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ISRAEL NEWS

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

There Will Never be a Palestinian

Democracy Facing reality. By Barbara Lerner

Israel's Natan Sharansky is one of the intellectual godfathers of President Bush's new "democracy first" approach to the Palestinian question. Sharansky's influence is hard to miss. His influence on the views of his countrymen is another matter. Twenty-nine months of suicide bombings, shellings, and machine-gun attacks aimed at civilians have decimated the ranks of Israelis who still believe a Palestinian state could ever be anything other than the same old terror-warriors, with new and more lethal powers. When I interviewed Sharansky in Jerusalem on February 12, his political party had just lost two of its four seats in Israel's 120-member parliament, but his faith that democracy was the answer remained unshaken.

Natan Sharansky has a big Russian soul, but he carries it on a small frame, and slumps in his seat. When I sat at his soon-to-be-vacated desk in Israel's Ministry of Housing and Construction, I had to scrunch down to be at eye-level with him. When I forgot, I would find myself looking instead into the eyes of his mentor, Andrei Sakharov, in a large photo above Sharansky's head. The man once known as Anatoly wants it that way. He believes the principles he and his fellow Soviet freedom fighters went to prison for are universal principles < as real and right in the Middle East as they were and are in what was once the Soviet Union. He also believes that in the terror war, as in the Cold War, appeasing tyrants can never bring lasting peace < only the spread of democracy can. And he believes, too, that democracy is for everyone, that neither Arabs nor Palestinians are exceptions to the rule.

I offer up the Israeli everyman's objection at the outset: Polls show that 80 percent of Palestinians approve of suicide bombings. Anyone they elect will be a murdering thug. "Of course," Sharansky explodes. "It's primitive to think democracy is about elections. It's not. It's about freedom. Freedom is the key." First, he explains, you have to free people from the all-pervasive fear that is the sine qua non of all tyrannies. Give people the freedom to express themselves, to say what they really think, over time < without the fear that government goons will come and get them. That's the start of the democratization process. Elections are at the other end. They come last, after people have experienced what it's like to live free, because that < not elections < is what democracy is about. Once people know freedom, Sharansky argues, they vote to keep it. And because rulers in a democracy can't ignore what majorities vote for if they want to stay in office, they have powerful incentives to respect freedom at home and to pursue peace abroad. For tyrants, the situation is quite different. Freedom is their nemesis, and to negate it they need to demonize enemies, both at home and abroad < justifications for their brutal, suffocating control.

It's a lovely theory < majestic in its universal reach, seductive in its sunny, egalitarian assumptions about human nature and culture. And, Sharansky insists, there is powerful, real-world evidence for it. Look at Russia and all the other countries that were once slave states of the Soviet Union, all more or less free and democratic now. The transformations in Germany and Japan are even more striking. "A thousand years of Russian serfdom wasn't ideal preparation for democracy," Sharansky notes dryly. Nazi Germany and imperial Japan, too, were both democratized, and have remained democracies for half a century now.

He's right, of course, but from the American point of view, there's a major difference between the Soviet Union on the one hand, and Germany and Japan on the other. We didn't have to occupy Russia or any part of the old Soviet Union to democratize it. In essence, we enfeebled Soviet dictators, and the people of those lands did the rest themselves. It wasn't like that in Germany and Japan. Those societies didn't crumble from within, under pressure. To democratize them we had to invade and conquer, settling for nothing less than unconditional surrender. Then, we tried their leaders as war criminals, and put their people under military occupation and kept them there for years < four in

Germany, seven in Japan.

We had to de-Nazify and de-imperialize them, to institute the rule of law over ourselves, to reeducate the populace, and to remake their societies. It was certainly a success < a remarkable one < but it was a monumental undertaking, and the costs were enormous.

Surely, I asked Sharansky, you don't think Palestinian suicide bombers and the population that worships them are like the Russians, Czechs, and Poles,

able and eager to free themselves with only a little help from us? Surely you see that for these Arabs, as for the Germans and Japanese, nothing less than a full-scale, long-term military occupation with a rigorous, all-embracing reeducation program has a chance? Sharansky is no pie-in-the-sky, peace-now wimp. He doesn't flinch or dodge. "Yes," he said calmly, "that's what must be done." Incredulous, I asked, "And you think the world will stand back and let Israel do that?" "No," he replied. "Of course not. Only America can do that."

I disagree. Like Sharansky, I believe in America's power to make the world a better, safer place by expanding freedom in the Middle East. I'm a strong supporter of President Bush's plan to liberate Iraq < to end the Baathist regime and set it on the road to democracy. I think Iraq is ripe for it. Europe may be blind, but most Iraqis know that Saddam Hussein and his thugs are responsible for their miseries < not America or Israel < and they are eager to be liberated. If they can work out tribal and religious differences peacefully, sharing power in a workable federation, a relatively short occupation might suffice. I think Iran < struggling hard to dethrone her tyrannical mullahs < is riper still and can succeed, with a little help from us. I think President Bush thinks so too. I think he sees Iran as the eastern end of a great new arc of freedom, stretching across the whole northern half of the region, from Iran through Turkey. I think he intends to create that new reality < a reality Middle Eastern despots in the south will have to compete with, one their subjects will know about and envy. It's a vision that is worthy of this great nation, and achievable at a cost we can afford.

But it's unrealistic, I think, to expect anything like democracy in the southern half of the Middle East any time soon < and a dangerous illusion to expect a Palestinian democracy ever. Look, first, at Egypt, the population giant of the south. Most Egyptians still see Nasser < a megalomaniacal thug, much like Saddam Hussein < as a hero. Most still blame the same scapegoats Nasser blamed for Egypt's poverty, backwardness, and oppression: America and Israel. Egypt's current dictator, Hosni Mubarak, pretends to be our ally, but his government-controlled media is still pumping out the same old lies and excuses, still demonizing us, still pretending that Egypt's half-century of stagnation is our fault, still goading his people to channel their blind rage at us and at Israel. And what is true for Egypt is true for other southern Arab states as well.

We can't occupy them all, of course. Still, the situation isn't hopeless, because most Arab states have one important positive thing in common with Germany and Japan. In each case, when you strip away the misdirected rage, the false claims that external enemies are responsible for their failures, there is still something left < something beyond hatred and lies on which to build a non-predatory national identity. There was a Germany before Nazism < a country and people with its own unique language and culture, a culture that produced Bach and Goethe, as well as Hitler. There was an Egypt, too, long before Nasser and Mubarak < an Egypt with great periods in its past, as well as appalling ones, and this is true of most other nations of the Middle East. True, too, of many ancient peoples in the region who have been denied nationhood for centuries < the Kurds, for example, and the Berbers.

It's not true of "Palestinians." They have no past to hearken back to. No past glories, no nation or people, no unique language or history or culture. And no wonder: Until the 1960s, they didn't exist. They are as much a product of the Sixties as slogans like "Make love, not war" or inventions like the kindly, democratic Uncle "Ho-Ho-Ho Chi Minh." Before the Sixties < when Arabs from what is now Jordan, Egypt, and Syria moved west of the Jordan River to take advantage of new economic opportunities opened up by the returning Jews < they took their nationality from their countries of origin,

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or from whichever Arab country claimed sovereignty over the land at the time. They were mostly Jordanians, but all three Arab states claimed the land, and each ruled it, or parts of it, at different times. Intra-Arab rivalries notwithstanding, all Arab nations < the whole Arab world, 200 million strong < agreed from the start that the Jews would never get to keep any part of ancient Israel, that everything from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea was Arab land, and that Arabs would take back every inch of it. This played well to Arab audiences, but it made for ineffective public relations with the outside world. "Help 200 million Arabs drive a handful of Jews into the sea" was not a winning slogan in most parts of the world. And as the Israeli handful defeated the attacking Arab millions in war after war, it became a liability the united Arab rejectionist front could no longer afford.

Unable to win militarily, they resolved to attack diplomatically instead, with a relentless new propaganda war. Job One was to obscure the fact that the same old Arab Goliath was still bent on destroying the Israeli David. To do that, it needed an Arab rejectionist front in miniature < a few million dedicated Arab warriors to present a saleable image to the world, an ersatz victim image to compete with the all-too-real victim image of the Jews. And so they invented a new Arab people, "the Palestinians," whose entire raison d'etre is hatred of the Jews, based on a false claim that "their" land has been stolen from them by greedy, foreign Jewish oppressors. This new national identity gave the re-named Arabs an instant claim to a separate new state of their own, and it gave every Arab dictator a cruel new cause to champion < a new and more effective way of redirecting the popular rage at real oppression at home into rage against manufactured oppression abroad. To give that rage a permanent base, all the Arab states together made pariahs of the so-called Palestinians < popular pariahs, but pariahs nonetheless. The Palestinians were unwelcome in every Arab state but Jordan, where they form the majority < and even there, the door is shut to further immigration. Consider: A million Jews who had lived in the Middle East since time immemorial were forced out of Arab lands and into Israel, but the Arabs in Israel were locked in, goaded with a constant stream of propaganda, supplied with clandestine weapons, and given large sums of money for murdering Jews.

These Arabs will never be at peace, will never know the blessings of democracy so long as they are encouraged to cling to a false and hateful identity as "Palestinians." They are not a separate people; they are part of the Arab nation and, with few exceptions, they need to be absorbed back into it. Until they are, there will never be peace in Israel or real and lasting progress toward democracy in the southern Arab states. The biggest mistake America can make would be to keep this evil identity alive by giving it a U.S.-sponsored mini-state. The ancient land of Israel has already been divided between Arabs and Jews, into Jordan and Israel. It cannot be divided again to create another viable state. (National Review Mar 27)

The writer conducted a series of interviews with Israeli politicians, journalists, religious figures, and ordinary citizens earlier this year.

Compromised by Terror By Jeff Jacoby

In exchange for a withdrawal of US and British troops, Saddam Hussein sends word that he is prepared to share some of his power with a senior member of his Baathist inner circle. Instead of maintaining absolute control over the Iraqi state, Saddam agrees to name Tariq Aziz his official deputy. The job will carry some limited authority, such as the right to appoint cabinet members without Saddam's prior approval. But Aziz will hold office at Saddam's pleasure. He will not be in control of the country's foreign or military affairs, and the Iraqi security forces will continue to take their orders from Saddam.

Sound like a good deal? Like the kind of democratic "regime change" that George W. Bush and Tony Blair would gladly embrace? Of course it doesn't. Any arrangement that left Saddam or his henchmen in control would be an ignominious defeat for the allies and a shameful betrayal of the Iraqi people. Whatever else regime change in Baghdad entails, at a minimum it must sweep the dictator and his accomplices from power.

Why should it do any less in Ramallah?

In a signal address last June, Bush called for a radical transformation of the Palestinian Authority. "Peace requires a new and different Palestinian leadership," he said, vowing that the United States would not support statehood for the Palestinians until they had "new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror," and had built "a practicing democracy, based on tolerance and liberty." It was a demand for regime change in all but name, and its meaning was crystal-clear: Yasser Arafat and his accomplices had to be swept from power.

Yet when Arafat recently named Mahmoud Abbas -- his longtime confederate in the Fatah and PLO terrorist organizations -- as the new Palestinian prime minister, the Bush administration was all smiles. "We respond favorably to it," beamed Secretary of State Colin Powell. "This, I think, is a positive step forward." National Security Assistant Condoleezza Rice said Abbas would be

welcome at the White House. Neither seemed to care that Arafat remained firmly in place atop the Palestinian Authority, that Abbas's new powers would be sharply limited, or that a PA headed by Arafat and Abbas was the furthest thing imaginable from "new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror."

The press was upbeat, too. Abbas, reported Ibrahim Hazboun in a widely reprinted AP story, "is a veteran advocate of peace with Israel and the most outspoken critic of the 29-month-old uprising." A few days later, his colleague Karin Laub identified the new prime minister as a "pragmatist and moderate," describing his appointment as "the first real promise of ending the bloody Israeli-Palestinian deadlock."

But Abbas is no more a "moderate" than Tariq Aziz, and notwithstanding his reputation as an "advocate of peace," he calls openly for violence against Jews.

Stories about Abbas routinely mention that he is known by the nom de guerre "Abu Mazen." Few if any remark on the anomaly of a supposed peacemaker using a nom de guerre. Fewer still have noted that as recently as four weeks ago, Abbas made it clear that he does *not* support an end to the terror war against Israel.

Discussing the PLO's recent terror summit in Cairo with Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Abbas told the Arab daily al-Sharq al-Awsat on March 3, "We didn't talk about a break in the armed struggle.... It is our right to resist. The intifada must continue and it is the right of the Palestinian people to resist and use all possible means." His only caveat was that terrorism should be confined to the disputed territories -- Gaza, the West Bank, and eastern Jerusalem. Such is the nature of Abbas's "moderation."

At Camp David in 2000, Abbas was among those who pressed Arafat to reject Israel's comprehensive peace proposal, notes political scientist Dan Schueftan, a former advisor to Yitzhak Rabin. Palestinians should have no regrets about refusing Israel's offer of 95 percent of the land, Abbas has since said, "because 95 percent is not 100 percent." He insists not only that Israel surrender every inch of land occupied in self-defense in 1967 -- including the Old City of Jerusalem and its Jewish holy sites -- but also that millions of Palestinians be given an unlimited right of immigration into Israel proper. Of course, that would spell the end of the Jewish state -- just what Fatah and the PLO have sought for 40 years.

In the 1980s, Abbas wrote a book suggesting that the Nazi Holocaust had been wildly exaggerated. Zionist propaganda had inflated the number of Jewish murder victims to 6 million, he claimed -- the true figure might well be "only a few hundred thousand." What's more, he wrote, the Nazi slaughter had been carried out with the help of Zionist leaders, who colluded in persecuting Europe's Jews in order to promote Jewish emigration to Palestine. Whether Abbas still believes these grotesqueries is unclear.

But this much is very clear: An inflexible radical who supports terrorism is neither a moderate nor an advocate of peace -- even if he does speak good English and wear well-tailored suits. A lifelong accomplice of Yasser Arafat is not an exemplar of democracy and tolerance. A Palestinian Authority ruled by the same aging terrorists who have ruled it from the start -- albeit with a slight shift of powers and portfolios -- is not a "new and different Palestinian leadership."

As the Afghans deserved better than Mullah Omar and his Taliban thugs, as Iraqis deserve better than Saddam and the Baathist SS, so the Palestinians deserve better than Arafat and Abbas. President Bush was firm on that point last June. This is no time to go wobbly. (Boston Globe Mar 30)

The writer is a columnist for The Boston Globe.

We're All Israelis Now By Ezra Levant

Allies see first-hand what Israel has faced for decades

Allied troops are now finding out what it is like to be Israeli.

Like Israel, the Allied coalition has had little problem dispatching the Iraqi army in open combat.

Credible reports from one battle claimed that 300 Iraqi soldiers were killed without a single American casualty.

Lop-sided numbers like these are reminiscent of Israeli battles with its Arab neighbours, particularly the 1967 Six-Day War and 1982 battle over the Bekaa Valley.

Allied commanders report their chief opposition comes from Iraqi paramilitary guerrillas, often dressed as civilians, hiding in apartments, mosques and hospitals. Sometimes they pretend to surrender -- and then attack when the Allies let down their guard. There have also been several suicide attacks on Allied troops.

In the city of Basra, Saddam's Fedayeen -- the Iraqi version of Hitler's Brownshirts -- forced other Iraqi soldiers at gunpoint to fight against the Allies. In one case, Fedayeen dressed in U.S. military uniforms, pretended

to be Americans and called for Iraqi troops to surrender to them. Those that did so were killed.

In other words, Saddam's loyalists are resorting to terrorist tactics, including terrorizing their own people.

That's been the state of affairs in Israel for decades. Suicide bombings are a weekly event in Israel -- but they target pizza parlours and buses, not just Israeli soldiers. Palestinian bomb-makers hide munitions factories in densely crowded Arab shanties, relying on Israelis' aversion to civilian casualties.

That's Saddam's plan in Baghdad, too.

Iraq knows that its greatest weapon is western public opinion -- and that the international media and diplomatic establishment will always give Iraq the benefit of the doubt. Iraqis are already trumping up civilian casualties to discredit Allied commanders.

As if on cue, Kofi Annan, the secretary general of the UN, accepted without question the Iraqi claim that Allied commanders are massacring civilians.

Specifically repeating one Iraqi allegation, Annan said: "I would want to remind all belligerents that they should respect international humanitarian law to protect civilians. Besides, they are responsible for the welfare of the civilian population."

To Allied ears, it is shocking to hear Annan criticize American tactics, but not Saddam's. What about Iraqi executions of Allied PoWs? Or Iraqi tanks hidden in the middle of hospitals?

France's reaction was even more galling. In London last week, Dominique de Villepin, France's Foreign Minister, refused to answer a reporter's question about which side France hoped would win the war.

This perfidy is nothing new for Israel, the universal scapegoat at the UN and the European Union, and the subject of their most one-sided excoriations.

For decades, sophisticated experts have lectured us about how concepts of right and wrong don't apply to the Mideast. They have renamed terrorists "militants" and dictators as "friends" or "allies." They have cast democratic Israel as the aggressor.

On Sept. 11, 2001, the fictions of that world view were exposed. Terrorists cannot be negotiated with or compromised with. They are enemies who must be defeated. The word "evil", long out of fashion, has been taken out of storage. It is the only word that is accurate.

The Allies are now seeing first-hand what Israel has faced for decades.

And George Bush and Tony Blair are responding as Ariel Sharon does: With moral clarity -- military force, combined with humanitarian compassion.

Sept. 11 turned all of us into targets. It has forced all of us to confront evil. We are all Israelis now. (Calgary Sun Mar 31)

Double Standards in the Media By Yisrael Medad and Eli Pollak

Two wars are unfolding. One is over two years old, between Israel and the Palestinians; the other is over a week old in Iraq. The two provide ample opportunity for comparison.

Mark Lawson, writing in *The Guardian* on March 26, noted: "The history of modern warfare can be summarized as a reversal of two numbers. In the Second World War, the aim was to kill as many people as you could with as few as possible watching what you were doing. In this second Gulf War the coalition's attempted trick is to kill as few as possible in front of the maximum number of viewers."

The motivation of the coalition (as well as Saddam) is to use the media for its purposes. But do the media play the role willingly, or do they utilize the opportunity to secure the public's right to know? Are journalists being paid to risk their lives and those of soldiers accompanying them for the sake of greedy publishers or are they justified in the name of the public's need to know?

War coverage is the consummate challenge to reporters; it carries risks, but also a promise of glory. It challenges their professionalism: Must a journalist display, at all times, a sense of dispassionate objectivity?

On D-Day, June 6, 1944, Ernest Hemingway, a war correspondent, was on a ship whose commander was having a hard time finding his designated landing area. Hemingway helped him navigate. In his filed report, Hemingway wrote, "It had been a frontal assault in broad daylight. No boat was lost through bad seamanship and we had taken the beach." How many correspondents today feel comfortable using that "we"?

That "we" can also be a group of people opposed to the war. Back in February, all BBC personnel were directed not to attend anti-war marches. Their duty, they were told, is to be "independent, impartial and honest." Veteran war correspondent Martin Bell called on 24-hour news channels to "curb their excitability" over the war in Iraq. He warned against unsubstantiated reports that may help the allied cause, but later turn out to be false. The anti-war bias of the BBC was highlighted by Paul Adams, the BBC's defense correspondent, who found it necessary to accuse the BBC of exaggerating the negative military impact of casualties suffered, while at the same time, downplaying battlefield

achievements. Hearing that coalition forces were fighting "guerrillas," he responded, "It may be guerrilla warfare but they are not guerrillas. Who dreamed up the line that the coalition are achieving 'small victories at a very high price'? The truth is exactly the opposite."

To supporters of Israel, Adams's complaint is familiar-sounding. But there are additional aspects of media ethics highlighted by the Iraqi war that reflect on Israel's experience with the media. No less a personality than liberal New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd wrote, "miscalculating, the Pentagon delayed trying to take down Iraqi TV... but that target should have been one of the first so the Iraqis could not have peddled their propaganda, paraded our POW's and shown brazen speeches by Saddam."

Yet, when Israel destroyed the Voice of Palestine's radio antennas in January, 2002, the act was attacked by Prof. Mordechai Kremnitzer, chairman of the Israeli Press Council, who said, "It is not possible to silence the voice of people who have something to say, even if they arouse ire and we don't want to hear it," and by spokespersons of the European Union and the United States government.

Journalists have already been killed in the present Iraqi war. Neither Saddam nor the terrorist groups or the coalition forces who were guilty were treated this week to the same level of harshness accorded to Israel when it prevented journalists from entering a war zone. The closing down of the CNN bureau in Baghdad was received in a rather ho-hum fashion, as if the Iraqi behavior were expected and understood.

Israel has been the object of derisive scorn for "collateral damage" inflicted on innocent civilians. The killing of civilians in Iraq, as reflected in news reports, is being dealt with in a very muted fashion. If there is blame, it is placed mostly on "sneaky" Iraqis, pretending to surrender or assuming the guise of everyday folks before attacking US or UK troops.

Israel has been repeatedly accused and hounded by Physicians Without Borders for detaining PA ambulances, although the evidence is that they were used as transport vehicles for Arab terrorists and their bombs. In the guise of detached factual reporting CNN and others termed those responsible for stone-throwing, tossing of firebombs and even shooting at Israeli soldiers as "demonstrators." But now, journalists are sympathetically relating the complaints of army commanders about Iraqi soldiers using hospitals as weapons stores and of others who intermingle with crowds of civilians, using them as cover.

American Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said last week that watching 24-hour television coverage of the war in real time can skew the public's overall perception of it. "It is a breathtaking sight to see," Rumsfeld said, "It tends to be all accurate, but not in an overall context." Haaretz's Rogel Alpher commented, "Despite the colossal financial and human resources devoted by television to the war, the fog of battle is thicker than ever." Another observer, Marvin Kalb, wrote, "Purists may still worry about the problems of embedding and patriotism; realists say the rules have now changed, and it's time we all recognize we are in a war against Saddam Hussein in Iraq and one against terrorism at home. And journalists may have to bend with the winds of change."

Will the media ever view Israel in such fashion?

Yisrael Medad and Prof. Eli Pollak are, respectively, a member and chairman of the board of Israel's Media Watch. (Jerusalem Post Mar 30)

How Did Things Go Sour? By Jonathan Lipow

Only a decade ago Israel was seemingly on top of the world. The Gulf War had greatly enhanced its national security, while a flood of immigrants from the former Soviet Union had permanently enhanced Israel's demographic balance.

A sensible process of gradual economic reform was underway, the economy was booming, and our neighbors had evidently abandoned their goal of destroying our country, given that they had showed up for unprecedented direct negotiations under Israel's terms at Madrid.

Ten years can make quite a difference. Virtually none of Israel's ambitions from 1993 have been realized. Indeed, Israel seems farther away from sustainable peace and prosperity than ever. How did things go sour?

It appears that two changes in policy contributed in turning Israel's dream into a nightmare.

The first was the shift in diplomatic strategy from the multilateral Madrid approach to the Arafat-centric Oslo process.

The second was a shift in economic policy from pragmatic market reform to a puritanical obsession with the pursuit of price stability, at literally any cost.

Adoption of these new policies immediately engendered problems that should have warned us of impending danger.

With Oslo, the first signs of trouble were the sharp rise in terror attacks

that followed the withdrawal from Gaza, as well as the spike in car thefts, foreshadowing the corruption that would eventually destroy the Palestinian economy.

With economic policy, the stock market crash of 1994, the ballooning leverage on the Bank of Israel's balance sheet, rising unemployment, and the shekel's evolution into the world's most overvalued currency during the late 1990s should have warned us that something was terribly wrong.

All this evidence was completely disregarded. That is the vital clue in identifying the common denominator shared by both policies: Both the Oslo debacle and the protracted and gratuitous recession are the result of letting ideology blind decision makers to the actual results of their initiatives.

Ideologues don't let evidence get in the way of a good fantasy. Indeed, the primary motivation of ideologues is not a search for objective truth, but a need for self-expression.

As such, ideology is inherently anti-empirical.

Consider the self-proclaimed peace camp. In shifting from Madrid to Oslo, Israeli diplomacy shifted from the emphasis on democratic process inherent in the Madrid formulation to a process in which Israel would do quick deals with dictators.

This may have made sense, although I am not sure exactly why. The only thing I am sure about is that the decision was made without reference to the considerable, and not really surprising, evidence that democracies are substantially less aggressive and warlike than dictatorships.

Alternatively, consider one of the central arguments of Israel's anti-inflationary zealots, the proposition that inflation slows economic growth.

This argument may sound convincing, at least to people who aren't trained in economics.

What matters, however, is that there is simply no evidence to support the claim. Endless repetition of this claim does not make it more true.

While ideologues generally pay little heed to evidence, sometimes the gap between beliefs and facts becomes so great that this is no longer an option.

Confronted with overwhelming evidence an ideologue will unceremoniously change the facts.

Dr. Meir Sokoler, deputy governor of the Bank of Israel and one of Israel's most passionate anti-inflationary ideologues, recently cited the experience of Denmark at the end of the 1980s as evidence that "a significant cut in budget and the deficit brings about an acceleration of economic activity."

This argument is bizarre. According to the IMF, Denmark devoted 43.1% of GDP to government expenditure in 1985 and following a small reduction in 1986 and 1987, restored spending to 43.4% of GDP by 1991.

Furthermore, economic growth in Denmark has been consistently lackluster throughout the past two decades, and was particularly weak during the period of relatively small government budgets (1987-1989).

Another example: Terje Larsen, a professional peace engineer and key architect of the Oslo Accords, defended them by arguing that prior to the violence of 2000 the accords had led to an unprecedented reduction in violence for Israelis and an economic boom for Palestinians.

In reality, terror rose sharply between 1993 and 2000, while GDP per capita declined by 20% for Palestinians during the same period. What can be learned from the bitter experience of the past 10 years?

By far the most important lesson is that Israel must forcefully reject policies motivated by what the senior George Bush so colorfully characterized as "the vision thing."

Visions and hallucinations are not a good method of navigating the ship of state. Common sense based on coherent analysis provides a far better compass. (Jerusalem Post Mar 31)

The writer is vice president in charge of portfolio management and venture services at the Tel Aviv representative office of Banc of America Securities.

Children of 'Commentary' By Jonathan S. Tobin

Norman Podhoretz engineered one of the most momentous switches in American Jewish intellectual history.

It isn't often that a magazine or its editor change the course of history. But Norman Podhoretz and Commentary did just that.

Last week, a conference on "Commentary, the American Jewish Community and American Culture," was held in New York, cosponsored by the Myer and Rosaline Feinstein Center for American Jewish History of Temple University and the City University of New York's Graduate Center underscored the extraordinary contribution made by this periodical.

Commentary was more than a place where leading Jewish literary lights found a home. It was, for more than one generation of American Jewish students and writers, a sort of correspondence graduate school where they were introduced to an exciting world of thoughtful political analysis, history, literary, music and art criticism, and new fiction.

The magazine was founded in 1945 under the leadership of Podhoretz's predecessor Elliot Cohen as a liberal anti-Communist journal published by the American Jewish Committee. In the 1960s, Podhoretz and the magazine had drifted to the Left. But under his leadership, Commentary, and the growing coterie of intellectual voices such as writer Irving Kristol, soon began the long march to the Right in defense of the freedoms their fellow liberals had forsaken.

Podhoretz thus engineered one of the most momentous switches in American Jewish intellectual history, as well as that of American political discourse.

Through the magazine he would become godfather to a new movement of political thought: neoconservatism. Based in a bedrock belief that opposition to communism was the first duty of the intellectual, neoconservatives represented American Jews who understood that liberalism had lost touch with this essential truth.

It was no coincidence that the rise of neoconservatism coincided with the increasing attacks upon the State of Israel. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War it became apparent that the Left was abandoning Israel just as it had abandoned the anti-communist cause it once led.

The realization that anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism were now more at home on the Left than on the Right was also a powerful force in molding the neoconservatives.

This was a difficult transition for a group that had grown up speaking the language of the Left. But by the time Podhoretz and Commentary found themselves backing Ronald Reagan, something had changed. They were no longer dissident liberals, but rather a new and important branch of American conservatism.

The ideas that percolated in its pages found expression in some of the Reagan administration's foreign and domestic policies. Just as the founding of William F. Buckley's National Review helped jump-start American conservatism in the 1950s, so too can Commentary lay claim to the transformation of that same movement decades later.

As Podhoretz has himself written following his retirement, the term neoconservative has itself become an anachronism. Those who are now labeled neocons are actually either former liberals who are today conservatives of long standing, or young conservatives who were never liberals.

Commentary and Podhoretz have their critics. Far-right paleoconservatives such as Pat Buchanan lament the fact that the neoconservatives have eclipsed their influence. Indeed, for these paleos, "neoconservative" is virtually synonymous with Jew, and their opposition to neo-con policies is more a function of anti-Semitism than anything else.

Podhoretz and Commentary won the intellectual arguments of the 1970s and 1980s. But the magazine's voice, today raised against the terrorist threat of Islamist fascism, is needed more than ever.

Fortunately, that message is heard not only in Commentary, but in publications such as The Weekly Standard (led by Irving Kristol's son William), and in the thinking of prominent Bush administration figures such as Elliot Abrams, Podhoretz's son-in-law, and others.

The proof of the enduring importance of this slim monthly whose pages boast no pictures cannot be measured solely in the resumes of its writers but in the power of its ideas. Those ideas, rooted in a rejection of anti-American Leftism, have found expression in the rhetoric of the current Bush Administration and helped revive the spirit of a principled foreign policy implacably opposed to totalitarians.

In the past, Commentary rallied intellectuals and general readers to the defense of American democratic values. Today, the growing chorus of vituperative anti-American critics should remind us that this fight is not over.

Such ideas matter. Whether they fully understand it or not, all those who speak up for these principles are the children of Commentary. (Jerusalem Post Mar 23)

The writer is executive editor of the Jewish Exponent in Philadelphia.

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