

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...

December 4-13

BAYT Brotherhood Mission to Israel. Visits to Jerusalem, Hevron, Bet El, Golan, Galil, displaced former Gush Katif families. For info: Moishe Posner 416-896-4451 moishe@rogers.blackberry.net or Larry Zeifman 416-256-4000 ext. 239 LWZ@Zeifman.ca

Commentary...

Making the Palestinian Argument By Evelyn Gordon

Nobody ever accused Israel of effective public relations. But the latest tactic adopted by the Foreign Ministry and American Jewish organizations represents a new low: arranging speakers and cultural performances that openly slander the country, in a misguided effort to demonstrate Israel's liberality.

A case in point was the recent tour of Israel organized by the American Jewish Committee for non-Jewish American politicians. It featured a visit to an Arab town where officials from Sikkuy, an Arab advocacy organization, regaled the guests with tales of how Israel mistreats its Arab citizens. Sikkuy's co-chairman, Ali Haider, for instance, told the visitors with a straight face that Arab Israelis are deprived of fundamental civil rights, and "the minute that Palestinian citizens of Israel try to protest, the police kill them."

Haider's charges are obvious nonsense: Arab Israelis enjoy the same civil rights enjoyed by citizens of any Western country. Nor is this difficult to demonstrate: One need only look at the many Arab newspapers, which routinely publish vicious invective against the government without fear of reprisal; the numerous demonstrations that take place unhindered despite speeches that border on criminal incitement (such as the Islamic Movement's annual "Al-Aksa Is in Danger" rally, at which movement leaders tell tens of thousands of listeners that the government is plotting to destroy the Temple Mount mosques); or the unbridled election campaigns run by the several Arab political parties.

But the AJC's guests – like those of organizations such as the Chicago Jewish federation, which invited Sikkuy to lecture to its donors next month – will not come away with any of those facts. What they will come away with is the belief that Israel oppresses its Arab citizens, because in the absence of facts, most people fall back on the "no smoke without fire" theory: that even if the claims are exaggerated, they must have some basis in reality. Very few people have the intellectual sophistication to realize that if such charges can be made in a public forum without fear, they are false by definition.

Tzipi Barnea, who organized the AJC event, defended it to Haaretz by claiming "the bottom line is that these meetings work." Yet it is hard to see how Israel's interests are served by bolstering the credibility of anti-Israel slander. And that is precisely what the AJC does when it presents Haider to its guests as a credible exponent of the Israeli Arab situation.

THE FOREIGN Ministry prefers its anti-Israel propaganda in the form of cultural events, to which it traditionally devotes about one-third of its PR budget. Last year, for instance, it financed a tour of American college campuses by the Israeli hip-hop group Hadag Nahash. Many of the group's lyrics are "acrimonious attacks" on the government; for variety, it also has some songs advocating socially beneficial behavior such as drug use. Aviva Raz Schechter of the Israeli Embassy in Washington acknowledged to Haaretz that some of the lyrics are problematic, but declined: "The intention is not to be so caught up by the minutiae of the lyrics, but to create an atmosphere of peace. Pay attention to the big, bottom-line message – that we need peace like we need air to breathe." Quite how "acrimonious attacks" on Israel's government create "an atmosphere of peace" remains a mystery.

Now, the ministry plans to expand this technique under the guise of a seemingly unexceptionable reform: As of January, Israeli representatives

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overseas will be given authority over 60 percent of the ministry's PR budget, which was previously controlled entirely from Jerusalem.

In itself, this makes sense: People on the spot undoubtedly have a better understanding of local conditions. The catch is that overseas representatives will decide not only which specific projects to invest in, but also what percentage of the budget to devote to cultural events as opposed to classic PR – and both opponents and supporters of the reform concur that the likely result is an increase in budgets for "culture" at the expense of classic PR.

UNFORTUNATELY, however, Israel's cultural exports almost all follow the Hadag Nahash model. Numerous Israeli films, for instance, have won awards at international festivals. But almost without exception, these films portray Israel as a brutal occupier oppressing the Palestinians for no good reason. Several recent award-winners, for example, dwell at length on the hardships that army checkpoints or the security fence impose on Palestinians, while ignoring the suicide bombings that prompted these measures, or the fact that Israel had offered to establish a Palestinian state in almost all the territories, but the Palestinians rejected this offer and launched a terrorist war instead. Showing such films will not persuade uninformed viewers of Israel's tolerance toward its critics; it will merely persuade them that Israel is a brutal and senseless oppressor.

Similarly, the Foreign Ministry routinely finances translations of books by leading Israeli authors and lecture tours by these same authors. But most of Israel's award-winning authors – people such as Amos Oz, David Grossman and Sami Michael – deem Israel primarily to blame for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and espouse this theory in both their novels and their speeches. Michael's intifada-era interviews, for instance, have included gems such as "the argument that we are in a state of war is a big lie," "the regime exploits [the conflict] to trample on and crush human rights" and Hamas operatives – the leading perpetrators of suicide bombings against civilians – cannot fairly be termed "terrorists."

It would seem self-evident that the best way to convince others of the justice of Israel's cause is not by underwriting vicious anti-Israel slander. Clearly, however, this is not self-evident to either the Foreign Ministry or the American Jewish establishment.

It is therefore the responsibility of ordinary Israelis and American Jews to teach these organizations the basic facts of life. (Jerusalem Post Sep 28)

A Prophecy Fulfilled By Cal Thomas

It took just 12 days from completion of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza before rockets started raining down on the Western Negev area from the now-unoccupied territory. The attacks late Friday might have occurred sooner had the terrorists not been preoccupied with torching synagogues and destroying flower-growing operations in Gaza that could have been used to produce income for Palestinian residents. Sadly, their hatred of all things Jewish prompted them to act against their self-interest.

(Late Sunday night, following crushing retaliatory attacks by Israel and threats from Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of an even more massive response, Hamas announced that it was halting all attacks from the Gaza Strip. For now, perhaps, but given its history, one can safely bet, not for good.)

A Reuters story about the Israeli attacks on Saturday said, "The upsurge in violence was a blow to international hopes that the pullout could revive peacemaking." The concept of international "hopes" is founded on the false premise that peace is dependent only on Israel's behavior. Every time Israel offers concessions, withdrawals, confidence-building measures and other "good faith" gestures, the response is more terror, more death and no peace. Will there ever come a time when the United States and the international community concludes that forcing Israel into making unilateral concessions is not a prescription for peace, but a guarantee of more war?

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who is facing a growing political challenge from former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, should have seen this coming because it has happened so many times before.

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz promised a "crushing and unequivocal response" to the rocket attack. The Hamas terrorist group

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blamed Israel for an explosion at a Hamas rally Friday afternoon that killed 15 people, though the Palestinian Authority said it appeared to have been an accident caused by Hamas members carrying explosives in a crowded area. Hamas vowed to resist any raid in Gaza and called for attacks on Israel.

Continuing his denial of the obvious, the top U.N. envoy to the Middle East, Alvaro de Soto, told the Security Council last Friday that the "road map" remains the only realistic method for achieving peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Not exactly. The road map requires reciprocity. So far, Israel has been the only party doing the giving and the Palestinian-Hamas-Fatah side has been doing the taking and the killing. Why should they stop when violence is giving them what they want?

Commenting on Israel's withdrawal, but ignoring the continuing terrorist threat, de Soto said, "Forces of moderation have prevailed over those of extremism."

You could have fooled me!

After de Soto spoke, the Security Council approved a statement again calling on both sides to adhere to the Road Map and saying the Gaza pullout must be only one step toward further Israeli withdrawal and efforts to achieve a viable Palestinian state.

The "quartet" of the U.N., the United States, Russia and the European Union has succeeded only in pressuring Israel to give and give and give. Whatever pressure it has applied to the Palestinian-Hamas-Fatah side has produced no cessation of violence, no disarmament and, in fact, no concessions at all.

The frustrating part is that no one pays attention to the pronouncements of the terrorists. Hamas announced it would flood Gaza with its soldiers once Israel withdrew. Islamo-fascist clerics call for the annihilation of Israel and tell jihadists it is their religious duty to kill Jews and Christians. Our "friends," the Saudis and Egyptians allow this rhetoric to flow unimpeded from their mosques and in their government-run media. Meanwhile, the Bush Administration and its State Department sink deeper into denial and pretend the terrorists don't mean what they say. The terrorists trumpet their plans and then carry them out. After they have caused death and destruction, they promise to do it again. Objectives can't be made clearer than that.

Will a second coming of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister make a difference? Perhaps. He once told me he had learned a valuable lesson from his own concessions during the Clinton Administration. Netanyahu should tell Israelis and the world that if he again becomes Prime Minister he will not budge on more land concessions until the Palestinian-Hamas-Fatah side begins responding positively to all of Israel's concessions.

Having given so much and received nothing in return, it may now be too late to save Israel, but giving more without getting anything ensures Israel's extinction sooner, rather than later. (Townhall.com Sep 26)

Israel's Disengaged Establishment By Caroline Glick

In the months that preceded the forcible eviction of all Israelis from their homes and communities in Gaza and northern Samaria, and during last month's expulsions themselves, the commanders of the IDF and police responsible for the operation defined "preventing" or "not exacerbating" the "schism in the nation" as one of their principal goals.

This was all well and good, but it was beside the point. At the end of the day, the fact of the matter is that there was never any schism between the security forces and the residents of Gaza and northern Samaria. This truth was laid bare by the love that the soldiers and policemen and residents showered on one another throughout most of the operation.

If anything, the confrontation which pitted the army and the police against the residents served to strengthen rather than weaken the bonds between those who settle the land and those that carry arms to defend it. And the long-term impact that this engagement will have on both sides is something that no one today can foresee.

And yet, there is a huge and gaping schism that fragments Israeli society. And those fomenting this schism are responsible for bringing about the ill-advised and immoral decision to expel these patriots from their homes and communities, turning them over to the Palestinian terrorists who Wednesday transformed the destroyed synagogue in Netzarim into a Hamas terror museum.

In the wake of the expulsions, the fomenters of the schism were beside themselves with rage at the fact that their plan to "disengage" the nation from the settlers by destroying Gush Katif went up in smoke.

Ruminating on this state of affairs immediately after the completion of the expulsions, Haaretz columnist Orit Shochat cautioned angrily, "Soldiers who experienced the evacuation won't travel to an ashram in India because they discovered that there is an ashram next door. The same Jewish religion that they hadn't seen up close for a long time embraces them into its fold with song and a tear and a common fate.

"They have now sat arm-in-arm at the synagogues in Gush Katif, they have now felt the holiness mixed with sweat, they have now moved rhythmically and sung songs, they have stood in line to kiss the Torah scrolls, they are now

half-inside." She continued, "The army may have planned for months for the evacuation and conducted simulations of every possible scenario, but it didn't think about this scenario." If she had replaced the word "army" with "our side," her point would have been more accurate.

And what is Shochat's side? What is the side that wished so desperately for the destruction of the Jewish communities in Gaza and northern Samaria, in order to destroy the connection between those who settle the land and the rest of the country? If the sides of the schism dividing the country are not the security forces and the settlers, then who are they?

This week, the identities of the two sides of the divide were exposed to all who care to see them when on Sunday the Justice Ministry announced its decision not to indict any policemen for their actions during the Arab riots in October 2000. Twelve Arab Israelis and one Palestinian were killed during those riots, which engulfed the entire Arab sector of the country. The decision sent a shock wave through Israeli society with a force that on its face is difficult to comprehend given that the events occurred five years ago.

The shock of the decision fomented two separate discussions in the Israeli public. The most glaring aspect of those discussions is that apart from the fact that they both were carried out in Hebrew, no common thread connected them. It is in these separate conversations that we find the root of the rift in Israeli society and can identify the two sides of the societal divide.

To understand the significance of the discussions, it is necessary to first recall what happened five years ago. Following months of increased violence and extremism in the Arab-Israeli sector incited directly by the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli Islamic Movement and the Arab members of Knesset, violent riots seized the Arab sector of Israel in October 2000. During the week of riots, Arab Israelis threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at Israeli civilian cars throughout the country. Israeli motorists were dragged out of their cars on Highway 65 along Wadi Ara and beaten. An Israeli motorist was murdered when Arabs from Jasser a-Zarka threw a rock at his windshield as he drove down the coastal highway.

In the wake of the riots, the government of then-prime minister Ehud Barak went into a state of panic, concerned that the Labor Party would lose its support base among Arab Israelis. And so, rather than arresting the Arab leaders who incited the riots, banning the Islamic Movement and ending PA infiltration into the Arab sector, Barak sought to appease the very leaders who had fomented the violence. This he did by offering to establish an independent commission led by a retired judge that would investigate the police behavior towards the rioters. That commission, led by retired justice Theodore Or, was given the perverse job of investigating only the police, as if the officers had simply been firing at ducks in a shooting gallery rather than trying to contend with a violent, heavily incited mob that was paralyzing and terrorizing the country.

Once the Or Commission was established, discussion of the actual events was silenced and replaced by a surrealistic parade of policemen and politicians summoned before a tribunal to defend their actions as if they had taken place in a vacuum. And so, this week's announcement of the decision not to indict any officers in the 13 deaths was the first opportunity that the public has had in five years to actually discuss what happened in October 2000.

The first discussion of the events was the popular discussion. It could be heard mainly in radio call in shows and on Internet news sites. Regular citizens concentrated on the context of the riots, questioning the Arab claim of discrimination.

They noted that the allegation that the police treated the rioters differently from Jewish protesters, by shooting rubber bullets and tear gas at them where none were used against Jewish protesters, ignores the fact that Jewish protesters don't attack the police with rocks and Molotov cocktails. They asked how it was possible for Israel to be embarrassed over what happened in October 2000 when the policemen's lives were in danger and they were massed against the rioters in order to protect the lives of civilians, tens of thousands of whom were locked in their homes for days, unable to leave their cities and their neighborhoods for fear of being attacked by mobs calling out "Death to the Jews."

The other discussion of the decision not to indict the policemen was the discussion of the leftist establishment which controls the legal system, the media and the universities. As was the case with the Or Commission, in the discussion that was carried out in the universities, the Justice Ministry and the media – where the public has no voice – the debaters ignored the context in which the 13 died.

On one side were the critics who claimed that the fact that the Police Investigations Department could not find sufficient evidence to justify indictments was a flimsy excuse for not conducting trials. They claimed that the fact that the families of the dead refused to cooperate with investigators was no reason not to indict, and the fact that the investigators expected the poor families to cooperate with them was evidence of their racism.

On the other side was the Justice Ministry. On Wednesday afternoon, Attorney-General Menahem Mazuz and his deputies held a press conference

to defend themselves against the attacks of the members of their club. Mazuz and his associates made no mention of the fact that refusal to cooperate with investigators is a criminal act. They made no mention of the incitement of Arab Israelis by the Islamic Movement, the PA and the Arab MKs. For them, the deaths of the 13 were an unmitigated tragedy. The only thing that interested them was defending their honor as champions of Arab rights to their establishment colleagues.

One of the questions that has been raised repeatedly since the expulsions of the settlers in Gaza and northern Samaria is why the commanders of the IDF and the police expected the expelled residents to violently attack them. After all, there is no official body in Israel that knows these people better than the army, which had stood by them for 38 years. Why did the army fear them as if they were the enemy?

The answer to this question has the same source as the answer to the question of who the sides of the national schism are. What became clear this week is that on the one side, we have the general public made up of secular and religious Jews, urban dwellers and rural settlers, rich and poor, civilians and the military and police, the hard core and the moderate Zionists. On the other hand, we have the powerful leftist establishment which, through its control of the media, legal system and universities, tells us what we should think and how we should act. Members of the establishment are bothered most by the rare occasions when the fact that their discourse and their rules have little connection to reality is exposed to the rest of us.

The choke hold that the leftist establishment exerts over the nation has been the cause of the major policy and military blunders that have been made over the past generation. The fact of the matter is that the distorted picture of our reality that is created by the establishment's image makers in the media, the anti-Israeli judgments meted out by our courts and the politically motivated decisions to investigate or not investigate various politicians, social classes and suspected crimes have caused a situation where people make decisions on both private matters and national issues based on wrong information and corrupted priorities.

No, it is true, we did not learn anything this week that we didn't already know. But this week's parallel discussions exposed clearly the fact that those who guide the nation are themselves, like Shochat, alienated from the rest of us and from the reality of the world we live in with all its goodness and horror. And the narrowness of this establishment was also exposed.

The nation has many tools at its disposal to change the status of forces in this country – politics, the military, the Internet and our own creativity – in order to cut the establishment down to size. The greatest challenge that we face as a society is to harness these tools to recover our right to define our world. Only by doing so will we be able to forge policies that are relevant to the many challenges we face. (Jerusalem Post Sep 23)

Saturday Night Live: Two rallies By Rabbi Berel Wein *Devotion and delusion in the Holy City*

Last Saturday night two different gatherings took place in my Jerusalem neighborhood. One was a rally for "peace" sponsored by the Geneva initiative and led by Yossi Beilin. This group met outside of the house of Prime Minister, barely two blocks from my residence.

The Prime Minister was not home since he was busy meeting with his Security Cabinet, planning a response to the barrage of Kassam rockets fired at towns inside Israel (1948 Israel) over the day.

The "Peace" rally nevertheless continued apace following the timeworn script of all such rallies. A popular singer sings a soothing song about the rewards of peace, a stirring speaker - this time Yossi Beilin himself - delivers a harangue about how the Palestinians really want to live next door to us in peace but it is the Israeli refusal to accommodate their demands for Jerusalem, the right of return and the freeing of the murderers of innocents from prison that prevent the Garden of Peace from being revealed. All of this on a day when countless Israelis had to flee their homes in Sderot to avoid the rockets being fired by our peace partners.

The schools in Sderot have been forced to close temporarily. A "work accident" killed many Palestinians in Gaza on Friday when a truck loaded with Kassam rockets exploded in the midst of a Hamas parade. Many Hamas "militants" were killed by their own hand in that event.

Of course, that event is also Israel's fault, for if Israel did not exist why would they need those Kassam rockets in the first place? Yet, I have a hunch that even without us being around they would find use for those rockets on their own fellow Muslims who would dare to disagree with them. Look at Iraq! All of this self-apparent logic is completely lost on the Geneva gang who persist in living in their well financed, well publicized but utterly unrealistic dream world. Too bad for them and too bad for the rest of us also.

By my unscientific judgment to the naked eye, the "peace" rally was poorly attended. Its organizers placed a brave face on this, declaring that more people came than was expected, whatever that means. We all want peace and crave for quiet and serenity. But we would also like to live and survive and be able to raise our children and grandchildren in our own homeland in security and

confidence.

If the Geneva organizers could figure out a practical and realistic way to accomplish this without giving away the store, they would find a great outpouring of popular support for their program amongst the Israeli public, including me. However, as the current situation really is, the Geneva platform and its "peace" rally is just a caricature of itself.

The other gathering on Saturday night was the beginning of the season of selichos by Ashkenazic Jewry. Sephardic Jews have been hard at prayer of selichos for nearly a month but the Ashkenazim just began only on Saturday night. These selichos gatherings far outdrew the "peace" rally. The Days of Awe are approaching and Jews are searching for some spiritual sustenance to nurture them in these dark and dangerous times.

In my synagogue, I noticed people at the selichos services that I had never seen before. I don't know the import of that. I just know that without some sense of spirit, tradition, attachment to Judaism and its people, land and history, life is very lonely, scary and empty. I therefore found the op-ed article about the unrepentant Jew that appeared in the Sunday issue of the Jerusalem Post very revealing.

Here is the "empty wagon" personified. But the villain of the piece is naturally the Jewish religion. It is what makes the writer of the piece wander all over the world, stateless without ideals, purpose and hope. Estranged from his people and past, he lashes out at a religious coercion that is practically non-existent any longer here in Israel.

The "peaceniks" say: "If only Israel would concede everything to the Palestinians the struggle would finally end." The rootless, estranged and embittered post-secularist Jew says: "If only there was no Judaism, then Israel would be an attractive place to live." To say that both have put the cart before the horse in their assessments of the reality of Jewish existence, survival and accomplishments is a gross understatement.

It is precisely Judaism that fuels the State of Israel and gives it and the Jewish people as a whole the strength and resilience to survive and triumph in the face of overwhelmingly negative odds. The angst of the Jew who has separated one's self from one's people and heritage will not be easily assuaged by wandering from Paris to New York or South America.

The call of selichos and the shofar of this season is a call to one's deeper inner self. Estrangement from that self is a loss for that person himself or herself but it is also a loss for all of us Jews and to the cause of Judaism itself.

The writer, a Jewish historian, author and international lecturer, offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com (Jewish World Review Sep 28)

A Third World Israel By Daniel Doron

Acting Finance Minister Ehud Olmert can win the war he declared on poverty by not repeating the past mistakes of pumping billions into our failed welfare system. He can win because government policies, which he can reverse, generate most poverty in Israel.

He can stop allowing local monopolies to plunder consumers, opening markets to price-reducing competition. He can reduce government-induced high housing costs and the high cost of education, health, infrastructure, electricity and water. He can make government operations a little more efficient, which will enable him to reduce taxes and increase workers' take-home pay by thousands of shekels.

Best of all for Olmert, such actions bear fruit quickly. They can earn him great public acclaim and clear him of the charge that despite his empathetic talk about poverty, he really always protects the interests of Israel's rapacious oligarchy.

If Olmert continues with failing distributive policies (the mandate he gave his anti-poverty commission is to shift more funds to existing welfare programs), it will be in part because he, like many other politicians, misreads the real needs of so many Israelis who cannot make ends meet. Most of our politicians heed the bad advice of the populist partisans of the extreme welfare state, the vociferous Social Lobby that arrogated to itself the exclusive right to "represent" the Israeli poor.

Since most of Israel's elites are educated in universities where crypto-Marxist dogmas rule, it is not surprising that the Social Lobby, which has promoted very destructive policies that cost billions and hurt the poor, is nevertheless promoted by many academics and their media friends, and that our politicians follow suit.

Two recent programs by prominent academics illustrate how they skew public perception and eventually policy formation.

Wealth redistributors (many of them affluent, or tenured, of course) seldom bother to think about what it takes to create wealth. To them, wealth – which in open democratic societies is created by hard-working individuals, benefiting from specific social conditions (laws, markets) – is merely "national income," a sanitized abstraction.

So they treat wealth as if it was manna falling from heaven, fortune's gift, a given. The only remaining problem, they think, is how to distribute

income "equitably," without any regard to who created it and how. So they advocate policies that kill the goose laying the golden eggs which underwrite necessary welfare programs.

Two professors, Jonathan Wolf, a London University philosopher, and Avner de-Shalit, a political science professor at Hebrew University (an avid promoter of socialism), devote most of their forthcoming book *Disadvantaged* to defining who are the poor and how the state can be held responsible for their plight and for helping them overcome it.

They were commissioned by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who is trying to pacify his party's left wing by being "social," as Israeli politicians are fond of doing.

This perhaps explains why he delegated this task to two professors who are apparently blind not only to economics but also to its political-science offshoots like the Theory of Social Choice. Otherwise how can one explain their approach to poverty as if it were a philosophical challenge of finding the right definition, rather than concrete and detailed analyses based on the fact that poverty derives from a variety of conditions, many of them cultural and many temporary.

But it is not only the abstract, reality-denying "philosophical" approach to poverty that mars the professors' analysis, but the shocking nonchalance with which they offer discredited failed "solutions." De-Shalit states: "We certainly recommend a better social democratic system where it will be more pleasant, and more moral, to live..." If this requires returning to the Israeli socialist system of 40 years ago, he explains, "than society must recognize this and go backwards, to what we had, or try something else."

Only by denying reality can Wolf and de-Shalit insist that governments, which generally impoverish people, are the ones who would care for the weaker strata "by necessarily practicing equality seeking policies."

Only by being blind to the terrible tragedy that Israel's distorted economic system, including its welfare system, has inflicted on the weakened strata, can they cavalierly recommend that we return to such an abysmal system or "try something else," but not, of course, the market economy, which has been proven as the most effective, albeit imperfect way, to eliminate poverty.

A childlike belief in an omnipotent and benevolent government and a blindness to the powers of markets marks even the work of many Israeli economists. Few of them ever demand the obvious, that government stop inhibiting competition and thus reduce prices and enhance the purchasing power of the poor. Instead they call for more government interference.

Thus Tel Aviv University economist Dan Ben-David, who is often solid in his criticism of our welfare system, does not seem to realize that its failures are not accidental but the inevitable outcome of political intervention in the economy. He absurdly suggests that we cure our maladies by having government "correct" what markets have failed to achieve.

One of his main recommendations is that government retrain workers, when its record in doing so has been a costly and unmitigated failure.

Those recommending further government intervention believe that they offer a "Third Way" between "unbridled" capitalism and socialism. They do not seem to notice that the only direction to which the Third Way leads is the Third World. (Jerusalem Post Sep 28)

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Business as Usual By Rachel Pomerance

When Richard Schifter represented the United States at UN bodies in Geneva and New York in the 1980s, there was a joke among diplomats about a parallel universe – the UN world – existing alongside the real one.

The "UN world is a make-believe world," Schifter says, pointing out the continued battery of anti-Israel resolutions that accompany the organ's preoccupation with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Which is why, in spite of Israel's disengagement from Gaza, the UN General Assembly, which opened September 17, will go about business as usual.

That business will revolve around empty political resolutions that, in striving to be even-handed, miss the gravity of Israel's recent move and, as a consequence, the opportunity to help pave the road toward peace at a critical juncture in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The harbinger of what's to come debuted only last month.

The UN Security Council issued a press statement supporting the disengagement process, but fell short of directly commending the Israeli government. And a monthly security council briefing on the conflict tempered its praise of the Israeli withdrawal with criticisms of Israeli actions like settlement building.

Taken together, the moves disappointed Israeli officials, reinforcing their interest in avoiding UN intervention.

This lukewarm UN stance comes, ironically, as a wide swath of diplomatic leaders – from Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan – have congratulated Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for his disengagement plan.

So what is it about the United Nations that prevents it from adjusting to reality, in line with its own peace-pursuing charter? And what do those discrepancies cost the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the organization itself, especially as it prepares for a major internal reform?

Despite its membership in the diplomatic Quartet – along with the United States, European Union and Russia – which has devised the road map peace plan for Israelis and Palestinians, the United Nations, on its own, is impotent.

Widespread recognition of UN bias – even among the countries that vote against Israel – has led to a serious credibility problem. The UN itself acknowledges this failing in its own reform plan.

The organization's ability to help broker progress in resolving the conflict is undermined by its institutional collusion with the Palestinians, the only people to hold a division within the UN secretariat devoted to their political plight.

As noted in a July 2005 report of the American Jewish International Relations Institute (AJIRI), which is chaired by Schifter, the UN Department of Political Affairs contains a Division for Palestinian Rights, a body comparable to divisions responsible for entire hemispheres.

Additionally, the Division for Palestinian Rights provides support to a UN General Assembly committee whose mandate flies in the face of the road map. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People states its purpose is to "enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination without external interference, national independence and sovereignty; and to return to their homes and property."

Since the "right of return" of Palestinian refugees is one of the key sticking points to be resolved under the road map, the Division for Palestinian Rights undermines the UN role in the Quartet, says the AJIRI in its analysis of institutional anti-Israel bias of the United Nations.

In addition there's the UN Relief and Works Agency, a program exclusively devoted to Palestinian refugees, while the rest of the world's refugees are grouped together under a separate UN body.

Against this backdrop there are those UN member states that behave like malicious Jenga players, eager to play a part in the collapse of the peace process.

The Palestinian UN representative, who holds observer status, floats an idea to members of the Arab League to sponsor a resolution. These nations, in turn, garner the support of the Non-Aligned Movement and its over 100 member-states and instantly create a majority in the 191-member UN. The European Union then waters down the resolution, which was intentionally exaggerated in anticipation of this result, and abstains from voting to show a dispassionate stance.

The cumulative effect of this routine impedes the peace process by inflating Palestinian expectations regarding negotiated results.

As Schifter puts it, "It makes a good many of the Palestinian extremists feel that the world is on their side, and if they just hang on long enough, Israel is going to go away."

So what should the United Nations do?

The estimated \$3 billion reconstruction of Gaza is being coordinated by former World Bank president James Wolfensohn, appointed by the Quartet as special envoy for the Gaza disengagement. UN relief organizations, which have long run operations on the ground, await further instruction from Wolfensohn, whose spokesman says a concrete plan will be hammered soon.

In the meantime, "the UN needs to be mindful that it's probably better to say less than more," says Stuart Holliday, former US ambassador to the United Nations for special political affairs.

Holliday, who now directs the international practice of the Washington, DC, public affairs firm Quinn Gillespie, adds that while the United Nations can help develop civil society in Gaza, it has no record of delivering commitments from either party to the conflict.

But years of anti-Israel resolutions at the General Assembly backed by a body that acts like a fortress in defense of Palestinian polemics will not change quickly if at all, says Holliday.

"All it takes is one country to take the floor in the General Assembly and then there's business as usual at the UN, which is to use the General Assembly to pass dozens of frivolous resolutions that basically are one-sided and view the problem only through the prism of the Palestinians," he says.

"If a Palestinian representative declares tomorrow that the moon is made of green cheese it's very possible that a majority of member states will declare that indeed the moon is made of green cheese," says David Harris, executive director of American Jewish Committee. "And if its green and not white cheese it's because the Zionists have poisoned the cheese, and that's the way it works," he said. (Jerusalem Post Sep 28)

כתיבה וחימה טובה