



ISRAEL NEWS

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

Commentary...

Jews and Anti-Jews By Ruth Wisse

Hatred of Israel is a crutch Arab states have to give up.

The day after Israel's failed assassination attempt on Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi, a "deeply troubled" President Bush let it be known that he did not think such attacks helped Israeli security. He was concerned lest the strike undermine the momentum he is trying to create for a "two-state" solution to the Palestinian crisis, part of his larger effort to extend peace and democracy in the Middle East. In response, the Jerusalem Post declared itself deeply troubled, too--by the failure of the said operation to eliminate the man who directs terror operations in Gaza. The Post believed that the American president would have done better to recognize the threat Rantisi represents to American security.

The Jerusalem Post has a point. President Bush may understand more clearly than his predecessors the nature of the threat to Israel's security. The attacks of Sept. 11 brought home to him the similarities between the two democracies. Along with most Americans, the Bush administration now grasps how the freedoms of an open society leave it vulnerable to assault. If America is duty-bound to strike the bases of those who threaten its security, no matter how far they are from its shores, then Israel, too, which constitutes the fighting front line in the war against terror, must root out the terrorists within and along its borders.

Yet the White House still cannot bring itself to admit the true nature of the aggression against Israel. It still tends to treat the regional crisis as "a conflict of two people over one land" that can be resolved by the creation of a Palestinian state. According to this view, since Jews and Arabs both lay claim to the same territory of Israel-Palestine, some division of the territory between will bring about a peaceful resolution. This is the assumption behind the "road map" the president presented at the recent meetings in Egypt and Jordan, inviting the Palestinians to halt their terror and Israel to withdraw some of its settlements from the disputed lands.

Unfortunately, the Arab war against Israel is no more a territorial conflict than was al Qaeda's strike against America, and it can no more be resolved by the "road map" than anti-Americanism could be appeased by ceding part of the U.S. to an Islamist enclave. From the moment in 1947 when Jewish leaders accepted and Arab rulers rejected the U.N. partition plan of Palestine, the Arab-Israeli conflict bore no further likeness to more conventional territorial struggles. Arab rulers defied the U.N. charter by denying the legitimacy of a member state. Arab countries refused to acknowledge the existence of a single Jewish land. Arab rulers did not object to Israel because it rendered the Palestinians homeless. Rather, they ensured that the Palestinians should remain homeless so that they could organize their politics around opposition to Israel.

At any point during the past 55 years, Arab governments could have helped the Palestinian Arabs settle down to a decent life. They could have created the infrastructure of an autonomous Palestine on the West Bank of the Jordan and the Gaza territory that Egypt controlled until 1967, or encouraged the resettlement of Palestinians in Jordan, which constitutes the lion's share of the original mandate of Palestine. Rather than fund the Palestine Liberation Organization to foment terror against Israel they could have endowed Palestinian schools of architecture, engineering, medicine and law. What Israel did for its refugees from Arab lands, Arabs could have done much more sumptuously for the Palestinians displaced by the same conflict. Instead, Arab rulers cultivated generations of refugees in order to justify their ongoing campaign against the "usurper."

This is hardly the first time that the Jews have served as the pretext for a politics of opposition. To cite only the most notorious example (whose outcome President and Mrs. Bush witnessed during their recent tour of Auschwitz), Hitler used the supposedly illegitimate presence of the Jews as the excuse for tightening control over all the instruments of state. His promise to rid Germany of "the Jewish vermin" ushered in an assault on democratic culture that gained popular support by targeting an unpopular minority. Anti-Semitism camouflaged the Nazi will to power and the imposition of totalitarian controls: In the name of limiting the "influence" of the Jews, Hitler delimited the power of the courts, the media, and the educational system. As a young German named Sebastian Haffner noted

at the time, "[the Nazis] provoke a general discussion not about their own existence, but about the right of their victims to exist." Suddenly, the Nazis had everyone debating the question of the Jews rather than questioning the legitimacy of the discriminatory laws against them.

In almost identical ways, the autocrats who govern Arab societies have used the "Zionist entity" to deflect attention from the worst aspects of

their rule. The unwanted presence of the Jews became the rallying point for internal dissatisfaction with the mounting problems of Arab regimes. The drumbeat against Israel invited the world to debate the iniquities of the Jews rather than question the legitimacy of the attacks against them. This comparison is not intended to equate the Germans with the Arabs, except in the ways that both exploited anti-Semitism to achieve broader political goals. Both used the alleged threat of "the Jews" to excuse their own failures. Anti-Semitism in both situations linked otherwise warring groups of the Left and Right.

The problem with anti-Semitism in its older and newer varieties is that it seems to serve its patrons so well. Without question, Arab rulers successfully deflected attention from their offenses by their decades of war and propaganda against Israel. Even the liberal Western media that might have been expected to support a besieged fellow democracy have long since focused on alleged Israeli abuses instead of on the abuses of their Arab accusers.

But, just as happened in Europe, the Arab obsession with Israel grew increasingly destructive not only of its Jewish targets but also of the sponsoring regimes. Attacking Jews consumed energy that should have been directed at alleviating the misery of Arab subjects. Blaming the Jews postponed democratization, which begins with people taking responsibility for themselves.

Moreover, anti-Semitism metastasizes very quickly; its culture of hatred and its appeal to violence cannot be contained. Although Arab governments tried to direct the war against Israel according to their political needs, Islamist and nationalist groups espousing the same ideology sprang up independently, sometimes in defiance of government control. Anti-Semitism morphed into anti-Americanism--not because America supported Israel but because America represented the same challenges of an open, democratic, competitive society. The Jews' function as a bulwark of democracy was determined by the despots who tried to crush them. America did not so much fight on the side of the Jews as find itself forced to tackle the anti-Jews.

It goes without saying that President Bush must subordinate other considerations to America's security and interests. And Americans obviously would be better served if there were no conflict in the Middle East. Yet until Arab leaders give up the crutch of anti-Semitism they can make no real progress toward responsible self-government, and it is futile to pretend that obsession with Israel is compatible with Palestinian independence. Rantisi greeted the "road map" by organizing major attacks against Israel, which he calls "our land, not the land of the Jews." America can't hope to win its war against terror while ignoring some of its major perpetrators and propagandists. (Wall Street Journal Jun 16)

The writer, a professor of Yiddish and comparative literature at Harvard, is the author of "If I Am Not for Myself: The Liberal Betrayal of the Jews"

Road Rage By Tom Rose

The only parties who seemed the least bit surprised that the road map got bogged down in a new wave of Palestinian terrorism and Israeli responses were the plan's American and European sponsors. While Western diplomats professed shock, neither Israelis nor Palestinians missed a beat.

Traffic on Jerusalem's Jaffa Road was fully restored less than three hours after 16 people were killed on Wednesday, June 11, by an 18-year-old Palestinian suicide murderer. In his pre-mission video, the young killer said he was acting at the behest of Hamas leader Abdul Aziz Rantisi, the lucky survivor of an unsuccessful Israeli Air Force missile strike the day before. Some restaurants into which body parts of victims had been blown even made a determined effort to reopen Wednesday night, so as to serve customers equally determined to patronize them.

None of the most influential supporters of the road map, the latest

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blueprint for Middle East peace, bothered to notice that virtually no one who actually lives here, be he Israeli or Palestinian, hawk or dove, believed the scheme had more than a remote chance of success. On the other hand, if half a century of failure to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict didn't dissuade the road map's advocates from giving the same old approach yet another college try, why should a bunch of local skeptics?

Like so many plans before it, the road map demands that Israel take concrete risks for peace while asking Palestinians merely to restate unfulfilled promises. But unlike earlier peace initiatives, the road map doesn't bother asking the Arab states to renounce the war to destroy Israel that they started on the day of Israel's birth in 1948 and have never ended.

And so Secretary of State Colin Powell reacted to the June 11 massacre not by calling for reevaluation or even a pause, but rather by seeking still more Israeli concessions. "We must not let this latest terrorist outrage derail the path to peace," he said in Washington.

What really threatens to derail the process, however, is Washington's failure to understand the predicament of its favored Palestinian leader--the new prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas. He is the figure now called upon to insure implementation of Palestinian commitments under the road map. To put it bluntly, if Abbas fails, the road map fails.

Yet how can Abbas succeed? He is a powerless figurehead, threatened by Hamas leaders who openly call for his murder, while Yasser Arafat works both publicly and behind the scenes to undermine him. Arafat calls Abbas a "traitor to the Palestinian cause." The hard truth is that, had Israel succeeded in eliminating Hamas mastermind Rantisi, it would have done far more to help Mahmoud Abbas than George Bush has done.

That's what made President Bush's condemnation of Israel's failed attempt to kill the Hamas leader so worrying. Forget the apparent hypocrisy of his criticizing Israel at the very moment U.S. forces were engaged in a much larger and deadlier counterterror operation in Iraq. More important, Hamas is as much a threat to Abbas as it is to Israel. Failure to recognize that undermines the very peace plan the president has so publicly embraced. For unless the United States backs real Palestinian regime change, Mahmoud Abbas stands exposed to his people as powerless.

A year ago, on June 24, 2002, President Bush shocked the diplomatic world by calling for the Palestinians to "choose" a new leadership "not compromised by terror." Implicitly, he was calling on them to replace Yasser Arafat.

By the time the road map was finally released earlier this year, Bush's demand for Palestinian "regime change" had been watered down to the appointment of a Palestinian prime minister without the removal of Arafat. Abbas took office in May, but he has floundered ever since. In the period leading up to last week's mayhem, Abbas had command of not a single Palestinian police officer, and therefore neither arrested a single terrorist nor confiscated a single illegal weapon.

In a concession to Israel, the Americans insisted that Prime Minister Abbas and not Arafat be the Palestinian official responsible for implementing the road map. Yet to succeed, Abbas needs much more than pronouncements of support. He needs power, and at present what little he has is rapidly slipping through his fingers.

To crack down on terror, Abbas needs control of the Palestinian Interior Ministry, yet that ministry remains firmly in Arafat's hands. To stop the incitement to violence, Abbas needs control of the communications and education ministries, which are likewise controlled by Arafat. Far from helping his former deputy, Arafat is now orchestrating a blood-curdling incitement campaign against him in the Palestinian media. But most important, Abbas needs the destruction of terrorist organizations like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Arafat's own Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade. By condemning Israel's attempt to do just that, George Bush risks pulling the rug out from under Abbas's feet and dooming the road map and the peace process. (Weekly Standard Jun 23)

The writer is publisher of the Jerusalem Post.

A Fatal Pattern of Behavior By Evelyn Gordon

Much has been written lately, both here and abroad, about President George Bush's sudden metamorphosis into Bill Clinton with regard to his handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Actually, the comparison is unjust to Clinton, who in this at least (if in nothing else) was no hypocrite: While Bush condemns Israel for targeting Hamas leaders even as US forces seek to do the same with Saddam Hussein and al-Qaida, Clinton appeased America's enemies almost as diligently as he wanted Israel to appease its own.

But distressing though Bush's about-face is, the fact remains that he does not ultimately determine Israeli policy which is why his sudden reincarnation as Clinton is far less worrisome than Ariel Sharon's sudden reincarnation as Yitzhak Rabin.

Despite the Right's accusations, this reincarnation is not evidenced by Sharon's ongoing evacuation of settlement outposts even as Jews are being slaughtered in the streets: Having in his Aqaba speech deliberately portrayed the evacuations as necessitated by Israeli law rather than as a concession to the Palestinians, he cannot now credibly claim that Palestinian terror justifies halting them.

Where the reincarnation was evident, however, was in Sharon's speech to the Likud Central Committee on June 8, where he adopted precisely the same tactic Rabin used so disastrously during the Oslo process. Rather than attempting to adjust his diplomatic program to reality, Sharon rewrote reality in an effort to justify his diplomatic program.

At this meeting, for instance, he declared: "The terror war launched against us 1,000 days ago has failed. I tell you today that the victory we aimed for is at hand."

That is a truly astonishing statement, given that Palestinians killed at least 24 Israelis in the 10 days following the Aqaba summit (in two other cases the murderers' identity is not yet known). Maintained, this pace would translate into 876 dead Israelis a year more than have been killed in the entire 32 months of conflict to date.

Admittedly most of these deaths occurred after Sharon's speech but even the much lower pre-Aqaba death toll (50 Israelis killed in three months) hardly constitutes a resounding victory. Equally fallacious was Sharon's claim that "the enemy was vanquished. His plans were thwarted."

In fact, Sharon's adoption of the US-backed "road map" was a defeat for Israel's positions: The Palestinians received a pledge from the entire world, including Israel, of statehood by the end of this year, without having to concede a single issue of importance to Jerusalem not even lip-service recognition of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, not even a lip-service promise to actively fight terror.

Most outrageous of all, perhaps, was Sharon's declaration that "the Palestinians' terrorist regime has been replaced by a new government that has stated before the whole world that it has abandoned the way of terror. This is the first fruit of our victory."

Yet that is precisely the same pledge the Palestinians made in five previous signed agreements the 1993 Oslo Accord, the 1994 Cairo Agreement, the 1995 Oslo 2 Agreement, the 1997 Hebron Agreement and the 1998 Wye Agreement!

Given that all these pledges proved not worth the paper they were printed on, one might think Sharon would blush to declare yet another such pledge a victory even if the new Palestinian prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, were demonstrably sincere.

In fact, Abbas has already made it clear that he is not sincere: He has repeatedly and publicly proclaimed that, just like Yasser Arafat, he will not lift a hand against the terrorist organizations and this pledge he has thus far honored.

Instead he has been trying to negotiate a cease-fire under which, far from giving up their arms, the terrorists would join the Palestinian security services, be paid official PA salaries and receive CIA training in how best to use their weapons!

Sharon's June 8 speech cannot even be dismissed as a momentary aberration: In a conference call with American Jewish leaders the week before, his bureau chief and confidant, Dov Weisglass, evinced a similarly Osloesque determination to disregard Palestinian noncompliance.

Though the cabinet formally decided that a "condition for progress will be the complete cessation of terror, violence and incitement," Weisglass announced that, in practice, Israel will demand no such thing: It merely wants terrorism reduced "to a tolerable level" (and how many deaths per week is that?).

As for the road map's unequivocal demand that "all official Palestinian institutions end incitement against Israel," Jerusalem, Weisglass said, has no idea when or if the Palestinians will honor this clause nor, he implied, does it care.

Even Sharon's willingness to continue taking occasional military action, such as last week's strike at Abdel-Aziz Rantisi, offers no comfort: Both Rabin and Shimon Peres did the same. Rabin expelled 415 Hamas leaders to Lebanon, while Peres ordered the (successful) assassination of Hamas "engineer" Yihye Ayash.

In both cases the military moves were primarily an effort to make the public overlook the diplomatic retreats.

Thus a mere three weeks after adopting the road map, Sharon has also begun adopting the same fatal patterns of behavior that Rabin and Peres did with Oslo. Rather than requiring the Palestinians to live up to their commitments, he has decided to declare half of these commitments unimportant and to whitewash violations of the rest.

In so doing, he has ensured that the road map will end as disastrously as Oslo did. (Jerusalem Post Jun 18)

Blue Days and Red Lines By Stewart Weiss

There was a time when Israel held certain truths to be rock-solid and sacrosanct: We don't negotiate with terrorists. Jerusalem will remain our united capital forever. We will never leave a captured or wounded soldier behind.

It was exactly those kinds of principled stands that gave Israel the character and image of a nation which stood for something, which valued ethics no less than expediency. You could take pride in a country which

although it was situated in the land of the souk held that not every item was negotiable or up for sale.

Indeed, much of the idealism that accompanied the Zionistic fervor which once thrilled the Jewish world which convinced Americans like myself to move here and start a new life was fueled by a sense of intractable adherence to that which was just and right. It was this determination to buck the odds and keep the faith that led to some of Israel's greatest moments: Entebbe, Operation Solomon, the capture of Adolf Eichmann and the liberation of the Old City and the Western Wall. Yet sadly, over the last several years, we have seen a steady deterioration of our moral character; we have blurred all the "red lines" which once sharply defined who and what we are.

We showed only lackluster efforts in trying to redeem our captured soldiers and agents from Zach Baumel, taken in 1982, to Jonathan Pollard, now serving his 18th year in American jails, to the boys captured at Har Dov three years ago and taken to Lebanon. We began to waffle on maintaining Jerusalem as an undivided, Jewish city, culminating in Ehud Barak's infamous offer at Camp David to hand over half the city, including many of our holy places, to our intractable enemies.

And now, by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's directive and at President George W. Bush's urging, we have let murderous terrorists out of jail in return for a meaningless promise not to murder again.

The release of "refrigerator bomber" Ahmed Jbarra, who murdered 14 people in cold blood in 1975, is a particularly bitter pill to swallow. He ended up serving just two years for each life he took. Two years! for robbing each family of a lifetime of pleasure and potential from their loved ones.

AS THE FATHER of a young man whose life was tragically cut short by terrorist gunfire, this latest perversion of justice has a chilling effect. It sends the message that there is no rule of law in Israel that the sentencing of a terrorist to one, or even a dozen life terms is ultimately meaningless, a mockery of justice and that the political whims of the moment can cancel out the very foundations of our moral character as a nation.

It makes me wonder, "For what cause did my son Ari die? To protect the eternity of the Jewish state or to uphold some politician's tenuous agenda?"

Sharon may believe that caving in to outside pressure will gain him popular prestige and the love of the international community, but he has it exactly backwards. It is only by holding fast to his beliefs and standing up for what is right that will gain him respect albeit grudging from Jew and non-Jew alike.

The world loves those who fight for their beliefs, and finds pathetic those who give in to each passing pressure, selling their principles to the highest bidder.

Ironically, it is the Palestinians' will to budge not an inch from their positions despicable and barbaric as they are that gains them admiration and support from the Western media and the liberal establishment.

The attainment of peace true, lasting, real peace will result from maintaining character and an unwavering pursuit of our cause, not from capitulation.

As my late father, himself a decorated World War II veteran, often told me: one of the keys to success in any military campaign is the concept of Hold Your Ground. Maintain your position, show your adversary neither weakness nor wildness. Look him straight in the eye, and do not back down. It's something for which Gen. Sharon was once famous.

There was a time when the Israeli government set the tone for the national mission and inspired the populace to endure the great suffering that generally accompanies true liberation movements such as ours. Today, however, it is the people who must lead the leaders. It is we, the rank and file, who must prod those in power to remember our missing soldiers, to show no quarter or mercy upon those who seek our destruction, to never abandon Jerusalem no matter what pressure is brought to bear upon us.

Above all, we must drum into their psyche the truth that, in politics no less than in life, you either stand for something, or you fall for everything.

The writer is director of the Jewish Outreach Center of Ra'anana.
(Jerusalem Post Jun 15)

The Sharks Taste Blood By Naomi Ragen

What is it about the office of prime minister of Israel that turns fearless generals into spineless jellyfish? How is it that people who can read complicated strategic maps and plot the crossing of the Suez Canal under enemy fire suddenly can't negotiate their way across the street without getting run over?

We cannot blame the disastrous stewardship of Israel over the last 10 years that has left her people battered, her economy near ruin, her political stature at its nadir on any particular party line. The fact is, prime ministers Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon, although on different points on the political spectrum, have all fallen equally into the same incomprehensible patterns of self-destructive leadership. All share equally in the ongoing disaster that is the stewardship of our precious Jewish homeland, the State of Israel.

It was Rabin who invented the Orwellian doublespeak of terror victims as "sacrifices for peace." It was Barak who continued to absorb terror attacks with a stiff upper lip, saying they wouldn't "deter him from pursuing peace." And now it is Sharon who tells us that lack of reciprocity on the Palestinian side "won't budge" him from blindly ripping up settlements in exchange for nothing. And he

says it as if it's a good thing, a brave thing he's doing, instead of utter stupidity.

I would have thought that if Israelis had learned anything at all from the wave of terror following Oslo it might have been the simple concept that when you sign an agreement and keep your end, you have to insist that the other side do the same and be held accountable for violations. Otherwise, what you have is capitulation and defeat, and the abandonment of your people to mass murder.

I think part of the answer to the question of the failures of Israel's last three governments Sharon's included is that the Israeli people simply refuse to see the handwriting on the wall. Recent surveys show that about 58 percent of the Israeli people are in favor of taking down settlements. The same survey shows 53% believe that the road map has no chance of succeeding.

Sharon was recently booted out of his own party conference, a party that only months ago supported him with fanatic fervor despite clearly stated policies that went contrary to everything the Likud party has ever stood for, and which he is now simply putting into practice. When it comes to politics, the Israeli people are not rocket scientists.

Maybe the dichotomy of people willing to give something for nothing shows more about how Israelis have been brainwashed by their own politicians into believing Palestinian propaganda, which points to settlements as the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Those with a slight historical perspective, of course, know that the attacks and murders and delegitimization of the Jewish state precedes West Bank settlements.

However, even if Israelis couldn't care less about these pioneer outposts they should be made to realize by their leaders that taking down settlements in the current situation is like a man swimming in shark-infested waters deliberately cutting his finger. Taking down even one flag-waving teenager on a hilltop in Samaria while the other side continues to pursue terror as a tactic is tantamount to letting the sharks taste blood.

Like Oslo, the road map is a disaster forced on us by those who do not have our best interests at heart, aided and abetted by our elected leadership, who, once again, have betrayed us.

The only question now is how many of us are going to die until they lay the road map to rest, only to replace it with yet another "peace plan" that won't work because, obviously, for the Palestinians, terror continues to pay. *The writer is a best-selling novelist.* (Jerusalem Post Jun 15)

Settling into a Fallacy By Ron Dermer

The spectacle this week of most of the world and many Israelis eagerly anticipating the removal of outposts in Judea and Samaria was absolutely pathetic. That in a region where a fanatical Islam is ascendant, where suicide bombers are churned out by the thousands, and where preachers openly shout "Death to the Jews" anyone could delude themselves into believing that taking some caravans off a few barren hilltops will advance the cause of peace is simply mind-boggling.

But in truth the attitude toward the entire settlement enterprise - Zionism in Arabic - over the years has never been about logic. Instead it is a byproduct of the emotional need to find symmetry between the Arabs and Israelis and apportion blame for the conflict to both sides.

Apparently, the reality of an unremitting Arab war against Israel does not comport with the fashionable sentiment that peace is achieved through mutual compromise. According to this belief, which regards all grievances to be at least partially valid, something must be squeezed out of everyone.

While I have little doubt that when it comes to settlements, reason will always be the slave to this sort of passion, it might be useful to repeat a few facts that might make maintaining that slavery a bit more oppressive for its masters.

First, the settlements are not illegal. Here one need not make an appeal to God or to history. International law will do just fine. The notion that the settlements are illegal rests on the assumption that Israel is occupying another nation's territory. Thus, according to the Geneva convention, Israel is not able to "deport or transfer part of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies."

Besides the quite obvious point that Israeli civilians have chosen to live in the territories rather than having been deported or transferred to them, the case for illegality is mistaken on much more fundamental grounds: Israel is not occupying another nation's territory.

There was no recognized sovereign power in the "territories" in 1967 when Israel captured them in a defensive war. Jordan's rule over Judea and Samaria between 1948 and 1967 was recognized only by Great Britain and Pakistan, and in those years the Palestinians did not yet consider themselves a people, much less demand statehood from their Arab rulers.

Nevertheless, had Israel had no claim to the territories, the idea that there could be illegal settlement in an international no man's land could not be dismissed out of hand. But the Jewish state does have a claim - not just because the land where our nation's patriarchs prayed, our prophets preached and our kings ruled engenders it, or because the right to secure borders in UN

Resolutions implies it, but also because the international law that is most relevant to the territories (the League of Nations' mandate which incorporates the Balfour declaration and which has not been superseded) gives Jews a right to settle there.

In fact, according to any criteria - historical, moral, legal, etc. - the worst one can say about Israel's behavior is that it is settling land that is disputed. If this action is nonetheless to be considered illegal, then both Arab and Jewish settlement in the disputed territories must be considered illegal. Alas, that type of moral symmetry is hard to come by.

SECOND, THE settlements have never been an obstacle to peace. Here, it might be useful to distinguish between being an obstacle to the peace process and being an obstacle to a peace agreement.

Anyone who believes that the settlements have been an obstacle to the peace process is suffering from a particularly severe case of delusion, even by Middle Eastern standards. Had there been no settlements, there is little doubt that the Palestinians would not have bothered to enter into negotiations with Israel. Jewish settlements, then, by convincing the Palestinians that time was not on their side, served not as an obstacle to peace, but as a catalyst for it. This suggests that advances in the peace process are more likely to be the result of the expansion of Jewish settlements rather than a product of their dismantlement.

But when most people call the settlements an obstacle to peace they are implying that the proliferation of settlements precludes the possibility of a peace agreement - an agreement that in their view necessitates the establishment of a Palestinian state. Of course, the idea that Jews living on 3% of the territory of a future Palestinian state could prevent its establishment makes no sense by itself. What is needed is the additional assumption that for Jewish settlements to survive in a Palestinian state, they must be protected by Israel's army.

To be sure, defending Jewish civilians against Palestinian terror would necessitate all sorts of bypass roads, checkpoints and military outposts. Given the existing map of settlements, this certainly would make a contiguous Palestinian state impossible.

Remarkably, it would seem, few people are bothered by the fact that what makes the settlements an "obstacle to peace" is not the settlements themselves but the Palestinian desire to kill Jews. For if the Palestinians were capable of building a society where Jews could live freely there would be no problem with the settlements.

In fact, the very notion that Jews should be physically removed from part of their ancestral homeland should seem patently abhorrent to anyone who believes in freedom - surely no less abhorrent than the idea that African Americans who "provoke" racist whites should be removed from predominantly white neighborhoods and cities in order to keep the peace.

But it is not abhorrent.

Even more remarkable, however, is that the same people who would consider the idea of Jews living safely within a Palestinian state laughable do not find any humor in a peace plan that envisions the same type of state living peacefully alongside Israel.

For the foreseeable future the settlements are likely to remain a scapegoat for the failure of the Arab world to reconcile itself to the existence of the Jewish state. The idea that Jews must be uprooted from their homes for the sake of peace may even gain ground in the months and years ahead.

But one of the most accepted axioms of Middle East peacemaking will still remain one of its most foolish and immoral. (Jerusalem Post Jun 15)

The writer is a political consultant who lives in Jerusalem.

Scanning the Road Map Scorecard By Michael Freund

For the sake of the Middle East and its future, let's take a moment and engage in a brief intellectual exercise.

Put aside any ideological or political feelings you might have one way or the other about the US-backed plan to establish a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Forget temporarily your personal views regarding Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas (a.k.a. Abu Mazen) or even US President George W. Bush.

Instead, let's focus on a simple, yet fundamental, question: are the Palestinians living up to their commitments as laid down in the road map?

On June 4, at the Aqaba summit, Abu Mazen stood before the television cameras and said, "A new opportunity for peace exists, an opportunity based upon President Bush's vision and the Quartet's road map, which we have accepted without any reservations."

Thus, with Bush, Sharon and King Abdullah of Jordan at his side, the Palestinian leader formally undertook to abide by the road map and its obligations.

Among other things, the road map requires the Palestinian Authority to halt terrorism and violence against the Jewish state. It explicitly requires that, "the Palestinians immediately undertake an unconditional cessation of violence."

A look at the record, however, reveals that since Aqaba, rather than putting a halt to terror, the Palestinians have in fact accelerated it.

According to statistics compiled by the IDF, there were a total of 142 Palestinian terror attacks in the ten days prior to the Aqaba summit. But in the ten days immediately following it, there were 154 such attacks, signifying an

increase in anti-Israel terrorism of almost 10 percent.

These included shootings, stabbings, bombings, rocket attacks against Jewish communities and the detonation of explosive devices against civilian vehicles.

Moreover, in the ten-day period before Aqaba, no Israelis were killed by Palestinian terror, whereas in the corresponding period after Aqaba, 28 Israelis lost their lives.

Hence, both in terms of the quantity of terror as well as its lethality, the Palestinians have clearly failed to live up to their road map obligation to bring about an end to the violence.

The second key Palestinian commitment under the road map involves putting a stop to anti-Israel incitement. The document requires that "all official Palestinian institutions end incitement against Israel in the Palestinian media."

Accordingly, Abu Mazen offered the following pledge at Aqaba: "We will also act vigorously against incitement and violence and hatred, whatever their form or forum may be. We will take measures to ensure that there is no incitement from Palestinian institutions."

Those were pretty strong words. For the first time in recent memory, a Palestinian leader was speaking out unequivocally against incitement to violence against the Jewish state. But the pertinent question is: have those words been backed up by action?

Two days after the summit, on June 6, the official Palestinian Authority radio station under Abu Mazen's control broadcast its regular series of weekly Friday prayer sermons. In the first homily, the preacher chose to heap praise on the Palestinian "resistance", which is better known to the rest of the world as the terrorist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, saying, "We salute our political parties and resistance factions, who call for unity."

The second preacher decided to denounce the establishment of the State of Israel, calling it a "disaster" and a "catastrophe".

A week later, on June 13, the rhetoric grew even harsher, when Abu Mazen's official TV and radio broadcast a sermon from the Sheikh Ijlin mosque in Gaza in which the preacher said, "O Allah, punish our enemies. O Allah, destroy the Jews and their supporters. O Allah, destroy the United States and its allies."

Hence, it is clear that the Palestinians are not living up to the anti-incitement requirements of the road map. Not only has Abu Mazen failed to stop such incitement, but the media organs under his direct control have continued to engage in it.

Finally, the road map also requires the Palestinians to take a serious of tough steps against terrorist groups. These include a requirement to "commence confiscation of illegal weapons", dismantle "terrorist capabilities and infrastructure", and undertake "visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israelis anywhere."

Nevertheless, no such steps have yet been taken by the Palestinian Authority. Instead, Abu Mazen has been negotiating with the terrorist groups, and has publicly vowed that he would not use force against them.

In the two weeks since Aqaba, the Palestinians have not arrested any terrorist leaders, nor have they confiscated any illegal weapons. The terrorist groups' infrastructure remains intact, and they now know that they have no reason to fear a crackdown.

Thus, on all three counts - ending anti-Israel violence, stopping incitement, and clamping down on terror groups - the Palestinians have failed to deliver the goods. In baseball terms, Abu Mazen is batting a solid zero in terms of performance, striking out on all counts.

There are plenty of observers out there ready to offer excuses, trying to justify the Palestinians' breach of their commitments. They cite the ongoing rivalry between Abu Mazen and Yasser Arafat, the state of various Palestinian institutions, as well as the relatively short period of time that has elapsed since the summit in an attempt to explain away Palestinian violations of the accord.

But those excuses are just that - they are excuses, and nothing more. The fact is that Abu Mazen and the PA voluntarily took upon themselves various obligations, and they have voluntarily violated every single one of them. Hence, they have no one to blame but themselves for their failure to keep their word.

And so, when you put aside all the emotions and feelings which the Middle East conflict so readily arouses, and examine just the facts, the conclusion that remains is clear: the Palestinians can not be relied upon to abide by their commitments, and they can not be entrusted with a state.

Time and again, for nearly a decade, they have signed agreements only to violate them systematically and repeatedly. If this is the case at the outset of the road map, when the Palestinians still have so much to gain, what will happen at its conclusion, when they achieve statehood and have nothing to lose?

The facts, as they say, speak for themselves. (Jerusalem Post June 18)
The writer served as Deputy Director of Communications & Policy Planning in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office.