



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee
of Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

Commentary...

The Fateful Hour Has Arrived By Caroline Glick

This week Iran presented the US with the ultimate challenge and Washington must now make a decision. Is it fighting to win?

Since the September 11 jihadist attacks on the US mainland, President George W. Bush has stated repeatedly that the greatest threat to global security is the specter of rogue regimes and terror groups acquiring weapons of mass destruction. At his January 2002 State of the Union address, the president declared that the regimes of Iran, North Korea and Iraq comprised an axis of evil and a central goal - indeed the most crucial goal - of the US-led war was to prevent them from acquiring or maintaining arsenals of weapons of mass destruction.

If we accept Bush's definition of the aims of the war, then five years on, the inescapable conclusion is that the US and its allies, such as they are, are losing this war and losing it badly. Iraq's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction was not captured by US forces who heroically brought down Saddam Hussein's regime three years ago this week. It vanished before they arrived.

Israeli intelligence reported before the US-led invasion that starting in late summer 2002 Saddam's WMD arsenal was shipped by truck convoy to Syria. Recently, documents seized from Iraq after the fall of the regime were released to the public. Those documents revealed that under the direct command of former Russian prime minister and KGB boss Yevgeny Primakov, Russian Spetnaz forces oversaw the transfer of Iraq's WMD to Syria ahead of the US-led invasion. These reports have been corroborated by Saddam's Air Vice Marshall General Georges Sada.

So rather than being destroyed or secured, Saddam's WMD arsenal was simply moved from one rogue regime with intimate ties to terror organizations to another rogue regime with intimate ties to terror organizations.

As for North Korea, 10 months after Bush labeled the Stalinist regime in Pyongyang a member of the axis of evil, North Korea announced that it had systematically breached its 1994 agreement with the US not to develop a nuclear arsenal and had harvested plutonium from some 8,000 spent fuel rods at its Russian-built Yangbon reactor. Immediately after the North Koreans admitted their duplicity, the US acknowledged that China, Russia and Pakistan had all actively assisted North Korea in developing its nuclear weapons program behind America's back.

So Bush was being played for a fool. A year after the September 11 attacks, America learned that neither its enemies nor its purported allies took Washington's war goals seriously. North Korea thumbed its nose at Bush, and Pakistan, China and Russia willfully betrayed him.

The Bush administration reacted to the ruin of its Asian strategy by pretending that it hadn't failed. Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and other top administration officials lauded Pakistan for its commitment to preventing North Korea from acquiring nuclear capabilities even as it became public knowledge that Islamabad had transferred centrifuges for uranium enrichment to the North Koreans. They said that China and Russia both knew that a nuclear-armed North Korea was inimical to their national interests and to global security even as neither Beijing nor Moscow expressed the slightest regret for their assistance to North Korea's nuclear program and gave no pledge to cease that assistance.

The Bush administration continued to negotiate with the North Koreans through the six-party framework with South Korea, Japan, China and Russia with the aim of convincing North Korea to stop developing nuclear weapons. Last February, this continued attempt to maintain a failed policy was exposed in all its preposterousness when North Korea announced that it had nuclear weapons. Again the US refused to acknowledge that its policy was a failure.

Last September, the US agreed to a South Korean proposal to offer North Korea aid and security guarantees in exchange for a commitment by Pyongyang to turn back the clock on its nuclear program. Pyongyang responded

in November by cutting off all talks in the six-party forum.

This week, the US tried again to engage North Korea at a symposium in Tokyo. Pyongyang reacted by threatening America with destruction. North Korea's Defense Minister Kim Il Chol said last Saturday that in the event of a US strike on the country, North Korea, "will mobilize its political-ideological might and military potentials built up generation after

generation and mercilessly wipe out the enemies and thus viciously conclude the stand-off with the US."

The US chief negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, responded to Pyongyang's call to obliterate America by saying, "We've got the right format, the right deal on the table - the September deal - so we have to be a little patient and realize that this is the right approach."

But the right approach to what? It may be the right approach for allowing North Korea to humiliate the US while expanding its nuclear arsenal and selling missile technology to Iran, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Saudi Arabia and anyone else who wants it. It is the right approach for placing Washington at the mercy of Beijing, which Washington believes is the only country capable of forcing North Korea to improve its behavior. It is also the right approach for ensuring that Russia, China and Pakistan believe that they can betray the trust of the US whenever it suits their purposes. It is the right approach to take, that is, if the US wishes to fail in its mission of preventing rogue regimes from acquiring and maintaining weapons of mass destruction.

It is not, however the right approach for ending North Korea's nuclear adventure. It is not the right approach for forcing North Korea to stop selling ballistic missiles to anyone who wants them. And it is not the right approach for destroying Pyongyang's ability to threaten the US and its allies with nuclear attack.

North Korea is a frightful place. It is led by a fanatical regime that carries out a systematic, monstrous genocide of its own people. It is fully capable of acting with deliberate malice and devastating depravity on an international level.

But it is alone. It has no vital natural resources that make it an attractive trading partner to states throughout the world. It does not lead, nor does it purport to lead a global movement of Stalinist millenarianism. It is not like Iran.

IRAN ANNOUNCED this week that it is a member of the nuclear club. Over the past five years this new member of the nuclear club has become the undisputed leader of the global jihad. It controls Hizbullah and Islamic Jihad. It has open and warm ties with al-Qaida. It has transformed Hamas and Fatah into its clients. Syria has become its vassal. It controls the majority of Iraq's Shi'ite politicians and militias. It is feared by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It is respected and revered by European Muslims.

With the largest proven reserves of natural gas in the world and huge deposits of crude oil, Teheran is flushed with oil and gas profits and has recently signed multi-billion dollar oil and gas deals with China. It has close business relations with Europe and Russia. It is a member of OPEC. And it is led by men who believe that they are living in a messianic age which demands millenarian behavior on the road to divine victory on earth.

Iran, the single greatest enemy of the US and everything it stands for, which has repeatedly stated its goal of destroying America and erasing Israel from the map of the world, is now on the verge of acquiring a nuclear arsenal. It already has delivery systems capable of launching nuclear strikes against Israel and most of Western Europe. Through its own Revolutionary Guards units, Hizbullah and its other terror clients, it has been actively warring against the US for 27 years.

Iran made its fastest leaps towards nuclear capabilities since the September 11 attacks. When in late 2002 Iran's secret nuclear facilities in Natanz, Arak and Isfahan were revealed to the world, the US reacted not by moving to destroy this emerging threat which it acknowledged to be the greatest threat to its own national security and to the security of the world. It reacted by backing Britain, Germany and France's attempts to appease the mullahs into giving up their nuclear weapons program.

The Europeans' diplomacy never had any chance of ending the Iranian program. Iran did not embark on its nuclear weapons program in order to be bought off but in order to have a nuclear arsenal. Yet Washington

Readers are requested to please mail contributions to: BAYT - re: *Israel News*, 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario. L4J 5V3
Annual Rates: Friend - \$36, Supporter - \$50, Benefactor - \$180. Dedications are welcome at \$120/week. Call (905) 886-3810 for further info.
See *Israel News* on the internet at www.bayt.org and www.frumtoronto.com Visit the *Israel News Blog* at www.frumtoronto.com/news/index.asp
Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the views of BAYT. Thank you to Continental Press for their ongoing support.

complimented the Europeans' worthless summitry by clearly signaling that Iran had no reason to worry about US military intervention. This it did by studiously ignoring the fact that Iran was actively warring against US forces in Iraq and flooding Iraq with its agents, spies and weapons.

To date, the US's official policy for contending with Iran is to seek redress in the UN Security Council. That is, the US has placed the responsibility for meeting what it has itself admitted is the greatest threat to global security in the hands of nations that do not share its assessment of Iran. By seeking Security Council action on Iran, the US has delegated the power for contending with the Iranian nuclear threat to China and Russia which have both assisted Iran in developing its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

Like its policy towards North Korea, the US's policy towards Iran serves not to thwart Teheran's nuclear aspirations but to facilitate them. It serves not to expand America's options for contending with this grave and gathering threat to its national security and global interests, but to limit them.

After the September 11 attacks, George W. Bush was revered by Americans and lovers of liberty around the world. His soaring rhetoric and stated determination to fight for all that is good and sacred in this world won the hearts of millions and instilled in them the hope that the great battle for civilization had been joined by a force capable of defending it.

America is the greatest nation on Earth and it does have the ability to defend the world against regimes like Iran and its allies. It can prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. It can take those weapons out of North Korea's hands. It can bring Damascus to its knees and force it to cough up Iraq's arsenal of pathogens. And no, military might is not the only way for it to accomplish these tasks.

But America cannot, and it will not accomplish any of these goals if it continues to abide by strategies and frameworks that serve only to strengthen its enemies and permit its "allies" to behave perfidiously. It cannot and will not defend the world from evil, demonic regimes like Iran's if it continues to allow the likes of the EU, Russia, Egypt and China to undercut its will at every turn.

This week Teheran threw down the gauntlet. The greatest battle of this war - the battle to prevent the world's most dangerous regime from attaining the most dangerous weapons known to man - has begun. The moment has arrived for President George W. Bush to make clear if he is, in the final analysis, the leader of the free world or its undertaker. (Jerusalem Post Apr 13)

Free Pollard, Not Barghouti Jerusalem Post Editorial

According to persistent reports, a deal could be in the works to swap convicted American spy Jonathan Pollard for convicted Palestinian terrorist Marwan Barghouti.

Pollard has been serving time for 21 years in a maximum-security federal prison in the US. Barghouti was convicted in Israel nearly two years ago on five counts of murder and was sentenced to five terms of life imprisonment plus 40 years.

Even prima facie the equation between Pollard and Barghouti is so inherently untenable that, despite the fervent desire to see Pollard set free at long last, denials that such a deal is in the works are welcome.

Pollard's espionage is no way comparable to Barghouti's homicides. Moreover, Barghouti's recidivist penchant is a foregone conclusion. In fact, once released he'd be that much more dangerous. As was the case with former Hamas spiritual leader Ahmed Yassin, years behind Israeli bars would enhance Barghouti's image and catapult him to the status of a revered hero.

Barghouti offered a clear picture of his mind-set in an interview with the newspaper Al-Ayyam published last Saturday, in which he vowed "to continue on the path of struggle and resistance," the conventional code for terror operations. He demanded the "full right of return for refugees" to Israel proper, code for inundating the Jewish state with potential millions of Palestinians, destroying its majority Jewish demographic and essence.

Barghouti also slammed Interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's convergence plan, accused Israel of having assassinated Yasser Arafat and opined that "the attempt to reach a phased peace deal utterly failed and must not be repeated under any circumstances."

Even more disconcerting is the contention that the reported swap is an Israeli initiative, the rehashing of a proposal first suggested two years ago but rejected out of hand. Such a rejection would hardly have come as a surprise. Why would the US wish to spring Barghouti?

Besides the obvious menace he'd pose to Israel directly, Barghouti's reintroduction to the scene of his crimes countermands everything America's own war against terror strives for. His offenses are cast in the precise terrorist mold that Washington has undertaken to end.

Israeli proponents of this exchange argue that Hamas's ascent to power is what revived this idea and is what could render it particularly expedient. The notion is that Barghouti, leader of Fatah-Tanzim, would function as counterweight to Hamas and, as the anarchy in the Palestinian areas increases, restore Fatah's lost hegemony - with himself at the helm.

However, the very perception of Barghouti as preferable to Hamas is inherently flawed. His rhetoric years ago may have been milder, but the deeds for which he was jailed superseded any purported moderation. And his newly restated aims and those of Hamas are all but indistinguishable.

Israeli endeavors to tip Palestinian political scales can only aggravate a bad situation. Israel already burned its fingers with such meddling, ironically by encouraging the rise of Hamas in the late 1980s as a foil to Fatah.

Releasing Barghouti would also undermine Israel's deterrence, further bereave the families of Barghouti's victims, and render Israel's judiciary a laughing stock.

In contrast with Israel's revolving-door, through which many convicted terrorists have been allowed out, it is extremely difficult to extract a convict from the American penal system.

In Pollard's case no amount of entreaties thus far could effect his release and former US president Bill Clinton even reportedly reneged on a deal with former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu to that end.

Pollard's transgression pales in comparison to Barghouti's atrocities. Pollard leaked material to America's ally (Israel) about an enemy's (Iraq's) preparations against it. American counter-espionage has incontrovertibly apprehended greater and more harmful spies, yet they weren't treated anywhere as harshly as Pollard.

Jews are currently celebrating Pessah, the festival of freedom. There's no context more suitable for Israel's premier, in his upcoming Washington visit, to put liberating Pollard from bondage at the top of his priority list. This should be done because it is what Pollard deserves, with no strings attached - and certainly not any strings connected to Barghouti. (Jerusalem Post Apr 16)

Iran, Now National Review Editorial

Four years ago, George W. Bush said his administration would not "permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons." Yet precisely that is about to happen. With Iran's announcement this week that it has begun uranium enrichment, we know that the world's most dangerous regime — a sponsor of global terror and sworn enemy of the United States that openly threatens the annihilation of Israel — is on a fast track to building an atomic bomb. If we don't want that to happen, we must recognize that our Iran policy has failed and change it — now.

Or, to be more precise, the Bush administration must recognize that it never had an Iran policy. It chose instead to second the policy devised by France, Germany, and Britain, which rested on the premise that Iran's rulers could be bribed and browbeaten into submission. This was never a reasonable assumption. Since its birth in 1979, the Iranian theocracy has shown pure contempt for the norms that govern relations among sovereign states: by permitting the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran; by declaring a fatwa on a British subject; by orchestrating a 1994 massacre at a Jewish center in Buenos Aires; by murdering 19 U.S. airmen in the Khobar Towers bombing of 1996; by subsidizing terror attacks and armed militias in Lebanon, Israel, Iraq. Is there now — was there ever — any reason to think the mullahs will play by the rules?

The problem with Iran is precisely not its nuclear program. The problem is the regime. We have every reason to think this regime would use its arsenal to threaten the U.S. and its allies, and to extract concessions inimical to our interests. Nor can we exclude the possibility that the mullahs would actually launch their nukes. Consider Hashemi Rafsanjani, that celebrated "moderate," exulting that the Muslim world will "vomit [Israel] out from its midst," since "a single atomic bomb has the power to completely destroy [it]." Nuclear deterrence operates on the assumption that your foe is rational. Things start to break down when a significant part of its ruling establishment fancies itself on divine mission to evaporate the Zionist Entity in a mushroom cloud, roll back the Great Satan, and usher in a paradisiacal rule by sharia. That's not a regime to bargain with. The goal must be to remove it from power.

This does not mean invasion and occupation. But it does mean getting serious about supporting the Iranian democracy movement. The contradiction of Iran is that its people, the most educated, moderate, and pro-Western of the Muslim Middle East, are ruled by the most aggressive Islamists in the world. It wouldn't take a large expenditure to catalyze that tension. President Bush routinely declares his support for the cause of Iranian democracy — something that, according to a dissident inside Iran who recently spoke to National Review Online, has made a deep impression on his countrymen. Why, then, has Bush's administration failed to give material aid to the Iranian democrats?

There are three things we should begin doing now. First, supporting Iranian labor unions. The Iron Curtain would not have fallen without Lech Walesa and Solidarity, and unions could play a similar role in Iran. As recently as three months ago, Iran's rulers had to dispatch the goons to crush a strike among Tehran's bus drivers, who were protesting not just their work

conditions but also the oppressive nature of their government, and were joined by demonstrators from all walks of Iranian life. The mismanagement of the Iranian economy — particularly its lack of refinery capacity — is such that a well-planned strike in the right sectors could bring the country to a standstill. Some will object that American support would discredit the unions, but let's not forget that similar things were said of Solidarity, or that there are ways of directing funds through nongovernmental channels.

Second, we should do everything we can to help Iranian student groups. Roughly 70 percent of Iran's population is under 30. These youths are the most pro-Western segment of Iranian society — and they happen to be mad as hell at Iran's rulers, who they think have isolated them from the modern world. The U.S. could galvanize that sentiment to its advantage if only it tried. A good place to start would be opening channels of communication with their leaders and repeating their message at every opportunity.

Which brings us to the third point: We should massively increase our pro-democracy broadcasts into Iran, both by funding U.S.-based Farsi satellite-TV networks and by exercising a modicum of intelligence in our Voice of America programming. VOA officials act like they're running the Columbia School of Journalism, but "balance" should count for a lot less than inspiring the Iranians to rouse themselves against tyranny and explaining to them the value of what we have over against what they don't have. We should also send them the message — through both broadcasts and the utterances of our diplomatic establishment — that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons will only isolate them and entrench the mullahs they so despise.

None of this is guaranteed to spark a revolution, but it has better odds than doing nothing. Indeed, these efforts should have begun years ago. Instead, we've waited for centrifuges to start spinning at Natanz. The sad consequence of that delay — and the world's indifference — has been to make military action against Iran much likelier. The U.N. Security Council's resolve to confront Iran looked serious for all of 15 minutes. Then China and Russia made it clear they'd block any resolute move to punish Iranian intransigence. There is talk of America's joining the EU-3 in targeted economic sanctions, but these would almost surely be ineffective. Not only does Iran's wealth come from oil — which no importing country is ascetic enough to deny itself — but there is no clear precedent of sanctions' having reformed a regime that already perceived itself as the enemy of those doing the sanctioning. The most likely consequence of sanctions would be to tie our hands and stop us from taking effective measures.

That leaves air strikes. We know where the nuclear facilities are; we have the means to target them; and we should not hesitate to do so if we reach a point where there is no other way to thwart the mullahs' atomic ambitions. While a massive bombing campaign can't stop Iran from eventually building nukes, it would delay that outcome by several years. But then what? If the mullahs stay in power, all that will change is the intensity of their lust for a bomb and the brazenness with which they export terror. Any air campaign should therefore be coupled with aggressive and persistent efforts to topple the regime from within. Accordingly, it should hit not just the nuclear facilities, but also the symbols of state oppression: the intelligence ministry, the headquarters of the Revolutionary Guard, the guard towers of the notorious Evin Prison.

Make no mistake: This is not a good option. Iran would probably retaliate with terrorist attacks against U.S. interests around the world, as well as aggressive efforts to destabilize Iraq. But the alternative — letting the mullahs go nuclear — is incalculably worse. For a quarter-century those mullahs have been fighting an undeclared war against the West with the only weapons they had: terrorism and a poisonous ideology. For a quarter-century we have failed to respond. They now stand on the brink of getting a new weapon — and this one will let them threaten the incineration of millions of infidels at the push of a button. Is this something that we — that anyone — should be willing to live with? (National Review Apr 13)

Disengagement Lessons By Sever Plocker

Flawed pullout predictions should make Olmert rethink his plan

Eight months after the withdrawal from Gaza, or what was referred to as a "unilateral disengagement," things are not developing according to the early scenario marketed to the public.

Almost nothing has materialized in the way pullout supporters promised us would happen.

The Gaza Strip did not calm down and the Palestinian Authority did not take matters there into its own hands in order to establish the Middle Eastern Hong Kong. Gaza is a no-man's land, the country of nobody. The Strip lacks a civilian regime, no currency, no enforcement of law and order, and most of the system tasked with providing the population with basic services is paralyzed, aside from the one run by the United Nations.

Armed gangs rule the narrow, derelict refugee camp streets. The only manufacturing activity is the industry of flying iron tubes that are launched to short distances. The point of launching them at Israel is unclear to anyone,

including the launching cells themselves.

Yet when you have nothing to do and you're young and filled with energy, and since your birth had only known poverty, occupation, and unemployment, you find an outlet in belonging to those ridiculous "Qassam cells."

The handing over of the border crossing with Egypt to Palestinian control also failed to lead to the expected results. The border is rather porous, checks are inadequate, and smuggling is rampant. There too, the Palestinians failed to implement their sovereignty.

Egyptian Border Guard troops received one kind of order: Preventing at any price the turning of Gaza into part of Egypt. They're carrying out this job, but nothing beyond.

The Palestinian Authority did not use the months between Israel's withdrawal and the general elections in order to reinforce its hold among Gaza residents. It was busy with internal power struggles. The elections were decided in favor of Hamas.

Fatah's armed spine was broken, some of the senior security officials left to the Gulf, and others quickly changed their political loyalty. For a while Gaza became Hamas land. Now, it's not even that: In fact, even the official Hamas has given up in the face of Gaza's collapse and left it to face its destiny.

And Israel, even though it removed its army and settlements, and even though it closed down the crossings to the movement of goods, is still stuck with Gaza as if it was a huge bone in its throat.

We didn't disengage: What is happening, and particularly what is not happening, in Gaza, continues to haunt us.

The responsibly over it, in the eyes of the world and in some ways in our own view, has not been lifted from Israel. This is complemented by the ongoing military activity against targets in the Strip, both in response to Qassam fire and in the form of targeted killings. In the eyes of Gaza residents, Israel continues to control the sea, air, and land. Only the settlers disappeared. This is good, but not enough.

Even the removal of the settlements is no longer perceived as such a huge victory by the Palestinian people. The thousands of good jobs at the settlements have disappeared, and instead unemployment and poverty grew. The ruins of Israeli communities were not cleared, even though the Israeli government pledged (or rather, was forced to) pay for the clearing. It's unclear who the guilty party is, the PA, or Egypt, or International groups.

Did Israel gain from the disengagement? Less than what its planners hoped. The United States didn't grant us even one cent in economic aid, even though in various phases of preparation for the withdrawal and upon the pullout, much was said about a special USD 2 billion grant. As of today, there's no grant.

For a short while, Israel enjoyed international sympathy, with the pullout perceived as the start of a large-scale unilateral withdrawal. Yet the sympathy is slowly evaporating, particularly following Ariel Sharon's illness.

Ehud Olmert may discover that the attitude to a Sharon-made disengagement is very different than the world's approach to an Olmert-made one. The first one fascinated the world because it appeared to be a personal sea change by a hawkish leader tired of war. The second one, Olmert's pullout, would look like - and already looks like - as an act by a centrist politician whose party received about a quarter of the vote in the recent elections.

The Qassams, of course, do not constitute a danger to Israel, but they're bothersome, annoying, and made the daily life of Gaza-area residents very difficult. And dangerous. Eventually, even if only due to the laws of probability, a rocket would land in a crowd concentration and lead to disaster.

The disengagement did not cause a rift within Israel society and didn't lead to one kind of self-reflection or another. Eight months later, its memory is vague and its lessons unclear. We prefer not to talk about it and not to mention it.

Was there a disengagement? Was there a (Gaza settlement of) Netzarim? The fact that the post-disengagement reality does not resemble the earlier scenarios and predictions should make Ehud Olmert rethink his diplomatic plans.

Would Israel really be able to unilaterally set its border vis-à-vis the Palestinians, a border they or the world would not accept? Would Israel be able to "converge" into "settlement blocs" in the West Bank and annex them? Who would finance such a move, which would cost tens of billions of shekels and not be perceived as a solution to anything? Who would prevent a tragic rift among the people? And what would be left behind in Palestine following a pretend-Israeli-withdrawal coupled with pretend-annexation?

Eight months after disengagement, the pregnancy only gave rise to question marks. (Yediot Aharonot Apr 16)

The writer is chief economics editor and deputy editor-in-chief of Yediot Aharonot.

Football Killing Fields? By Tom Gross

Outrage and disbelief as world soccer body condemns Israel, not Hamas

Israel is used to being singled out for unjust criticism and subjected to startling double standards by the United Nations, the European Union, much of the western media and numerous academic bodies. But now FIFA - the supposedly non-political organization that governs the world's most popular sport, soccer - is getting in on the act as well.

FIFA has condemned Israel for an air strike on an empty soccer field in the Gaza Strip that was used for training exercises by Islamic Jihad and the al-Aqsa martyrs brigade. This strike did not cause any injuries. But at the same time FIFA has refused to condemn a Palestinian rocket attack on an Israeli soccer field last week which did cause injuries.

With the soccer World Cup, which takes place only once every four years, just weeks away, it is a time of mounting emotion for the hundreds of millions of people across the globe who passionately follow the game.

As FIFA meets in the next few days to decide what action to take against Israel, the double standards involved could not be more obvious. Up to now FIFA, which sees itself as a purely sporting body, has gone out of its way to avoid politics, and has refrained from criticizing even the most appalling human rights abuses connected to soccer players and stadiums.

When Saddam Hussein's son Uday had Iraqi soccer players tortured in 1997 after they failed to qualify for the 1998 FIFA World Cup Finals in France, FIFA remained silent. Uday, who was chairman of the Iraqi soccer association, had star players tortured again in 1998. And in 2000, following a quarterfinal defeat in the Asia Cup, three Iraqi players were whipped and beaten for three days by Uday's bodyguards. The torture took place at the Iraqi Olympic Committee headquarters, but FIFA said nothing.

Again, FIFA simply looked the other way while the Taliban used UN-funded soccer fields to slaughter and flog hundreds of innocent people who had supposedly violated Sharia law in front of crowds of thousands chanting "God is great". (Afghan soccer coach Habib Ullahniazi said that as many as 30 people were executed in the middle of the field during the intermissions of a single soccer match at Kabul's Ghazi Stadium.)

FIFA equally failed to speak out when soccer stadiums in Argentina were turned into jails.

FIFA's silence was no less deafening when, according to the International Red Cross, about 7,000 prisoners were detained (and some tortured) in Chile's national soccer stadium after Augusto Pinochet seized power in 1973.

Nor did the organization threaten Russia with sanctions after Chechen president Akhmad Kadyrov was murdered by a bomb explosion at Grozny's Dynamo stadium.

As for the Middle East, FIFA refused to criticize the decision to name a Palestinian soccer tournament after a suicide terrorist who murdered 31 people at a Passover celebration at the Park Hotel in Netanya in 2002. (At the tournament, organized under Yasser Arafat's auspices in 2003, the brother of the suicide bomber was given the honorary role of distributing the trophies to the winning team.)

FIFA also failed to condemn the suicide bomb at the Maxim restaurant in Haifa in October 2003 which injured three officials from the leading Israeli soccer team Maccabi Haifa.

But then last week, FIFA finally found a target worthy of its outrage, and leapt into action. That target was Israel.

The international governing body for soccer condemned the Jewish state, and announced that it was considering possible action over the Israeli air strike last week on the Gaza soccer field that had been used for terrorist training exercises. The field, which had also reportedly served as a missile launching pad, was empty at the time; the strike itself came in response to the continuing barrage of Qassam rocket attacks directed at Israeli towns and villages.

Only a couple of days earlier, one of those Qassam rockets landed on a soccer field at the Karmiya kibbutz in southern Israel, causing light injuries to one person. Several other Israeli children and adults needed to be treated for shock. The attack was claimed by the Al-Quds brigades, an armed wing of Islamic Jihad. The soccer pitch is regularly used by children and it was only a matter of luck that there were not greater injuries. (Since Israel's withdrawal from Gaza last year, several members of the kibbutz, including a 10-month-old baby, have been wounded after their homes took direct hits from Qassams. Israelis elsewhere have died after being hit by these weapons.)

In an interview with the Jerusalem Post, Jerome Champagne, FIFA's Deputy General Secretary, who had personally condemned the attack on the Palestinian soccer pitch, refused to extend a similar condemnation to the attack on the Israeli pitch.

Champagne said he had discussed the matter with FIFA president Sepp Blatter and that a decision on what action to take against Israel would be announced soon. Champagne, a French national, also sent an official letter to the Israeli Ambassador to Switzerland. (FIFA is based in Zurich.)

A FIFA condemnation of Israel is no small matter. The incredible passions that soccer arouses in most countries around the globe seem to have few boundaries. For example, it was said that the only time the guns fell silent

during the Lebanese civil war was during the 1982 World Cup matches.

Individual Israelis, outraged by FIFA's blatantly one-sided decision, have been sending emails to FIFA asking why "they care more about the grass on an empty soccer pitch than the human lives saved by strikes on the Qassam launching pads."

They have also asked where FIFA is when anti-Semitic banners go up in European soccer stadiums, and there are chants from spectators about sending Jews to the gas? And where, they wonder, are the FIFA sanctions against the Arab or Asian countries that refuse to allow Israel to compete in Asia?

Other questions have been raised, too - why, for instance, FIFA has moved games from Israel because guest teams were afraid to come to Israel, but has never banned any other national teams from playing home games on account of local Islamic violence. Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey were allowed to continue playing matches at home.

In response to some of this criticism Champagne - perhaps unaware of the phenomena of some radical Jews being at the forefront of whipping up hate against the Jewish state - wrote to the Jerusalem Post saying he couldn't possibly be biased against Israel because his wife was Jewish.

In its widely circulated report on the FIFA condemnation of Israel, the Associated Press also failed to mention the Qassam rocket attack on the Israeli soccer pitch. As a result, and not for the first time, AP gave its readers around the globe an unbalanced impression of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The popularity of soccer ensured AP's story was used by dozens of news outlets - among others, Al-Jazeera, CBC News of Canada, and the Los Angeles Times. Only the Israeli press mentioned the Qassam attack on the kibbutz Karmiya soccer pitch, an attack which the Islamic Jihad website admits to carrying out.

The outrage felt in soccer-mad Israel at these astonishing double standards is all the greater since FIFA president Sepp Blatter has made it clear that FIFA should not become involved in politics. Following calls last December from German politicians that Iran should be banned from participating in the forthcoming World Cup (which starts in Germany on June 9, 2006) because of repeated Holocaust denial by the Iranian president, Blatter said "We're not going to enter into any political declarations. We in football, if we entered into such discussions, then it would be against our statutes. We are not in politics."

Indeed so emboldened does Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad now feel by FIFA's support that he announced last week that he will likely attend Iran's opening match against Mexico in Nuremberg on June 11. Holocaust denial is a serious crime punishable by a prison term of up to five years in Germany, but Ahmadinejad no doubt feels that powerful international bodies like FIFA will protect him.

Meanwhile FIFA (and other sporting bodies) continually turn a blind eye to boycotts of Israeli sportsmen.

In February, Tal Ben Haim - the Israeli national soccer team captain, who plays his club soccer for the English Premiership team Bolton Wanderers - was banned from joining his Bolton teammates for their training matches in Dubai. FIFA pointedly ignored this. So did Bolton despite the fact that the team claims to be among the leaders of the campaign to "Kick racism out of football" in the UK.

Only last week, another English club, West Ham, left their two Israeli players, Yossi Benayoun and Yaniv Katan, at home when they went to Dubai. FIFA naturally had nothing to say.

Whilst Israel is often slandered as an "apartheid state," (despite having several Arabs playing in its national team), Dubai has received no criticism for what appears to be a clear "apartheid" policy.

Indeed, were Israel allowed to compete against other Asian teams for a World Cup berth, rather than against the likes of England and France, the relatively strong Israeli team would most probably have been able to qualify for this year's World Cup.

Not all is rotten in world soccer. Some individuals still seem to know right from wrong. Last week, Ronaldinho, the Brazilian superstar widely regarded as the best current player in the world, donated signed footballs and shirts to Israeli child suicide bomb survivors, saying he hoped his gifts would "warm the hearts of the children who have suffered so much."

But FIFA, meanwhile, apparently thinks it is OK for Palestinian terror groups to continue targeting such Israeli children, firing missiles from the Gaza Strip, even though Israel has left the area. (National Review Apr 11) *The writer is the former Jerusalem correspondent for the London Sunday Telegraph and New York Daily News.*

חג שמח