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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

of rabbis Shlomo Aviner and Yuval Sherlo, professors from Bar-Ilan and Hebrew University, and the words of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe and Rav Kook as well as, of course, Rashi and Nachmonides.

This community claims as its own not only Kook and Soloveitchik, but Agnon and Bialik too. We don't only look to Mizrachi founders Meir Bar-Ilan and Shmuel Haim Landau, but to Herzl, Ben-Gurion, Ahad Ha'am and

Commentary...

Don't Count Us Out Yet By Ira Slomowitz

There has been much glee on the haredi Right and the secular Left over the impending implosion of the religious Zionist camp. Conventional wisdom has it that religious Zionism will come to an end with the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, with the vision of Israel as reishit tzmihat geulatenu ("the first flowering of our redemption") rendered meaningless.

The haredim are waiting with open arms to welcome us back to the fold as brothers who lost their way when they put their faith in Zionism. The secular Left, now post-Zionist, will be glad to be rid of the last remaining organized opposition to the de-Judaization of the State of Israel.

Even the remaining Zionist Left is hoping that that last obstacle to peace and normalcy will finally be out of their hair - leaving no one to remind them that they too once cared about the people and its land, literature and music.

We cannot even look to the Revisionists, the heirs of Jabotinsky and Begin, who were too embarrassed to march, literally and figuratively, with their religious Zionist allies. They too await the demise of religious Zionism so they can go back to building their party in the image of their historic nemesis - the old, corrupt Mapai.

Is this the end? Has religious Zionism, the original Mizrachi and Hapoel Hamizrachi movements, become irrelevant? Does the movement that seemed a short time ago at the peak of its energy and standing really face a simple, if not quiet, end after "disengagement"?

IT IS a bit premature to plan a good-bye party. Religious Zionism is still the most vibrant and pluralistic movement in Israel today. Optimist that I am, it seems to me that religious Zionism will react with the productive power and force that has built it into if not the most politically astute player in the country, then the most pluralistic, dynamic and productive of the forces at work in Israeli society.

If we look at the reaction of the secular Left and the haredi Right to the dismantling of their sacred cows we see the reactions of dying and irrelevant social movements. The secular Left has over the last decades taken two ideas as its own: the Oslo peace process and the socialist welfare state. Both have proven not only unworkable but disastrous to Israel.

The haredi Right hasn't fared too well either, coming face to face with issues that have impoverished and devastated what could have been a productive community. An inability to understand that an elitist ideology cultivating Torah study to the exclusion of all other pursuits has no place in mass society has crippled the haredi leadership's ability to contend with real-life issues like feeding families, raising productive children and defending the Jewish people from violence.

And we have not even touched on the haredi failure in dealing with the big issues of the last 100 years - Zionism, the future of European Jewry, the place of America in Jewry's future.

THIS LEAVES us with the religious Zionists, who this summer will also have to come to terms with a challenge to their way of life and ideology. Again, it may be optimistic of me, but I think that when the time comes and the anger and feeling of betrayal recede, religious Zionists will be able to go back to their own reservoir of ideas, plans and dreams and regroup to be an even stronger and more positive force in Zionism than it ever was.

Religious Zionist communities are by their very nature both pluralistic and attuned to change. Praying together in the same synagogue you find people who are rabbis, doctors, plumbers, lawyers, bus drivers and professors. Sitting next to each other every week in shul we find people reading and studying the words

Jabotinsky. Unlike the haredim, we can look to the West and to science, philosophy and psychology to allow us as individuals and as a community to regroup.

Our children will still be raised with the ideals of Torah va'Avoda, which encourage a dedication to army service, intellectual pluralism, community service and family and communal life based on belief in God, the people of Israel and mankind.

Where religious Zionism has failed has been in the political sphere. We as individuals have taken seriously the challenge to build a Jewish state, but have not supported the politicians who claim to represent us.

The National Religious Party, for all the good it may have done, is a factional party, while its prospective constituents feel a part of the nation. We don't vote for the NRP en masse because we are not a bloc like the haredim, nor an ethnic group like Shas. There can be no comparison between the failure of the NRP and the fantastic success of the haredi parties to deliver for their constituents. This is because the haredi population - at least as portrayed by its leadership - is monolithic and unbending, while the religious Zionist ethos continues to be one of self-sacrifice and compromise.

This summer will see the best religious Zionism has to offer. There will be emotion and intellect, power and silence. Some will resist what they view as a betrayal, some will acquiesce all the same. Others will support the withdrawal while feeling the pain of evicting good Jews from their homes. Sadly, we will see a small group of violent offenders whom the press will portray as the true face of religious Zionism.

We will survive the ordeal not because we are unified but because we are pluralists by nature. After disengagement there will definitely be some religious Zionists who will give up on Zionism or on religion. But most of us will continue as a community to pray, to learn Torah, to study the sciences and the humanities, to work, to defend the country and raise our children as Jews and Israelis.

I don't doubt that there will be trouble. I also don't doubt that, in the end, the haredi

and secular leadership will be disappointed when we pick ourselves off the ground, dust ourselves off and continue to be in the vanguard of building the only Jewish state we have.

The good-bye party for religious Zionism will have to wait. (Jerusalem Post Apr 20)

The writer, a translator and weblog author, lives in Kfar Saba.

This week's issue is dedicated
 in commemoration of the first yahrzeit of
Tali Hatuel and her four daughters,
 killed in cold blood by Arab terrorists.
 Tali, eight months pregnant with her fifth child, was
 driving with Hila, 11, Hadar, 9, Roni, 7, and two-
 year-old Meirav on their way to take part in an
 event on behalf of Gush Katif, where they lived,
 when the brutal murders occurred.

חג כשר ושמח

In Every Generation By Barbara Sofer

I was recently listening to a European professor, a pacifist with truly impressive humanitarian credentials, as she described the suffering of the Palestinians under "occupation." Suddenly I realized there was no mention of the war they launched in September 2000. We Israelis were cast as the familiar unrepentant evil empire, lacking sensitivity, and the sole source of Palestinian misery. Conspicuous by their absence were even the token recognition that Israel might have security concerns, and the usual nominal condemnation of terror.

Had the speaker slept, Rip Van Winkle-like, through the past half decade and missed the headlines about bombers ripping apart buses and cafes, murdering doctors and nurses as they came home from work and targeting teenagers out at a discotheque? Of course not. She'd simply waved away that silly violence as a justifiable reaction to occupation; it was something that we

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Israelis needed to accept. Camp David, Taba, Sbarro and the Park Hotel weren't landmarks on the internal map of her world view.

Hers was the clearest articulation of what I see as a trend of "intifada denial," a phenomenon in articles domestic and foreign that urges us to get on with the peace plans and behave as if we were back in the heady summer of 2000. Remember back then how we were expecting so many millennium tourists that we were urged to take home pilgrims to cope with the overflow?

Intifada-denial is a dangerous error. Even for Israelis who enthusiastically supported Oslo and Camp David, four years of violence has forced a reckoning with reality. The pointless murder and savage mutilation of civilians, coupled with the images of celebratory joy by Palestinians as buses were torn to pieces and the Twin Towers crumbled had to be an awakening. Anyone who is concerned about peace in the Middle East would be nuts not to factor in this hatred.

Would that we could turn the clock back to 2000. Let's imagine what would have happened if the Palestinian people had invested their considerably energy, not in violence but in restructuring the PA by accepting Ehud Barak's plan at Camp David.

A nascent Palestinian state could have been celebrating its fifth anniversary. Young leadership could have reformed the corrupt mechanisms of government instead of devising plans for recruiting and dispatching teenagers as human bombs. The techies who design tunnels and bomb factories could have been turning out air-conditioners and gas cooking grills, building houses, improving their highway system and designing computer programs.

The billions of euros poured in by the Europeans would have supported these projects, as well as constructing bright new schools, hospitals equipped to treat cancer and prevalent genetic diseases.

How many playgrounds and sports centers could have been built with the money spent on Kassam rockets alone? Soccer teams from Gaza City and Jenin would be competing in regional leagues. Jericho could have become the Monte Carlo of the Middle East. It has far better weather. PA educational television could have been highlighting talented vocal artists and ambassadors, paid for by commercials for new colleges offering badly needed specialties.

A population with health problems frequently caused by marriage within the family could be in waiting rooms for preventative check-ups instead of waiting at checkpoints. Luxury hotels on the Mediterranean would be offering kosher-for-Pessah vacations. We could have been tearing down walls instead of investing precious resources in building new ones.

BUT, OF course, this is more than a question of wasted opportunities. So many are dead, so many have lifelong disabilities. As a society we have become terror survivors. The term "terror survivor" was actually coined in this "intifada" by a Jerusalem woman named Shoshana Gottlieb. She was shot in the spine on the way home from work. Because she'd been bending over to put orange peels in a plastic bag on the floor, she wasn't killed. The terrorist who shot her for pay later complained that he didn't get his money because she'd survived.

Gottlieb, a mother of five, was speaking in Washington, and visited the Holocaust Museum there. She was surprised and impressed that so many average Americans were waiting in long lines for the exhibits. She suddenly realized that she wasn't just a victim; that, like her parents who had been in Auschwitz, she was a survivor too. She wanted to stand up and shout it, but of course she couldn't. Shoshana is confined to a wheelchair.

We're in the midst of preparing for Pessah, the national holiday in which it's our obligation to pass on to our children the message of the joyous, divine moment of liberation from slavery. I know it kind of throws a damper on the party, but we're also obliged to remember that in every generation someone tries to destroy us.

Imagine reading those lines of the Haggada at the Pessah Seder at Shoshana Gottlieb's home. The *intifada* was, indeed, another of these malevolent but futile attempts to destroy us. Were that it wasn't so.

If we don't remember, we can't expect others to. Nor will they be able to understand the poignancy of our eternal longing for "Next Year in Jerusalem." (Jerusalem Post Apr 21)

Fight Disengagement, Not the Army By Shaul Goldstein

These days anyone who disagrees with the views of long-time settlement movement leaders Elyakim Ha'etzni, Daniella Weiss and company earns the dubious title "leftist." Ha'etzni and Co. have the monopoly on knowledge, wisdom and prophecy. The rest of us are supposedly in the dark.

When did the settlement movement lose its patience for other opinions? Has Ariel Sharon succeeded in imposing his non-democratic culture on us?

A month ago there was a *sulha* (reconciliation) event with the heads of the Druse community in Dalyat el-Karmel. It was attended by members of Knesset, representatives of Gush Katif, rightists from the center of the country and a representative of the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

One of the members of Ha'etzni's movement, "Gamla shall not fall again," called on soldiers to refuse orders and warned Druse leaders that "if a Druse soldier carries out an uprooting order the whole community will be stained."

Likud MK Ehud Yatom got up, condemned the call to refuse orders and

rejected out of hand the idea of smearing Israel's loyal Druse community. He said the Druse didn't have to "prove" their loyalty to the state – the evidence was there, in the graveyards. For that he was booed by some of "our" people to the point where he got up and left. And Ehud Yatom is one of the settlement movement's most loyal supporters.

Many leaders of the campaign against Sharon's plan have called on the rest of the movement to come out, by the thousands, head for the areas to be evacuated and prevent the uprooting with our bodies. With our bodies?

It is clear to all that a passive struggle, even a tough one, will not stop this disgraceful expulsion. The IDF has patience and the ability to bring in reinforcements and it will not stop until the terrible mission is carried out. Only serious violence – or worse – could bring the heads of the army or the government to understand what is happening and call a halt.

IN TRUTH, I too want to shout at the prime minister: "Stop this terrible, destructive plan. You are ripping apart the nation and the land!"

But I won't show my frustration through violence, nor via anarchy. Because one is never extreme enough for those who are yet more extreme. All the revolutionary leaders in the world found themselves beheaded or thrown into jail by those more extreme than they. Anarchy can begin with a just cause and end in dangerous chaos.

If 5,000 or 100,000 people can change a legal decision by the Knesset or the cabinet via brute force, tomorrow every 1.5% of the population will be imposing its good or ill will on the rest: They will force through work on the Sabbath; opening stores selling pork; uprooting graves when the real estate people feel like it; preventing kashrut in the IDF, and so on and so on. Anarchy.

We, the national religious public, consider ourselves the country's moral elite. We know many more challenges lie ahead in the struggle over the face of Israel – the nature of public life, Shabbat, marriage and divorce, conversion, the status of the High Court of Justice and the rabbinic courts, school curricula and the state's attitude towards sacred values.

And, of course, the struggle continues over parts of the Land – Jerusalem, the Golan, the Jordan Valley, Judea, Samaria, the Galilee and the Negev. With so much to do tomorrow, how can we sleep tonight?

But instead of making the bed in such a way that we can get up out of it the next day, we are planting its legs in a murky swamp and saying, "We'll talk after the flood." But "after the flood" there won't be anybody to talk to. We are a small nation in an ocean of hatred. We need each other. Senseless hatred got us exiled from our land; only through "senseless love" will it, and we, be rebuilt.

I hate the uprooting plan and have not given up on the struggle against it. I call on every person who is committed to the values of liberty, freedom and Zionism to raise the banner of this struggle, to fight for the soul of the nation – through information, education, protest, and the kind of passive resistance that is not liable to deteriorate into violence.

I intend to be there on the day of reckoning, along with hundreds of thousands, publicizing the truth about the Palestinians' intentions toward us.

But if, God forbid, we fail, we must not "burn down the house" – for how, then, shall we live in it? (Jerusalem Post Apr 17)
The writer is head of the Gush Etzion Regional Council and deputy head of the Yesha Council.

Does Israel Want Palestinian Democracy? By Jeff Jacoby

During their press conference in Crawford, Texas, this week, President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon referred several times to Palestinian democracy. Bush, for example, mentioned his "vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side." Sharon said the Palestinians should "choose the path of democracy and law and order."

But there was little in their words or body language to suggest that this democracy talk was anything more than lip service. An Arab Palestine in which ordinary citizens could freely criticize their rulers? In which political power wasn't monopolized by terrorist groups? In which the government didn't stoke the fires of anti-Semitism in order to deflect attention from its own corruption? In which there was freedom of speech and conscience? In which the outcome of elections wasn't predetermined? No -- that sort of genuine and vibrant democracy seemed far removed from anything that Bush or Sharon was expecting, let alone demanding, from Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority.

In Sharon's case, this comes as no surprise. Like his predecessors dating back to Yitzhak Rabin, Sharon has never regarded the democratizing of Palestinian society as a priority. Quite the contrary. Believing that only an iron-fisted ruler could suppress terrorism and make peace, Israeli leaders have actually welcomed Palestinian autocracy. In a notorious comment early in the Oslo years, Rabin assured Israelis that Yasser Arafat would be able to crack down on terrorism since he, unlike Israeli authorities, could operate *"bli bagatz u'bli betselem"* -- unhampered by a supreme court or by human rights groups. The absence of Palestinian democracy and civil liberties, far from being seen as a root of terrorism, was hailed as a boon in fighting it.

But if Sharon has never believed that Arab democracy is essential to peace and progress, the same can't be said about Bush. No contemporary

political leader has championed freedom and self-government for the people of the Middle East more fervently. None has argued with more conviction that the key to ending terrorism and the fanaticism that spawns it is decent, democratic governance. None has proclaimed a more sweeping doctrine of liberation and human dignity. "It is the policy of the United States," he avowed in his second inaugural address, "to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."

In recent months, the bubbling of democratic ferment has lifted hopes across the Middle East. In Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, even in Syria and Saudi Arabia, an "Arab spring" is beginning to transform what has been till now the most reactionary region on earth. Sooner than anyone predicted, Bush's faith in democratic revolution has begun to bear fruit -- to seem not just idealistic, but realistic.

If that faith should have special relevance anywhere, it is in the Palestinian Authority. For it was with regard to the Palestinians that Bush first expressed the idea that diplomatic gains and international legitimacy must be linked to democratic reform. In June 2002, he declared that before there could be a Palestinian state, there would have to be "a new and different Palestinian leadership . . . not compromised by terror." Palestinian society, he said, must become "a practicing democracy based on tolerance and liberty."

But with no corresponding Israeli interest in promoting Palestinian reform, Bush's principled stand came to naught. Arafat was shunned, but Sharon embraced Arafat's longtime crony Abbas -- a PLO veteran deeply "compromised by terror." Instead of making Palestinian progress on human rights and freedom the price of further Israeli concessions, Sharon announced that Israel would unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip and expel the Jews living there. Sharon's retreat will do nothing to encourage democracy. It will simply condemn a million Gaza Arabs to the permanent despotism of the Palestinian Authority.

In Crawford, Bush loyally described Sharon's plan as "courageous," but he must know that it is nothing of the sort. It is a blow to Israeli democracy no less than to Arab democracy, and a blow to the cause of Middle East freedom for which the United States is sacrificing so much.

For the first time in Israel's history, the United States is led by a president determined to see liberal democracy take root in the Arab world. For the first time, the Arab Middle East is alive with democratic possibility. Never has there been a better opportunity to transform Palestinian society from a dangerous, hate-filled dictatorship into a civilized, self-governing democracy. If Israel squanders this chance to nurture liberty and tolerance in its own back yard, it may never get another. (Boston Globe Apr 14)
The writer is a columnist for The Boston Globe.

The Bush Administration Has Some Explaining to Do on Hamas.

By Andrew C. McCarthy

Back in July, the Justice Department held a bells-n-whistles press conference to announce a major case: a 42-count indictment, charging seven men and an ostensible charity with underwriting Hamas to the tune of nearly \$60 million. Hamas, a ruthless terrorist organization dedicated to the annihilation of Israel and responsible for numerous gruesome attacks that have claimed the lives of hundreds of victims - including Americans - has been formally designated as a terrorist organization under various U.S. laws for many years.

In announcing the indictment, then-Attorney General John Ashcroft could not have been more straightforward: "To those who exploit good hearts to secretly fund violence and murder, this prosecution sends a clear message: There is no distinction between those who carry out terrorist attacks and those who knowingly finance terrorist attacks. The United States will ensure that both terrorists and their financiers meet the same, certain justice."

Evidently, Scott McClellan did not get the memo. At his press briefing Wednesday, President Bush's spokesman was asked about the very real possibility that Hamas could come to dominate what will pass for the "legislature" of the Palestinian Authority (PA). There followed this stunning exchange:

Question: In the event that Hamas, a terrorist organization not yet disarmed by the PA, wins a majority in the legislative PA, will the Bush administration still send \$350 million U.S. taxpayer dollars to the PA, or not?

McCLELLAN: It's - the one thing that you see when people have elections that are free and fair is that they tend to choose people who are committed to improving their livelihood, not people who are committed to terrorist acts. And I think if you look back at the previous Palestinian elections, the people that were elected, while they might have been members of Hamas, they were business professionals. They were people that ran on talking about improving the quality of life for the Palestinian people and addressing their economic needs and addressing other needs that are important to them - not terrorists. [Emphasis added.]

This assertion, by the public face of the Bush administration, is breathtaking. Here's hoping it will be corrected, resoundingly, with due haste.

What is McClellan thinking about here? All terrorist organizations engage in this kind of beguiling propaganda. That Nazis had lots of spiffy spokesmen

talking about improving people's lives. So does the IRA. So does Hezbollah. Osama bin Laden's construction concerns built roads and infrastructure to improve people's lives in Sudan and Afghanistan - all the better for ingress and egress to the many terror training camps he ran in those countries with impunity.

The rationale for the Bush presidency, the bedrock basis for reelection, is that the President has been clear-eyed and unflinching on the central issue of the day: the threat posed by militant Islamic terrorism. Again and again, he has said it: Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. This was the firm foundation of the Bush Doctrine - no quarter for terrorists, no place, no how. And no exceptions for the Palestinian Authority.

We have structured our law around it. Numerous people have been prosecuted under beefed up laws that forbid providing any kind of material support to terrorist organizations. In case after case, those defendants plead the same thing - what we might now call the "McClellan Defense": "Sure the government might say they're a terrorist organization, and sure they might mass-murder civilians, but they do a lot of good, too. They run charities. They run social service organizations. They have a lot of good business people who talk about improving the quality of life. I was only contributing to this happy-face side of the house, not the bad terrorists."

The defense gets laughed out of court, because most people are not fools. As a practical matter, people know dollars are fungible. If you give money to a terrorist organization - like the \$350 million McClellan indicates we are thinking about giving to a Hamas-dominated PA - you don't control it; the terrorists do, and they decide whether to channel it to healthcare or bomb-building.

More importantly, as a behavioral incentive, people understand and endorse what antiterror law seeks to achieve. If an organization practices the savagery of terrorism, if it seeks political accommodation by murdering its way to the bargaining table, it must forfeit any right to be heard or, bluntly, to exist. No matter how many hospitals and charities it runs. No matter how many nice men in nice suits it trots out to prattle about social justice. End of story.

President Bush has always seen the likes of Hamas as Hamas - i.e., as thugs, not businessmen. It was because of this that he was preferable to Senator Kerry, who saw terrorism as a problem to be managed in conjunction with the international community and its nuanced view of the world's Hamases as "political resistance movements" that, alas, occasionally strap explosives to adolescent suicide bombers - a somewhat less-than-nuanced way of killing lots of civilians.

It was because President Bush insisted, as a premise of his "roadmap" for Middle East peace, that terrorism be halted and terror groups be disarmed, that he was preferable to President Clinton, who labored eight long years trying to groom an incorrigible terrorist, Yassir Arafat, into a statesman - in a "peace process" that bred the Intifada and an ever-rising death count.

If McClellan is to be taken seriously, it seems we are back to nuance and grooming. Is he to be taken seriously? (National Review April 18)

The writer, who led the 1995 terrorism prosecution against Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman and eleven others, is a senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

Pretty Man By Sarah Honig

There was Richard Gere in Jerusalem, still every bit - white coiffure notwithstanding - the Hollywood hunk of his younger years, with amazing facial bone structure, a boyish, toothy grin and an adolescent knack for spouting superficial slogans about mutual understanding, international cooperation and nonviolence.

How cute! Mind you, charmers like Gere charm their way into high places and can impose on the schedules of elder statesmen and self-professed deep-thinkers like our own ever-sprightly Shimon Peres. Chummily the twosome chatted before the cameras, sharing chic clichés of brotherly love, saccharine righteousness and, never to forget, the "New Middle East."

Then someone asked Peres which Gere movies he'd seen. My Fair Lady, the deputy PM chimed instantly. Common wisdom has it that he meant to say Pretty Woman. In any case, with greater things - like global harmony - at stake, Gere seemed unoffended.

The pretty man displayed equal magnanimity in Ramallah, when he posed for other cameras with Mahmoud Abbas, that noted humanitarian who engineered a few terror atrocities, denied the Holocaust and now purports to promote peace. The next day the PA daily Al-Ayyam captioned the photo: "President Abbas with the British ambassador."

But Tinseltown's suave schlemazel persevered. Lesser egos might be bruised, but Gere's ego is bigger than that. This captivating crusader for justice has taken it upon himself to raise us benighted natives to his standards of boundless goodwill. He brings with him profound erudition, experience and insight about the plight of our pitiable region, enabling him to offer the ultimate catchy, kitschy cure to all that afflicts us.

We're not the first he's tried to uplift and/or reform. The tribulations of Tibetan refugees in Nepal touched him back in 1978 and he spared no effort to demonstrate how compassionately he commiserated and empathized. In

the Eighties Gere zeroed in on Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador. He brought crayons to displaced peasants to help them illustrate their traumas.

"If I can feel the pain of another person, it's the same as my pain," Buddhist dabbler Gere pontificated in a recent interview with the Survival International organization's bulletin. "When they're hungry, I can relate it to the times I've been hungry" - in all likelihood when dieting. In the same interview, though, he also listed the bad guys who harm tribal and indigenous folk. "The US," he intoned reprovingly, "is providing expertise for this kind of horror and human rights abuse. And if it isn't the US, it's Argentina, Britain or the Israelis."

THEY YOU are. We plainly aren't worthy of his sympathy. The yet-vulnerable remnant of the world's most persecuted people is chided for not facilitating shallow sanctimony by committing altruistic suicide (just as nonviolence guru Gandhi proposed on the eve of the Holocaust, thereafter condemning Jewish victims and survivors for failing to nobly self-destruct). Yet Arab Nazi-torchbearers, whose bestseller list is topped by *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols Of The Elders Of Zion*, are portrayed as downtrodden underdogs.

They mocked Gere's presumption last January, when he broadcast a TV commercial urging them to participate in their then upcoming elections. Sure of the moral sanction of his celebrity, he cheerfully announced: "Hi, I'm Richard Gere and I'm speaking for the entire world. We're with you during this election time. It's really important. Get out and vote."

Our circumstances here are far more complex than populist purveyors of fantasy and professional utopians like Gere can comprehend. Our travails are nothing like he imagines when seeking to shower us with the benefit of his infinite smarts. There's no panacea in the synthetic salvation proffered by stylized icons of spiritual virtue.

It's charitable of Gere and his fellow glitterati to try to spark up our drab existence with their electrifying visits, but announcing the dawning of a new era of accommodation and informing us of suddenly improved opportunities for coexistence isn't enlightening. It's blinding our eyes to the dangerous reality that lurks behind deceptive declarations and counterfeit cease-fires. It's whitewashing corrosive hate and making believe that embellishing the hideous will change it.

Pacifists toyed with the masses' minds precisely thus in the 1930s, creating the climate for appeasement and emboldening Hitler. Then, as now, delectably simplistic solutions did incalculably more damage than good.

Why should any Hollywood ham assume that his fame equips him with a license to butt in, and that we're all bound to bow before his own inordinate esteem of his intellectual and ethical stature?

If Gere's script for our future bombs, only we will pay. He won't stick around to face the grisly consequences. He'll have found other fashionable causes and leisure-time larks. It'll be no skin off his perfect nose. The peace he peddles is, alas, as real as the British ambassador's stirring performance in *My Fair Lady*. (Jerusalem Post Apr 15)

Israel's Big Gamble By Cal Thomas

After meeting on Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, President Bush said, "The United States is committed to Israel's security and well being as a Jewish state, including secure and defensible borders. We're committed to preserving and strengthening Israel's capability to deter its enemies and to defend itself."

The president did not say what he meant by such a "commitment," but it is hard to accept that Israel's security is preserved and strengthened when the American government, over several administrations, has pressured various Israeli prime ministers into relinquishing land to its sworn enemies.

The two sides haven't even gotten to the road map yet and are still in what might be called the "pre-road map stage." But Sharon has said that even in this stage, certain conditions must be met before moving to the road map, itself.

These, reasonably, include a full cessation of terror, violence and incitement, the dismantling of terror groups and collection of their weapons, as well as the cessation of smuggling of terrorists and weapons, particularly from Egypt, through the Gaza Strip and into Israel.

None of these conditions, which are spelled out in the road map, have been met, but that does not deter President Bush, or those who have preceded him, from pressuring Israel to give more.

On every previous occasion when Israel has caved to U.S. pressure and ceded territory vital to its own defense, the Palestinian and Arab side has behaved like a giant boa constrictor. It swallows its prey, rests for a bit to digest it, and then starts looking for more.

The Bush Administration wants to send additional tax dollars to the Palestinians to build infrastructure. If new Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas wants money for Palestinian infrastructure, he can draw on considerable amounts socked away in secret Swiss bank accounts by the late Yasser Arafat.

According to Issam Abu Issa, former chairman of the Palestine International Bank, Arafat misappropriated hundreds of millions of dollars, and he and some of his cohorts became millionaires while they allowed many Palestinians to live in squalor. Read all about it in the fall 2004 issue of *Middle East Quarterly*.

If one visits the State Department's Web page on which the "road map" appears, one finds the headline "A Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict."

The key words are "performance-based." So far, it is only Israel that has been doing the performing. The Palestinians have limited their performance to lip service and meaningless gestures.

In the past, the Palestinians were happy to reduce incidents of terror in order to get the next piece of land. After they got it, the terror resumed because terror is at the center of their strategy to capture all the land. What they don't get by intimidation, they will try to take by all-out war at the appropriate time.

Phase One of the road map was supposed to be completed in May, 2003. It called for "ending terror and violence, normalizing Palestinian life and building Palestinian institutions." Since not one of these objectives has been realized, even in the "pre-road map" period, how could anyone other than a cockeyed optimist believe that the Palestinians are serious about co-existing with Israel?

Sharon has repeatedly said that moving forward depends on these steps. Yet he acknowledges the problem of continuing terror, although at different levels of intensity. So, if it is a condition for "moving forward" that the terror completely stop, but yet the terror continues, why is Israel moving forward anyway?

Doesn't he make the case against the very policy he is implementing, which includes the uprooting of thousands of Jews in Gaza (along with the evacuation of their cemeteries and synagogues)? It was none other than Sharon who urged these Jews to live in Gaza in the first place.

The flaw from the beginning has been the belief that what Israel does or doesn't do affects the conduct of her enemies, whose policy remains the elimination of Israel - by hook, by crook or by road map. (Jewish World Review Apr 14)

Loyalty to our Land and People By Yehudit Tayar

The Hebrew title "Sar HaBitachon" is pathetic. "Bitachon" in Hebrew means security and "Sar" means Minister. What security is Shaul Mofaz ministering? I just came back from Katif where I have been fortunate to spend a great deal of my time for the past thirty years. The officers in our army cannot look us in the eye. They sit helpless while dozens of missiles hit Jewish civilian and military targets. They sit helplessly due to direct orders from this so-called minister of security. They know as we do that something can be done but that they have been told not to do anything even though 100 missiles have already hit us.

The launchers of these deadly missiles are televised and aired on Israeli T.V., so it is certainly not a question of finding them, only eliminating them. The callous policies of abandonment of citizens of Israel by this government are painfully reminiscent of the abandoning of one of our soldiers to bleed to death in the Tomb of Joseph under the orders of an Israeli government. That was the first time that I felt ashamed to be an Israeli.

Today I am ashamed for the Prime Minister, the so-called Defense Minister of Israel and all of those elected to office in order to give us security and protection because they have deliberately decided not to do so. While Mr. Sharon is off in the United States meeting with President Bush the citizens of Israel are under attack.

The demonic plan to uproot thousands of decent, patriotic and loyal citizens of Israel while terror is on the escalation throughout the land is dangerous not because of so-called Jewish extremists but because of real Muslim terrorists. The same terrorists that are found in Jerusalem spitting out hate and disclaiming the Jewish rights to the Temple Mount, the same hate that is perpetrating terror and the smuggling of weapons of destruction in Shechem, Ramalla, and the North of Israel.

Perhaps Prime Minister Sharon and Defense Minister Mofaz are waiting for us to return fire on to those who are firing on us and endangering our lives and the lives of our children. Perhaps they are seeking an excuse to confiscate our weapons that were given to us by legal license in order to protect our lives. Perhaps this is yet another attempt to smear us with the label of fanatics and extremists.

I invite them and all of you to come to see us in Katif. To see the children going off to nursery school and schools, to see the farmers working in their hothouses and fields, to see mothers shopping with their infants. Come and see the children playing, and the dignity of these wonderful Jewish pioneers who are determined to continue in the direction we have always gone: protecting the Torah, the Land and people of Israel by being the kind of Jews we are supposed to be. Neither the rockets and missiles of hate nor the disdain and callous abandonment of our government will change us.

Governments come and go. Prime Ministers and Defense Ministers disappear into the pages of history. We, the people of Israel go on and we will be here long after them. We are writing glorious pages in the history of our people: endurance, love, humility, and belief. Would that the governments and elected officials of our country and people prove the same loyalty to our Land and people.

The writer is a veteran spokesman for the Settlement Movement and lives in Samaria with her husband and family.