

## 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...

#### **Sunday September 18, 7:10pm**

*Communal prayer gathering with speeches by Rav Shlomo Miller and Rav Baruch Taub, at the new Bais Yaakov Elementary School, 15 Saranac.*

### Commentary...

#### **The Civil War That Wasn't** By Natan Sharansky

The looming civil war, which Prime Minister Ariel Sharon prophesied from the pages of The New York Times, did not materialize.

It did not because a civil war requires two opposing camps fighting each other, hating each other, and most importantly, convinced that their survival depends on the annihilation of each other.

Over the past two months, I spent a great deal of time in Gush Katif, both with families in the last minutes of their lives there, as well as with the soldiers and officers. What I saw, even at the most trying and tragic moments, was not a division into two camps of evacuating soldiers and evacuees.

The settlers and the army were of the same camp – Israeli citizens placed in a difficult, and often impossibly grueling, situation. Two warring camps simply did not exist.

During the demanding days of the so-called disengagement, there were many dramatic televised scenes of resistance and human tragedy. But many other, no less telling, scenes were not caught by the media.

The cameras missed the joint mincha prayers and the shared volleyball games on opposite sides of the ostensibly dividing Kfar Maimon fence. They missed soldiers being the first to offer their condolences to a family sitting shiva, even ritually tearing their clothes, mourning three generations of life in Gush Katif and the imminent disappearance of a unique world of Torah and modern agriculture built on the barren sands of the Gaza strip.

They did not see the final Torah lesson led by the head of a family for his children, joined, first hesitantly and sheepishly, and then actively and vigorously, by the evacuating soldiers; they overlooked the tear-swollen eyes of the soldiers and settlers alike, discussing what our forefathers, Abraham and Isaac, must have felt when the wells that they had excavated were sealed. They did not cover a senior officer, going door-to-door to the homes of his own soldiers all over Gush Katif, apologizing personally for the pain that the army and state was inflicting upon these families.

They also missed the last Shabbat prayers in the beautiful synagogues of Gush Katif, when the prayer for the well-being of the state was tearfully chanted. In it, Israel is called "the beginning of our spiritual redemption," and God is asked to bless the heads, ministers and advisers – the same government that had sent the army to destroy the world the people of Gush Katif built with their labor, dreams and blood.

Perhaps the most telling were the dialogues between pairs of Israeli journalists on all three major TV stations. One would be stationed in Gush Katif; the other in the studio. As time went by, the two professionals, who had worked together for many years, started speaking different languages.

The reporter in the studio would still be using the clichés about the dangerous settlers running rampant in the Gush; the reporter who had spent two weeks in the field came to see in the residents of the Gush fellow human beings facing a personal tragedy of unimaginable proportions.

Disengagement was widely portrayed as a battle between the powers of democracy and lawless settler fanatics. For sure, violent acts and protests were committed on the fringes. But the leaders of the Yesha Council, no less than the army and police officers, did all in their power to ensure that, despite all the pain, this would be a "battle" with one side: that both those who implemented the government's decisions and those who protested them would play on the side of democracy.

And yet, the disengagement did cause other fronts to surface. An invisible but very tangible border arose; not between soldiers and settlers, but between those who shared the pain of disengagement and those who did not. The latter could not relate to the disappearing world of Gush Katif as part of their own

world. ד"ר

The excruciatingly painful battle between these two camps was waged on the pages of some of our newspapers, in the often base attacks from the Knesset podium, and in the heartless comments of "they deserve it!" or "I have more in common with the Palestinians than with the crazy settlers," heard often enough in the streets.

Our sages tell us that a two-headed baby was once brought before King Solomon, who was asked to rule if this

infant was one child or two. The king ordered hot water sprinkled on one of the heads, to see if the other head would respond in tears. If it did, the child would be considered one human being; if not, two disparate ones. According to the wise king, empathy is the ultimate sign of oneness.

Still, like any high tragedy, the struggle for Gush Katif showed not only anguished weakness, but also great hope. Within the depths of this struggle, the Panim el Panim (Face-to-Face) movement was born. Thousands of settlers and their friends knocked on the doors of more than 100,000 homes in Kiryat Shmona, Netanya, Tel Aviv, Beersheba and Haifa. Half of the houses opened their doors. In many homes, the knock was the beginning of an important dialogue and the establishment of vital connections.

Paradoxically, the disengagement itself became a massive and unprecedented face-to-face event, of an intense and often heart-wrenching intra-Jewish dialogue. Yet, we cannot and should not wait for tragedies on such a scale to initiate a dialogue among ourselves.

From its inception, the Gush Emunim movement believed that it should constantly move ahead, build and expand, never looking back. The rest of the nation, they believed, would surely catch up later. Yet, the nation, as the leaders saw all too late, did not catch up. Instead, bridges of dialogue have to be built between the camps.

But for this, the face-to-face process must be encouraged and even become the nexus of our Zionist activity. The civil war that wasn't teaches us that we are all in the same camp – except perhaps those indifferent to their fellow citizens' suffering. We must continue knocking on each other's doors. Breaking down the walls of ignorance and indifference is critical not just to our strength against external enemies, but our ability to address the many societal challenges facing us in the days ahead.  
(Jerusalem Post Sep 13)

#### **The Image of the Truth** By Caroline Glick

They say that one picture is worth a thousand words. No doubt this is true. But what is the guarantee that those words are truthful?

On September 30, 2000, The New York Times ran a photograph that, no doubt, for the photo editor, told the entire tale of the then two-day-old Palestinian terror war against Israel.

The picture showed a bloodied, frightened youth sitting in the foreground and an irate Israeli border guard, mouth agape, standing behind him, wielding a police baton. In the background, crimson flames and black smoke plumed upward behind cement blocks.

The photo editor never questioned what it is that he was looking at. Of course, the boy was a Palestinian. The assailant was the angry Israeli policeman. After all, as an enlightened man of the world, he knew what every right thinking person knows: the Palestinians are the victim. The Israelis are the aggressors. And so, the caption under the photograph told Times readers that indeed, what the photo editor assumed, was reality.

Sadly, the thousand words told by that photograph were a thousand lies. The bloodied youth in the foreground was a Jewish student from Chicago named Tuvia Grossman. He had been dragged out of his taxi in east Jerusalem by a Palestinian mob and was beaten and stabbed to the edge of death. With his last measure of strength, Grossman screamed and ran to the nearest Israeli security forces he could find. The border guard with the baton was protecting him from the mob.

Eventually, after receiving an angry letter from Grossman's father in Chicago, the Times apologized for the error. Grossman spent 10 days in the hospital in Jerusalem and then was flown to his family in Chicago where he was confined to a wheelchair for five months as he recuperated from his many wounds.

The story told by that picture then, was the story of the prejudice of the Times' photo-editor.

In much the same manner, the images we are broadcast from Hurricane Katrina tell us a certain story. The victims, in most of the pictures, are

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African Americans. And the story that has emerged from these images is one of racism. The white (and Republican) Federal government, we are led to believe, waited for an unforgivably long period of time in providing rescue and relief to the victims of the terrible storm, because of the color of their skin. The pictures, like the people who are asked to tell us the story, repeat over and over again that if these had been rich whites, rather than poor blacks, the National Guard would have been called in days before to restore order to New Orleans and to evacuate the victims.

It's a wonderful story. It is easy to follow and allows angry people to feel justified in their hatred and prejudices against Republicans and against President George W. Bush. But like the picture of Tuvia Grossman, it has the singular problem of being untrue.

After the initial barrage of unfounded criticism was launched, the fact of the matter, that the city of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana did not implement their own evacuation plans in spite of the fact that the authorities all knew that the below-sea-level city could not survive a category 4 hurricane like Katrina, began to emerge.

And yet, in the meantime, a myth was born that told the easy story of racism.

What both these examples show is that in spite of what we have been led to believe by our image-inundated world, images do not speak for themselves. They speak with the voice of their creators and their distributors. Every one of us attaches our pre-existing beliefs to what we see and each of us is influenced at some level, and often deeply by the interpretations that are given to the images by those who bring them to our attention.

In Israel, the challenge of imagery is perhaps the greatest challenge that we face. It is important to recognize this fact as we enter into the era where Palestine has been established in Gaza. If we simply glance at the images purveyed to us this week, we understand how massive the challenge remains and how dangerous it will become if we do not rise to meet it.

First of all, let us recall, 12 years ago, when then prime minister Yizhak Rabin embraced Yasser Arafat and the PLO and thus embarked on the Oslo peace process, he was able to convince security hawks of the value of his policy explaining that the Palestinians, not Israel, were about to be put under a microscope. Rabin argued that if the Palestinians did not abide by their commitments to end terrorism and live at peace with Israel, then the entire world would stand by Israel's right to defend itself. Israel would re-enter the areas that it had transferred to PLO control and that would be the end of that. It was a risk, he said, but a calculated risk.

Unfortunately, events proved otherwise. The images purveyed to the world by the PLO propaganda machine were images of cruel Israeli "occupation forces" embittering the lives of the victimized Palestinians. The fact that billions of dollars in international aid were stashed in Swiss bank accounts was of no interest. The fact that the Palestinian security forces established by Arafat were twice their permitted size was cosmically boring. The fact that terror reached unprecedented levels just a year after that handshake on the White House lawn was interpreted not as proof of Palestinian duplicity, but as a justification for increasing calls for yet more Israeli land transfers and further strengthening of the wholly corrupt, and terror supporting Palestinian militias.

The same was the case when then prime minister Ehud Barak went to Camp David five years ago and begged Arafat to establish a state on all of Gaza, 95 percent of Judea and Samaria and in east Jerusalem, including Judaism's most sacred site of the Temple Mount and then threw in land in the Negev for good measure.

After Arafat tore up Barak's offer and went to war against Israeli civilians, Barak declared that now the Europeans and the Americans, and of course the Israeli Left, would accept the truth. Arafat and the PLO had been unmasked. As PA minister for Jerusalem affairs, Faisal Husseini admitted shortly before his death at the end of 2000, Oslo had been a "Trojan horse," brought in to destroy Israel from inside.

All was known, and yet the image creators and their eager audiences from London to the State Department refused to budge. As the dozens of Israelis murdered became hundreds, and then topped 1,000, with thousands more wounded and maimed, the Palestinians remained the victims, and Israel remained the aggressor.

Now, as Israel approaches the final phase of the withdrawal from Gaza and northern Samaria, we are told again, this is the test for the Palestinians. They have sovereign territory now in Gaza. They will be forced to instill order. They can no longer claim victim status. We are no longer there. And yet the images this week tell us, again, that this is untrue. On Wednesday, Arafat's nephew and security boss Moussa Arafat was murdered in Gaza by a mob of terrorists with automatic rifles and RPG. His son was kidnapped and is now assumed dead. The perpetrators were the Popular Resistance Committees. This is a terror group formed by Arafat in the months ahead of the war in the spring of 2000 that includes elements of Fatah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Members of the group also serve in the official Palestinian militias.

This challenge to the Palestinian Authority's leadership was met with listless protestations by the likes of Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei. In the same manner, Palestinian forces stood by on Tuesday as hundreds of young men and teenage boys descended on the ruins of Neveh Dekalim and threw stones and attempted to mount an IDF tank. It was an act of pure aggression, meant not to destroy the tank but to create an image of Israeli aggression on the one hand, and fecklessness on the other.

After one of the attackers was killed by the tank, the Palestinians launched rockets at civilians by Kibbutz Yad Mordechai which borders northern Gaza. The press explained the story as a cycle of violence. But there was no cycle of anything, just an escalation of Palestinian violence, from throwing rocks at a tank to shooting mortars at civilians.

For Europeans and leftists in Israel and America, no matter what the Palestinians do, the images emanating from here will be interpreted as justification for further Israeli land giveaways in light of continued Palestinian victimhood.

For Arab audiences, in Palestine – n e Gaza – in Judea and Samaria and throughout the Arab world, the pictures emanating from here will tell two stories. The first is of Jewish ruthlessness and cruelty that justifies the continued massacre of Israeli civilians. The second image is one of Israeli weakness in the face of constant terror – of Israel falling apart. This image sends a message saying that momentum is on the terrorists' side. All they need to do to bring about the destruction of Israel is continue their terrorist war of attrition.

For most Israelis, the images tell a different tale completely. The images expose the transformation of Gaza into a new Afghanistan replete with warlords who terrorize their people and their neighbors; a society embroiled in chaos; and a society where Islamic fascists have the upper hand over simply corrupt, secular murderers.

The great challenge of Israel is to meet the false images portrayed by those who cling to their mendacious "narratives" of the Palestinian war against Israel with truthful ones.

Tuvia Grossman made aliya on Wednesday. In an interview with The Jerusalem Post, he said, "You don't realize how many people's lives have been affected forever from terrorist attacks. Some people are wounded for the rest of their lives. Once I get settled in, I would love to assist victims of terror in any way I can."

Grossman's story, both his victimization and his stubborn loyalty and love for the Land of Israel that motivated him to return here and build a life of giving despite his terrifying experience, is the story of the Jewish people and of the Jewish state. It is this truth we must uphold and contrast against the barbarism of our enemies if we do not wish for their false images to become our reality. (Jerusalem Post Sep 9)

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#### **Gaza Grows** By Evelyn Gordon

If anyone thought that Israel's withdrawal from Gaza would revive prospects for peace, Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas scotched that notion last week. Full withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines is insufficient, he declared: Israel must also concede additional territory inside these lines.

Specifically, Abbas demanded land north and east of the Gaza Strip. This land was indeed on the Arab side of the 1949 armistice lines, but Egypt, which controlled Gaza at the time, traded it to Israel in 1950 in exchange for a larger chunk of land that Israel held in eastern Gaza. This new border was subsequently acknowledged not only by UN Resolution 242, but also by the Oslo Accords, which the Palestinians signed. The PA, therefore, has no conceivable claim to this land: Not only did Israel "purchase" it by ceding a larger bit of land to Gaza, but the new border was recognized by both the UN and the PA itself.

Thus when PA officials first raised this demand in talks with Israel several weeks ago, Israeli officials dismissed it as a negotiating ploy. But what Abbas did last week is not so easily dismissed: In an interview published in a major Palestinian daily, Al-Quds, on Saturday, he told the Palestinian public that "the evacuation of the settlers, the settlements and the army from the Strip are steps in the right direction, but it does not mean the end of the occupation. There are lands in eastern and northern Gaza still under occupation.... We need to renegotiate the details and get back to the real border."

This statement manages to undermine every major foundation of the peace process at once.

First, peace was always predicated on the idea that Palestinian demands are finite, and that once Israel meets them, the grounds for conflict will disappear. But in this case, Israel no sooner agreed to withdraw to Gaza's recognized international border than the PA produced a new territorial demand – one it had never raised before – and began mobilizing Palestinian public opinion behind it.

Second, any treaty requires confidence that once an agreement is signed, the issue is closed. But in this case, the PA, which consented to the current Gaza-Israel border in the Oslo Accords, is now blithely demanding that the issue be renegotiated.

Third, the peace process relied on the assumption that even if parts of Palestinian society were reluctant to end the conflict, their leaders would educate them toward reconciliation. Instead, the "moderate" Abbas has done the opposite: By raising his new territorial demand publicly, in the Palestinian media, he has encouraged the Palestinians to adopt a previously nonexistent grievance, thereby making it harder for any future leader to reach an agreement.

Fourth, the peace process was predicated on the belief that most Palestinians do want peace. But even Abbas, the most moderate leader the

Palestinians have yet produced, is apparently so unwilling to give up any pretext for conflict that he has advanced a completely untenable territorial claim in order to avoid acknowledging the end of Israel's "occupation" of Gaza. That indicates that his goal is not ending the conflict, but perpetuating it.

HIS CLAIM is the more remarkable because the PA already has far more valid grounds for refusing to declare "the occupation" over: Israel's unwillingness to give it control over the Gazan-Egyptian border crossings or allow it to reopen the Gaza airport. Since control of one's borders is an essential element of sovereignty, Gaza clearly will not be independent of Israel until this issue is resolved. Yet Abbas's fear of allowing any pretext for conflict to lapse evidently runs so deep that he felt a need for a back-up excuse, however flimsy, lest Israel give in to international pressure and concede on the border control issue.

Fifth, the peace process always relied on the assumption that the Palestinians truly want an independent state. Yet even the most "moderate" leader they have yet produced has now proven himself so loath to assume the responsibilities of statehood that, rather than welcoming Israel's cession of the Strip and using it to demonstrate the PA's ability to run a state, he prefers to grasp at any excuse, however untenable, to declare that the occupation continues, and therefore the PA is still not responsible for Gaza.

Finally, the peace process rested on the belief that ending "the occupation" would end Palestinian terror. Thus disengagement supporters predicted that Israel's departure from Gaza would largely end terror from the Strip, because the terrorist organizations would be unable to justify continued attacks against Israel from "liberated" territory.

Yet the man universally hailed as the leading Palestinian critic of terror has now provided the terrorists with a hitherto undreamed-of excuse for continuing attacks from Gaza: that Israel has in fact not withdrawn completely, so further terrorism is necessary to liberate the rest of the Strip. That is precisely how Hizbullah justified continuing attacks against Israel after Israel's pullout from Lebanon: Ignoring the UN's unequivocal finding that Israel had fully withdrawn to the international border, Hizbullah invented a new piece of "occupied Lebanese territory," the Shaba Farms, and then explained that it had to continue attacking Israel to "liberate" this territory.

And of course, Abbas will not lift a finger to prevent the attacks for which he has just thoughtfully provided the pretext: As he reiterated for the umpteenth time in that same Al-Quds interview, he has no intention of disarming the terrorist organizations.

Unfortunately, neither the Israeli Left nor the international community is likely to allow unpleasant reality to disturb their dreams. True believers, as Gershon Baskin of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information demonstrated in these pages on Monday, can always find an excuse: The Palestinians, he explained forgivingly, "have apparently forgotten" about the land swap. (Jerusalem Post Sep 11)

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### **When Pictures Lie** By David Gelernter

*A TV report that helped fuel the deadly Palestinian intifada appears to be false. So how is truth supposed to compete with a video fraud?*

A 55-SECOND video report, produced in 2000 by a French TV station and distributed free of charge around the world, has caused untold injury and grief to Israeli civilians. This month, the French author Nidra Poller analyzes the evidence in Commentary magazine and shows that the video is a fraud — "an almost perfect media crime," the retired French journalist Luc Rosenzweig calls it. That Poller's piece is conclusive is merely my own judgment, of course. But we are all required to make such judgments, in the light of such reports.

There is a wider story here also. We are vulnerable to video lies. Against purposeful lies, truth has never been so helpless, so weakly defended.

More than 500 Israeli civilians have been killed in the intifada, the Palestinian uprising that began five years ago. They were ordinary people chatting on a bus, eating ice cream in a restaurant; suddenly, a bright flash. The next moment the walls are spattered with blood and the bomb's hellish odor fills the air. Some people are blinded, others are cut to pieces. Parents living the worst seconds of their lives cast about wildly for their children in the screaming, smoky chaos.

What explains such bestial crimes? The reported death of a Palestinian child, Mohammed Dura, in Gaza did as much as anything else to ignite the current uprising. In the short video segment produced on Sept. 30, 2000, and distributed immediately, a state-owned French television station called France 2 accused the Israeli army of deliberately shooting and killing the 12-year-old.

You may remember the footage: A man and boy crouch in fear. Shots hit a wall far from the pair; a final round of gunfire kicks up a dust cloud that hides father and son, who are "targets of gunfire from Israeli positions," says the voice-over. When the dust clears, the boy is stretched at the man's feet. The voice says that he is dead.

This version of the story was retold around the world — and it has figured in countless wall posters, an Al Qaeda recruiting video, an epic poem. Last June an aspiring suicide bomber was arrested on her way to a hospital — to kill Israeli children, she said, in memory of Mohammed Dura.

BUT, ACCORDING to the Commentary article, the video is a fraud. The footage itself is ambiguous, the alleged main event hidden by dust. The voice-over is what makes us understand what we are seeing. It comes from Charles

Enderlin, a correspondent at France 2 (and a French Jew who became an Israeli citizen 20 years ago). Enderlin has never claimed to have been anywhere near the scene of the alleged shooting. His Palestinian cameraman told him the story.

Lots of supporting evidence was supposed to back up the cameraman's story — more footage of the supposed father and son pinned by Israeli fire, footage showing the child's death throes. France 2 has since admitted, according to Poller, that no such footage exists.

The voice-over reports that the child is dead, yet the rest of the segment — which wasn't aired but survives — shows the child propping himself on an elbow, shading his eyes with his hands. Poller saw the tape.

A boy named Mohammed Dura did die in a Gaza hospital that fateful Sept. 30. His face doesn't match the face in the video. Presented with these facts, France 2 officials said that "they would look into the matter."

In early 2005, Enderlin published an article in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. His report "may have been hasty," he wrote, but was justified because "so many children were being killed." (But the intifada had barely started; "so many children" were not being killed — not yet.)

What did happen? Chances are we will never know for sure. But Poller reports that outtakes she saw show phony battle scenes staged by Palestinians. Painstaking analysis done by students at the Israeli Military Academy found the same actors playing multiple roles: "The injured and dead jump up, dust themselves off, play at offensive combat."

Poller's article raises far more doubts about the report's authenticity than I can list here. But disproving a video report is much harder than getting people to believe it. You must convince people that their own eyes and ears have deceived them. They must follow the twists and turns of your logical argument, do their own thinking, reach their own conclusions. Give people an opportunity to switch off their brains and they will grab it.

How can cautious, painstaking truth compete with brazen video lies? If the report turns out to be just what it looks like, a despicable fake, who will produce another 55-second video telling the truth? Which TV stations will broadcast it? Where does Israel go to get its reputation back? What will it all matter to grief-stricken Israelis whose children, husbands, mothers and fathers have died in acts sparked by the Dura story?

The rational response is to insist fiercely on the transcendent importance of truth. Yet today we often hear that there is no truth. There are only competing narratives, we are told, all equally true or false.

Yet the truth of what happened on Sept. 30, 2000, is critical to the way the world works, the way people behave. The pictures we were shown and the story we were told is true or false, not both. Enderlin, France 2 and the larger media establishment have an obligation to tell us which it is. Because lies can kill. Lies do kill. (Los Angeles Times Sep 9)

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### **Mourn for Us. Mourn for the World** By Naomi Ragen

Ever since the decision to retreat from Gaza, I have felt that events were rushing by at such a furious pace it was impossible to comprehend them. The horror of forcible evacuations of Jews by Jews, the bulldozing of hundreds of homes, the wholesale destruction of businesses and schools and community centers. The busloads of homeless arriving in Jerusalem with only the clothes on their backs, forced into hotel rooms with no refrigerators to hold bottles and baby food. The frightening and strange parallels of human suffering and homelessness across the seas by an act of God.

The idea that synagogues would be blown up, the decision to leave them followed by the horror of Hamas-led destruction and wholesale burning of holy places. The falling of two Kassam rockets within Israel (Sderot and Yad Mordechai) with no Israeli response, despite our Defense Minister's toothless threat of "zero tolerance" for any more Kassams. The knowledge that more Kassams will fall, and our government will do nothing until it is too late, until small Jewish children lie dead in the streets of Israel, as we experienced during the Intifada.

The Philadelphi corridor, that strip of land between Gaza and Egypt where so many of our young soldiers died keeping terrorists from smuggling in more weapons and bombs, suddenly turned over to Egyptians - (even though the weapons-smuggling tunnels clearly exited into Egyptian army camps.) The complete failure of the Egyptians to exert control of the border, allowing Palestinian hordes from Gaza to overrun them....

The symbolism of 9/11 being the day that Israel let the terror groups take over Gaza. How can I understand how America - who spoke so bravely of fighting terror, of finding in anyone who supported terror an enemy of the United States-- is now responsible for Israel's complete capitulation to terror?

In my mind's eye, I see what should have happened: The American support to destroy Hamas. The destruction of terrorist camps all over Gaza. The denunciation of the Palestinian Authority for being terror-supporters. The support for the settlers in Gaza and the West Bank. Instead, this incomprehensible policy of appeasement and capitulation. The British desire to cancel Holocaust Memorial day to appease the Muslims.

History will show that the day Israel was forced by the United States and Europe and her own misguided stupidity and blindness to give aid and succor to terrorism, to leave her people vulnerable to terrorism, was the day the peace of the world was destroyed.

I don't know how this is going to happen, but just as the feeding of Ethiopia and Poland and Czechoslovakia to Hitler, bite by bite, only whet his appetite and increased his hubris, so the burning of Jewish synagogues by the Hamas in Gaza, the unprovoked rocket attacks that went unanswered by a brave and competent army, incomprehensibly emasculated by weak and confused politicians, will prove a turning point that all mankind will have reason to mourn.

I mourn now. (NaomiRagen.com Sep 13)

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### **Christianity Dying in Its Birthplace** by Daniel Pipes

What some observers are calling a pogrom took place near Ramallah, West Bank, on the night of September 3-4. That's when 15 Muslim youths from one village, Dair Jarir, rampaged against Taybeh, a neighboring all-Christian village of 1,500 people.

The reason for the assault? A Muslim woman from Dair Jarir, Hiyam Ajaj, 23, fell in love with her Christian boss, Mehdi Khouriyye, owner of a tailor shop in Taybeh. The couple maintained a clandestine two-year affair and she became pregnant in about March 2005. When her family members learned of her condition, they murdered her. That was on about September 1; unsatisfied even with this "honor killing" – for Islamic law strictly forbids non-Muslim males to have sexual relations with Muslim females – the Ajaj men sought vengeance against Khouriyye and his family.

They took it two days later in an assault on Taybeh. The Ajajs and their friends broke into houses and stole furniture, jewelry, and electrical appliances. They threw Molotov cocktails at some buildings and poured kerosene on others, then torched them. The damage included at least 16 houses, some stores, a farm, and a gas station. The assailants vandalized cars, looted extensively, and destroyed a statue of the Virgin Mary.

"It was like a war," one Taybeh resident told the Jerusalem Post. Hours passed before the Palestinian Authority security and fire services arrived. The 15 assailants spent only a few hours in police detention, then were released. As for Khouriyye, the Palestinian Arab police arrested him, kept him in jail, and (his family says) have repeatedly beat him.

As the news service Adnkronos International notes, for Palestinian Christians "the fact that the Muslim aggressors have been released while the Christian tailor-shop owner is still being held, at best symbolizes the PA's indifference to the plight of Palestinian Christians, at worst shows it is taking sides against them."

A cousin, Suleiman Khouriyye, pointed to his burned house. "They did this because we're Christians. They did this because we are the weaker ones," he said. The Khouriyyes and others recall the assailants shouting "Allahu Akbar" and anti-Christian slogans: "Burn the infidels, burn the Crusaders." To that, an unrepentant cousin of Hiyam Ajaj replied, "We burned their houses because they dishonored our family, not because they are Christians."

This assault fits a larger pattern. According to the Catholic Custodian of the Holy Land, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Christians in the Bethlehem region alone have suffered 93 cases of injustice in 2000-04. In the worst of these, in 2002, Muslims murdered the two Amre sisters, 17 and 19 years old, whom they called prostitutes. A post-mortem, however, showed the teenagers to have been virgins – and to have been tortured on their genitals.

"Almost every day – I repeat, almost every day – our communities are harassed by the Islamic extremists in these regions," Mr. Pizzaballa says. "And if it's not the members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad, there are clashes with ... the Palestinian Authority." In addition to the Islamists, a "Muslim land mafia" is said to operate. With PA complicity, it threatens Christian land and house owners, often succeeding to compel them to abandon their properties.

The campaign of persecution has succeeded. Even as the Christian population of Israel grows, that of the Palestinian Authority shrinks precipitously. Bethlehem and Nazareth, historic Christian towns for nearly two millennia, are now primarily Muslim. In 1922, Christians outnumbered Muslims in Jerusalem; today, Christians amount to a mere 2% of that city's population.

"Is Christian life liable to be reduced to empty church buildings and a congregation-less hierarchy with no flock in the birthplace of Christianity?" So asks Daphne Tsimhoni in the Middle East Quarterly. It is hard to see what will prevent that ghost-like future from coming into existence.

One factor that could help prevent this dismal outcome would be for mainline Protestant churches to speak out against Palestinian Muslims for tormenting and expelling Palestinian Christians. To date, unfortunately, the Episcopalians, Evangelical Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, as well as the United Church of Christ, have ignored the problem.

Instead, they pursue the self-indulgent path of venting moral outrage against the Israeli bystander and even withdrawing their investment funds from it. As they obsess with Israel but stay silent about Christianity dying in its birthplace one wonders what it will take to awaken them. (New York Sun Sep 13)

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### **Take Back the Holy Sites** By Michael Freund

The scenes from Gaza are as ghastly as they were predictable. Energized by Israel's retreat, thousands of Palestinians wasted little time in descending on abandoned Jewish communities, torching yeshivot and bulldozing synagogues in a frenzy of hate and destruction.

Among those leading the charge was none other than Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, who dismissed these places of Jewish prayer and study as "empty structures" and vowed that all such buildings would be destroyed.

Indeed, in the former Jewish community of Netzarim, Palestinian policemen chose not to intervene as rioters assaulted the synagogue, with one Palestinian officer telling a Western journalist: "The people have the right to do what they are doing."

Shortly thereafter the PA even dispatched a bulldozer to help the mob complete the demolition.

And so we were all treated to the bitter and painful irony of watching anti-Semitic mobs gleefully flattening synagogues as the Israeli army beat a hasty retreat.

But this is hardly the first time our government has stood by and watched as Palestinians desecrated a place held sacred by Jews. Remember Joseph's Tomb? It was just five years ago, on October 7, 2000, that the IDF withdrew from the site under cover of darkness after a joint assault launched by Palestinian police and terrorists. The PA, of course, then agreed to protect the Tomb, but that promise quickly went up in smoke. Several hours later the burial ground of the biblical Joseph had been reduced to debris.

Palestinians armed with pick-axes and hammers attacked the tomb, smashing the stone structure and ripping it apart, brick by brick. They burned Jewish prayer books and other religious articles and subsequently began transforming the site into a mosque.

It was then and there, at Joseph's Tomb, just days after the start of the second intifada, that the Palestinians learned two very dangerous lessons, which continue to haunt Israel until today.

First, they saw that violence pays. Israel's retreat from Joseph's Tomb was the first time Israel had fled under fire, abandoning territory to Palestinian control under threat of the gun.

Secondly, the Palestinians also learned that they could deliberately assault Jewish sites of immense historical, religious or emotional significance without fear of retribution from Israel.

After all, if they got away with an attack on Joseph's Tomb, why not take down a couple of abandoned synagogues in Gaza?

The same holds true of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where successive Israeli governments have failed to stand up to wanton Palestinian acts of desecration.

THEREIN LIES the "original sin" of various Israeli policymakers, who have consistently capitulated, retreated and withdrawn whenever the Palestinians have trampled on some of our most important national symbols. Instead of displaying some elementary Jewish pride and confronting the rioters to prevent them from torching what is holy to us, we prefer to shrug our collective shoulders, look away in shame, and hope for the best.

That may have made sense when the extent of our national power was limited to community councils in the shtetls of Eastern Europe, but surviving in the modern-day Middle East requires an entirely different approach.

For far too long we have inculcated in the Palestinians a sense of impunity when it comes to vandalizing or defiling Jewish holy sites, and it is time for this to change forthwith.

In light of the Palestinians' behavior in Gaza this week, it should be clear to all that they cannot, must not, be entrusted with safeguarding or administering Jewish religious sites under any circumstances whatsoever.

The Palestinians have once again failed to demonstrate even the modicum of decency and civility that calls for respecting houses of worship that belong to others.

And so Israel should not hesitate to do what should have been done already: take back Joseph's Tomb, reassert its sovereignty over the Temple Mount, and eject the PA-controlled Muslim Wakf from the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron.

These three sites, more than any others, symbolize our ties to this Land, and the abiding faith upon which they are based. It is time for all of them to return to sole Israeli control.

Such a step would send a clear and unequivocal message to the Palestinians that there is a price to be paid for treading on Jewish religious rights and assaulting our holy sites. It would also underline Israel's determination to retain these sacred spaces in any future arrangements that might be reached.

There is a limit to what a nation can be expected to tolerate when its most hallowed places repeatedly come under attack.

Israel's patience reached that limit long ago. It is time we let the Palestinians know that their abuse of our heritage, and all we hold dear, will no longer be tolerated. (Jerusalem Post Sep 14)

*The writer, who served in the Netanyahu government, is a Ra'anana-based contributor.*

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