



Jerusalem 6:47 Toronto 8:15

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

Events...

Wednesday June 1, 8:30

*Assistant Mayor of Kedumim **Raphaella Segal** speaks at Routes Jewish Centre 1118 Centre St.*

Commentary...

The Jewish Canary By Asaf Romirowsky

September 11th strengthened the bond between the United States and Israel. Ilan Berman, Vice President for Policy at the American Foreign Policy Council, explained: "Israel's stable, pro-Western and democratic character, its robust defense infrastructure and modern military, and its strategic location in the volatile Middle East have only grown in importance to the United States since September 11." Both nations are also engaged in a war against the same terrorism. But unlike the United States, the legitimacy of the Jewish State is still questioned on a daily basis.

September 11th has also put academia on the defensive. Many professors defended the forces that perpetrated the attacks under guises of liberalism and freedom of speech. Some argued that bin Laden's motivation somehow included concern about world poverty or that the U.S. itself precipitated the attacks—anything other than bin Laden's medieval fanaticism. As George Orwell wrote, "some ideas are so stupid that only intellectuals could believe them." The stupidity that Orwell referred to has shadowed the views of many academics when it comes to how they portray the relationship between Jews and the Muslim world. The victimizer has become the victim, and liberal political correctness has become its smokescreen.

For example, Ward Churchill, the chairman of Ethnic Studies Department at the University of Colorado, earlier this year depicted the 3000 people massacred at the World Trade Center on 9/11 as "little Eichmanns." Nicholas De Genova, an assistant professor at Columbia University, declared at an anti-war rally in March 2003, that "U.S. patriotism is inseparable from...white supremacy" and then expressed the "wish for a million Mogadishus in Iraq" referring to the 1993 incident in Somalia when eighteen U.S. troops were killed.

At a rally in San Francisco organized by the far left group International A.N.S.W.E.R., Hatem Bazian, a senior lecturer in Islamic studies at Berkeley, declared "It's about time that we have an intifada in this country that change fundamentally the political dynamics in here." These incidents, and the academic boycotts, divestment petitions, and other discriminatory actions against Israel, are precursors to a general reexamination of issues surrounding academic freedom, campus extremism, including incitement to violence, university autonomy, and classroom politicization. The division between academia and the rest of society grows larger and larger.

College campuses have become podiums for those hostile to Israel, as different human rights, anti-globalization, and anti-imperialism groups that have adopted the Palestinian cause as the single most important confront academics. As Phyllis Chesler, author of *The New Anti-Semitism*, states,

American campuses have bred a new and diabolical McCarthyism. Academics now have the right to teach brazen lies, which they expect to be protected in the name of 'free speech. Worse, when an academic tries to teach the truth - the truth - about Israel or about America, or about Jews, [he or she] will be ostracized, bullied, demonized, and accused (by the new McCarthyites) of leading a McCarthyite witch hunt against left-wing freedom of expression, which, in my view, is really the censorship of any view that does not conform to a left-wing and anti-American view.

In academic circles, individual scholars' views are often turned into a political litmus test. For example, Fouad Ajami, the articulate interpreter of

Arab culture and politics who teaches at Johns Hopkins University, has been subject to scathing attacks from Arab critics such as Asad Abu Khalil in a review of Ajami's book *The Vanished Imam*. And Daniel Pipes has noted that the Nation asked a Jewish leftist, Andrew N. Rubin, to critique Ajami's book for being too supportive of Israel.

What's worse, money from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia is being pumped into departments vis-à-

vis chairs, grants, and fellowships. They determine what topics related to the Middle East are taught. The liberal Left that dominates many campuses is more than ready to accept these funds and to promote the implicitly anti-American agenda they bring. Only some of these gifts are brought to the public's attention, as in the case of the Harvard School of Divinity, which returned a \$2.5 million gift from the president of the United Arab Emirates, who also funds vicious anti-Semitic and anti-American groups. If not for the efforts of students such as Rachel Fish, who exposed the gift, I doubt that the administration would have returned this gift.

Academia has made Jews the canary in the coal mine in the sense that if universities are indicators of social trends, and anti-Semitism is becoming more acceptable there in the guise of anti-Zionism, then there is a problem society-wide. Our students must recognize that there is never justice in terrorism. It is unacceptable that some should even speak of eliminating a living and breathing state like Israel. But you'd be surprised how common such statements are on campus. These advocates are the ones that should be on the defensive. (Middle East Forum May 13)

Diplomatic Dead Ends By Caroline Glick

Wednesday the White House and the US Capitol were hurriedly evacuated as a small Cessna plane entered the restricted airspace over Washington, DC. The swift evacuation of both buildings is an indication of just how seriously the US takes the threat of yet more attacks against its homeland.

And the truth is that the US has good reason to worry. First there was the spate of recent reports about al-Qaida's non-conventional weapons programs and the suspected connections between al-Qaida chief in Iraq Abu Musab Zarkawi, the Iranian regime and Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan's general store for nuclear weapons. But over and above that, the events of the past week show that the US attempts to use diplomacy to advance its efforts to stem the North Korean and Iranian nuclear weapons programs have thus far been abysmal failures.

Since last Thursday, delegates from 180 nations have been convening at the UN for a month-long review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This review occurs every five years and is generally both a dialogue of the deaf and utterly inconsequential. But over the past year, Bush administration officials as well as American non-proliferation experts have noted the need to update the NPT to prevent rogue regimes like Iran and North Korea from exploiting the loophole in the treaty that allows all states to develop nuclear programs for peaceful use. Both Iran and North Korea have used the loophole to attain the nuclear infrastructure necessary to develop illicit weapons.

Unfortunately, the treaty's signatories are dominated by the so-called Non-Aligned movement whose 116 members, generally led by Egypt, divide their time fairly equally between condemning Israel and condemning the US. The current treaty review conference is no exception. Led by Egypt, the developing nations have scuttled all American attempts to even agree on a conference agenda. The Egyptians first demanded that the conference set up a subsidiary body that would be charged with making the Middle East a "nuclear free zone" meaning that a new group would be formed whose sole goal is to pressure Israel to destroy its alleged nuclear arsenal.

Beyond their obsession with Israel-bashing, the Egyptians went a step further and aimed their diplomatic guns at the Americans. The bloc of developing countries under Egyptian leadership has demanded that the US address its "violations" of the agreement. These presumed violations involve

Yasher Koach and thank you to our supporters. Thank you also to Continental Press for their ongoing support.
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. Israel News can be viewed on the internet at www.bayt.org

the Bush administration's denying that the US's announced decision from five years ago to disarm parts of its nuclear arsenal is binding.

Not that there is any reason for the sanctimonious Egyptian delegates to worry, but according to Israeli security sources, their own country has some answering to do for its own covert nuclear armament program. On Tuesday night, Channel 10 reported that, based on a preponderance of circumstantial evidence, Israel now believes that Egypt is developing nuclear weapons with the assistance of North Korea and A.Q. Khan's nuclear proliferation network.

According to the sources, until recently the identity of the third country aside from Iran and Libya that received assistance for its nuclear weapons program from Khan was unclear. Now, they claim it is all but certain that Egypt was the beneficiary of his largesse. Egypt has received heavy North Korean assistance for its ballistic missile program having illicitly purchased Nodong missiles from the North Koreans in recent years. Israel now reportedly believes that Pyongyang has also been assisting Egypt with its nuclear program.

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry had good reason to feel confident going into the NPT conference. This week the anti-American Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva hosted a summit of South American and Arab states whose main purpose like that of the NPT conference was to condemn Israel and the US. The Arabs managed to get their South American friends to sign onto a declaration calling for Israel to remove itself to the 1949 armistice lines including in Jerusalem and received their support for a definition of terrorism that leaves out Palestinian terrorism against Israel. Additionally, the conferees condemned the US for renewing its sanctions against Syria. The US reportedly requested to be present at the conference as an observer but was turned down by Silva.

AND IN the meantime, on the ground, unscathed by the "international community," the North Koreans and the Iranians are imperviously sprinting forward with their nuclear weapons programs.

On Wednesday, North Korea announced that it had removed 8,000 nuclear fuel rods from its reactor at Yongbyon. If the rods are reprocessed, the South Korean media reported that in the course of the next several months, North Korea will have enough plutonium to make a few nuclear bombs. Mohammed ElBaradei, the head of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, said last weekend that Pyongyang already has enough plutonium to make six bombs.

To date, the US strategy for dealing with North Korea has been to try to induce it to cease its nuclear program through the six-nation talks that Pyongyang walked out of last June. Hopes for the talks have hinged on China curbing North Korea a Chinese client state. China, through its oil supplies and other trade with North Korea, has kept the Stalinist regime alive and kicking.

These hopes came up empty on Tuesday when the Chinese announced that they would not support placing sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear weapons program. In so doing, the Chinese effectively gave their approval for North Korea's acquisition of nuclear arms. In light of China's new declared policy, it is unclear what diplomatic options remain open to the US in dealing with Pyongyang.

The Iranian situation is even bleaker. Iran, far from being a client state, has its own state clients. Aside from that, whereas North Korea's neighbors in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are alarmed by its nuclear weapons programs, Iran's program has not evoked any particular concern from its immediate neighbors only from their common enemies Israel and the US.

On Monday, Teheran stated that it was lifting a suspension on its uranium enrichment activities. It is supposed to officially inform the IAEA of its decision to continue with its uranium enrichment activities by the end of the week. If it does so, it will effectively kill the British, French and German attempt to convince Teheran to end its nuclear program and move the issue to the UN Security Council. But even if this happens, the Chinese have already declared that they will use their veto in the Council to oppose any action against Iran.

In an interview with Ma'ariv on Wednesday, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Moshe Ya'alon said that, within a year to 18 months, Iran will have completed the nuclear fuel cycle giving it the ability to produce nuclear weapons at will.

According to sources in Washington, the US policy towards Iran is based primarily on a plan to topple the regime. Some 70 percent of Iranians oppose the regime and there has been a significant amount of unrest throughout the country for the past several months.

However, as Iran expert Michael Ledeen from the American Enterprise Institute wrote recently in the National Review, the US has done next to nothing to assist the democratic opponents of the regime. And as Henry Kissinger pointed out in an op-ed in The Australian on Wednesday, it is far from clear that regime change, if it is to occur at all, will happen fast enough to thwart the Iranian nuclear weapons program from reaching completion.

There is a strong sense in Washington these days that a large part of the reason that the Bush administration has yet to construct a coherent policy for dealing with Iran's nuclear program is that it is hoping Israel will launch a military strike against the Iranian nuclear sites, thus obviating the need for any

real action. And yet, if these officials are even mildly aware of what is happening today in Israel with the government completely obsessed with the Palestinians and the Gaza and northern Samaria withdrawal programs they would take little comfort in that hope.

Clarifying this point, on Monday Col. David Marciano, head of the weapons department in the IDF's Ground Forces Command, reportedly said that the current war with the Palestinians has absorbed virtually all the attention of senior commanders. Israel is so engrossed with the Palestinians, he said, that little time has been spent planning for a regional war with enemies like Syria and Iran.

Kissinger wrote, "If George W. Bush's first term was dominated by the war against terrorism, the second will be preoccupied with the effort to stem the spread of nuclear weapons." Given the events of the past week, it is unclear what diplomatic options remain open for the president to choose from.

Many opponents of the Bush administration have been eager to accuse the president and his advisers of being responsible for the failure of their diplomatic attempts to deal with the issue. But the truth is, given the fact that anti-Americanism is second only to anti-Zionism as the popular course in the world today for countries seeking to augment their international standing on the cheap, it is unclear what the Americans could have done differently.

Today it would seem that what is really necessary is a diplomatic campaign aimed not at convincing the Iranians and the North Koreans to cease their nuclear programs, but to pave the way both internationally and domestically for military assaults against the countries' nuclear programs. Such a campaign should highlight North Korea's policy of starving its people to death and gassing them in death camps. It should also highlight Iran's abysmal human rights record, the regime's lack of legitimacy and its support for terrorism throughout the world.

Aside from that, the Americans would be well advised to quietly mention to the Israeli government that the Palestinians, while important, are not the only problem that Israel should be dealing with right now. Barring all these, the already startling evacuations of the White House and the Capitol will become far more terrifying. (Jerusalem Post May 12)

Business as Usual in the Palestinian Authority By Daniel Pipes

Yasser Arafat's demise in November excited great hopes among those who saw his malign personality as the main reason for Palestinian intransigence.

But those of us who saw the problem as larger than Arafat – as resulting, rather, from the deep radicalization of the Palestinian body politic – expected little change. Indeed, I wrote at the time of Mahmoud Abbas' election to head the Palestinian Authority that, "he is potentially a far more formidable enemy to Israel" than was Arafat.

How do things look half a year after Arafat's death? About as awful as anyone might have expected. Specifically, Mr. Abbas is unambiguously leading the Palestinians to war after the Israeli retreat from Gaza in August 2005. Consider some recent developments.

* Hiring terrorists as soldiers: Rather than arrest terrorists, as required by the informal February 2005 cease-fire between Israel and the Palestinians, Mr. Abbas has instituted a unique employment program for them, incorporating them into his security forces. The Associated Press explains the charming point system to determine who gets what rank: "A high school diploma ... is worth eight points, while a year in an Israeli prison or on the run counts for two points each. Gunmen don't get credit for time served in Palestinian lockups, but they win extra points if they were wounded by Israeli army fire or had their homes demolished." The Israeli authorities have accepted that even convicted Palestinian killers carry weapons.

* Arming terrorists: The Palestinian military intelligence agency facilitates terrorist groups smuggling SA-7 Strela shoulder-fired missiles into Gaza to use against Israeli aircraft.

* Inciting the population: As Palestinian Media Watch, the Center for Special Studies, and Michael Widlanski have exhaustively detailed, the political speeches, press content, mosque sermons, school textbooks, and wall posters remain as rabidly anti-Israel and anti-Semitic as during the worst days of Arafat's rule. For example, Ahmad Qureia, the PA's so-called prime minister, has threatened "an explosion" over Israel's handling of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

* Pretend arrests of terrorists: As under Arafat, the PA plays the charade of arresting terrorists with fanfare and then allowing them quietly to "escape" from prison. Two examples of these revolving-door arrests: Two perpetrators who assisted a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv in February 2005 left jail in April; and the Palestinian police arrested their first Hamas terrorist on May 2 but promptly released him one day later.

As a result of these steps, Palestinian terrorism, especially coming out of

Gaza, has dramatically increased since April. Things have reached such a low point that one analyst, Leslie Susser, finds that the February cease-fire "may be on the verge of collapse."

It is hard to argue with Caroline Glick's conclusion that the Sharon government and the Bush administration were both "horribly wrong" in betting on Mr. Abbas. And yet, neither of them concedes this error because, having stressed Mr. Abbas's good intentions, both now find themselves deeply invested in the success of his political career.

The planned Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in August is likely to precipitate new rounds of violence. One could come in July, as the Israel Defense Forces engages in a massive sweep of Gaza to ensure that the forthcoming retreat takes place not under Palestinian fire.

More violence could follow in September, as the Palestinians, Gaza now under their belt, begin a new assault on Israel. That round presumably will feature the substantial rocket arsenal that Hamas has been amassing. Israel's chief of staff, Moshe Ya'alon, is on record predicting, "Immediately after the disengagement we can expect a burst of terrorism."

Thus has Ariel Sharon neatly arrayed all the elements for a massive train wreck.

Ironically, the one thing that might prevent this scenario from playing out would be a Hamas victory in the Palestinian council elections scheduled for mid-July. Israeli voices are increasingly calling for the Gaza withdrawal to be postponed or even annulled should Hamas do well, as seems likely. For example, Israel's foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, has said if Hamas wins the elections, it would be "unreasonable" to implement the disengagement plan and allow Hamas to create a "Hamas-stan" in Gaza.

So, there are many possibilities in the next four months. Their common element is that by September, the Arab-Israeli theater will be in yet worse shape than it is today. (New York Sun May 17)

A Tale of Three Families By David Wilder

Last year, as you may recall, following Independence Day (Yom Ha'atzmaut) I wrote an article called "The Traffic Jam that Saved Eretz Yisrael." Tens and hundreds of thousands of people from around Israel, arriving at Gush Katif, to show support for a strong, continued Israeli presence in this area, never made it, due to the huge traffic jam that clogged the roads leading into the Gush.

This year, the organizers, having learned from the past, set up huge parking lots just outside Gush Katif and shuttled people in and out of the Gush on buses. That's the way it was when over 120,000 people visited Gush Katif a few weeks ago, during the Passover holidays and so it was yesterday when over 80,000 Jews again arrived at Gush Katif.

I left for Gush Katif with my wife and three of our children just after eight in the morning. An hour and a half later we arrived at the Kissufim junction. I was fortunate to be able to get my car through, and not have to leave it at the parking lot, and drove on in. We made a brief coffee stop and then began the day's adventures. I told my wife that we were going to visit some places she'd never seen before, and we were off.

Our first station was 'dream village.' That's right. Shirat HaYam is the kind of place everyone dreams about, but few are able to actualize. There are sixteen lucky families who have had the good fortune to live the life you've dreamt about. Located in the heart of Gush Katif, across from Neve Dekalim, the Song of the Sea, as the name is translated in English, borders the Israeli coast. Shirat HaYam's palaces sit only meters from the Mediterranean Sea.

We visited with Merav Cohen, married to Itamar, with three young children (and a dog). Ora (my wife) and I know Merav since she was about a year old. She and our oldest daughter Bat-tzion grew up together; for most of their childhood they were inseparable.

Merav and Itamar have been living in their Shirat HaYam palace for a few years now. Merav takes care of the kids. Itamar can't sit still. When we were at their home, he was off at work, on Independence Day. No, Itamar wasn't sitting in an office across from his computer. Rather, he was on a roof, a few houses away. Building. Building a new house. What? Less than three months from 'expulsion?!' Who's he building a house for? Arabs?!

No. Itamar was hired to build a house for a family at Shirat HaYam, and that's exactly what he's doing. "Disengagement?" What's that?"

I visited Merav a couple of months ago, and then found her bright and cheery. I sort of wondered how she'd be now. Any doubts I might have had were quickly erased. Smiling and as happy as ever, Merav expressed no fears or apprehension. "We are here – this is our home. We are here to stay."

Anyone looking at Shirat HaYam's homes from the outside, well, they might ask me where they are hiding the 'palaces' I speak of. But believe me, each and every one of the caravan homes is a real, true palace. And the life, it is that of a king. Being able to look from the window at the waves of the Mediterranean rolling against the shore, or stepping outside, walking through the sand, and

drenching yourself in the purifying waters of Israel's western coast – it is nothing less than a dream.

Merav was very happy to see us and as we left, we promised to come back and visit – maybe for a short vacation this summer, or during the fall Succot holidays in another half a year.

We left the magic of Shirat HaYam, and drove to the southern-most community in the Gush – Morag.

Driving the road to Morag, well you wonder if you've hit the end of the world, or maybe you missed a turn somewhere. The sides of the road are sand – and a fence. Not too far away, visible from the road is Rafiah, not known for its warm relationship with Israel or Israelis. The road to Morag has been shot at, bombed with mortars and Kassam missiles, and mined. Frequently Israeli security forces discover bombs on the road. Sometimes they only find them as they explode.

The entrance to Morag dispels any and all qualms. The colorful sign, surrounded by grass and trees, is sight for sore eyes. All of a sudden you feel like you've come in from the cold – or perhaps in Morag's case, you've come in from the heat. It doesn't get too cold at Morag.

We drove around some of the neighborhoods and saw dozens of hothouses which provide employment for many of the community's forty families. Then we stopped to ask directions. Our daughter Ophira knows one of Morag's residents, and we decided to stop and say hello.

Rabbi Hagai Cohen and his wife Tirza have, if I remember correctly, nine children. A few years ago, while driving up the hill to his home, then in Eli in the Shomron, Rabbi Hagai's car was shot at and he was hit. Very critically wounded, he spent over a year recovering from his injuries. Last summer, when visiting Gush Katif, the Rabbi talked to his wife about visiting a neighborhood 'all the way out.' "No, that sounds too dangerous for me," was her response. This past winter, during the Hanukka vacation, the Cohens moved from Eli to Morag.

Munching on homemade cookies, Rabbi Hagai, a school Rabbi in Jerusalem, told us how he travels back and forth between Morag and Jerusalem a few times a week. "Next year I won't have to make the trip – I'll be teaching here in Morag and in Gush Katif," he explained.

"You have to understand. When families first arrived here in 1983, they weren't super idealistic religious Jews. They were simple, traditional people, who came here to make a living with their agricultural talents. They transformed a tract of desert into a sea of blossoms."

How do they feel now, as D-Day approaches?

"You know, if they'd been offered substantial funds seven, eight, ten years ago, in return for their departure, they would have left. But now, after five years of war, missiles, mortars, they are adamantly opposed to abandoning their homes. And you know, it's not easy. We are new here and of course, wouldn't receive damages following an expulsion, G-d forbid. But these people, they don't know what will be with them 'the day after.' They have many children, a job, a house, a hothouse – and all of a sudden – they ask, 'how will we feed our children – where will we find work,' – one man words for the Gush Katif municipality, and he knows that his employer may cease to exist. So what will he do? The temptation to sign on the dotted line, take the money and run, it's very strong. But these people have all resisted. None are giving in. Not a one."

We bade farewell to our newly-found friends, wishing them a happy Independence Day holiday, and continued on our way. We drove all the way back to the other side of Gush Katif, to our home away from home, Kfar Darom.

Independence day was a very special day for this community, today closing in on 100 families. Kfar Darom originated in 1946 and fell during the War of Independence. It was reestablished in 1989.

Over the years of warfare, mortars and missiles were aimed directly at Kfar Darom. Five of its residents were killed by Arab terror. An IDF soldier was killed by a direct mortar strike. Others were critically wounded, including Mrs. Hannah Barat, a thirty-nine year old mother of eight, who was struck by a terrorist-fired bullet and paralyzed from the waist down. She became pregnant and gave birth to her eighth child after sustaining her injuries.

On Independence Day thousands filled Kfar Darom, celebrating the construction of their new synagogue, built in memory of the five victims of Arab terror. A new Torah scroll was also dedicated. A festive parade, starting at a huge stone monument at the site of a bus blast which left two dead and many wounded (including the three Cohen children, who had their legs blown off), made its way into the community and to the beautiful new synagogue. The ceremony continued for several hours, with participants from all over Israel.

Following the celebrations, we made our way to our friends, Tali and Noam Sudri, who we've known for many years. There we found other family members visiting them, from as far away as the Golan, and Jerusalem. Sitting

at a decorated table, enjoying a holiday meal, the Sudris and their children showed no anxiety or fear. "The children – no they're not concerned. They're sure – we're here to stay." Speaking during the meal, Noam talked about the verse in Psalms (126:1, "A Song of Ascents. When the L-RD brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like dreamers."

You might expect, during an "Independence Day" on a date closing in on 'expulsion,' an event proving just how independent we are not, people might be so bitter that they would refuse to celebrate, cursing, rather than blessing the State within which they live. But not the Sudris and not the other hundreds of people who live in Kfar Darom. Yesterday was a holiday, the dedication of the first permanent synagogue ever built there, a synagogue waiting to be built since 1946. Just as others, in Gush Katif and the northern Shomron, continue to build, continue to look forward, continue their lives, optimistic and happy, happy to be fulfilling the mitzvah, the positive precept, of 'settling the land.'

There is a special sanctity in Gush Katif – the fragrances of salt-water and the perfume of flowers fill the air, and the unbelievably vast faith of these 9,000 families is so tangibly abundant, that faith is, in my opinion, infinitely larger than the sea so near to them. This is the tale of three families, three who are thousands, three who represent the entirety – from Morag, to Shirat HaYam, to Kfar Darom. These are true Israelis, true believers, true patriots. These people, they are the future of our people in our Land, in all our Land. (Jewish Community of Hebron May 15)

Battle of the numbers: What Demographic time bomb?

By Bennett Zimmerman, Roberta Seid and Michael L. Wise

Demography is a central issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Conventional wisdom holds that Israel faces a demographic time bomb because the Palestinian Authority's reported 3.8 million population, combined with Israel's 1.3 million Arabs, already almost equals the Jewish population (5.4 million). Some Israeli demographers contend that given high Arab birthrates, Jews will quickly become a minority between the Jordan and the Mediterranean.

But this doomsday scenario is wrong.

Remarkably, no one had bothered to verify the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) numbers until we formed a team of American and Israeli researchers to exhaustively study Palestinian, Israeli and third-party sources. They revealed that the 2004 Arab population in the Territories is closer to 2.4 million than to the PCBS claim of 3.8 million, a 60% overstatement.

This million-and-a-half person gap arose because the PCBS figures are based on predictions, not on actual, real-time measurements. The PCBS also inflated its 1997 census, the base figure for its predictions, and then applied high birth and unrealistically high immigration assumptions to this inflated base, compounding the same errors year after year. Our audit found that the PCBS projections were not met for even one year between 1997 and 2004.

On top of the PCBS error, some Israeli demographers again applied the high growth rates, and continued to build further errors, exponentially, into the future.

Together these groups have built a demographic house of cards.

Until those projecting the future bother to correct the present, their discussions about the future are meaningless.

What our study found. We calculated a 2004 Arab population of 1.35 million in the West Bank and 1.07 million in Gaza, a total of 2.42 million, by correcting the following errors:

Fewer births: Since 1997, the PA Ministry of Health (MOH) recorded fewer births than the PCBS predicted. These detailed records (including hospital and home births) were corroborated by PA Ministry of Education records for children entering school. Reduction: 238,000.

Retrospective alterations of recorded birth data: The PA MOH retroactively restated births to reflect the overseas residents included in the 1997 PA Census. After the census, they included overseas births of nonresidents. We included only resident births. Reduction: 81,000.

Net Emigration: Instead of 236,000 immigrants moving to the Territories since 1997, as the PCBS had predicted, 74,000 residents left. Reduction: 310,000.

Internal migration: Immigrants from the Territories who received Israeli IDs over the past decade under family reunification programs (according to the Israeli Interior Ministry) must be removed from the PCBS count. Reduction: 150,000.

There were overstatements in the PCBS 1997 census, the base population used for the demographic projections.

Double Counting: Jerusalem Arabs counted in Israel's population were also counted in the PCBS 1997 census. Reduction: 210,000.

Inclusion of non-residents: The PCBS claimed it conducted a residential census, but it also included people who had been living abroad for one or more years if they ever held residential identity cards. Reduction: 374,000.

IN MARCH 1998, the PCBS publicly acknowledged the inclusion of

325,000 overseas Palestinians in its 1997 census base. The anticipated growth of this non-resident population was included in the PCBS forecasts, a fact that has been ignored or neglected by demographers and government agencies.

In October 2004, the PA's Central Election Commission reported that the number of eligible voters aged 18 and above living in the Territories was only 1.3 million, not the 1.85 million predicted and claimed by the PCBS. These figures from the Election Commission are consistent only with our lower population measurements.

The Bottom Line: The 2004 population between the Jordan and the Mediterranean is 60% Jewish and 40% Arab, similar to the ratio since 1967. In the West Bank and Israel, the ratio is 2 Jews for every 1 Arab and in pre-'67 Israel and Jerusalem, it is 4 Jews for every 1 Arab.

While the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS) categorizes non-halachic Jews from the FSU as "Jews and Others," some demographers place them in the "Palestinian Arab and Other" category, which is misleading. Israel is becoming more culturally diverse, but not more Palestinian Arab.

Growth rates since 1990 also undermine the demographic time-bomb scenario.

The Gaza growth has declined from 4% to 3% and is much lower than the rates published by the PCBS. West Bank Arab growth was equal to Israeli Jewish growth of 2.5% per annum. Notably, fertility for West Bank women has declined to 3.3 births per women, while the Israeli Jewish fertility has risen to 2.7. This half-child gap disappears when Israeli immigration and Arab emigration is fully considered. Abnormally high Israeli-Arab growth rates have been fueled by migration into pre-67 Israel.

Where are the demographers? Israeli demographers who warned that Arabs will become the majority failed to verify the base PA population and to analyze the PCBS-supplied growth rates. These rates, the highest in the world, assumed immigration would soar. Since the publication of our study, the PCBS has removed these unrealistic assumptions, collapsing its own predictions about future growth from nearly 5% to 3.5%. If the PCBS factors in emigration, these rates will fall even further.

Prof. Arnon Soffer, a University of Haifa geographer, produced a series of wildly different population estimates. In his widely distributed 2004 booklet, *Israel Demography 2004-2020*, he claimed the Arab population in the Territories was 3.8 million. One month later, in a pamphlet entitled *Implementation of the Right of Return*, he wrote that the population was only 2.8 million; a number he reconfirmed in an interview with Arutz-7 Israel National News shortly after our study was released. These dramatic vacillations make his projections about the future questionable.

Prof. Sergio DellaPergola, a demographer at Hebrew University, in recent Knesset committee hearings, publications and public forums claims that he applied high Arab birthrates to ICBS population figures from the mid-1990s. The problem with his estimate is that no conceivable fertility rate can grow the population from the last reported ICBS survey to his current claim of almost 3.5 million Arabs in the Territories.

We use the actual number of births recorded by the PA Ministry of Health. These actual figures yield high birthrates against a smaller, but more accurate base consistent with earlier ICBS and PCBS measurements of a residents-only base.

Our study is available for public examination on the Internet. Researchers must demand that all claims be equally transparent and open to review. Black boxes should no longer be tolerated for issues of such great national importance for Israel.

Some contend that the lower population we documented simply delays the demographic time bomb. The data indicate otherwise.

The current Jewish majority, with its rising birthrate combined with modest aliya and/or returning overseas Israelis, would easily maintain the demographic balance in favor of the Jews. Parity between Jew and Arab might never be reached if Arab migration and fertility trends continue. And in Israel and the West Bank, Jewish dominance is overwhelming, both in absolute numbers and in terms of growth rates.

Given these factors, demographers who predict that Arab dominance is inevitable are indulging in pure and fallacious conjecture. (Jerusalem Post May 17)

is The authors comprise the American Team of this study. The Israel team includes Yoram Ettinger, Brig Gen. (Ret.) David Shahaf, Prof. Ezra Sohar, Dr. David Passig, Avraham Shvout, and Yakov Faitelson. www.pademographics.com.
