recall that way back in 1996 bin Laden published a "Declaration of War Against the Americans." (Note that he didn't declare war on "American Jews.") As for Saddam, he clearly seeks vengeance against Americans, among other things for kicking him out of Kuwait (not a Jewish country last time I checked the World Almanac) and humiliating him in 1991. That's why he attempted to assassinate former President George H. W. Bush in 1993.

It is mind-boggling that Moran, Hart, and Buchanan — not to mention Levin, Lerner, Shapiro, Bennis, and so many others on the Left — fail to comprehend this. It is a mystery how so many people have managed to persuade themselves that Bush and Sharon — not Saddam and bin Laden and other self-proclaimed "jihadists" — are the problem. It is baffling that anyone would believe that the Iraqis are content under Saddam's jackboot, and that so many people who fancy themselves champions of human rights support — at least implicitly — the perpetuation of one of the world's bloodiest and most aggressive tyrannies, while turning a blind eye to Saddam's victims — Iraqi and Israeli, Muslim, Jewish, and Christian alike.

The puzzler is why so many otherwise intelligent people continue to believe that appeasement and scapegoating are ever an answer or can ever bring real peace. (National Review Mar 12)

The writer, formerly a New York Times foreign correspondent and communications director for the Republican National Committee, is president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a think tank on terrorism created immediately after 9/11.

Not New, Not Leadership Jerusalem Post Editorial

As it turned out, there is even less than meets the eye to the appointment of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) as prime minister of the Palestinian Authority.

The whole American-European-Israeli idea was to transform Yasser Arafat into a figurehead and transfer power to a more palatable replacement. That, so far, is clearly not what is happening.

At its meeting Monday in Arafat's rubble-encircled Ramallah headquarters, the Palestinian Legislative Council decided that the new post of prime minister would not include the two most important items: authority over the security forces and negotiations. Skeptics of this maneuver claimed that these functions would have remained in Arafat's hands in any case, but the PLC did not bother creating even the appearance of handing them over to Abbas.

As Ziad Abu Zayyad, a former cabinet minister, explained, "The president [Arafat] will be the more important. Arafat is the symbol of the state. He will be in charge of everything, including security and foreign policy. But he cannot do everything alone. Under him, there will be people who will do things. It's not a one-man show and it shouldn't be."

So what difference does Abbas's appointment make? Attempts to decipher the move have focused on Abbas the man and his record, which are decidedly mixed. He was born in Safed, where he lived until he was 13, when he fled with his family to Syria during the War of Independence. He has been a leading figure in the PLO's Fatah movement since its inception.

Now thought of as a moderate, Abbas wrote a book called *The Other Side: The Secret Relationship Between Nazism and Zionism* in which he claimed that fewer than a million Jews died in the Holocaust and that they were killed as part of joint Zionist-Nazi plot.

In November, Abbas bravely told a Palestinian audience in Gaza that the current armed offensive against Israel was "a mistake" and seemed to call for an end to all violence. But as his name became more prominent in the race for prime minister, his position hardened. In a March 3 interview with the London-based A-Sharq al-Awsat, he seemed only to rule out suicide missions inside Israel.

But all this reading of the tea leaves in Abbas's statements and history misses

the point. Even if Arafat were handing over all his power, which he is not, and even if Abbas were an authentic moderate, which is questionable, the entire model here is flawed. Once again, the US, Europe, and even Israel seem to be seeking a "moderate" they can anoint, rather than demanding true Palestinian democratization.

This model, it should be recalled, is what led to the reliance on Arafat in the first place. Back in 1988, when the US opened a dialogue with the PLO in return for Arafat's promise to renounce terror, and in 1993 when Oslo was signed, the idea was to turn a blind eye to Arafat's penchant for corruption and despotic rule, and to pretend that this was irrelevant or even helpful to the prospects for peace. This was an obviously fatal mistake.

Perhaps, if he had real power, Abbas would be an improvement over Arafat. But this is a bit like those who hailed Mikhail Gorbachev as a great democrat when all he was doing was trying to save the Soviet Union. Gorbachev may have been the most "moderate" Soviet leader, but he was at best an unwilling link in the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Only when Gorbachev stepped down, the Soviet Union fell apart, and Boris Yeltsin was elected did Russia start out on its new path in earnest.

Similarly, the significance of Abbas' appointment is not that he represents the "new leadership" that US President George W. Bush called for in June as the basis of a democratic Palestinian state capable of making peace with Israel.

The appointment matters only if it is a stepping stone to the complete unraveling of the Arafat-led Palestinian Authority and its replacement through real democratic processes. (Jerusalem Post Mar 11)

What the West Just Doesn't Get By Barry Rubin

The Region. The problem is not Sharon, but the worldview and strategy of Arafat and the Palestinian leadership.

Last November 23, during Israel's election campaign and just after a major terrorist attack, a New York Times editorial called the bombing "another horrifying assault on civilians" and explained it in these terms: "The terror strategy is obvious. It aims to drive frightened voters to the extreme wing of the Likud party and then wait for new Israeli reprisals in Gaza and the West Bank that will radicalize more Palestinians."

One might be led to conclude that terrorism is bad because it makes people vote for Likud. But is there any evidence that this is what Yasser Arafat, Fatah, Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad wanted?

Indeed, both private and public remarks indicated that the first two wanted Israelis to vote for Labor - hoping they would be frightened into concessions - while the latter two groups believe there is no difference among Israeli politicians, since all are equally evil.

The New York Times believed that if terrorism stopped, Mitzna would win: "Palestinian terrorists do not want to see the kind of political debate in Israel that could reopen the door to a compromise peace agreement. Were it not for new attacks like the bus bombing, the coming election could encourage just such a constructive debate."

This is silly. If the fighting ended, Sharon could claim credit for defeating the Palestinian war on Israel, while a Mitzna victory would have required a major Palestinian shift toward compromise and conciliation, probably also including Arafat's departure from power.

And that's just the point the editorial - and most Western discussion on the conflict or the election - misses completely. The problem is not Sharon but the worldview and strategy of Arafat and the Palestinian leadership.

By rejecting the Camp David and Clinton plans, starting and continuing a war against Israel, promoting terrorism and raising incitement and hatred to new levels, they destroyed any chance for an end to Israel's presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a Palestinian state, or peace for some time to come.

But much of the Western analysis and reporting, as well as policy, sees the current situation as akin to the sporadic terrorist attacks that took place, more often than not against Arafat's preferences, during the 1990s peace process.

The problem is not that the terrorists are trying to wreck a Palestinian peace effort: Terrorism is the Palestinian strategy. And these attacks are not just the work of a few extremists but a campaign financed and partly organized by Arafat himself.

It isn't just that Israelis are emotionally upset by the attacks; the point is what the attacks have taught them.

Some people won't accept this reality because it is so horribly grim; others

reject it because they want to blame Israel, or hope for a quick happy ending. But such is the experience of the last decade and especially of the last three years.

The Washington Post editorial of last December 16 was closer to the mark: "Most Israelis yearn for a peace settlement. A large majority say they are ready to support the creation of a Palestinian state in most of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and to dismantle Jewish settlements to make way for it. So why is Mr. Sharon winning?"

Because "the Palestinians have utterly failed to control the terrorists in their ranks or put forward a leadership that could be a credible negotiating partner for Israel. In the absence of such a leadership, or an uncompromising Palestinian renunciation of violence, a peace settlement seems to many Israelis more an impossible dream than a tangible choice."

But finding Sharon's victory a paradox in its January 29 editorial, the day after the election, The New York Times managed to blame him for the absence of a peace agreement.

"In this time of insecurity, Israelis feel safer under Mr. Sharon's hard-line leadership and see no Palestinian partner with whom to negotiate." Yet, it concluded, Sharon had "betrayed this promise by failing to try to advance peace and by encouraging the building of new settlement outposts." This is false on both points.

The Times told Palestinians that they would benefit if they were to "denounce that terror, promote internal democratic reforms and give Israelis more encouragement to take chances for peace." But isn't their failure to do all that what killed the peace process, blocks progress today and has caused the deaths of almost 3,000 people on both sides?

Absent was any talk about Arafat himself, or any sense of the kind of views he expressed in his March 3 speech to the Arab summit. Among the points he made there, aside from saying that he is the one who really wants peace:

* Israel has instigated a war against Iraq as part of its "own war against the Palestinian people and the entire Arab nation" so that it can build an empire "extending from the Nile to the Euphrates."

* It intends to expel all Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza.

* Israel's war is not only "racist and colonialist" but also a "war of genocide and ethnic cleansing."

* Yitzhak Rabin "was killed by these extremist elements that govern Israel now."

* Israel started a war against the Palestinians after rejecting all peace proposals and as the result of a "secret agreement between Barak and Sharon to destroy the peace process."

* Israel can do these things because the US has given it advanced weapons including "depleted uranium and poisonous gases."

These claims are not just propaganda. They are the operating assumptions of the Palestinian leader. And that is the root of the problem.

The writer is director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center of the Interdisciplinary Center and is editor of the Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA). (Jerusalem Post Mar 11)

The Real Double Standard By Evelyn Gordon

Fears of irredentism are used to veto the Kurds' national aspirations. Why not the Palestinians'? The writer is a veteran journalist and commentator.

Opponents of war with Iraq have increasingly been complaining of an American "double standard" vis-à-vis Iraq and Israel. And there is considerable justice to this charge, if not quite in the way its adherents mean it.

Yet America is far from being the only guilty party - because the real double standard in this case is the almost unanimous demand for a Palestinian state by a world that rejects the idea of a Kurdish state.

By any objective standard, the Kurds have a much stronger claim to statehood than do the Palestinians. The Kurds have been a distinct ethnic group with a distinct language and culture for centuries, if not millennia, whereas the Palestinians began thinking of themselves as a separate nation only after Israel was created in 1948.

Before 1948, the only people known as "Palestinians" were the Jews who lived under the British Mandate. The region's Arabs called themselves "Arabs," not "Palestinians"; they called the area "southern Syria," not "Palestine"; and they considered themselves not a separate nation but part of the larger Arab nation that covers most of the Middle East.

Nor is there a distinct Palestinian language: The Palestinians speak Arabic.

But in addition to enjoying greater historical and cultural legitimacy, an independent Kurdistan would also be far more likely than a Palestinian state to be a peaceful, democratic and responsible member of the international

community.

Both Kurds and Palestinians obtained autonomy at roughly the same time: the Kurds after the 1991 Gulf War, the Palestinians after the 1993 Oslo Accords. Since then, despite a terrible start (civil war), the Kurdish autonomous zone - with no international recognition and minimal international aid - has blossomed both economically and in terms of civil liberties.

A New York Times report (July 29, 2002) noted the existence of "opposition parties and dozens of free-ranging newspapers and satellite television channels, as well as Internet cafes where people are free to visit any Web site they like. The Kurdish-controlled territory is notable, too, for the absence of the apparatus of repression that has turned Saddam's Iraq into a terror state."

The Palestinian Authority, in contrast, has regressed in every area during its 10 years of autonomous rule - despite widespread international recognition and the second-highest level of per capita aid in the world. Economically, per-capita gross domestic product fell by an average of 2 to 3 percent a year from 1994-1999, and another 30 percent after the PA launched the intifada in 2000.

Unemployment, which was around 5 percent in the pre-Oslo years, has never since been below 12 percent and is currently about 50 percent.

The PA is also little better than a police state: Its 50,000 armed policemen give it what Amnesty International termed "possibly the highest ratio of police to civil population in the world," and they have been used to intimidate the press, political opponents, human rights activists and even judges.

There have been repeated reports of torture in PA jails and extrajudicial killings of suspected collaborators with Israel.

The PA controls the only radio and television stations; newspapers that failed to toe the PA line have seen their distribution suspended and their editors incarcerated, and Yasser Arafat even tells Palestinian stringers for the foreign press what items not to cover (Haaretz, February 12).

The PA has deprived its people of the most basic democratic right of all - that of voting out the sitting government: Arafat canceled the elections scheduled for 1999, over a year before the intifada gave him the excuse that the presence of Israeli troops made elections impossible.

EVEN MORE important, the Kurdish autonomous area has lived in relative peace with its neighbors: Kurdish terrorists have not been using it as a base from which to launch attacks on the rest of Iraq or neighboring Turkey, Syria and Iran.

The PA, in contrast, has served as a haven for an unprecedented campaign of terror against Israel. Within two and a half years after Oslo was signed in 1993, Palestinian terror had claimed as many victims as it had during the entire preceding decade.

By five years after the accords were signed, the terrorist death toll had surpassed that of the 12 worst years of the pre-Oslo period - the years of Arafat's mini-state in Lebanon (1970-82), which claimed 162 victims and included such spectacular attacks as the Munich and Ma'alot massacres.

And with the outbreak of the intifada, Palestinian terror underwent another quantum leap, claiming more than 700 Israeli victims since October 2000.

Indeed, the only argument against a Kurdish state is the fear that it would destabilize Turkey by prompting irredentism among Turkey's Kurdish minority. Yet Turkey's "legitimate anxieties," as the New York Times put it in an editorial last week, are viewed by the entire world as trumping the Kurds' desire for independence.

No one, however, appears to consider the fear of Palestinian irredentism in Israel to be grounds for vetoing a Palestinian state - even though Israel's Arab minority, like Turkey's Kurds, constitutes one-fifth of its population and includes a sizable faction that openly identifies with Israel's enemies, advocates violence against the state, and even declares the state's eradication to be its goal.

There are only two possible explanations for the worldwide double standard that deems a Palestinian state essential but a Kurdish state taboo, even though every tenable argument points in the other direction.

One is that terrorism works: The Palestinians are taken more seriously precisely because of the PLO's 40-year campaign of anti-Israel terrorism. The other is that anti-Semitism works: The Palestinians are taken more seriously precisely because their target is Israel rather than another country.

It is difficult to decide which option is more frightening. (Jerusalem Post Mar 11)