

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

generates an illusion." A Palestinian state under the existing leadership would intensify the existential threat to Israel.

* The realization seeping into Palestinian consciousness that terror was harming their cause will be totally undermined by Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. The "victorious" terrorists will be able to strengthen their argument that by continuing to kill our civilians they will ultimately overcome Israel's will to resist.

The devastating Ya'alon scenario conveys the fear that by renewing our former delusions about having peace partners we are inviting a replay of the Oslo debacle.

The response to Ya'alon were murmurs that, having been prematurely retired, he has become a disgruntled and embittered has-been. Neither the prime minister nor his cabinet, or even the opposition, felt a need to respond.

This is outrageous. Moshe Ya'alon, who pleaded to deaf ears in successive governments to prepare for Arafat's return to terror, is probably one of the most sophisticated strategic thinkers to ever head the IDF. More importantly, he was the principal architect of the highly successful military response to terror, demonstrating that contrary to the mantra of the bleeding hearts and capitulationists, terrorism can be significantly neutralized by resolute military responses. Ya'alon's dual-track policies of proactive military initiatives - including targeted assassination - combined with the construction of the security fence have been fully vindicated, resulting in the reduction of terror to the lowest levels since the outbreak of Palestinian violence in 2000.

It was precisely when the terrorists were in disarray and reduced to their lowest level that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stunned the nation with a call to "end the occupation," followed by his announcement of unilateral disengagement. He struck a responsive chord with many Israelis who had concluded that settlements in areas surrounded by hostile Palestinians could not be sustained.

YET DESPITE this, General Ya'alon felt obliged to tell his prime minister that in his military estimation, the proposed unilateral disengagement is a prescription for disaster. An outraged Sharon, until then a staunch supporter of Ya'alon, responded by effectively sacking the military chief a year before Ya'alon's retirement.

There are of course those who insist that Ya'alon was solely motivated by sour grapes. But unlike his predecessors, Ya'alon does not appear to be harboring political ambitions. He never had dreams of a Greater Israel. He is neither a religious Zionist nor a settler, nor right-wing. Indeed, Haaretz journalist Ari Shavit, who recently interviewed him, describes Ya'alon as an incorruptible man whose clean record no one could match, "a principled ascetic, honest and modest. An Israeli from another era; a man of truth."

CAN THE only country in the world facing an existential threat simply ignore such a warning from the retiring head of its defense establishment? After hearing such views, are we willing to continue blindly trusting the policies promoted by our prime minister - policies which on the surface lack any long-term strategic content? Policies based on cliches like retaining "the united and eternally undivided capital of Jerusalem" and "no further withdrawals from the territories," which even idiots recognize as cynical rhetoric? After all, even Palestinian Civil Affairs Minister Muhammad Dahlan warned Israel that unless Palestinian demands are met, a third "intifada" is inevitable.

In a sense, one could say that Ya'alon has legitimized the Likud rebels. In the light of his public statements, it behooves those of Sharon's Likud followers - who admit privately that they don't understand where his policy is leading us - to set aside political expediency and act on behalf of the national interest by finding the courage to say what they really believe. If the Knesset ignores Ya'alon's cri de coeur that the House of Israel is in danger, history will judge our leaders harshly for failing to live up to their responsibilities during a time of crisis. After all, Ya'alon is not merely relating to unilateral disengagement; he is challenging the entire basis of our current policy.

I don't know if Ya'alon is right. But when a man with his qualifications feels impelled to share such fears with the people, at least a full debate and review is warranted. To expedite this, the time has come for Prime Minister Sharon to do what he has assiduously avoided: provide the Knesset and the nation with a comprehensive review of his intentions, including where his real endgame lies, and to subject himself to a full Knesset debate, which should lead to an informed discourse throughout the nation.

We stand once more at the crossroad, and need to make decisions that will

Events...

Wednesday June 29, 8:00pm
Informational evening about
Ramat Shilo, a new Torani Leumi neighbourhood in Ramat Bet Shemesh affiliated with Yeshivat Lev HaTorah, at BAYT.

From the PA Media...

PA Encouragement of Child Martyrdom (Shahada) Continues
By Itamar Marcus and Barbara Crook

Promotion of Shahada, or death for Allah, has been the backbone of the Palestinian Authority's messages to its children since the start of the terror war in September 2000. Although the number of these messages has been reduced in recent months, the promotion and glorification of child Shahada continues nonetheless, as seen this week on PA TV.

This week's Shahada promotion was seen during the broadcast of The Palestinian Diaspora, a series presented as a factual dramatization of history that has been shown daily on PA TV in a prime time slot for the past month. Throughout the series, Israel's creation and ongoing existence has been presented as injustices that must be fought.

This episode was set in 1956, as Arab's mourn Israel's existence. A 12-year-old refugee reads his uncle a story he wrote. The scene has two explicit messages:

- A child should be willing and anxious to fight and die in order to destroy Israel.
- Arab 'refugees' can never resettle, but must 'return' to Israel.

The following is an excerpt from the scene
Boy: "His mother cried and said, 'My son! Swear to me! Don't leave me alone...! I'm afraid you will be killed.'

"Her son said to her, 'Don't cry, my mother! Let me go and fight for the sake of the homeland. The enemy stole our beautiful land... We all must fight in order to redeem the lost paradise... We lived in joy and happiness, until the foreign enemy [Israel] came and expelled us from our land, and we became refugees in tents. But we will return, by Allah's will!"

"His mother told him, 'Farewell, my son. Allah be with you.' He kissed her and left to fight, and fought until he became a Shahid [martyr for Allah]."

Uncle: "...Let me ask you, if they come and tell you, we will give you a very big house, a car, land and money, just resettle! Would you agree?"

Boy: "No!"

Uncle: "...the homeland is greater than individual possessions." [PA TV, June 16, 2005]

It's important to note that the segment opens with the boy's friend writing "I shall return" over a map he drew of 'Palestine' - which removed Israel's existence. (Palestinian Media Watch Jun 22)

Commentary...

For a Real Knesset Debate By Isi Leibler

Have we lost our minds? How else can one explain the curtain of silence which greeted the devastating press interviews by outgoing chief of General Staff Moshe Ya'alon?

Ya'alon predicted that:

- * Current government policies might culminate in a new round of terror directed at the major population centers - including Tel Aviv - which could be inundated by suicide bombers and Kassam rockets.
- * Even a retreat to the '67 armistice lines will not achieve a settlement. The current Palestinian leadership will only be satisfied when Tel Aviv is conceded and Jewish sovereignty is ended.
- * Mahmoud Abbas and Arafat are birds of a feather, and Abu Mazen's determination to promote the Arab "right of return" is set in stone.
- * About the two-state solution, Ya'alon says, "We have created a paradigm that

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have existential implications on our long-term future. Over 1,000 Israelis have already lost their lives. If the Knesset does not act now and conduct an informed debate on these issues, it would amount to a dereliction of responsibility, and history will condemn the leaders of Israel far more harshly than in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War disaster.

End the silence. Start an enlightened debate.

The writer chairs the Diaspora-Israel relations committee of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, and is a former chairman of the governing board of the World Jewish Congress. (Jerusalem Post Jun 16)

A New Road Map For Peace: Looking up to the sky

By Rabbi Dov Greenberg

We've been reading about the "road map" to peace in the Middle East for many years. Anyone can see it hasn't taken us very far. It's been like trying to get to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco using a map of Lower Manhattan. You can try harder, pray harder, and double your speed. But your efforts only succeed in getting you to the wrong place faster. The fundamental problem has nothing to do with traffic jams, diversions or delays; it has everything to do with using the wrong map.

For over a decade, Israel has navigated tirelessly to achieve peace using the Oslo map, which was built on this premise: Assuage the other side's grievances -- end the occupation; give the Palestinians land, armed forces, their own state - and peace will follow. Hence in 1993, Israel brought the P.L.O. out of exile and gave it recognition, international legitimacy, governmental autonomy and authority over 98% of the Palestinian population.

Where has this map brought us? In the past decade, terrorism has increased dramatically. Eleven years ago, Yitzhak Rabin in his historic speech on the White House lawn, spoke of a future in which mothers no longer weep for sons lost in battle. But the weeping has not ended; it's reached a deafening crescendo. Terrorists have killed more Israelis in the eleven years since Oslo began in 1993 than in the 45 years of Israel's existence before that.

Obviously we've been using the wrong map to move us toward peace. Is there an alternative?

Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that his aim as a philosopher was to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." The fly keeps banging its head against the glass in a vain attempt to get out. The more it tries, the more it fails, until it drops from exhaustion. The one thing it forgets to do is look to the sky. Like the frustrated fly, the one thing Israel has forgotten to do is look to the sky.

If Israelis were to look up, they would see an alternative map to peace, provided by El Al, Israel's renowned airline.

El Al is the gold standard in aviation security. There is a security, safety and comfort on El Al planes felt by all of its passengers - Jews, Christians and Moslems alike - that one does not feel on any other aircraft. This is an astounding achievement, since El Al is the world's most coveted terrorist target in the sky.

Now, imagine if El Al decided that because it has been despised for decades, it is time to change its policy and methods of security. First, El Al would invite people who in the past wished to hijack and blow up its planes and passengers and give them "autonomy" on one section aboard El Al aircraft. In these sections, former hijackers could move about freely without scrutiny or supervision. Next, El Al would make these "reformed militants" responsible for the security of passengers seated in their area of the aircraft. This overture of peace would certainly demonstrate to the international community that El Al is truly committed to coexistence and liberal values. It would help put an end to the animosity felt by many toward El Al.

Some would propose that El Al show more "flexibility" and relinquish its control of the cockpit to the former terrorists. Some would advocate that El Al construct a wall to enclose the autonomous aisles or to unilaterally withdraw from several seats that are in close proximity to those aisles.

All of these strategies, of course, would be suicidal for El Al. All of them miss the fundamental point. Compromising on security or granting autonomy on a single seat would spell cataclysmic disaster for the entire airline. The life of every passenger, Muslim, Jew and Christian, would be placed in mortal danger. Travelers would before long bid farewell to El Al. That would spell the end of the airline.

The only way for El Al to eradicate terror from its airplanes is not through concessions or autonomy, but rather by destroying any hope the terrorists have of achieving their objectives. El Al has adopted an uncompromising stance against terrorism, and they make no apologies. The world stands in admiration of what El Al has accomplished. The El Al road map goes by the name "peace through strength."

This is the right road map to peace in Israel.

If the last decade of the Oslo process has taught anything, it is that no responsible government can give in to terror. Such behavior does not end terror, but invites it yet more.

The Arab terror 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 current "road map" than anti-Americanism could be appeased by yielding New Jersey to Osama bin Laden.

Hence, Israel's intent to withdraw from Gaza is profoundly misdirected. The Palestinian goal over the last decade has been to demoralize the Israeli people through terrorism and force a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the territories. If they succeed, the relentless war against Israel will be launched far more

advantageously from their newly acquired territory.

At the end of World War II, Winston Churchill quipped, "You can rely on America to do the right thing, once it has exhausted the alternatives." Israel, which has far fewer alternatives than the U.S., has long ago exhausted them all. How much more innocent blood needs to be spilled before we abandon the failed maps of the past? How many more children have to be blown up by suicide bombers before we pursue the course El Al has bravely charted. (NaomiRagen.com Jun 19)

The writer is executive director of Chabad at Stanford University.

A Democratic Hamas? By Asaf Romirowsky

In an official statement, White House Spokesman Scott McClellan stated that Hamas associates that deal with politics "may be members of organizations, but are not terrorists, versus terrorists, people who have blood on their hands." [1] Is this distinction enough to convince us that Hamas only makes wine and honey and provides social welfare? And does the Bush administration not know what Hamas really is?

Hamas is the Arabic acronym for "The Islamic Resistance Movement" (Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya) and connotes heat, zeal and passion for a cause, the cause here being the destruction of Israel. Hamas was legally registered in Israel in 1978 by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who used to be the movement's spiritual leader until 2004. On March 22, 2004, he was killed when IAF helicopters fired missiles at him as he was leaving a Gaza City mosque. Subsequently, Hamas's leadership declared, "Sharon has opened the gates of hell and nothing will stop us from cutting off his head." In August 1988, the Hamas Covenant was published and challenged the PLO and its claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

At the time, the US and Israel thought this would off-set the PLO, but this obviously back-fired. The first intifada acted as a major catalyst to Hamas' creation as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Hamas is a theocratic movement dedicated to Islamic law, not a mythical Islam and democracy mixture, which is in effect a direct offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood's agenda, the same group responsible for assassinating Sadat.

Today, we are facing the possibility that Hamas will become a legitimate player within the Palestinian Authority (PA) despite the fact that since 2000, Hamas has been responsible for over 425 terrorist attacks. In the upcoming general elections scheduled for July, Hamas will be in position to gain between 35 to 40 percent of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. The Palestinian man on the street sees no problem with Hamas' role or policies; the opposite is true as Ahmad Khadoura says, "I don't think they [Hamas] will return to armed struggle. But if there is a need, why not? If it is necessary." [2] Moreover, the voices that are coming out of the Arab academia would you like us to accept Hamas and Hezbollah as legitimate political expressions even if they are armed. As Emad Gad, a political scientist at Cairo's Al Ahran Center for Political and Strategic Studies, stated, "engagement with Hamas and Hezbollah is important, but it's complicated and difficult because they're still armed."

Politics maybe the art of the possible, but incorporating Hamas will not make it possible for the PA to democratize; instead, it will allow terrorism to enter through the front door. The Bush administration would like to reform the PA and insert democratic elements. Co-opting Hamas is counter-productive to that goal. There is a reason that Hamas is on the State Department's terrorist list; let us not forget why we put them there in the first place. They finance and implement terrorist activities; moreover, much of their fund-raising is done here in the States.

The simplest definition of democracy is "a form of government where all the state's decisions are exercised directly or indirectly by a majority of its citizenry through a fair elective process." The concept is so far-fetched for Hamas that a "fair elective process" is not even a part of Hamas' lexicon. The use of force to pressure groups or individuals is the way that they operate.

As far as the Palestinian man on the street is concerned, Hamas is a social welfare contractor which provides education, warm meals and medical assistance; thus, it is so appealing. If Abbas is serious about reforming the PA and working with the US and Israel he and his Fatah party need to work towards providing a better social welfare program which will put Hamas out of business.

The bottom line is that the odds of Hamas changing its modus operandi and abandoning its mission--destroying the State of Israel--is non-existent. That said, the tension that needs to be resolved is between Fatah and Hamas--in other words, between Islamists and secularists. And that will determine the character of the PA. (FrontPageMagazine.com June 22)

The writer is a Campus Watch Associate Fellow for the Middle East Forum and the Israel Affairs associate for the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia.

[1] http://fullcoverage.yahoo.com/s/nm/mideast_usa_hamas_dc

[2] http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2005/06/05/hamas_finding_fertile_ground?mode=PF

Define Deviancy up By Saul Singer

In a recent column datelined New Delhi, The New York Times's Thomas Friedman worried that "America's reaction to 9/11 unintentionally led to an erosion of core elements of American identity." An Indian writer, Gurcharan

Das, complained to Friedman that America, which used to welcome "all kinds of oddballs... with a wonderful spirit of openness" is now projecting a spirit of "go away."

"American openness has always been an inspiration for the whole world, [Das] concluded. 'If you go dark, the world goes dark.'"

There could hardly be a more concise description of how terror works. Its goal is precisely to make America "go dark" and turn inward. So Friedman and Das are certainly right to bemoan the elements of a bunker mentality that have ensconced themselves in the post-9/11 American psyche.

But what is Friedman's solution? A "national commission to look at all the little changes we have made in response to 9/11 - from visa policies to research funding, to the way we've sealed off our federal buildings, to legal rulings around prisoners of war"

Such a commission would not only be a waste and a distraction, but one more example of "going dark." Can Friedman not see that the terrorists' dream is to convince America that militant Islam can never be beaten, and therefore the only alternative is to learn to live under threat?

Terrorism is a cloud casting a shadow over American society and, by extension, the world. So long as that cloud is there, all the "darkening" phenomena Friedman describes will be there, even if it may be possible to soften them around the edges.

For example, Israel is building a huge state-of-the-art checkpoint near Bethlehem, resembling the streamlined inspection system at an airport, that should block terrorists just as well while making life easier for innocent people.

Similarly, the US may find more friendly ways to protect its embassies. Immigration policies might also be adjusted so that they maximize security and keep America's doors open to the world. But the goal should not be just to better adjust and calibrate, but to win.

America and Israel should not learn to live with terrorism. There is something to the argument that because Israeli society was not broken by terrorism and we managed to continue a semblance of normal life while bombers were blowing themselves up on our streets, we won the terror war.

But we must remember that so long as we progressively take for granted higher and higher levels of threat, it is the terrorists who are winning. Just as Daniel Patrick Moynihan identified the problem of "defining deviancy down" in the social sphere, an increasing ability to live with terror "defines security down" in the strategic arena.

IN NEW YORK, Rudy Giuliani showed that it was possible not just to live with crime or stop its spread, but to actually beat it back and make the streets and subways much safer. By the same token, America must stay focused on the goal of making it safe to again build soaring skyscrapers and tear down its "go away" sign.

Disengagement is, of course, a much more extreme form of living with terror. It takes for granted that even though a million Arabs live in Israel, it is unsafe for a single Jew to live in a future Palestinian state. It hunkers us down behind a security barrier on the assumption that we will continue to be under attack and can only improve our defensive lines.

For Israel, the real victory is a stable peace, so pushing off that goal means, for now, giving up on victory. This is not to argue for final-status talks now, but to observe that we have essentially given up the idea of winning short of the comprehensive transformation of the Middle East that America has set as its own goal, for its own security reasons.

Neither America nor Israel should lose sight of this goal. For the goal to remain in sight, it should not only be defined in what can be dismissed as utopian terms: democracy taking hold everywhere. The proximate watershed to aim for is much more modest: driving every rogue regime either out of power or out of the terror and nuke business. In practical terms, the goal is narrower still, since Iran, Syria and North Korea are the boldest and most dangerous rogues, and Iran is the only one large enough to, through its defiance and survival, deal the entire war against militant Islamism a serious setback.

So if you don't like Gitmo, Israel's fence, and taking your shoes off at the airport; or if you're afraid to rent space at the top of New York's "Freedom Tower," don't form another commission. Focus on winning. Define deviancy up.

For Americans to feel as safe as they did pre-9/11 is not utopian, it's insufficient - the US and the world can be made safer and more free than they were on September 10, 2001.

Aiming for anything less means that the terrorists are winning. (Jerusalem Post Jun 20)

The writer is Editorial Page Editor of the Jerusalem Post and is author of the book, "Confronting Jihad: Israel's Struggle & the World After 9/11."

The Ya'alon-Dichter Divide By Uri Dan

Two commanders who have recently retired, chief of General Staff Moshe Ya'alon and Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) director Avi Dichter, succeeded - thanks to their close cooperation in defeating the terrorist offensive of Palestinian suicide bombers.

No democracy in the world has had to face this kind of war, when almost every day for four years Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigades attempted to send suicide bombers to attack buses, coffee shops, shopping malls and streets in Israel. The current lull was not imposed on the Palestinian terrorist organizations by the impotent Palestinian Authority, or even by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan.

The lull is actually due to the success of the Shin Bet and the IDF, together with the Israel Air Force (during Dan Halutz's time as commander) in systematically killing the terrorists and their leaders, such as Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantisi, the heads of Hamas.

Consequently the Israeli public owes a debt to Ya'alon, who commanded the IDF for three years, and to Dichter, who directed the Shin Bet for five years. They succeeded in breaking down the rigid organizational frameworks existing between the two bodies, to facilitate the free and rapid flow of intelligence information that thwarted attempted attacks by bombers.

It is therefore not surprising that American and European intelligence services are now coming here to study how we are battling Islamist fascism.

Dichter repeatedly claimed, in the numerous interviews he gave last week, that the security fence has led to the dramatic decrease in the number of penetrations by suicide bombers. He implies that if the government had constructed the fence earlier, this would have saved many more lives.

NATURALLY SUCH arguments provide ammunition for attacks on the government by its detractors, who aspire to its downfall.

In contrast, Ya'alon told me a different story: He attributes the success in the campaign against the bombers more to military operations than to the construction of the fence. Ya'alon explained to me, in a conversation in Jerusalem two weeks ago, that the Israeli capability of reaching the terrorists' homes and hiding places, and of arresting or killing them before they perpetrate attacks, changed the face of the war and gave the Jews the upper hand.

This isn't the sole bone of contention between Ya'alon and Dichter when analyzing the situation. Although Ya'alon emphasized that he was optimistic in the long run, he warned that after disengagement Palestinian shelling can be expected not only of Israeli towns near the Gaza Strip but also of cities in the center of the country, from Palestinian bases in Judea and Samaria, if Israel doesn't continue to make concessions to the Palestinians in the West Bank also.

In contrast, Dichter is trying to sound more optimistic even now, claiming that there is "no intelligence information" supporting Ya'alon's analysis of the situation. However, in the same breath Dichter adds that even if the four settlements in Samaria are uprooted, the IDF will have to continue to control the area.

Perhaps Ya'alon and Dichter mean the same thing?

In other words, Dichter is promising quiet for the towns in the center of the country, on condition that the IDF, led by Dan Halutz, continues to control the area. And perhaps Ya'alon is afraid that subsequent governments will give up control of Judea and Samaria, leading to a rain of Kassams on Ra'anana and Kfar Saba.

In my opinion, the explanation is far simpler: Dichter, despite his half-hearted denials, intends to enter political life. Ya'alon is still far from such an ambition.

It is very strange that Dichter is claiming that "there is no intelligence" supporting Ya'alon's grave warnings. What does he expect - recordings of phone calls or written operational orders of the Palestinian terrorist organizations indicating that they are planning to continue the war after Israel leaves Gaza?

After all, the writing is on the wall. Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Palestinian Authority are continuing the massive smuggling of arms to the Gaza Strip via the tunnels in Rafah. The Palestinians are transferring their military industry for the production of Kassams and mortars to Judea and Samaria.

Why should they do so, if not to continue the war against Israel? What is Dichter thinking?

Consequently the scorn voiced by some Israeli pundits about Ya'alon's warnings will come back to haunt them.

With all due respect to Dichter, he has apparently failed to absorb the most important lesson from the failures of the Shin Bet chiefs who preceded him: Former Shin Bet directors, Ya'acov Perry, Carmi Gillon and Ami Ayalon, all fell asleep on guard duty because Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Yossi Beilin and Ehud Barak believed the lies of Oslo, and of Yasser Arafat himself.

They had intelligence information that Arafat was intending to continue the struggle against Israel, and not to seek peace. They threw this intelligence into the garbage can. Hundreds of Jews paid with their lives. Now we need to pay attention to the writing on the wall. (Jerusalem Post Jun 17)

Rally Round the Flag B Michael Freund

It is staring us right in the face - the prospect of heightened civil strife, sharpened internal division and even more, raucous public discord.

In less than 60 days, if all goes according to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan, Israel will withdraw from Gaza and northern Samaria, uprooting thousands of Jews from their homes and pushing the nation to the brink of a major schism.

Whatever one may think about the wisdom of the proposed retreat, there can be no doubt that it will send a painful shudder through Israeli society, one that is sure to be felt for decades to come.

There is hardly an ideological or political seam-line in the country that will not be affected, in one form or another, by the trauma that will ensue should Israel's armed forces be deployed against the very citizens they are

sworn to protect. One can only imagine the heartrending scenes, the tears that will be shed and the silent prayers that will be recited in the heat of that terrible moment, should it come to pass.

The wound in the nation's psyche will be gaping, which is why we all need to begin preparing now for the possible aftermath.

This is not a matter of coming to terms with the withdrawal, of accepting it, or even legitimizing it. But now more than ever, it is essential for the future of this country that we start reinforcing the glue that holds our society together.

Irrespective of whether the withdrawal does occur, the strains on the country are already beginning to be felt. Failure to address them now will merely increase the risk of greater disarray and turmoil in the months and years to come.

The idea of promoting national unity is hardly new, and barely a day seems to go by without some politician or spiritual leader stressing its importance. But, like most abstract concepts, unity must be grounded in something tangible if people are to grasp its significance and meaning.

THAT IS where our national symbols come into play. Objects such as our flag and the national anthem are perhaps our most powerful, and most underutilized, tools for strengthening the bonds that hold us together.

In times such as these, where our unity is at stake, what could be more natural - and more necessary - than to reach for these evocative symbols?

Just think about how patriotic Americans are. Every baseball game begins with the Star-Spangled Banner, and every schoolchild recites the Pledge of Allegiance, solemnly reaffirming his or her loyalty to the nation and the principles on which it was founded.

America has a Flag Day to underline the importance of its national banner; it celebrates its founding fathers with striking memorials in its capital, and it even has a National Museum of Patriotism. Located in Atlanta, the museum's mission is "to deepen our appreciation of patriotism and citizenship" and "help schoolchildren connect with the founders of our country and understand the values that have created the greatest nation on earth."

Contrast this with Israel, where so little organized effort is made to imbue the public with a sense of patriotism and national pride. Sure, the flags come out on Independence Day, but where are they during the rest of the year?

Take, for example, Israel's schools, where so little is being done to cultivate a love of country or a sense of shared civic responsibility. There is no reason why every classroom should not be adorned with a large Israeli flag, or why the singing of Hatikva, the national anthem, should not become part of every educational institution's weekday routine.

THE LAND itself is a living curriculum, with an abundance of historical and religious sites that most children are never taken to see. What could possibly leave a stronger impression on Israel's youth than getting to know their own history up close? And how about constructing our own Museum of Jewish Heroism celebrating Jewish pride and inculcating in visitors, young and old, a healthy sense of national accomplishment and self-respect?

As the Baron de Montesquieu, the great 18th-century political philosopher, once noted, the promotion of love for one's country "ought to be the principal business of education." But the wise Baron did not stop there, pointing out that "the surest way of instilling it into children is for parents to set them an example."

So, it is about time we stopped shying away from words such as nationalism and patriotism, and instead embraced them as wholeheartedly as possible, promoting them and the values they represent at every opportunity.

We can bring about change by restoring a healthy sense of national dignity and self-esteem, insisting on a larger role for our national symbols in public life. However divided the electorate might be on the issues of the day, it is precisely these symbols that can serve to reinforce the underlying bonds that unite us as a people.

Abraham Lincoln understood this well. On the eve of the American Civil War, in his first inaugural address, he concluded with a heartfelt plea to his fellow citizens not to allow their differences to "break our bonds of affection," noting that they were bound together by what he called "the mystic chords of memory." (Jerusalem Post June 22)

A Coward for Prime Minister By Caroline Glick

During her visit to Jerusalem on Sunday, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice applauded Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, saying, "He has displayed courage and vision in putting forth this disengagement plan."

Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth.

In a new book, *Boomerang*, published in Hebrew last week, left-wing commentators Raviv Drucker and Ofer Shelach provide an insider's narrative account of how Sharon came to make the decision to withdraw from Gaza and Northern Samaria. Their findings are devastating.

Based on interviews with senior government and military officials, Drucker and Shelach report that Sharon's decision in December 2003 to abandon his electoral platform, which opposed the unilateral transfer of land to the Palestinians and rejected out of hand the notion of expelling Israelis from their communities in the Gaza Strip or Judea and Samaria, stemmed from considerations that had absolutely nothing to do with Israel's national security interests.

According to the two writers, Sharon's basic impetus for adopting the radical left-wing plan - that had been overwhelmingly rejected by voters in the January 2003 elections - was his desire to avoid indictment for his role in corruption

scandals for which he and his sons Gilad and Omri were under police investigation.

They write: "In private conversations [Sharon] said he was convinced that [state attorney Edna] Arbel would try to bring about his indictment and his resignation from the premiership." Sharon's aides, first and foremost among them his personal attorney and chief of staff Dov Weisglass, told Sharon that to avert indictment he had to take a bold initiative "to change the public agenda away from the media's focus on the investigation." And so the disengagement plan was born.

After Arbel was booted up to the Supreme Court, Sharon, still under investigation, made a move to head off an indictment by the new attorney-general, Menachem Mazuz. As the media bleated daily, Mazuz's first order of business upon taking office would be to decide whether or not to indict Sharon and his son Gilad in what had become known as "The Greek Island Affair."

The day after Mazuz came into office, Sharon invited radical left-wing columnist Yoel Marcus from Haaretz for a visit at his residence in Jerusalem. Sharon outlined his plan to withdraw from Gaza to Marcus. As expected, Marcus embraced both Sharon and the plan in Haaretz the next day, and thus the radical Left was brought on board Sharon's bandwagon. Shortly thereafter Mazuz closed the investigation on Sharon and Gilad.

In an interview last Wednesday night on Channel 2, Shelach said, "The people who are closest to Sharon told us absolutely that if it hadn't been for those police investigations, this decision [to withdraw from Gaza and northern Samaria] would not have been made."

Several months ago, a senior government official who was involved in the government discussions about the withdrawal plan told me, "Sharon placed the legal establishment on the horns of a dilemma. They had to decide what moved them more, their love of the law or their hatred of the settlers. It was an easy decision."

SHELACH AND Drucker's book gives the lie to the notion that any security or strategic considerations were taken into account by Sharon and Weisglass in formulating the withdrawal plan. Indeed, as Maj.-Gen. (res.) Amos Yaron, who now serves as Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz's senior policy adviser, is quoted as having said, "If the disengagement goes through, it will be proof that there is no need for any decision-making process in the State of Israel."

This is the case because, as the authors demonstrate, the plan, which was Weisglass's brainchild, was made without any staff work, without any discussion with the army, and without any debate by the cabinet. Weisglass presented it to then US national security adviser Rice without any discussion with or forewarning to the IDF or the Shin Bet and against the strenuous objections of both.

To counteract the security establishment's opposition, Sharon effectively fired the IDF chief of general staff, Lt.-Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, and Shin Bet director Avi Dichter by not extending their tours of duty, as is routinely done for both positions. He simultaneously stacked the General Staff and the Shin Bet with commanders who, like Mofaz, understand that they are personally indebted to the prime minister.

Not surprisingly, the media establishment, which, like the legal establishment, hates the settlers more than it loves the law, has been silent on Drucker's and Shelach's revelations. There have been no follow-ups to Shelach and Drucker's television appearance from last Wednesday in any of the television newscasts or major newspapers.

DRUCKER'S AND Shelach's findings point to two critical and acute problems in Israel. The first is that Sharon, in sharp contrast to the public image that his advisers have carefully crafted for him, is neither a great visionary nor a strong leader. He is an old widower moved by personal ambition and an overarching desire to be perceived as a man he is no longer capable of being. The second problem is that our legal establishment is inspired by our political leadership as so prejudicial that it is capable of inspiring policies that are antithetical to national security.

The fact that, in spite of their clear support for the left-wing platform of an Israeli return to the 1949 armistice lines Drucker and Shelach could not ignore the fact that Sharon's entire policy was based on nothing other than his desire to be admired and to avert criminal indictment, shows clearly how history will look back on this period. It also shows that, as was the case with the critics of the Oslo process, critics of this plan - which, like the Oslo agreement, was put together with no discussion or debate, against the strenuous opposition of the defense establishment and with no thought of what would come in its aftermath - will be proven right in all of their warnings of impending disaster.

There are still two months before this ill-begotten and breathtakingly ridiculous plan is to be carried out. In the time that remains it will be interesting to see whether those, both in Israel and the US, who were brave enough to oppose the Oslo plan on the basis of its obvious and gaping flaws but who today, placing their trust in large part on Sharon's reputation as a strong leader, support the withdrawal plan, will reconsider that support. If they do not, they, like Sharon, will not be remembered by history for their past bravery, but rather for their decision to prefer momentary and opportunistic accolades for their "moderation" over the long-term security of the State of Israel and the stability of the Middle East as a whole. (Jerusalem Post Jun 21)