

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...

Tifferet - Her Death Made a Difference By Rachel Saperstein

Tifferet Tratner, age 24, was the first resident of Gush Katif to be killed directly by a mortar shell.

In four years of endless bombardment, Gush Katif had experienced life in the realm of the

supra-rational, the realm of endless miracles by the Almighty. Mortars launched by Arab terrorists in Khan Yunis into the Gush Katif settlements exploded everywhere. They caused damage and injuries, but no deaths. The day before Yom Kippur 2004, this extraordinary statistic changed.

A mortar smashed into Tifferet Tratner's home, collapsing the roof onto her. She was home only because she had found an abandoned puppy and was caring for it. Unconscious, she was flown to Soroka Hospital in Beersheba, where she died.

Her death sent shock waves through a community that has been blasted by Arabs and designated for destruction by the Israeli government.

Who was Tifferet Tratner? It seemed that very few knew her. She was shy, barely speaking to passersby even when walking her dog. Her parents had come on Aliyah from the United States and settled in Jerusalem. Tifferet was their sabra daughter.

After high school, she did her year of national service in the isolated settlement of Netzarim, where she had an uncle. Her grandfather was killed by terrorists while visiting Netzarim. One of her sisters lives in the Gush Katif settlement of Atzmona.

Tifferet then did a second year at the Katifari, the N'vei Dekalim zoo. Her 'adoptive parents', Eli and Pazit Moses, said, "She was modest and had a quiet sense of humor. One had to make an effort to know her, but it was worth it."

On the morning before the holy day of Yom Kippur, as people rushed to do last minute shopping, as housewives prepared the pre-fast meal, as children played in parks near their homes, the sound of exploding mortars broke the still morning air. Tifferet's house was hit. She was found by a neighbor and a security guard. Less than two hours later, she was laid to rest in Jerusalem. Because of the hurried burial, her friends and neighbors, still in shock, could not attend the funeral. She died alone, and was carried to her grave by her immediate family and by the reverent people of Jerusalem, people who did not know her.

The Yom Kippur holiday intervened. Shiv'a, the seven days of mourning, was cancelled. No one was able to "sit shiv'a" for Tifferet.

But her name, her picture, her life and her death were endlessly recounted in the Israeli and international media. Her death made a difference. Instead of the usual ineffectual response to attacks, the IDF entered Khan Yunis and did a massive cleaning of the area near the wall. And the next night we slept without a mortar attack.

Tifferet, I didn't know you while you lived, and I'm sorry it took your death to make a difference. You were aptly named: Tifferet means "splendor". As Eli Moses said, "Tifferet was our first sacrifice. May she be our last sacrifice." (IsraelNationalNews.com Sep 27)

The writer is a teacher at the N'vei Dekalim ulpana and a spokeswoman for the Katif Regional Council.

Events...

Wednesday, October 20

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From the PA Media...

Twice in Three Days on PA TV: PA Religious Leaders Call for Genocide of Jews By Itamar Marcus & Barbara Crook

Twice in three days, PA religious leaders have openly called for the genocide of Jews. Broadcast on official PA TV, both called for the murder of Jews until the Jewish people are annihilated. Both presented the killing of Jews not merely as the will of Allah, but also as a necessary stage in history that should be carried out now. To support these mandatory killings, both cited the same Hadith - Islamic tradition attributed to Mohammed - expressing Allah's will that Muslims will kill Jews, before the "Hour" of Resurrection.

The words of the Hadith: "The Hour [Resurrection] will not take place until the Muslims fight the Jews, and kill them. And the Jews will hide behind the rock and tree, and the rock and tree will say: oh Muslim, oh servant of Allah, this is a Jew behind me, come and kill him!"

Numerous times in recent years Palestinian religious leaders and academics have taught publicly that this particular Hadith applies today. This teaching may well be a dominant motivating factor that drives terror against Israeli civilians, because it presents the killing of Jews as a religious obligation, not related to the conflict over borders, but as something inherent to Allah's world.

Note also the defining of Jews as "the brothers of the monkeys and pigs" in Maadi's religious lesson. PA religious leaders teach, based on a story in the Quran, that Jews were cursed by Allah and turned into monkeys and pigs.

This is consistent with the PA teaching that the Jew's have inherent and unchanging character defects.

The following are the texts of these broadcasts:

Sheik Ibrahim Madiras Friday sermon, PA TV Sept. 10, 2004: "The Prophet said: the Resurrection will not take place until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims kill them. The Muslims will kill the Jews, rejoice [in it], rejoice in Allah's Victory. The Muslims will kill the Jews, and he will hide. The Prophet said: the Jews will hide behind the rock and tree, and the rock and tree will say: oh servant of Allah, oh Muslim this is a Jew behind me, come and kill him!. Why is there this malice? Because there are none who love the Jews on the face of the earth: not man, not rock, and not tree everything hates them. They destroy everything they destroy the trees and destroy the houses. Everything wants vengeance on the Jews, on these pigs on the face of the earth, and the day of our victory, Allah willing, will come."

Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim Maadi on his weekly TV show, Sept. 12, 2004: "We are waging this cruel war with the brothers of the monkeys and pigs, the Jews and the sons of Zion The Jews will fight you and you will subjugate them. Until the Jew will stand behind the tree and rock. And the tree and rock will say: oh Muslim, oh servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him." (Palestinian Media Watch Sep 14)



Syria's Guests Jerusalem Post Editorial

On August 31, 16 Israelis were murdered by suicide bombers on buses in Beersheba. Hamas claimed responsibility.

Yesterday, Izz al-Din al-Sheikh Khalil, who reportedly headed Hamas's external "military" wing, was killed in an explosion in or near his car in Damascus. The day before, senior Syrian officials claimed that Palestinian groups had left Damascus. It seems this announcement was somewhat premature.

Syria's announcement, in response to increasing international pressure, of the withdrawal of some troops from Lebanon, and its repetition of an old

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claim that Palestinian terror chieftains are not operating out of its capital only serve to highlight the truth in both cases.

Syria still occupies a neighboring Arab state, and it is still a state sponsor of terrorism.

Khalil's death, whether or not Israel is responsible for it, unveils the cynicism of Syria's usual ploys. Bashar Assad's regime has been caught in the "round-up-the-usual-suspects" act. The implications of this are broader than one rogue regime and one terrorist organization.

Though the 9/11 Commission Report pointed it out in the most delicate of bipartisan terms, even that consensus product conceded that perpetrators of major terrorist attacks require some form of sanctuary, or, as the report put it, the "time" and the "space" in which to plan and train. Deny the terrorists sanctuary, the report implied, and decisive progress could be made toward eliminating the organized large-scale terrorism that casts a shadow over our world today.

Indeed, the entire terror network has depended on the sort of "plausible deniability" that rogue regimes like Syria have enjoyed – certainly before 9/11, but to some extent even today. It is an open secret that Iran and Syria provide aid, sanctuary, and often direction to three of the most dangerous international terrorist groups in the world today: Hizbullah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad. Yet these two countries, while shunned by the United States, are treated as members in good standing of the United Nations and respected trading partners of the European Union.

"Plausible deniability," in other words, is alive and well.

Israel is already being treated to pious lectures, led by none other than Syria and Iran, to the effect that by allegedly striking in a foreign capital it has engaged in state terrorism.

Civilized nations should respond in the opposite fashion. The question is not why Israel acted (as the United States has against al-Qaida terrorists in Afghanistan, Yemen, and elsewhere), but why known terrorists felt Damascus was a congenial place to live.

It is been argued that in an age when a handful of terrorists armed with box cutters and based in remote regions under failed regimes can bring down the World Trade Center, state sponsorship does not really matter. Stretched ad absurdum, this argument is irrefutable: even if no nations supported terrorism, no one can guarantee that all vestiges of terrorism can be eliminated.

But even if it is impossible to claim that state sponsorship is the only source of terrorism, it at least as implausible to claim the opposite: that a war against militant Islamism can be taken seriously, much less won, while some governments support terrorism with impunity and as a matter of national policy.

Those who minimize the role of state support seem to be making simultaneously contradictory claims: that driving states out of the terror business is not enough, and that it is not necessary. Which is it? Perhaps it is not sufficient, but how can it be claimed that it is not central to the war the West has found itself in?

Though Khalil did evidently feel relatively safe in Damascus, it is telling that other Hamas leaders, such as Khaled Mashaal, seem to be looking for a new home for their organization.

Leaders like Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantisi, who made a habit of bragging to the international media about the slaughter of Israeli civilians, are no longer with us.

Israel and the United States, in other words, are showing the world how terrorists who were open about what they did and received open support for it are now, literally, on the run. This is good news not only for Israel, but for the cause of a freer and safer world in general. The more Israel's example is followed, rather than pilloried, the closer we will all be to victory over the jihad that threatens free peoples everywhere. (Jerusalem Post Sep 27)

Two UN Camps on Terrorism By Anne Bayefsky

The plight of SC Resolution 1373

In the weeks immediately following 9/11 there comes another anniversary - this time of the UN response to the finally unmistakable global threat of terrorism. On September 28, 2001, the Security Council adopted resolution 1373. It has proved, however, to be the high water mark. Despite John Kerry's repeated calls for greater UN involvement, the organization's contribution to the war on terror has gone downhill ever since.

Three years after resolution 1373 was passed, the UN still cannot define terrorism. Member states are essentially divided into two camps.

In one corner is the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), composed of 56 states insisting that terrorism excludes "armed struggle for liberation and self-determination."

More precisely, blowing up Israelis of all ages in cafés, synagogues, buses, and discotheques is legitimate.

This point of view triggers collateral damage across the UN. For eight years

the UN has been struggling to adopt a comprehensive convention against terrorism. It cannot finish the task because the OIC holds out for an Israeli exclusion clause. Another round of bogus negotiations is scheduled for early October. No UN member state is prepared to change the rules and insist that a vote be called in the absence of consensus.

The upshot is the one line on the UN Web site devoted to the definition of terrorism. It refers interested parties to the ongoing discussion over a terrorism convention that "would include a definition of terrorism if adopted."

The UN's inability to identify a terrorist has real-life implications. In the last month, the Security Council has been faced with the terrorist acts in Beslan, Russia, and the suicide-bombing in Beersheba, Israel. The bombings in Israel claimed 16 lives and wounded 100 from a population of 6,200,000. The hostage-taking in Russia left 326 dead and 727 wounded out of a population of 143,800,000. The proportionate trauma was as great, if not higher, in Israel.

The Security Council deadlocked over the Beersheba attacks, and no "presidential statement" was possible. Instead, there was a statement to the press saying that council members (read "not all") condemned the bombings along with "all other acts of terrorism" (code for "Israel engages in terrorism, too").

DURING THE debate, Security Council members Algeria and Pakistan maintained a position of "principle" - there should be no double standards, no singling out of one act, no selective condemnation. That was August 31.

On September 1 the Security Council adopted a "presidential statement" on behalf of the council as a whole concerning Beslan. It strongly condemned the terrorist attacks, expressing the deepest sympathy with the people and government of Russia and urging all states to cooperate with Russian authorities in bringing to justice the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of these terrorist acts.

Of course the council couldn't mirror such calls when it came to Israeli victims, since the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of Palestinian terrorism start at Yasser Arafat and end in the protectorates of Damascus and Teheran. Whatever happened to Security Council resolution 1373?

The resolution's legal requirements are impressive: "Refrain from providing any form of support, active or passive, to entities or persons involved in terrorist acts;

"... take the necessary steps to prevent the commission of terrorist acts;

"... deny safe haven to those who finance, plan, support, or commit terrorist acts;

"... prevent those who finance, plan, facilitate, or commit terrorist acts from using their respective territories for those purposes against other States or their citizens..."

To implement these obligations, 1373 gave birth to a Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC). The CTC then spawned 517 state reports about all those busy activities states were taking to implement the resolution. Among them is the most recent report from Syria - headquarters of Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and others featured on the State Department list of foreign terrorist organizations. It informs the Security Council about "procedures and measures adopted and in force in the Syrian Arab Republic aimed at the suppression... and prevention of terrorist crimes, and... the denial of safe haven, refuge, assistance or any form of help in the territory of... Syria."

A parallel universe. One in which the UN's chief global response to 9/11 - the Counter-Terrorism Committee - has never managed to name a single terrorist organization, individual, or state sponsor of terrorism.

Another UN committee was created in 1999 under Security Council resolution 1267 in response to al-Qaida and the Taliban. This so-called sanctions committee has never agreed on which states are not complying with their obligations or given the council a list of delinquent states for further action.

Oh, yes. In the other corner stands almost all the rest of the world: paralyzed, intimidated, or furiously giving campaign speeches about UN multilateralism as the sensitive way forward in the war against terrorism. The writer is an international lawyer and senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. (Jerusalem Post Sep 26)

From Jenin To Fallujah? By Jackson Diehl

Two and a half years ago this week, the Israeli army launched an offensive against the Palestinian towns of Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah and Bethlehem -- which, it said, had become havens for extremist groups and suicide bombers who made daily life in Israel unbearable. Images of flattened houses and civilian casualties soon filled the world's television screens: Palestinian spokesmen claimed, falsely, that thousands were being massacred. U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan declared himself

"appalled." President Bush publicly called on Israel to withdraw "without delay." Some editorial writers -- such as this one -- argued that the offensive would do more harm than good.

As Americans and Iraqis now debate what to do about insurgent-held Iraqi towns, it's worth revisiting that Israeli campaign -- because what followed offers a counter to some of the conventional wisdom. Yes, there are innumerable differences between the West Bank and Iraq. And yet the salient point is that through the robust use of military force, Israel has succeeded in reducing the level of violence it faces by more than 70 percent.

Despite occasional feints at diplomacy, the strategy pursued by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has been unadulterated. Israeli forces have invaded and swept Palestinian towns and refugee camps repeatedly. They have carried out hundreds of "targeted killings" of suspected militants, often through air strikes. They have assassinated the Islamic clerics and political leaders who inspired the bombers. Not only has this relentless warfare not been leavened with reconstruction projects or a nation-building program, but Sharon has done his best to destroy existing Palestinian political and governmental institutions.

Yet it's now undeniable that the "military solution" that so many believed could not work has brought Israelis an interlude of relative peace. In 2002, 228 Israelis died in 42 suicide bombings; in March 2002, as Sharon launched his offensive, 85 died in nine attacks. This year there have been 10 suicide bombings and 53 Israeli deaths; last week's bombing in Jerusalem was only the second such bombing in more than six months. While the prospects for an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement remain dismal, and no one expects the violence to end, life in Israel has returned to something approaching normal.

The cost in lives has been lower than commonly believed. For example, in the invasion of Jenin's refugee camp, Israel wiped out the leadership and infrastructure of terrorist organizations responsible for more than two dozen suicide bombings. But human rights groups later documented only 52 Palestinian deaths, of which 22 were civilians. Twenty-three Israeli soldiers died. Since 2002, Palestinian deaths have declined along with those of Israelis. The uproar over the offensive, and what has followed it, has seriously eroded Israel's standing in Europe and elsewhere. But the consequences of that loss are mostly intangible.

So should the U.S. Army stop worrying about the collateral damage of an invasion of Fallujah? Of course not: The United States, after all, is still primarily focused on political goals in Iraq and not merely an end to car bombings. Yet the Israeli experience does suggest that it's wrong to insist, as many in Washington do, that a military campaign against the terrorists' bases could not substantially improve security conditions for both Americans and Iraqis. The visuals would be awful and the outcry loud, on al-Jazeera and maybe at the United Nations. But if the reality were modest civilian casualties and heavy enemy losses, the result might be an opportunity to pursue the nation-building that now is stymied.

This raises another question: Could U.S. forces and their Iraqi allies duplicate the Israeli army's success? Here the outlook is debatable. Israeli officials I've spoken to are themselves doubtful. One major reason for their military success, they say, has been superior intelligence: Thanks to decades of investment in human sources as well as high technology, Israeli forces know who their enemies are and are very good at finding them. Moreover, by 2002 there was a strong political consensus in Israel that there was no choice but to take the offensive against the terrorists and bear the inevitable costs. As the U.S. presidential campaign is demonstrating, Americans are deeply divided over whether the war in Iraq is worth fighting.

One thoughtful Israeli I spoke to said that as he watches the U.S. mission he thinks not of Jenin but of Lebanon. There, Israel's 1982 invasion and subsequent attempt to fashion a new political order deeply divided its society and led to a losing situation from which retreat was all but impossible. It was 18 years before Israel finally exited from Lebanon and stopped the slow but excruciating accretion of its casualties. That history is not nearly as encouraging as the more recent tactical victory over terrorism -- but it's another possible forecast of the American future in Iraq. (Washington Post Sep 27)

Do Journalists Take Sides? By Jonathan Tobin
Reuters spat with chain over use of 'terrorist' highlights a built-in bias

The echoes of Rathergate - the decision by CBS News' Dan Rather to broadcast a story that could affect the results of a presidential election based on fraudulent documents weeks before ballots will be cast - will be heard in the mainstream press for years to come.

But no matter what this sorry episode means for Rather's career or the election, the main impact will be to solidify the notion that the media is biased. That was a difficult pill for an old newsman like Rather to swallow, and he still maintains that the blunder was made in "good faith."

That, of course, is debatable. But his insistence, despite evidence to the contrary, that his decision was made in the tradition of journalism practiced

"without fear or favoritism" is very much in line with a more recent tradition. This is one that maintains journalists must pretend to be objective, no matter how subjective they really are.

Objective journalism is the ideal, but as much as we journalists like to polish this Olympian pose of disinterested reporting, the truth is, in many cases, it's a lot of bunk.

Dan Rather isn't the first and won't be the last journalist to buy into false evidence just because it confirmed his pre-existing notions of what the truth should be. And as notorious as this case is, it isn't nearly as important to our understanding of the way institutionalized bias can operate as other, less publicized issues.

Case in point is the way the press labels certain people and activities. Like terrorism.

The reluctance of many in the media to tag some people - or anyone for that matter - as a terrorist is an ongoing sore point for many readers, viewers and listeners.

Various news media style guidelines have made the use of the word controversial for journalists because it is regarded as subjective or judgmental. Indeed, Steven Jukes, the Reuters news service's former global head of news, famously said in the aftermath of Sept. 11 that: "We all know that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, and that Reuters upholds the principle that we do not use the word terrorist."

While many newspapers and broadcast outlets were not afraid to label the 9/11 attacks as the acts of terrorists, this shibboleth against using the word has been generally observed when it comes to describing those Palestinian Arabs who deliberate targeting of Israeli civilians for mass murder.

Few in the secular media have challenged this assertion, thus allowing groups such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade, whose singular purpose is the murder of Jews, to be routinely described as associations of "militants" or "activists," as if they were merely trying to organize a union at a textile factory.

This is the line taken by CNN, National Public Radio, The New York Times and Knight-Ridder newspapers. But lately, one exception has popped up - and the high priests of this cult of media objectivity are not happy about it.

The Canadian chain, CanWest Global Communications, publishers of 13 daily newspapers including The National Post in Toronto, has instituted a policy of calling terrorists "terrorists." This means that when their papers run world news articles from Reuters, CanWest editors are instructed to substitute the word for whatever euphemism the wire service has employed for these killers.

To cite an example, one recent Reuters story described the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade as a group that "has been involved in a four-year-old revolt against Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank."

Instead of this description, the National Post inserted the following: "The Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades, a terrorist group that has been involved in a four-year-old campaign of violence against Israel."

According to David Schlesinger, the current global managing editor for Reuters, this is an outrage. For him, the use of the word terrorist is an "emotive word." He told CBC News that this was an unacceptable slanting of the news. Excuse me?

The Al Aksa group has murdered hundreds and maimed thousands of Israeli men, women and children in relentless suicide bombings since September 2000. To describe Al Aksa as anything but a terrorist group is not only false, the Reuters line is itself a classic example of the media spinning the news to fit the frame of reference of one side in a dispute.

To describe the Palestinian campaign of terror as nothing more than a "revolt against Israeli occupation" is to buy into the myth that theirs is a battle for freedom, rather than an effort to destroy Israel and kill its people.

When Reuters and similar news sources obscure this fact and veil these atrocities in nonjudgmental copy, it is they who are editorializing, not the people at CanWest.

Scott Anderson, CanWest's editor-in-chief, told The New York Times that Reuters is off base. "If you're couching language to protect people, are you telling the truth? I understand their motives. But issues like this are why newspapers have editors."

He's right. But the question remains: Why don't more editors and newspaper chains - like the Knight-Ridder monopoly, which maintains its stranglehold on daily newspapers in Philadelphia - use their judgment and common sense on this issue, instead of following the herd of politically correct sheep?

Do they fear retribution?

Schlesinger hinted at this when he told the Times that CanWest's policy could possibly "endanger its reporters in volatile areas." Reuters is worried that the people it won't call terrorists will terrorize them.

But there's more to this issue than cowardice. For Reuters, the pretense of objectivity about a group of murderers is more important than telling the plain truth about their activities, especially when they seem to favor the murderer's cause.

As long as that is the conventional wisdom among journalists, the profession will continue the slide into the pit that people like Dan Rather and David Schlesinger have dug for us all. (Jewish World Review Sept 27)
The writer is executive editor of the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent.

'Palestinian' Pentant for Prevarication By Joel Mowbray

Up-close and personal with Arafat's top PR flack

The man sitting across from me was a consummate PR flack: smooth, eloquent, charming, passionate.

He also happened to be the spokesman for the world's most experienced terrorist, Yasser Arafat.

Saeb Erekat is something of a rarity in the Palestinian Authority (PA): by his own account, he has "never had a gun in his hand" and has never been to jail. While he may not personally perpetrate violence, his polished prose advances its cause - deviously.

Whereas most spokesmen cleverly contort the truth without fracturing it, Erekat lies like he breathes. At a one-hour session with nine American journalists, Arafat's mouthpiece wasted no time in doing what he does best.

Asked upfront whether Arafat's machine, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, recognizes the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, he emphatically states that it does. Except it doesn't.

The PLO's initial charter called for the destruction of the Jewish state of Israel. When I asked the clean-shaven, bespectacled spokesman if that provision had been removed, he said yes, twice. He spoke as convincingly as he says, "My name is Saeb Erekat." Yet it was a complete lie.

Arafat designed an elaborate hoax in 1996 and again in 1998, telling the world each time that the charter had changed, without actually changing it. The charter remains unchanged. To this day, the PLO's map of "Palestine" stretches from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean, with no Israel in between.

The divergent paths of what is said and what is done is not unique to Erekat, though he is often at the forefront. When Israeli Defense Forces "massacred" "civilians" in Jenin in 2001, Erekat was the most prominent prevaricator convincing the world media that over 500 innocents had been murdered. Yet he could not have hoodwinked the world alone.

Literally hundreds of Palestinians acted in concert to convince the world media that over 500 innocents had been murdered. In truth, only 56 Palestinians died, 47 of whom were terrorists. 23 Israeli soldiers also perished.

Despite multiple authorities - including the PLO's best friend, the United Nations - concluding that no massacre occurred, Palestinians to this day cling to the disproved myth crafted three years ago.

In his near-perfect English, Erekat delivered a steady stream of fabrications. For most of them, prior knowledge would have been necessary to detect the lie. Sometimes, though, he contradicted himself immediately after exhaling.

Asked about why his version of the Camp David peace talks in 2000 was so wildly different than those of both Israeli and American officials, he responded, "I'm not implying that anybody is lying." Moments later, however, he claimed that in a one-on-one conversation with Bill Clinton earlier this year, the former president apologized to him for lying to the world about what "really happened."

Only once during the hour did Erekat stumble. I asked him if Arafat controls Fatah or Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, both of which have repeatedly slaughtered innocent civilians. He adroitly dodged the question - until the fifth time I asked it. Finally he admitted that Arafat has some control over Fatah, yet pleaded ignorance with respect to the bloodier Al Aqsa, saying, "I cannot answer this question."

Erekat did at least say one thing that was entirely truthful. "Palestinians deserve better leaders." Yes they do. (Jewish World Review Sept 27)

The writer is the author of "Dangerous Diplomacy: How the State Department Endangers America's Security".

Four Big Mistakes By Saul Singer

It is hard to think of something more difficult than willfully changing yourself. That, more than the more mechanical task of apologizing and fixing what you have done, is the heart of the Jewish concept of teshuva (repentance, lit. "return").

Changing course is not much easier on the national or international level. A natural place to start, though, is where widely acknowledged mistakes have been made. Is it too much to ask that we not stride headlong into repeating a freshly smarting blunder? Four big mistakes, starting globally and working back home, come to mind.

* Terror's no biggie. Everyone agrees, from Democrats accusing the Bush administration of failing to connect the dots, to the 9/11 Commission, to Bush himself - who overnight transformed America's stance from passivity to preemption - that years of flaccid responses to lesser attacks set the stage for 9/11. Yet now something scarier is happening. We're getting used to the idea that a series of "9/11s" is normal.

America's 9/11 has been followed by Australia's in Bali, Spain's in Madrid, and Russia's in Beslan, not to mention our own continuing war and the traumas Nepal, France, South Korea, the Philippines, and Great Britain have gone through with their nationals shot, beheaded, or kidnapped in Iraq. Despite all this, Bush is widely accused of being ideologically obsessed with fighting terror, and many Americans seem more likely to base their votes on issues such as stem cell research or abortion than on the global threat to life and limb.

Though a poll found that some 40% of Americans think Bush is doing too little to fight terror, it is also clear that the president believes it would be political suicide to even hint that he has Iran's mullahs in his sights.

America, to say nothing of Europe, has not fully decided it is at war, or if it is, whether fighting it means anything markedly different than what it meant before 9/11. The net message to the terrorists is that a steady flow of attacks, or one much larger than 9/11, may not lead to the loss of more pro-terror regimes, but to increasing Western demoralization and infighting. Complacency redux.

* Leaving no choice. Couple the words "Iraq" and "mistake" and the assumption is that the reference is to toppling Saddam. That was not the mistake. In fact, it is almost impossible to imagine the war against the jihadis being taken seriously today if Saddam were still shredding his people and funding suicide bombers from Baghdad - unless perhaps Iran's mullahs had been toppled instead.

Which brings us to the real mistake. There was a way that war could have possibly been avoided in Iraq, and that is if Europe, instead of furiously lobbying to dismantle UN sanctions, had tightened them further, and stood shoulder to shoulder with the US in enforcing the UN's disarmament requirements. In that scenario, Saddam might have done a Gaddafi and renounced WMDs and terror.

Now, the "peace" lobby that left no choice but military action in Iraq is doing the same thing in Iran. Britain, France, and Germany know full well that the window is closing in which to force Iran to give up nukes and terror or be cut off from the global community. Once Iran has bombmaking capability, the options are: watch as the terror network gains its first nuclear sponsor or take military action. Iraq redux.

* He's our thug. It is now understood that the US made a mistake in backing Arab dictators in the name of "stability," and that the US and Israel mistakenly bet that Arafat believed in land for peace. We ostensibly learned that solid ground do not thugs make.

But if you peel back the lid on the quiet diplomacy between the US, Egypt, Israel, and the "Palestinian Authority" on who will take over Gaza after Israel leaves, there is once again a search for the next darling strongman. We continue to swoon before the likes of Muhammad Dahlan and Jibril Rajoub, while setting aside professed democratic principles for another day. Oslo redux.

* Ram the plan. The bullets that felled Yitzhak Rabin seared in our minds the price of division. Ariel Sharon's political consciousness was branded by a similarly polarized period, the Lebanon War. Ehud Barak and Sharon both seemed to enter office having learned that existential decisions can only be made by maintaining a broad consensus.

Now Sharon seems prepared to move forward with his plan even if his opposition to a referendum projects fear of a definitive electoral test of the popular will. This is reminiscent of Barak's descent into the 2000 Camp David summit with his broad coalition lying in tatters around him.

This won't work. Sharon needs to prove that he is not acting against the majority, either by a clear Knesset vote, a referendum, or new elections. And to obtain this he needs to use not just political muscle but old-fashioned persuasion, explaining how the price he proposes paying will deliver positive dividends, not just avoid worse dangers. Sharon of all people should understand that no plan can make us safe if it tears us apart.

If we stop repeating these four big mistakes, the coming year could well be a better one. (Jerusalem Post Sep 27)

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