

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*

Commentary...

Straight Talk By Saul Singer

The White House lacks moral clarity when it comes to Israel.

It is amazing how sophisticated the war against terrorism has become. According to almost every government in the world, the elimination of Ahmed Yassin was counterproductive, if not downright idiotic. Peace Now called it a "prize for Hamas."

Someone really ought to alert those commandos hunting down Osama bin Laden to stop before it's too late. Kill Bin Laden? What a prize for al Qaeda that would be.

What a rube I am for clinging to the primitive notion that eliminating a terrorist organization's undisputed leader might prove to be a setback for it.

How could I have missed what was obvious to Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, that Yassin was a "moderating influence" on Hamas? And now it's too late.

"We are deeply troubled by this action by the government of Israel," said America's U.N. Ambassador John Negroponte. "We didn't think it contributed to the peace process." And I thought that removing a leader who makes Yasser Arafat look like Mahatma Gandhi might be good for peace!

It is easy to dismiss such reactions, especially from a friend like the U.S., as lip service to ease doing what counts, namely blocking a Security Council resolution from Algeria - a country known for its delicate touch with fundamentalists. The same Negroponte said of Yassin, "He preached hatred and glorified suicide bombings of buses, restaurants and cafes. This Security Council should not, and the United States will not, support initiatives which ignore this reality."

So what does it matter if the U.S. gets in little digs while doing the right thing? It matters because it perpetuates a paradigm that is harmful to both the U.S. and Israel.

Since 9/11, Israel's enemies have clung desperately to the notion that their fight has nothing to do with the jihad against America. Embarrassing cracks in this facade do appear, such as when Palestinians cheered 9/11 itself and led the world among peoples choosing bin Laden as a leader who could be most trusted to "do the right thing."

More typical, however, is the move of Hamas's new leader, pediatrician, and media favorite Abdel Aziz Rantisi, who already has said that Hamas has "no plans" to attack American targets. Message: I'm no bin Laden, so take me off your radar screen.

Even Hamas, which is not shy about refusing to contemplate Israel's right to exist within any borders, must give the impression that the fight against Israel is not part of a global jihad. Yassin let it be known that he was willing to discuss a truce with Israel for 40 years. This was an attempt to have it both ways: not to give up on destroying Israel, but play into the idea that Israel can increase its acceptability by giving up territory.

The Palestinians understand that the world cannot bring itself to really oppose anything in the name of a struggle for their own state, but that there is little sympathy for a jihad to destroy Israel.

But what kind of war is the Arab-Israeli struggle? Are we witnessing a brutal but temporary interlude in a fundamentally negotiable conflict? Or a total war, fought only by armies and terrorists, that must end in one side's total victory, like al Qaeda's war against America?

The difference is critical, because negotiable conflicts, it is argued, need to be fought differently. This nuance is to be found in President George W. Bush's response to the Yassin hit, "Israel has the right to defend herself from terror. And as she does so, I hope she keeps consequences in mind as to how to make sure we stay on the path to peace."

There is no path to peace with al Qaeda, but there is one with the Palestinians. But here's the rub: We can't get near the path to peace until we beat the jihad that prevents this conflict from becoming a negotiable one.

Beating jihad requires tearing off, not participating in, its disguises. Hamas must be destroyed because its raison d'etre is to destroy Israel. For peace to have a chance, as Bush observed in June 2002, the Palestinians must choose "new

leaders, leaders not compromised by terror." The "right of return" is not about resettling refugees, but about employing demography where tanks and terrorists have failed.

Every place jihad is allowed to masquerade as a nationalist struggle, it should be unmasked, with the explicit purpose of endorsing total war against it. Total war does not mean that a democracy should abandon its values and respect for innocent life, but it does mean fighting to win, not to negotiate.

The Yassin hit was a missed opportunity for the U.S. to explain that groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad may specialize in the "Palestine sector," but they are blood brothers of al Qaeda and should be treated as such. The Bush administration's lack of moral clarity on this does not just harm Israel's security. It harms America's. So long as even the U.S. fears exposing the jihad against Israel, the war against global jihad cannot be won. (National Review Mar 31)

The writer is editorial-page editor of the Jerusalem Post and author of Confronting Jihad: Israel's Struggle and the World After 9/11.

When should we stop supporting Israel? By Victor Davis Hanson

The recent assassination of Sheik Saruman raises among some Americans the question-at what point should we reconsider our rather blanket support for the Israelis and show a more even-handed attitude toward the Palestinians? The answer, it seems to me, should be assessed in cultural, economic, political, and social terms.

Well, we should no longer support Israel, when...

- Mr. Sharon suspends all elections and plans a decade of unquestioned rule.
- Mr. Sharon suspends all investigation about fiscal impropriety as his family members spend millions of Israeli aid money in Paris.
- All Israeli television and newspapers are censored by the Likud party.
- Israeli hit teams enter the West Bank with the precise intention of targeting and blowing up Arab women and children.
- Preteen Israeli children are apprehended with bombs under their shirts on their way to the West Bank to murder Palestinian families.
- Israeli crowds rush into the street to dip their hands into the blood of their dead and march en masse chanting mass murder to the Palestinians.
- Rabbis give public sermons in which they characterize Palestinians as the children of pigs and monkeys.
- Israeli school textbooks state that Arabs engage in blood sacrifice and ritual murders.
- Mainstream Israeli politicians, without public rebuke, call for the destruction of Palestinians on the West Bank and the end to Arab society there.
- Likud party members routinely lynch and execute their opponents without trial.
- Jewish fundamentalists execute with impunity women found guilty of adultery on grounds that they are impugning the "honor" of the family.
- Israeli mobs with impunity tear apart Palestinian policemen held in detention.
- Israeli television broadcasts-to the tune of patriotic music-the last taped messages of Jewish suicide bombers who have slaughtered dozens of Arabs.
- Jewish marchers parade in the streets with their children dressed up as suicide bombers, replete with plastic suicide-bombing vests.
- New Yorkers post \$25,000 bounties for every Palestinian blown up by Israeli murderers.
- Israeli militants murder a Jew by accident and then apologize on grounds that they thought he was an Arab-to the silence of Israeli society.
- Jews enter Arab villages in Israel to machine gun women and children.
- Israeli public figures routinely threaten the United States with terror attacks.
- Bin Laden is a folk hero in Tel Aviv.
- Jewish assassins murder American diplomats and are given de facto sanctuary by Israeli society.
- Israeli citizens celebrate on news that 3,000 Americans have been murdered.
- Israeli citizens express support for Saddam Hussein's supporters in Iraq

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in their efforts to kill Americans.

So until then, I think most Americans can see the moral differences in the present struggle.

If the Palestinians wish to hold periodic and open elections, establish an independent judiciary, create a free press, arrest murderers, subject their treasury to public scrutiny, eschew suicide murdering, censure religious leaders who call for mass murder, embrace non-violent dissidents, extend equal rights to women, end honor killings, raise funds in the Arab world earmarked only to build water, sewer, transportation, and education infrastructure, and pledge that any Jews who choose to live in the West Bank will enjoy the same rights as Arabs in Israel, then they might find Americans equally divided over questions of land and peace.

But all that is a lot of ifs. And so for the present, Palestinian leaders shouldn't be too surprised that Americans increasingly find very little in their society that has much appeal to either our values or sympathy. If they continually assure us publicly that they are furious at Americans, then they should at least pause, reflect, and ask themselves why an overwhelming number of Americans-not Jewish, not residents of New York, not influenced by the media-are growing far more furious with them. (victorhanson.com March 28)

Just an Absence of War By Shlomo Avineri

Exactly a quarter of a century ago – in March 1979 – Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty which put an end to decades of war between the two nations. When President Anwar Sadat and Prime Minister Menachem Begin attached their names to the peace document on the White House lawn, with president Jimmy Carter as witness and facilitator, there was hope for a new dawn in the Middle East.

It was not to be.

Twenty-five years later, there is still no regional peace. Israel and Syria have failed, despite numerous attempts, to reach an equivalent agreement. And with the failure, at Camp David in 2000, of the US-sponsored negotiations between prime minister Ehud Barak and PA chairman Yasser Arafat, the hopes of an Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation receded even further, with escalating violence embittering both sides more than ever before.

But even the promise of normal relations between Israel and Egypt has proved to be a chimera. Israelis were ready to give up all the Egyptian territory they had captured in 1967 because it appeared they would finally be accepted by the largest and strongest Arab state.

Yet today relations between Israel and Egypt are bitter, and Israelis speak of a cold peace. Egypt has withdrawn its ambassador from Israel, President Mubarak pointedly refuses to visit Israel, and commerce between the two countries is minimal.

The Egyptian press, mainly under government control, is scathing in its depiction not only of Israel and Zionism, but also of Jews in general, with state TV presenting vitriolic anti-Semitic programs; Egyptian academics, artists and sport teams refuse to visit Israel; no Israeli has ever been invited to an Egyptian university; and Egyptian schoolbooks continue to present Israel in the same way as when the two countries were at war.

When Egyptian officials are asked about this they maintain that so long as Israel continues to occupy the Palestinians, normalization cannot take place. This claim is totally false.

IN 1980 I was a member of the Israeli delegation which negotiated the Cultural, Scientific and Educational Agreement between the two countries. Taking a leaf out of the book of Franco-German reconciliation after World War II, we suggested setting up a joint school commission to revise textbooks in both countries, so as to eliminate hate, misrepresentation and stereotyping.

If the Germans and French could do this after centuries of enmity, why not Egyptians and Israelis?

We were dumbfounded by the vehemence of the Egyptian response. The Egyptian deputy minister, who headed their delegation, almost went through the roof: "This is out of the question. You want to dictate to us what will be taught in our schools? This is part of our sovereignty!"

We did not pursue the point: What did school textbooks matter with no war, and nobody killed on the border?

We were wrong. It now appears that the Egyptian strategy has been, from the very beginning, not to move toward reconciliation and rapprochement.

The current Palestinian intifada is a mere excuse. In signing the treaty Egypt wanted – legitimately – to get back its territory, but in return it never aimed at anything save a cold peace.

A cold peace is better than a hot war. Yet it falls short of what everyone had in mind when the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Sadat and Begin. Peace is not just an absence of war. It is a state of mind, a moral disposition, an ethical commitment. This is not what the Egyptians were seeking.

The cold peace Egypt offered Israel should be kept. One can only wish something similar could be achieved with the Palestinians. Yet, in marking the 25th anniversary of this agreement, one should realize what it is – and what the Egyptians chose it should not be. (Jerusalem Post Mar 30)

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Find the Differences By Itamar Marcus & Barbara Crook

The Western world sees Hamas as a terrorist organization seeking Israel's destruction, but treats the Palestinian Authority (PA) as a peace partner, either actual or potential, for Israel. The fact that Israel continues to seek contact with PA leaders heightens the clear distinction made between the PA and Hamas.

But the distance between Hamas and the PA has been shrinking for years. And the way the PA has responded to the killing of Yassin shows just how close the two groups actually are. The PA has gone far beyond its expected level of condemnation of the killing, and has eulogized Yassin as a leader representing all the Palestinian Authority.

PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, for example, told PA TV that just as "Yassin united the Palestinians in his life he united them again in his death." Yasser Arafat's official daily, Al Hayat Al Jadida, published a cartoon of a wheelchair shaped as a map of what the PA calls "Palestine" (which erases all of Israel) thereby stating graphically that Yassin and "Palestine" are one and the same.

In an unprecedented move, PA television ceased all regular programming for days, and except for brief news reports broadcast only slides of the Koran sung to mournful tunes. In the Arab world, this Koran broadcasting is usually reserved for the deaths of heads of state, as was done on Syrian TV after the death of Hafez Assad. That PA TV treated Yassin in this fashion demonstrates his elevated stature among PA leadership and PA society.

Anyone listening to PA leaders' pronouncements in Arabic over the years has recognized that there never was a meaningful ideological divide between the PA and Hamas. It is well understood, for example, that Hamas believes Islam demands Israel's destruction. As the Hamas charter states, "Palestine is an Islamic Wakf the liberation of Palestine is an individual duty binding on all Muslims everywhere."

Less noted is that PA religious leaders have repeatedly made identical rulings. Even when the Oslo Accord appeared to be in its heyday, Yousuf Abu Snehah, preacher of Al-Aksa Mosque, issued this ruling on PA TV: "The land of Palestine is a Wakf for all The liberation of Palestine is an obligation for the entire Islamic nation" (April 30, 1999).

The perception is that a difference between Hamas and the PA is that the latter, at least in principle, had given up using violence to reach its political goals. Yet it was Arafat who said in 1999, literally anticipating the current terror war: "The agreements won't liberate the land. Every centimeter needs struggle, and the land needs blood" (Al Hayat Al Jadida, January 25, 1999).

When Hamas started using suicide terrorists to kill Israelis in 1996, the PA condemned the killings in English. But in Arabic, PA leaders made it clear that there was no difference in attitude, only a division of labor.

Muhammad Dahlan, then head of Preventive Security in Gaza, said that the presence of Hamas "is important and essential in the cooperation in the building." Hani Alhasan, a member of the Fatah Central Committee, explained the role of Hamas: "Unity is in the nature of construction, and it is incumbent upon us to divide the work among the builders." (Al Ayyam, August 31, 1997).

As long ago as 1997, after the bombing at Tel Aviv's Apropos cafe, a member of the PA Legislative Council expressed his condolences to the family of the suicide bomber during a session of the Legislature, and "his words were interrupted by the applause of the members of the [PA Legislative] Council" (Al Hayat Al Jadida March 27, 1997). It should be stressed that all this cooperation was openly expressed in PA society long before the current terror war began in October 2000.

After starting the terror war, the PA completely erased any differences between the "builders" by creating its own suicide terror unit, the "Aksa Martyrs Brigade," which has committed numerous suicide terror attacks identical to those of Hamas.

IF THERE is any difference today between Hamas and the PA, it's in their attitudes toward temporary agreements with Israel.

While the Hamas charter states, "There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by jihad," the PA has argued that temporary agreements can be used to gain strategic territory from which to fight more easily for Israel's destruction. Then PA minister Abdel Aziz Shahin explained this just months before the PA started the terror war: "The Oslo agreements [were] a foothold and not a permanent settlement, since war and struggle on the land is more efficient than a struggle from a distant land... The Palestinian people will continue the revolution until they achieve the goals of the '65 revolution..." – that is, the destruction of Israel (Al-Ayyam, May 30 2000).

Faisal Hussein called the Oslo Accords a "Trojan Horse... the Oslo agreement, or any other agreement, is just a temporary procedure... according to the higher strategy [Palestine is] 'from the river to the sea.'" (Al-Arabi – Egypt, June 24, 2001).

Today, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas both embrace the use of terror to fight Israel. The only meaningful difference between them is the acceptance or rejection of political process as a vehicle to destroy Israel. Marcus is founder and director of Palestinian Media Watch. Crook is PMW's North American representative. (Jerusalem Post Mar 28)

Unacceptable. Unjust. By Daniel Gordis

A couple of years ago, our office started using a new driver. The previous one, it turns out, couldn't make a living when the tourists abandoned the country, and left for the States. My secretary told me about Shlomo, the new driver, right before I was to get picked up for a drive to a meeting, and I didn't think much of the news.

I got in the cab, sat in the back, introduced myself to Shlomo (who appeared to be in his mid-fifties) and told him where I was going. We set out on our way, and as we made our way across the city, I noticed a photograph on the dashboard. A young woman, probably in her twenties. An informal photo, in a Plexiglas frame glued to the dashboard. You don't often see things glued to the dashboards of luxury Mercedes cars, so I was curious. I leaned forward a little, and read the words at the bottom of the frame. "Limor, HYD." Limor -- May God Avenge Her Blood.

Now I was even more curious. This was clearly going to be a sensitive subject, but this is Israel, and subtlety has never been a strong suit of this society. So I just asked.

"Is that your daughter?"

"Limor. She was twenty-seven. And beautiful."

"I'm sorry."

"She was killed at Moment Cafe."

I had no idea what to say. So for a moment, I said nothing, and then he continued.

"You know, they keep telling me that it will get easier with time. I'm still waiting."

He turned up the volume on the classical music station a bit, maybe to drown out the rest of the world. I don't know. He stared out the windshield, and I stared out the window, certain that anything I said would be absurdly trite. And, of course, I'd only met him a few minutes earlier. Even had I had anything to say, this probably wasn't the time.

We still have the same driver. Sometimes it's Shlomo who picks me up, but usually, it's Nir, his son, probably in his mid-twenties, too. Between the two of them, they keep the cab running almost 24 hours a day, or so it seems. Because most of my trips to the airport are late at night, it's Nir I usually see. It's Nir who picks me up from the airport, too.

And each time we wind our way back into Jerusalem, he takes the same route to my house. A left at the Wolfson towers, up into the middle of Rechavia, following the narrow roads until the car is alongside Moment Cafe, now rebuilt, opened, better guarded, and full. There are sometimes faster ways to get to Bakk'a, days when the traffic in Rechavia is ridiculous. But he never varies his route. We always go by Moment. He never says anything, and I don't ask. Limor's picture is there, looking out at both of us, almost as if to remind us that we're really not in a hurry. So what if the traffic is a little thicker in Rechavia? The five minute difference isn't that significant, compared with everything he lives with and thinks about each time he looks at his dashboard.

It was Nir that I thought of when I first woke up on Monday morning. The radio had gone off at 6:15, and the news was prattling on. Helicopter. Missile. Killed. Sounded like a regular morning newscast. Until I was awake enough to get the name. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Strange, but I thought of Nir. Before anyone else. And I wondered if he'd heard yet. I wondered how he'd feel knowing that we got the guy who killed his sister. I wonder if this provides any comfort whatsoever. I doubt it.

Certain things we don't have to wonder about. Like whether Yassin deserved to die. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw can lecture us about the killing being "unacceptable, unjust." I don't mind. For when I think about the British, I still think about the shores of Palestine closed to Jewish refugees from the Nazis, desperate and starving human beings being turned away, sometimes forced to return to the Europe from which they'd fled, sometimes sent to worse fates. As a Brit, Straw should, indeed, know a thing or two about "unacceptable, unjust."

"Unacceptable," I think, is a mild way of describing Yassin's resume. Yassin was crystal clear. This conflict is not about the territories. It's about the whole thing. There can be no "Zionist" entity in the Middle East, which is a Muslim part of the world. There can be no compromise, no negotiation. The Jews must go. Got to give him credit for clarity.

And for persistence. Under Yassin, Hamas was responsible, in the last few years, for 425 bombings, resulting in 377 deaths, and 2076 injured. "Unjust"? The Sbarro Pizza parlor. The Dolphinarium, packed with teenagers. The Moment Cafe. The #37 bus. Cafe Hillel. The #19 bus. Many, many others. And now, the port at Ashdod, a strategic target that ultimately resulted in the cabinet decision to get rid of him and let Hamas know that we've had enough. And that we have no intention of leaving.

Very few Israelis that I know are terribly worried about the "justice" of the decision to kill him. If he didn't deserve to die, no one does. And some people do deserve to die. No one I know shed any tears that he's gone. But no one I know went out into the street to fire assault rifles into the air in celebration. Or gave candy to children to mark the joy of the event. That, most of us know, would be "unacceptable."

Was killing Yassin smart? That's the only question. The morality of the killing is, to my mind, not an issue. And for the wisdom, who knows? Whether it ultimately weakens Hamas and makes it possible for the Palestinian Authority to take over when we pull out, as Sharon says he plans to, remains to be seen.

What we've got in the meantime, is a stalemate of dread.

On their side, the Hamas leadership has gone underground. Abdel Aziz Rantisi, Yassin's successor in the Gaza strip, is threatening unprecedented reprisals and ultimate "liberation of the homeland." The IDF, undoubtedly, is now aiming for him. One assumes that Rantisi knows there's not much profit in his buying green bananas.

But Rantisi's threats have not gone unheeded in Israel's cities. People here believe him. There are security checkpoints virtually everywhere, and now, they're really checking. I had breakfast yesterday at Cafe Hillel, another reminder of Yassin. My secretary, actually, asked me to change the location. "Don't eat there this week," she pleaded. "It's not a good idea." But the point is that we're not leaving. That's exactly why Yassin had to go. So I didn't change the venue and went to Cafe Hillel.

The cafe, like Moment, is completely rebuilt, and is usually packed. It can be hard to find a table at breakfast. Not yesterday. There were six of us in the whole restaurant, plus the waitress, and the very alert guard outside the door. On the way to the cafe, walking to the cafe, I looked into the buses making their way down Emek Refa'im. Almost empty. Five or ten people on a bus, in rush hour.

When I finally got to the office, a colleague told me that on the way home on Wednesday, he was driving past one of the open air markets of Jerusalem, when an elderly woman knocked on the window of his car. She had sacks of food from the market, she showed him, and she lived a few blocks away, too far for her to walk. But she was afraid to get on the bus. Would he drive her home?

A couple of days ago, the Editorial Page of HaAretz carried its daily political cartoon, this one of a Domino's Pizza guy (yup, Dominos and Office Depot have made it here) on a motorcycle, delivering a pizza to a family. Only the family is behind sandbags, barely willing to stretch out an arm to take the pizza. That pretty much summed it up.

But the cartoon missed one thing -- why we're in this mess. Yes, for the moment, things are a bit edgy, but we've been here before. What Israelis need to remember, and what the rest of the world needs to understand is why Yassin hated us. Simply because we're here. And why we had to get rid of him. Because he had pledged to keep killing us until we left. But we're not leaving. Where would we possibly go? Even if we agreed to go, where would we go? As if Europe wants us back. Or as if it worked out very well last time we were there. Or as if the French have learned very much since 1943.

Last Sunday night, Elisheva and I went to a lecture by Aharon Applefeld, one of Israeli's preeminent novelists. Tali and Avi were out, so we left Micha by himself. He was lying on the living room couch, reading some enormous 700+ page book that he was determined to finish, and was fairly oblivious to our imminent departure. We told him that we had our cell phones if he needed us, and he should go to bed by 8:30. He barely looked up, but muttered, "OK." We knew he wouldn't go to bed on time, but we also couldn't exactly complain that a fifth grader wanted to stay up late because he was busy reading a novel.

Applefeld told his story. Of an idyllic eight years in a completely assimilated, wealthy, Jewish European home. Of his mother being shot by the Germans. Of him and his father being taken to a slave labor camp. And of his decision to flee the camp, because he knew he wouldn't survive it. And so, at the age of eight and a half, he found himself alone, in the forests of Europe, masquerading as a Christian, struggling to survive. He worked in the home of a prostitute, buying her groceries and cleaning her house, until one of her drunken clients called him a Jew. He fled. He worked for horse thieves, who would have him drop into the stables from the skylight, land in whatever he landed in and then open the door to the stable so they could steal the horses. He told of the nights he slept alone on the forest floor, of the days when he ate the moss off of trees. At the age of ten.

And I thought about Micha, exactly that age now. I wondered. If he were alone in the forest tomorrow, would he know to do that? Would he have the presence of mind to work for a prostitute, for horse thieves? Would he figure out that he could eat moss off of trees if he was starving? I doubted it. Which means we can't let that happen to him.

In the days since Yassin's death, since the palpable sense of dread has pervaded every nook and cranny of life here, I've thought of Applefeld at ten. Of Micha at ten. And then I thought of Abdallah Quran, the ten year old boy from the Balata refugee camp who was given, apparently unbeknownst to him, a bomb to carry across a checkpoint. A ten year old who tries to make a living for his family after school by transporting packages across the checkpoint, he had no idea who put the bag on his cart. The explosive had a remote control apparatus. Someone who gave him the bomb was going to use a cell phone to set it off. And presumably blow Abdallah to high heaven, too.

And people compare the two sides of this conflict?

That incident didn't make it to much of the international press. But when Hussam Abdo, the sixteen year old who tried to walk an explosive belt through a checkpoint two days ago, got caught by soldiers, there happened to be a camera crew on hand. And the whole thing was filmed. Turns out, Hussam was given 100 shekel to carry the explosive and blow it up. He was

also promised 70 virgins in heaven, he said.

The good news, I first thought, was that the Palestinian community was outraged. Tamam Abdo, his mother, said to the press, "It is forbidden to send him to fight. He is young, he is small, he should be in school. Someone pressured him." Finally.

But then, I read the rest of the interview. "If he was over 18, I wouldn't feel so angry ... then it is his decision," she said. Ah, another beautiful humanist sentiment. Or her neighbor, Sadia Abdel Rahman -- "We have to carry out serious attacks. This is not a children's game. This is an embarrassment."

I guess we all get embarrassed by different things. When Israel sent an F-16 in July 2002 to drop a one ton bomb on the home of Salah Shehadeh, then the military chief of Hamas in Gaza, we got him. Israelis were pleased about that. But a one ton bomb is an enormously powerful weapon, and in killing Shehadeh, we killed fourteen other people, including nine children. Israelis were outraged, and mortified. Shehadeh, like Yassin, deserved to die. But Israeli society was in an uproar. Not like that, people said, on the left and on the right. We can't begin to be like them. That's the whole idea of living here; that's an important part of having a country to call our own. If we're not going to be different, even better, what's the point?

Eventually, the government apologized. And the IDF changed its policy. So last September 6, when the IDF decided to get Yassin, we sent an F-16 again, but this time, with a quarter-ton bomb. The bomb worked perfectly, and the pilot hit his target. But the building was only damaged, and Yassin was scarcely wounded. And what was the reaction of the typical Israeli? Satisfaction. We'd learned something. We missed, true, but at least we were different.

I'm struck by the fact that very little coverage of the killing of Yassin has made any mention of the missed attempt on his life in September. It's because, I think, the reason that we missed reveals a dimension of this conflict that most of the world doesn't want to see. It upends the moral equivalence that the international press broadcasts. It suggests that some people in this conflict still do think about what's "acceptable" and "just." It reminds the world that there's more than one people in this region that has needed to be liberated.

We're just days away from Passover. Already the stores are filling with Passover products. Israelis are cleaning. Buying. Inviting. And remembering. Remembering Pesach two years ago, and the bloodbath called the Park Hotel. And remembering that Hamas, and Yassin, did that one, too.

Will this Pesach be quieter? Hard to know. One hopes so. Prays, in fact. But no matter what happens, there will be a certain satisfaction, even if a sad one, in knowing that people who blow up our Seder can't do so with impunity. That's the difference between life now and life when Aharon Appelfeld foraged for his food in the forest. Appelfeld grew up in the world in which people could shoot his mother and send him to die, and there was no one to fend for him.

That's what's changed. That's the bottom line. I can't imagine a decent human being feeling joy at the death of another. Not joy, no. But satisfaction? Yes. Because there has to be a price to pay for the wholesale murder of Jews. There simply must be. Anything else, Mr. Straw needs to understand, is what's truly "unacceptable." (Daniel Gordis.org Mar 28)

Since moving to Israel in July 1998, the writer has been writing on Israeli society, with a particular focus on the collapse of peace since September 2000.

Silencing Israel's Supporters By Hillel Halkin

Last week I attended an international conference on anti-Semitism - my second in a year - in Montreal. Conferences on anti-Semitism are as common as cough drops these days. It's a method of coping. When you don't know what to do about something, you hold a conference; and when you don't know whom to invite to it, you invite someone who's been to a previous conference.

The news on anti-Semitism is bad. And it looks worse from Canada than it does from the United States or Israel. Canada has a Jewish population of 360,000, which puts it behind France and Russia and ahead of Great Britain. And its Jews, like those of Europe, feel less powerful and more vulnerable than do American Jews or Israelis. They live in a country in which anti-American and anti-Israel sentiment is growing and increasingly resembles such sentiment in Europe. And they experience intimidation that is more like its European variety, too.

Indeed, coming from Israel to a conference many of whose participants were Canadian Jews and academics, I was appalled by the stories that I heard and by my own ignorance - as an ex-American who condescendingly tends to think of Canada as just the US with a passion for ice hockey - of what has been happening: a heavily anti-Israel press and media; synagogue burnings that have gone undealt with by the authorities; an atmosphere of fear in schools and on campuses that makes Jews, let alone gentiles, unwilling to express pro-Israel thoughts and feelings.

This was a theme that came up over and over. I heard it from professors, from university students, and from high school students.

* "Hardly any of the Jewish colleagues at my institution are ready to face the disapproval and hate that speaking out for Israel would expose them to."

* "On my campus, you're taking your life in your hands if you protest at a pro-Palestinian rally."

* "I tried defending Israel in a discussion in class and got shouted down without the teacher interfering."

* "If I wore a star of David in my school, it would just get ripped off." In Canada, it happens all the time.

Anti-Semitism masquerading as anti-Zionism is now rampant in many democratic countries. France is worse than Canada. England not much better than France. An Israeli journalist at the conference told me that in Italy, which she often visits because she writes for an Italian newspaper, she has to be accompanied by two bodyguards everywhere she goes because of threats that have been made on her life.

If we in Israel do not yet understand how serious all this is, it's because of one right and one wrong perception.

The right perception is that, as unpleasant as the situation may be for them, French, English, Italian, or Canadian Jews are not in any real danger. As long as they don't wear a kippa in the street, avoid looking Jewish in the wrong neighborhoods, and keep a low profile on Israel, they're fine. Anti-Semitic violence in such countries is almost always the work of Muslim immigrants, and is supported only by the lunatic fringe among non-Muslims.

The wrong perception is that if European or Canadian Jews are, with rare exceptions, not physically threatened by anti-Semitism, we in Israel are certainly not. This is to misunderstand the entire thrust of the worldwide anti-Israel campaign. It is not a purpose of this campaign to harm Diaspora Jews. On the contrary, harming them only illustrates the link between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism that the anti-Zionists are anxious to conceal. It is its purpose to silence them, as it is to silence Israel's other supporters. Such silence, if it came to pass, would be far more dangerous for Israel than all the suicide bombs that have gone off in the intifada.

Suicide bombs will not destroy Israel. Only Arab and Muslim armies or - alternatively or complementarily - severe inner demoralization can possibly do that. The creation of such demoralization - and/or of a situation somewhere down the road in which an Israel faced with superior Arab and Muslim military force will have no friends left to come to its aid - depends on first delegitimizing this country in the public opinion and political life of Western democracies. And public delegitimization takes place at precisely the point at which a cause has vocal and widely heard critics and no longer has vocal and widely heard supporters.

An Israel without friends is an Israel that will not ultimately be able to withstand the Arab and Muslim onslaught, which is why it is important to realize that we do have friends. Lots of them.

I met one on my way back from Montreal. I had flown to Toronto to catch my flight to Israel and had boarded a terminal shuttle. It was a dark, cold Canadian night, and there was no one on the shuttle but me.

"Where to?" asked the black driver in a West-Indian accent.

"El Al."

"You live in Israel? I been there. Yerooshalayim, Yam Ha-Melak, all around. Which one of the 12 tribes you from?"

I explained that we no longer have 12 tribes and that, like most Jews, I was probably from the tribe of Judah.

"Yeah, yeah, I know," the driver said. "God took 10 of you into exile. But don't worry, He'll bring you all back. I'm telling you that!"

He burst into a laugh of extraordinary good nature, brimming with glee at the surprise God had in store for me. "You're His people, my friend. He loves you. I'm telling you that!" He was, he told me as he slowed down the shuttle to get in as many words as possible before reaching our destination, a member of a Pentecostal church. There were hundreds of others there like him, he said.

There are tens and perhaps hundreds of millions of others like him - in Canada, in America, all over. Evangelical Christians are today the biggest pro-Israel group in the world. And the nicest thing about them is that they do not love us because they hate Muslims, as so many Muslims love Palestinians because they hate us. They love us for who we are, or at least for who they think we are.

The idea that, after 1,500 years of persecution by Christianity, our biggest allies are now devout Christians - and not only devout Christians but often the most unlettered, unworldly, and unsophisticated of the devout, people with whom we seem to have absolutely nothing in common - is so staggering that we haven't really managed to absorb it yet. There is so much justified suspicion and anger at Christianity on our part that we don't know how to begin to think of it. But while we're trying to figure it out, we can permit ourselves the satisfaction and gratitude of knowing that such people are out there. That's part of the good news. (Jerusalem Post Mar 29)

חג כשר ושמה