



Jerusalem 5:10; Toronto 6:12

ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
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Commentary...

The Spirit of Israel Jerusalem Post Editorial

Those who wish to gauge the spirit of the Israeli people as the winds of war gather ever-ominously right around the corner from this country and at least in theory menace us need only pass by a bus stop and marvel at the fact that ordinary folk still line up there. Or they can peek into busy shopping malls and movie theaters. These have not been shunned despite more than two years of unremitting terrorism, which deliberately and fiendishly targets precisely the sites where noncombatants congregate.

Israelis have gone through hell since September 2000 and it's not over yet, by any stretch of the imagination. But despite the merciless slaughter of children, housewives, people at work, and people at play, life here has not come to a standstill.

Just in the past couple of days, against the backdrop of American ultimatums being issued and summarily rejected in Baghdad, as well as ever-shrill Hamas threats, Israeli parents took their costumed children to Purim celebrations.

These street festivities appeared surreal as unessential diplomatic staff and their families were flown out of the country, foreigners were urged to get out ahead of the Iraqi conflict, and airlines limited their services or avoided our airports entirely.

Indeed, the throngs at the Holon Adloyada celebration gave proof to the fact that Israelis are not scared off too easily. It's not because they are reckless or foolhardy. They are unassumingly resilient, without flag-waving jingoism.

They keep going though the going is tough even downright dangerous. Only the inclement weather cancelled some outdoor Purim merrymaking. The stormy weather, in fact, has dominated much more small talk than the war looming next door.

This contrasts starkly with the panic which not long ago gripped the Washington, DC, area while the serial sniper duo were still at large. Israelis brave the likes of them almost daily. The mere act of raising the terror alert to Code Orange recently instilled trepidation in heartland America, whose civilians are immeasurably less exposed to danger than their long-suffering Israeli counterparts.

Observers of our scene both seasoned locals and visiting outsiders must be struck by the composure with which most Israelis are gearing up for the war in Iraq. This is not the fatalistic resignation of an apathetic people.

Israelis, in fact, are anything but passive, are not given to taking much of anything lying down, and are unlikely in the extreme to refrain from speaking their minds or exhibiting their emotion on any occasion. Hence the current stiff upper lip is nothing to scoff at, especially given the traumatic experience of a dozen years ago when another president Bush and the same Saddam Hussein first faced off.

Then no fewer than 39 Iraqi Scud missiles shattered Israel's relative security and took a considerable psychological toll. The population realized belatedly that plastic sheeting offered no defense against conventional explosives, while the government's abstention from retaliation whether one approved of it or not added to the sense of vulnerability and loss of deterrent.

Psychologists have already kick-started their debate on whether that 1991 round of American-Iraqi hostilities steeled Israelis or, conversely, sensitized them, but all agree that it left bad memories. The collective hope is that this time

it would be different. For one thing, the unfinished business of the forerunner to this showdown will finally be attended to.

Secondly, despite unsavory past experience with predictions of a low probability that Iraq would attack Israel, considerable credence is given to present-day assurances. Opinion polls show that one-fourth of the population has no intention of sealing off any rooms and just as many do not intend

to don gas masks.

The decision for now to keep schools open is seen as indicating that the likelihood of Scuds crashing into our neighborhoods again is indeed low.

This is bolstered by the report of the chief of Military Intelligence to the cabinet to the effect that western Iraq appears to be free of missile launchers. More powerful still are the odds given by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who reckons that there is only a 1 percent chance of Israel being hit.

But while these may be soothing messages, they are accompanied by ostensibly conflicting signals. Israelis cannot afford lackadaisical complacency, when instructed to seal rooms yet again and keep their gas masks handy. The absence of hysterical fear and foreboding doesn't negate the existence of tension and unease, especially as we realize that for us it will not be over with the last air raid over Iraq.

At that point the US will need to win back alienated Arab hearts and this might be most readily accomplished by squeezing from Israel concessions that will put Israeli civilians at potentially greater risk than ever. Odds are, then, that our existential struggle will merely move to other arenas and take other forms. (Jerusalem Post Mar 19)

Bush's Choice: Powell or the Prophets By Michael Freund

Did the president really say what I think he said? Speaking in the White House Rose Garden this past Friday, a clearly delighted Colin Powell at his side, George W. Bush went ahead and used the O word, as in "occupied," when describing Israel's heartland of Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

In laying out his vision for the establishment of a Palestinian state, Bush said that, "as progress is made toward peace, settlement activity in the occupied territories must end," the implication being that Jewish housing construction somehow inhibits Middle Eastern harmony.

With the United States poised to liberate Baghdad, the president's use of the O word might seem a matter of secondary importance, as the entire region will soon undergo a fundamental transformation of historic proportions. America is about to reshuffle the Arab deck, with far-reaching consequences for nearly every country involved.

But with all the uncertainty regarding precisely what will emerge in the post-Saddam era, there is one issue about which there should be little doubt. Once the Iraqis get walloped, Russia, Europe and the Arab world will intensify their criticism, seeking to force Bush to "balance" his liberation of Iraq with independence for the Palestinians.

In fact, such pressure is already starting to mount. As the New York Times reported over the weekend, Bush's Friday statement came as "a result of pressure from British Prime Minister Tony Blair." Blair, the Times noted, has been demanding that the White House adopt the road map leading to a Palestinian state so as "to quell the anger throughout the Arab world over the Bush administration's perceived focus on Iraq."

Hence, the president's reference to the "occupied territories" and his call for the establishment of a Palestinian state should not be written off lightly. Rather, it is just a small taste of what is yet to come.

To be fair, the White House's stance on Judea, Samaria and Gaza is hardly new. American presidents have long been vocally opposed to the expansion of Jewish communities in the territories, even as they remained inexplicably silent about the illegal growth of neighboring Arab villages.

But Bush is not just any American president. Unlike his predecessors, he has pushed Yasser Arafat into a corner, courageously stood up to Saddam Hussein, underlined the need for democratization of the Arab world and launched a far-reaching global war on terror.

It may sound cliched, but he is by far "the best friend Israel has had in the White House" in a good long time.

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And that is what makes his latest remarks so puzzling.

For as a number of recent stories in the US press have made amply clear, Bush is a religious man who takes his Christian faith seriously. And yet, if Jesus were alive today, the US State Department would likely criticize him for being a Jewish settler and an obstacle to peace.

After all, according to the New Testament, Jesus was a Jew born in Bethlehem, which is south of Jerusalem, in what Colin Powell considers the "occupied territory" of Judea. His parents were Jews who undoubtedly prayed at a local Bethlehem synagogue, learned Torah at a local study hall, and bought food at the local kosher marketplace.

Thus they were Jewish settlers in every respect.

Needless to say, the New Testament itself contains no mention of the word "Palestine" or "Palestinians," for the simple reason that they did not exist. All told, in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the terms "Judah" or "Judea" appear 877 times, and "Samaria" is used on 123 occasions. There is no reference to phrases such as the "West Bank" or "occupied territories," as Islam had not yet even come into being.

It is therefore hard to understand why the president would consent to pressure Israel to turn over Judea, Samaria and Gaza to the Palestinians, for he would appear to be acting contrary to what his own hallowed text seems to demonstrate, namely, that these areas belong to the Jewish people and no one else.

The same goes for Israel's capital, where many of the events in the Christian bible, such as the last supper on Mount Zion, the denunciation in the Garden of Gethsemane and the crucifixion on Golgotha are all described as having taken place in Jerusalem in Roman-occupied Jewish Jerusalem, that is.

Hence, Christians who accept Palestinian demands to Jerusalem are essentially denying the validity of their own traditions.

It is imperative, then, that American Christian supporters of Israel launch an all-out effort to remind Bush of these facts and counter the pressure he is coming under from the likes of Tony Blair and Colin Powell.

Bush is an honest and decent man, true to himself and his belief system. But he is facing enormous pressure to mollify the Arabs at the expense of the Jewish state, and he will therefore need a great deal of public backing if he is to stand up to it.

Since Bush is a man of faith, Christian supporters of Israel should appeal to him using a faith-based approach, pointing out that the New Testament he professes to believe in provides ample evidence that places such as Bethlehem and Hebron have nothing to do with the Palestinians, and everything to do with Israel.

Of course I, as a Jew, personally look to the Torah for validation of my people's unbreakable connection to the Land of Israel and exclusive rights to it. As far as I am concerned the views of the Prophets take precedence over those of Colin Powell any day.

Once the war in Iraq is over, though, Bush will likely have to make a choice between the two.

Now is the time for American Christians to speak out and remind him that when it comes to politics versus prophecy, the man of faith must ultimately follow his heart.

The writer served as deputy director of communications & policy planning in the Prime Minister's Office from 1996 to 1999. (Jerusalem Post Mar 20)

Letter in NY Post

Your editorial describing our Prime Minister Jean Chretien as a weasel was unfair and inaccurate. Our prime minister is not a weasel. He is actually an inept buffoon and an embarrassment to this once-great nation. Please cease comparing Chretien to a weasel. It is unfair to the furry creatures.

Tom Czitron, Toronto, Canada (NY Post Mar 19)

Stop Apologizing! By James Taranto

Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old terrorism advocate from Olympia, Wash., died in a bulldozer accident yesterday. Corrie was at fault in the accident, which occurred when she either stood or crouched in front of an Israeli Defense Forces bulldozer in Gaza, the Jerusalem Post reports:

The bulldozers were part of an IDF tunnel- and mine-clearing operation. The Rafah refugee camp borders Egypt, from which Palestinian terrorists smuggle in weapons and explosives. And according to interim peace accords, Israel has the right to operate in and secure the area.

Corrie not only backed anti-Israeli terrorism; she also hated America. An Associated Press photo shows Corrie, her face contorted with hate, burning a "mock U.S. flag" at a pro-Saddam rally last month. (Hat tip: Little Green Footballs.) Reuters reports on a "symbolic funeral" that drew some 1,000 Palestinian Arabs. One of them tells the "news" service: "We fly a U.S. flag today to show our support to all American peace lovers, those like Rachel." If she were still alive, no doubt she'd have burned the flag.

It's a shame that Rachel Corrie died the way she did. It's shameful that she

lived the way she did. (The Wall Street Journal Mar 17)

Fight the Canard By Berel Wein

A lengthy op-ed piece in last Saturday's New York Times by Bill Keller ran with the headline: "Is it good for the Jews?"

The thrust of the article was that even though the myth of a Jewish conspiracy directing American foreign policy is preposterous, it nevertheless exists, persists and is believed by hundreds of millions throughout the world - and by millions in the United States itself. The fact that the public opinion polls here in Israel show overwhelming support for President George W. Bush's willingness to disarm Iraq - even by war, only seems to reinforce this myth of Jewish conspiracy.

This is especially true, I think, because Israel is the only democratic country in the world where its citizens exhibit such overwhelming support for the Iraqi war. There are many reasons for this support here. Iraq is a sworn and bitter enemy of Israel. It has never made any armistice agreement with Israel, even as far as the 1948 War of Independence is concerned. It has attacked us whenever it could, most notably in the Yom Kippur War when it rushed to the side of Syria in the north and in the 1991 Gulf War when it rained 39 Scud missiles upon us.

Saddam Hussein actively supports all terrorist activities against Israel and Jews, and funds and rewards the families of suicide bombers. Sadaam conducts a regime of brutal terror and cruelty that is unequalled - even in comparison to what has transpired in this very bad neighborhood in which we live.

So, there is no doubt that we would all be relieved and gratified to see him and his weapons of destruction go. But it is a long stretch of the imagination to see the insidious hand of a Jewish conspiratorial plot driving the US and the United Kingdom to war.

The conspiracy theory has haunted the Jewish people for the entire past century. The evil book, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* which has as its premise the existence of a world-wide Jewish plot that controls everything, was a product of the Czarist secret police in the Russia of the 1890s. It has remained immensely popular ever since.

When Henry Kissinger visited Saudi Arabia in 1974 to appeal for the lifting of the Arab oil embargo against the West after the Yom Kippur War, he was given a copy of the Protocols by his hosts and told to read it in order to understand the world's problems. Hitler, Stalin, the entire current Arab world and much of the Muslim world and anti-Semites everywhere generally used - and still use - this blasphemous work to justify the hating and killing of Jews.

Wall Street, the US government, Hollywood and the Western media, culture and values, have all become code words for the Jewish conspiracy believed by hundreds of millions of people around the globe. And this spells great and significant problems for Israel and the Jewish people.

The awareness of the presence of this widespread belief in the Jewish conspiracy theory throughout the world is unfortunately not lost on American foreign policy.

America will be faced with two basic choices after the end of the war against Iraq. It can attempt to disprove the Jewish conspiracy theory by adopting a basically anti-Israeli stance in its diplomacy in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This has been the classic State Department position over the decades. After all previous Middle East wars, Israel has been presented with a diplomatic and economic bill by the US. It is as though America feels forced to prove it is not controlled by a "Jewish-Israeli lobby" and therefore presses Israel for concessions. This only guarantees that the struggle will continue. It raises the hopes of the Palestinians that eventually they will drive us into the sea.

The other option, which is long-range and far more difficult to execute, is a campaign of education and propaganda if you will, to somehow disprove the myth of the Jewish conspiracy. There is a certain passivity in the Jewish world itself regarding this issue of the Jewish conspiracy. It is as though we secretly also accept such a ridiculous notion.

A concerted effort by all Jewish organizations as well as by the State of Israel to counter this myth would certainly be something that is good for the Jews. It would also be beneficial to the cause of peace and harmony everywhere in the world. (Jerusalem Post Mar 14)

The Quintessential Jew Remembered By Yehuda Avner

It was Tuesday, June 21, 1977, Menachem Begin's first day in the prime minister's office, and I had been unexpectedly summoned into his presence. He glanced up sharply through his thick, black-rimmed spectacles. He seemed dwarfed somewhat by the gigantic mahogany desk behind which he sat.

The signs of a recent heart attack were still upon him. His face was sallow, his cheekbones pronounced, his semi-bald crown thrown into

prominence. Yet he was impeccably neat and imperious, like a patrician, a man to be addressed by title, not by name.

In a voice so formal it sounded like an official pronouncement, he declared, "I have this day received a letter of invitation to Washington from the president of the United States of America, Mr. Jimmy Carter, and I wish you to look over it with a view to preparing a reply."

Taken aback, all I could do was to sit up with the ramrod posture of a new recruit, nod, and croak for permission to retire in order to draft a response, as was my wont with his predecessors. But he, in a tone that was just a shade supercilious, said there was no need for that any more. He wrote his own English letters and speeches. What he needed was someone to touch them up for him.

"I will prepare the reply, and you will Shakespearize it," he said with a good and encouraging smile. And then, in English, by way of explanation. "Polish my Polish English. Stylize it. Give it a touch of Shakespeare." The telephone buzzed.

The prime minister had two telephones on his desk, one cream-colored - a regular line with press buttons - and the second a red point-to-point military set, linked directly to the defense people in Tel Aviv. He stared at the buzzing red mechanism as if he had an aversion to it. Tightening his lips, he delicately picked up the receiver and gravely said, "Hello?"

It was Ezer Weizman, his new defense minister. From what was being said I gathered that there had been two PLO Katyusha attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel, albeit with no casualties or damage. Also, overnight, Muslim militia had assaulted a Christian Maronite village in northern Lebanon, slaughtering civilians.

Austerely, his expression pained, the prime minister said into the phone that the PLO attack might well be a deliberate test of his will on this, his first day in office. He, therefore, suggested a commensurate response.

"And as for the Muslim attack on the Christians," he added in a tone that was sharp, stubborn, and dogged, "the policy of our new government is clear. It is our moral duty as a Jewish state to come to the aid of the Lebanese Christian minority.

"We shall come to the aid of any persecuted minority in the Middle East. The Christian world has abandoned the Maronites. We shall not abandon them."

I sat dumbfounded. Begin had just turned Israel's Lebanese doctrine on its head. Yitzhak Rabin, his predecessor, never permitted Israeli forces to become so directly entangled in the Lebanese bloodbath for fear of being sucked into its infernal civil war.

I was still searching for something to say when Begin's eyes focused on the door through which Yechiel Kadishai, his closest aide and confidante, had just popped his head to announce that Reb Raphael was on the line.

"Put him on," said the prime minister slouching back in his chair, crossing his legs, and cuddling his cream receiver to his ear. "Aha, Reb Raphael, how are you?" he purred with fond intimacy. "I have been thinking much of your dear father of blessed memory on this day. We shall remain faithful to his legacy of Eretz Yisrael, I promise you."

Reb Raphael was a name I knew. His late father was the widely adored and saintly Reb Aryeh Levine, a legend in his lifetime. When the British ruled Palestine, Reb Aryeh toiled to render aid and comfort to captured Etzel fighters, many of whom were condemned to long terms of imprisonment.

Some were sentenced to death and hanged. Their last embrace at the foot of the gallows was Reb Aryeh's. Now his son ran the small Jerusalem yeshiva which his father had founded.

The prime minister inquired about the yeshiva's welfare, and as he listened his features became compassionate.

"Azoy," he sighed. "I'm so sorry to hear things are so difficult. I shall speak to one or two friends to help. Meanwhile, send the electricity, water, and telephone bills to Yechiel. I shall see to them personally. It's a mitzva I want to do."

And then, pumping encouragement back into his voice he reassured Reb Raphael that all would be well.

"Don't fret. Your task is to sit and learn and teach. We shall see to the rest," he said.

With Lebanon on the boil, I found this benevolent tete-a-tete between an obscure yeshiva head and the prime minister of Israel astounding. But this, clearly, was the man's metier.

He spent the next few minutes briefing Kadishai about Reb Raphael's plight and asked him to get hold of a certain Sir Isaac Wolfson in London. (The most important thing about Sir Isaac Wolfson was that he was a very rich Jew).

He now began to muse out loud about what he would reply to president Carter, when his cream phone buzzed once more and his eyebrows rose in pleasure upon answering it. "Sir Isaac!" he boomed. "How glad I am to have found you."

Begin listened intently to what Sir Isaac was saying, and in an English that was accented but perfect responded by thanking him profusely for his expressions of good will. Then, with a roguish glint in the eye, he asked, "So tell me, Sir Isaac, the British press, do they have a good word to say about me on my

first day in office? Or am I still their favorite fiend?"

Whatever Sir Isaac's answer was it wiped the impish look from the premier's face. Little by little it darkened into displeasure. He clucked his tongue, wagged his head, and in a tone huffy with disdain, shot back, "So The Times is at it again, preaching Middle East appeasement just as it preached German appeasement in the Thirties.

"That's the newspaper, remember, which dismissed the atrocities of Hitler's Brownshirts as mere 'revolutionary exuberance.' Bah! What do they want of me now? Another Munich? Give up Judea and Samaria like Neville Chamberlain forced Czechoslovakia to give up the Sudetenland? What are we supposed to do, commit suicide like Czechoslovakia?"

Sir Isaac reported other things that made Begin plainly upset. In a tone of resignation, he lamented, "So there are people who still think of me as the terrorist, eh? After all these years they are still blinded by their prejudices.

"But you know the truth, Sir Isaac. You know we were never terrorists."

Abruptly, he rose to his feet, his shoulders squared, his voice stiffened: "We were freedom fighters. We fought bravely fair and square, man-to-man, soldier-to-soldier, against the British. Never did we deliberately hurt civilians.

"And you tell me there are still people there in Britain who call me a terrorist and Yasser Arafat a freedom fighter? I have nothing but contempt for them."

His tone went suddenly raw: "That so-called Palestine Liberation Organization - 'Liberation,' bah! - that murderous Nazi organization led by that war criminal Yasser Arafat, they target civilians exclusively - children, women, and men.

"So I say to you, Sir Isaac: Justice will win the day!"

He trumpeted this final sentence like a peroration of an oration at a rally.

And having thus let off steam, he lowered himself back into his chair, and in an unruffled, winning fashion spent the next few minutes expanding on the actual purpose of his call. This he wrapped up with an appeal that came from the bottom of his heart:

"Sir Isaac, I would not be troubling you now did I not sincerely believe that saving Reb Raphael's yeshiva is a mitzva - a sacred and noble deed. And, knowing your generosity, I thought you might want to have a share in it."

The philanthropist's response was so generous it brought a blush of pleasure to the prime minister's cheeks. Over and over again he cooed into the telephone, "Thank you. Thank you."

Had a stranger happened to overhear how Menachem Begin opened his heart to Reb Raphael and to Sir Isaac Wolfson, he might have gone away thinking that a prime minister's job in Jerusalem was some sort of yeshiva drive punctuated by affairs of state. Just to watch him handle, in one and the same breath, and with equal zeal, a presidential letter from the White House, a military flare-up in Lebanon and a yeshiva appeal in Jerusalem, was a heady and spellbinding experience.

For the first time the Jewish state had at its head a prime minister who was a companion of the old school. No other premier before - or since - has possessed his cozy acknowledgement of God, his deep reverence for the Jewish heritage, his innate sense of Jewish kinship and his familiarity with the ancient customs. None have had his infectious, Jewish common touch, which made Jews everywhere feel they really mattered.

Politics aside, under his tutelage Israel and the Diaspora bonded with spirited spontaneity. For Jews everywhere sensed that prime minister Menachem Begin was the quintessential Jew.

The writer is a veteran diplomat and served on the personal staff of five Israeli prime ministers. Jews everywhere commemorated that yearzeit of Menachem Begin z"l on 4 Adar. (Jerusalem Post Mar 14)

Beware of a False Dawn By Isi Leibler

What the national camp needs to do in response to the inexorable momentum for a Palestinian state is - stay in government.

The impending war and its subsequent impact on the region makes it mandatory for leaders in the national camp to review their current policies and future strategies.

Over the past months our leaders have been reassuring Israelis that President George W. Bush would never impose a Palestinian state on Israel unless our basic security requirements had been met and the Palestinian Authority "reformed" itself. Israel was also told not to be too concerned with the Quartet's road map, against which it had registered over 100 objections.

As a nation that has suffered more than its fair share of self-delusion, it is crucial that during these critical times we resist duping ourselves into heralding yet another false dawn. Take the following chilling scenario:

The Americans achieve a clear-cut military victory in Iraq. They decide to rebuild their bridges with the Europeans and the rest of the world. Britain's Tony Blair, whose own political future remains at risk, pleads with Bush to impose a peace settlement in the Middle East and to do so in "an evenhanded" manner in conjunction with the Quartet. Bush stands by his loyal British ally and announces his determination to "end the cycle of

violence" and achieve a Middle East peace settlement in which both partners are obliged to make sacrifices.

Arafat, who by now has fulfilled the Quartet's requirement to "democratize" by appointing his deputy as prime minister, remains in effective control. Under his instructions the Palestinians effusively welcome the president's statement and call on Israel to withdraw its forces and "end the occupation." They also undertake "to do their best" to halt terrorism, especially within Israel proper.

Notwithstanding Israel's "very close" relationship with the Americans, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer calls on the IDF to withdraw to pre-intifada positions, demands an immediate freeze on all settlements, and states that the time is now ripe for an immediate resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon calls on President Bush and pleads that Israel cannot accept demands which amount to rewarding terrorism. He reminds the president that the Palestinians' end goal remains the destruction of Israel and that they are still not willing to take the necessary steps to root out terrorism.

Sharon fails to persuade Bush, and Israel once again assumes the role of sacrificial lamb. The US suspends economic aid and threatens to impose economic sanctions. The Europeans, with great delight, institute a total boycott. A Palestinian state is enthusiastically endorsed by the international community.

A few years later we wake up one morning and learn that hostile forces are massing on our borders.

An ugly scenario indeed. And highly improbable. But utterly inconceivable?

No. In fact, in terms of previous cozy understandings or reliance upon friends, elements of this nightmare are *déjà vu*.

To forestall such events Israel must initiate an international campaign outlining the security requirements Israel regards as crucial prerequisites before it can endorse a Palestinian state.

Israel needs to emphasize that its position is based on the Middle East policy speech delivered by Bush on June 24, which clearly makes Palestinian statehood conditional on prior democratic reform and implicitly endorses:

* The necessity of the Palestinians to explicitly announce an end to the conflict and forgo an Arab right of return.

* A Palestinian commitment to demilitarization, which Israel will supervise and enforce without reliance on third parties.

* Demonstration of Palestinian willingness and ability to control terror.

* An enforceable commitment to ensure that incitement against Jews in Palestinian schools, mosques and media will be suppressed.

Israel must remind its friends that this is not a conflict between two peoples over land. It is about the Arab rejection of our right to Jewish sovereignty in our homeland. It must also reiterate that the society Arafat has created is an evil entity which endorses child sacrifice, indoctrinates youngsters in schools and mosques and sanctifies as martyrs those who murder Jews.

However, Israel should be under no illusions.

We will lose this vital battle in the war of ideas if in the midst of such a campaign the government collapses as a consequence of squabbles within the national camp.

It is therefore high time and absolutely critical for the Right - hard-liners in Likud as well as the NRP and National Union - to become realistic, more pragmatic and flexible rather than dogmatically taking "principled" stands and isolating themselves from the mainstream into barren opposition roles.

Politics amounts to the art of the possible. Like it or not, the entire international community, including our only remaining friends, the Americans, is now fully committed to the establishment of a Palestinian state. And while most sane Israelis obviously oppose a Palestinian state under the current circumstances, it is also clear that in the context of a settlement, the vast majority of Israelis would be willing to endorse Palestinian statehood.

We now stand at a crucial crossroads. Those opposed to a Palestinian state under any circumstances must realize that no policy can be permanently engraved in stone.

Should a crisis erupt in our relations with the Americans, there is a vital need for the presence of representatives of the national camp to act as watchdogs in government against those willing to make compromises without adequate security safeguards.

If, after losing a battle, they retreat once again into opposition they will create a vacuum, paving the way for the formation of a government which could include unreconstructed Oslo apologists and other defeatists. Paradoxically, under these circumstances resignation from the government would amount to a prescription for accelerating the formation of a Palestinian state under the worst possible conditions.

We have an extraordinarily good case, which would be utterly undermined by the government's collapse. If we can succeed in winning the hearts and minds of decent people and convince our American friends that we are fighting the same battle against Arab fundamentalism and international terror, Israel will overcome. (Jerusalem Post Mar 16)

The writer is senior vice president of the World Jewish Congress.

Israel on Their Minds By Barbara Sofer

I'd left Israel less than 24 hours earlier, but I'd already been assailed by our brethren abroad, both for Israel settlement policy and for the evenhanded treatment of Jews and Arabs in our hospital.

With one ear to the latest war prognostication, I recently flew to Los Angeles to fulfill a commitment to deliver a series of speeches in the American West. Back when I happily agreed to the assignment, visiting far-flung Jewish communities, March seemed an unlikely time for the beginning of the war with Iraq.

But when the date came around, the plan felt problematic. Sitting in a middle seat on the flight from New York to Los Angeles, my Israeli seatmate to the right was reassuring. He held a high-profile military job. If he could go on an approved vacation to Hawaii, certainly I could go on a shorter speaking tour. I felt better. We Israelis rely on our insider tips.

On the same flight, the passenger to my left was a local member of our tribe. After the usual exchange of pleasantries, he expressed his displeasure at the expansion of towns in Judea and Samaria. There we were, cruising from New York to California, reviewing policy from the Peel Commission to Taba.

The bottom line of all such disputes is the morality of the Jewish state. I thought I did all right. When my dinner came, he asked if he could get a kosher meal also.

The Angelinos who kindly hosted me for Shabbat lunch have Israel's morality much on their minds too. They thought it was our physicians' moral responsibility to refuse to treat Palestinians. Israelis needed to let the enemy bleed to death, they insisted. On what moral principle was I basing my belief that our medical staff should not be handing out death sentences?

Most of the dining companions agreed with the hosts. At last, another guest rallied to my side. She felt proud when she saw a photo of an Israeli soldier giving a handcuffed, blindfolded Palestinian a bottle of water.

The vehemence of the opinions pleases me, if not the arguments themselves.

How glad I am that Israel is so much in the minds and hearts of our American brethren that they are eager to leap into heated battles. I never resort to that ultimate trump card - my living in Jerusalem while they spend their lives abroad.

Tucked into my notebook is that old quote of Golda's, "We have nothing against the Jews in the galut [Diaspora], it is the galut itself that we protest." Chase Manhattan Bank used to advertise, "You have a friend at Chase Manhattan." But Bank Leumi shot back, "You may have a friend at Chase Manhattan, but we're mishpocha."

Still, the difference between here and there weighed heavily as I described the events of the last two-and-a-half years and our preparations for the next Middle Eastern war.

My in-flight reading was Yoram Hazony's *The Dawn*, the Shalem Center political scholar's analysis of the Scroll of Esther. Hazony contrasts the different roles successful Jews played in ancient empires - Joseph, Daniel, Nehemia, Esther and Mordechai.

Joseph's work in the service of Pharaoh prepares Egypt and the Jews to survive seven years of famine, but ultimately builds the Egyptian House of Bondage. Daniel is a man of no compromise, who relies on miracles. Nehemia uses his influence to allow the Jews to return to the Land of Israel and rebuild their autonomy.

Had Queen Esther not endangered her own secure life to rescue her people, her success at becoming the most important woman in Persia would have been nullified.

Says Hazony, "Purim added a cosmopolitan message for Jews far from their homeland and their God: If the Jew will stand up for himself and fight for his faith, the Diaspora can allow power and life not only for individual Jews, but for the Jewish People as a whole."

With which of our biblical heroes will the Jews of today's Diaspora identify if need be?

I hope they will never be faced with this dilemma, I pray as I take an early

morning walk through Beverly Hills. The lawns advertise candidates for city council. Nearly all the names are Jewish.

In America, the forthcoming war with Iraq has replaced the headlines from Israel on the news. "Only nine health workers in Chicago have been inoculated for smallpox," says one headline in a Sunday supplement.

A Washington-based writer likens her daughter's fears to a pebble stuck in her brain and contends that East coast residents feel more threatened than Californians. In California, North Korean missiles are on everybody's lips.

In Colorado Springs, hosts point out the granite headquarters that will function if - God forbid - Washington falls. "There" isn't so secure either.

As we prepare to sit down to our Purim feasts in Jerusalem, I'm glad to be so passionately in the minds of our brethren there. To keep them in mind here too, at our table we have the tradition of raising our glasses in a toast to the continued health and well being of our brethren in the Diaspora, and praying for their speedy return to Zion. (Jerusalem Post Mar 16)