

Events...

Monday, October 18, 7:30 PM

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Commentary...

Why They Continue to Murder By Avraham Tal

The reality is that what Israel is waging in Gaza today is a defensive war against paramilitary organizations whose goals go beyond those of a war of national liberation.

Critics of the tactics that the Israel Defense Forces are employing against the terrorists of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al-Aqsa, which have also caused casualties among Palestinian civilians, ignore the fundamental change that has taken place in the nature of the war. One can continue to define the IDF as an army of occupation and the Palestinians as "fighters," or even "freedom fighters," as certain Israelis and foreigners do. But the reality is that what Israel is waging in Gaza today is a defensive war against paramilitary organizations whose goals go beyond those of a war of national liberation.

There are people who claim that murderousness is embedded in the Palestinians' blood, but it is not necessary to resort to this explanation to understand the nature of the struggle they are conducting against Israel in general, and in particular since the historic turnabout took place in the government's policy: the decision in principle to leave the Gaza Strip and evacuate all the Jewish settlements there, and also the implications of the exchange of letters between Israel's prime minister and President George Bush in April 2004 - that in the future, the West Bank will also be evacuated, except for areas in which there is a heavy concentration of Israelis, and a viable Palestinian state will be set up.

The decision to remove the Jewish settlers from Gaza - backed by the credible steps that the government is taking in terms of preparations and legislation - should have brought about an end to the acts of violence, at least in the area destined for evacuation. After all, the Palestinian "freedom fighters" have achieved their goal in this area: In less than a year, they will be able to rule the entire Gaza Strip, free of Israelis, and inherit the infrastructure that the Israelis will leave behind. So why do the Palestinian organizations continue their campaign of murder against civilians and soldiers in Gaza, with even greater intensity than before?

The accepted explanation is that Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al-Aqsa - each organization individually and all of them together - want to prove that they, and only they, succeeded in expelling the Israelis from Gaza via "the resistance."

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

But this is not the whole truth. The organizations - and certainly Hamas and Islamic Jihad - view the continued fighting against Israel in the Strip as an additional stage in their effort to expel it not only from all of the territories, but also from the 1948 borders. As Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaida's number two, said last week: "The liberation of Palestine is an obligation incumbent upon all Muslims."

Even if it is possible to assume - with very grave reservations - that Fatah might perhaps someday be willing, through lack of choice, to accept the existence of Israel in the 1948 borders, there is no doubt that the organizations now waging the terrorist war in Gaza do not intend to make do with the evacuation of the territories. No Hamas or Jihad spokesman has ever declared the intention of recognizing Israel in its 1948 borders; in practice, it is also hard to hear such willingness from the heads of the Al-Aqsa gangs and the Popular Resistance Committees operating in the Strip. It is no accident that peace initiatives by various Israeli governments, and particularly that of Ehud Barak's government, have met with Palestinian rejection. The Islamic movements reject any such initiative for Islamic reasons (all of Palestine is part of the Muslim waqf, and no infidel entity can be allowed to exist in it).

But the secular Palestinian movements also have difficulty accepting the existence of a Jewish state in Palestine. Granting legitimacy to such a state would make it difficult to justify the struggle against it in the future, both on the ground and in international forums. Therefore, the Fatah leadership prefers to postpone the establishment of the Palestinian state, in the hope that the unceasing armed struggle against the Jewish state will undermine its foundations and perhaps even lead to its disappearance from the stage of history.

Israel is currently waging an existential war against forces that wish to eradicate it: There is such a thing as the genocide of a state. In this existential war, Israel is fighting murderous gangs that operate from behind or from the midst of Palestinian civilians, most of whom, unfortunately, support these gangs and their murderous tactics.

Even though the IDF's orders to refrain from harming civilians are clear, and are also generally obeyed, in this war, there is no way to avoid injury to some noncombatants, as well. There is no place here for tortured consciences, because our existence, both as individuals and as a state, is in danger, and our own protection therefore deserves to be given more priority than their protection. Palestinians who are harmed in IDF operations are paying for the murderous intentions of the terrorist organizations. Their blood is on the head of their own leaders. (Ha'aretz Oct 4)

On Wednesday, October 20, One Israel Fund presents the
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חג שמח

From Rather to Barnea By Yisrael Medad and Eli Pollak

CBS television's 60 Minutes is one of America's most popular news magazines. And CBS anchor Dan Rather, who also appears on segments of 60 Minutes, is one of America's most prominent news personalities.

Rather was in Dallas on November 22, 1963, when president John F. Kennedy was assassinated. His broadcasts from the scene propelled him to instant celebrity.

During Richard M. Nixon's administration, Rather regularly tangled with the president, who once quipped, "I am sure Mr. Rather thinks the best kind of press conference is one with him alone."

On September 8 60 Minutes aired a story about supposed preferential treatment President George W. Bush received when he served in a National Guard unit during the Vietnam war. CBS asserted that Bush had been suspended from flying for the Texas Air National Guard because he had

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failed to meet its standards.

It turned out the report was based on forged documents or, as CBS asserted in its eventual apology, on letters they could not "authenticate."

By September 15, the program had been completely discredited. CBS apologized, but argued it had every reason to believe the veracity of its sources.

"We made a mistake in judgement, and for that I am sorry," Rather said.

But Rupert Murdoch, head of the rival cable network FOX, said he'd have terminated Rather if the veteran anchor had worked for him.

Murdoch says, "The traditional media in [the US] is in tune with the elite, not the people."

THIS IS not just a riveting American story. It has ramifications – the liberal-conservative political-cultural divide – that go beyond the specifics of this case. Moreover, Israeli media consumers can learn a lot from the Rather incident, even if our media itself probably won't.

There is a media elite. It's usually liberal and often behaves unprofessionally.

Former IBA director-general Motti Kirschenbaum, responding to a complaint we once lodged, said in a radio interview that it's only natural for most media people to be liberal. After all, he said, liberals are inquisitive and suspicious; qualities that make for good journalists.

This admission opened the floodgates. Over the years many media stars admitted that their politics were nowhere near the Right, and some – like Shelly Yechimovitz and Aviv Lavie – said they voted for the communist-oriented Hadash Party.

One frequently suggested remedy is for the mainstream media to make it a point to employ journalists who are not all cut from the same cloth. Regrettably, the idea of distinguishing news from views and reporting professionally is considered by some in our elitist media as naive and impractical.

While media sloppiness is lamentable, there are also cases of unscrupulous journalists who are not above fooling their readers and viewers. Recently, Yediot Aharonot columnist Nahum Barnea wrote that the car of Othniel Schneller, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's original choice to head the office charged with implementing his disengagement plan, had been vandalized. The incident allegedly took place in his home community of Michmas, east of the Green Line.

Schneller denied the story on Kol Chai radio. But Barnea has not apologized for having demonized the foes of disengagement.

Another example. A few months ago, we documented how Israel Radio military correspondent Carmela Menashe misrepresented relations between the IDF and residents of the Gaza community of Netzarim.

An apology by Menashe – or her superiors – has yet to come, nor have any disciplinary actions been taken.

Part of the solution is to give Israelis access to a more politically varied media menu.

That's why closing down Arutz 7 and sentencing its owners and operators to jail (while dozens of other non-licensed stations continue to broadcast) smacks of ideological animosity at the offices of the state prosecutor and attorney-general. The public deserves to hear Arutz 7, and nothing justifies keeping it off the air.

The media belongs to its consumers, and this is particularly the case in an Israel where tax-funded public broadcasting dominates.

Another possible remedy is for consumers to have constituent representation on such governing bodies as the Press Council. That might also help ensure a more balanced media. (Jerusalem Post Oct 3)

The writers are vice-chairman and chairman, respectively, of Israel's Media Watch. The latter is a professor at the Weizmann Institute.

Blind Hatred By Robin Shepherd

Unless Britain's media becomes more balanced, a hostile climate could worsen

Britain's Jewish Chronicle can make for sobering reading these days. At a time when fanatical hostility to the State of Israel and the related rebirth of anti-Semitism in Europe have become commonplace, the shock value of the latest cemetery desecration or the latest distortion of Israel's actions in the Middle East has become subject to the law of diminishing returns. The more we hear about it, the less it affects us.

But last week's issue of that newspaper contains a story so appalling that it deserves to be heard by all. The author, Mark Scodie, relates the tale of how a 30-year-old Israeli woman, who wants to remain anonymous, was turned down for a job at a London-based Christmas decorations company called Gisela Graham. On rejecting the woman's application, the company's marketing director, Piers Croke, made a few comments in an e-mail to her about the reaction she was likely to elicit from potential recruiters by including on her resume' the fact that she had done two years military service in the Israeli army as a conscript.

The following remarks attributed to Croke were quoted in the Jewish Chronicle: "The natural reaction of most educated Europeans to the information

you provide is likely to be 'So it was she who guided those gunships to targeted assassinations and the murder of women and children with indiscriminate bombing and strafing of refugee camps.'"

With this, be warned, Croke was merely warming up.

"A sizable proportion [of Europeans and Americans] doubt the 'right' of Israel to exist. This has nothing to do with anti-Semitism. Nor is it racism – that is the kind of disgusting attitude which one might say is inherent in the idea of the State of Israel and, one might say, among a large section of believing Jews elsewhere, who regard the rest of us as inferior, unclean, and not chosen by God. What could be more racist than that?"

Many of us have been disappointed at a rejection letter. But this surely sets something of a world record in the art of kicking someone when they are down.

The case has been referred to Britain's Commission for Racial Equality, the official body charged with combating discrimination on ethnic, national, or religious grounds, and Croke and his company have apologized to the woman in question. But the broader point here is as obvious as it is alarming.

The intellectual atmosphere in Britain has now become so hostile to Jews and Israel that the rantings one might usually expect from extremist political organizations have invaded the mainstream. In normal circumstances, after all, you would hope to be able to tell the difference between a job rejection letter from a respectable company and a tirade from a neo-Nazi fringe group.

What is worse is that this case is no exception. Last year, Amit Dushvani, an Israeli biology student, had his PhD application turned down by Andrew Wilkie, professor of pathology at Oxford University, in the following terms: "I have a huge problem with the way the Israelis take the moral high ground from their appalling treatment in the Holocaust, and then inflict gross human rights abuses on the Palestinians because they wish to live in their own country."

Prof. Wilkie, who was suspended but not fired, went on: "I am sure you are perfectly nice at a personal level, but no way would I take on somebody who has served in the Israeli army."

In May of the same year a motion was proposed at a conference of the Association of University Teachers, a leading union for university professors, calling for a total academic boycott against Israel. The motion failed but was supported by one-third of the delegates.

Why matters have gone so far is difficult to say. In only a slightly toned-down version, such sentiments are commonplace on the BBC and in the Guardian newspaper, two of Britain's most influential media outlets. Perhaps this has helped to legitimize the kind of fanaticism that has worked its way through society. Perhaps also, Jewish groups have not had the support they deserve in trying to combat this garbage.

Apart from the obvious objection that the above examples are based on the kind of collective guilt principles that one would have hoped, that along with its victims, the Holocaust would have buried in Europe forever, a big part of the problem is that vehement anti-Israeli sentiment is usually based on ignorance.

The media that is not already reflexively hostile to Israel is clearly failing to restore balance. The public can perhaps not be faulted, given the coverage of the issue, for not being able to compare Israel's human rights record with that of its neighbors. There is something wrong when the debate is not undergirded by basic facts. For example, although civilians are sometimes killed in Israeli attacks on militants, they are never the target, while the converse applies to Israel's enemies, who proudly maximize their carnage on buses, in cafe's, and other public places.

The case of Croke and his vile rantings against a 30-year-old woman from Israel should awaken us from our slumbers. After all, there are only so many wake-up calls you can ignore before it becomes too late.

The writer, an adjunct fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies based in Central Europe, is the former Moscow bureau chief of The Times of London. (Jerusalem Post Oct 1)

The Larger Picture By Sarah Honig

Much ink is lately being spilled and costly air time wasted on sanctimonious denunciations of comparisons between those who collaborate in pulling Jews out of their homes today and those who collaborated in such despicable tasks during the Holocaust.

Amid the hypocrisy and hand wringing, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that nothing like the same emotion was spent on comparisons of Jews to outright Nazis (not merely their coerced Jewish bureaucrats).

The trailblazer was Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who called IDF soldiers "Judeo-Nazis." Shlomo Gazit likened crocheted kippot to Nazi insignia. Prof. Moshe Zimmerman regards Jewish children in Hebron as Hitlerjugend, and soldiers serving in the territories as SS men. Tommy Lapid recognized

his Holocaust-slain grandmother in the old Rafah woman (presumably equating Israeli troops with German tormentors). The ignoble list is long, but no one demands that the attorney-general investigate.

Slurs from "enlightened" circles radiate the aura of truth. Comparisons become shocking, odious, illegitimate, and inflammatory only if hailing from those whom the cultural-cum-political establishment and imperious post-Zionist intellectual cliques love to vilify.

In actual fact, comparisons to past national traumas aren't invalid. To avoid them is to stupidly insist on repeating egregious historical errors.

Analogies can be enlightening, provided they aren't vicious, fallacious, far-fetched, or harp on details. Particulars resist comparison. The large picture is different.

There's no denying that Arabs were avidly pro-Nazi in WW II (Haj Amin el-Husseini worked for Hitler in Berlin during the war years). There's no denying that Israel's enemies today strive for the identical objectives of their pro-Nazi predecessors. They're torchbearers in every sense. The state they wish to destroy (whether they announce so openly or camouflage their intent in "right of return" doublespeak) is home to survivors of Nazi horrors. In other words, it's the progeny of would-be annihilators vs. the progeny of those sentenced to annihilation.

Nevertheless, many among us refuse to acknowledge this basic pattern. The focus of comparisons ought to be this cognitive failure - not who's the traitor or which Jew most resembles Third Reich archetypes.

The consistent backdrop to the larger picture is the seemingly immutable Jewish mind-set. The Holocaust's unfathomable tragedy and the miracle of renaissance Jewish independence incredibly seem to have changed nothing in the Jewish character.

There's no escaping the painful conclusion that Jews aren't normal. We've proved this for better or worse countless times in countless situations, but our inability to behave like other sovereign nations is the most glaring evidence of our collective national aberration. You can search the world over but won't encounter another country in which folks ponder daily what more to offer their foes, what they can cede to appease, and how to curry a little favor abroad.

This need to pay for our right to live is a uniquely Jewish syndrome. We feel an onus to justify what's a self-evident, inalienable right everywhere else. Our obsession to analyze things from our enemies' point of view and understand them is simply unparalleled.

Back in 1916, Ze'ev Jabotinsky described the Jews as "very strange with their pangs of conscience and sentimentality. They sincerely lament the misfortune of arch-haters what compassion they feel for the poor Poles on whom Providence inflicted the inconvenient Jewish problem."

Jewish guilt for burdening oppressors and assailants is entrenched and with it, apparently, the compulsion to make amends.

Its origins may be traceable to the penchant of every local medieval tyrant to oblige Jewish communities to pay exorbitantly for the privilege of not being slaughtered. Jews began to treat such levies as the way of the world, only to be expected.

This is where comparisons to the Holocaust become cogent. They're less about the villains than about the perceptions of their targeted victims. Jews have known cruel persecution before the Holocaust but throughout, hoping for the best, they consistently deluded themselves. They continued to do so even in Nazi ghettos.

When the Germans demanded periodical blood ransom - the handover of given quotas of Jews - there were those who dared hope that if the awful sacrifice were made, the rest would be let alone, at least for a while. They will have paid for the right to live another day, month, even a year. They repressed the realization that the Nazis couldn't be satisfied with a limited sacrifice, that they wanted it all.

A couple of generations later, citizens of the Jewish state seek to pay with a different coin - land. If they offer another strategic asset, another sliver of homeland, they'll mollify the enemy for a while, keep it at bay, buy a little peace with a little land, maybe even for months or years. They repress the realization that the Arabs can't be satisfied with a limited sacrifice, that they want it all. (Jerusalem Post Oct 1)

The Island California By Sarah Honig

In 1705 Eusebio Kino earned much scorn when he claimed to have crossed from Mexico into California without getting his feet wet. According to contemporary scholarly opinion, it couldn't be done. True, many vintage navigational charts documented evidence from explorations conducted as early as 1539 to the effect that California was part of America's mainland. But prevailing intellectual fashion decreed otherwise.

For nearly two centuries, leading mapmakers depicted California as an island, regardless of ample proof to the contrary. Kino's truth was unwelcome and hotly disputed. In 1711 England's foremost cartographer, Herman Moll, insisted that "California is undoubtedly an island. Why, I have had in my office

mariners who sailed around it."

So much for ostensibly trustworthy incontrovertible evidence, like that furnished by actress Vanessa Redgrave in a Jerusalem press conference recently when she asserted that Israeli soldiers routinely and deliberately fire into Gazan classrooms, aiming for pupils' heads.

Her calumny, like Moll's spurious geography, gained resonance. The more falsehoods are repeated, the more convincing they sound and the more de rigueur they become. Facts aren't readily allowed to interfere with trendy opinion.

Accounts of Kino's overland journey were dismissed, as are reminders that there never was an independent Arab entity in Palestine, that Palestine is merely a Roman name invented to rile defeated Jews, that it was a European import adopted by 20th-century Arabs (who mispronounced it) in order to wrest the narrow sliver of land Jews could call their own.

The myth of plundered Palestine was born after Arab aggression lost the Arabs more land in 1967. No one cares that the PLO had been founded three years before that. No one asks which Palestine Arafat sought to liberate prior to the onset of awful occupation.

No one wants to know why Israel was forced into the so-called occupation. No one wants to recall that Israeli leaders had offered to cede everything. No one wants to admit that they were spurned because Arabs refused to forgo their "inalienable right" to inundate the Jewish state.

It's not bon ton to realize that the struggle isn't about the liberation of "occupied Palestine" but about the attempted annihilation of Israel. Indeed, Israel's continued existence is no longer perceived as a righteous cause by forward thinkers like Redgrave. In their topsy-turvy reality, the victim takes the blame.

It was no surprise in the aftermath of the Beslan bestiality to see Redgrave superciliously pontificating in televised discussions. She and fellow panelists resorted to euphemisms when alluding to the identity of those who forced hundreds of captured children to undress, denied them water, and executed grown-ups in front of their horrified eyes before setting off explosives. It's politically incorrect to emphasize the identity of "revolutionary desperados" who shot no less than 46 bullets into the back of one 12-year-old girl.

INSTEAD OF speaking of Muslim and Arab terrorists, most media comment referred to "hostage-takers," "separatists," "attackers" and the by-now-standard "militants." Calling a spade a spade isn't enlightened.

Uninitiated visitors from Mars could easily conclude that the villain of the piece was Putin and that Beslan's juveniles paid the expected price for his benighted policies. Oppressed and frustrated Chechen underdogs were left with no viable option but to butcher youngsters. It's natural for an aggrieved party to commit atrocities. The only way to preempt more of the same is to evince sensitivity and tolerance towards potential mass murderers.

This is all too familiar to Israeli ears. We're often told that had we not successfully defended ourselves, we'd be terror-free. (We also wouldn't be here.) The postulate that despair triggers terror isn't questioned. No nation had ever been as humiliated, tortured, and bloodied as the Jews during the Holocaust. No nation ever had as much justification for revenge.

Nevertheless, outraged Jewish survivors didn't storm German schools and massacre the Nazis' progeny.

Moreover, it's different strokes for different folks. Jews are expected to obligingly turn the other cheek. The right to rage seems an exclusive Muslim preserve. High-minded advocates stand ever ready to whitewash psychotic Islamic violence exported worldwide - even via the comfortably-off Saudi guests in America who crashed into the Twin Towers or well-heeled British-born Pakistanis who blew up Mike's Place in Tel Aviv. Modern Molls would rather disseminate fraudulent claims than admit that Muslim emigres don't wish to integrate into host countries but to transform them. These aren't downtrodden altruists. They're expansionist fanatics.

They could ignite World War III.

Unflappable intellectual heirs of capricious cartographers won't acknowledge this. Spain's King Ferdinand VII only appeared to reimpose rationality with his royal edict of 1747 proclaiming that "California is no island."

In fact, spirits of departed deniers of California's continental connection still accompany today's danger-deniers on the voyage of the Good Ship Lollipop around mythical islands in the vast sea of utopian goodwill.

(Jerusalem Post Oct 4)

Bush, Kerry, and the Jewish Vote By Jeff Jacoby

When they go to the polls in November, which of the two major parties will American Jews support? Consider:

At Party A's national convention, a prime speaking slot went to an infamous racial inciter, one with an ugly history of Jew-baiting. At Party

B's convention, a leading speaker recalled with empathy the many pre-9/11 victims of terrorism, such as Leon Klinghoffer, whom the killers "marked ... for murder solely because he was Jewish."

Party A's presidential nominee said nothing about Israel in his convention acceptance speech. Party B's nominee, on the other hand, made a point of referring to "our good friend Israel" - and his campaign later distributed that portion of his remarks to its national e-mail list.

Increasingly, Party A is the political home of those who demonize Jews, such as the South Carolina senator who claimed that the war in Iraq was launched to "take the Jewish vote." Conversely, Party B has driven out the anti-Semites in its midst, and is now where the most ardent philo-Semites in American politics are concentrated.

So which party will American Jews vote for in November?

If you know your political tides, the answer won't surprise you: Jews will almost certainly vote overwhelmingly for Party A - the Democratic Party - just as they have for more than half a century. They will do so notwithstanding the Democrats' willingness to indulge a race-baiting hustler like Al Sharpton. Notwithstanding John Kerry's uncertain trumpet in the war against radical Islamic terror. Notwithstanding the Bush administration's unprecedented support and friendship for Israel.

For countless American Jews, loyalty to the Democratic ticket is as automatic as breathing. The roots of that loyalty run deep. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, waves of Jewish immigrants from Europe, where the most anti-Semitic elements of society were often the most conservative, brought with them an intense aversion to right-wing politics - and an appreciation for the left, which they associated with emancipation and equality. Those attitudes were intensified during World War II, when the most lethal enemy in Jewish history was ultimately destroyed by an alliance led by a liberal Democrat named Franklin Roosevelt.

But America in 2004 is very different from the America of 50 or 100 years ago. American Jews owe it to themselves to base their political loyalty on something stronger than force of habit. Those who vote for Democrats (or against Republicans) because that's what their parents and grandparents did ought to take a closer look: When it comes to the issues they care about most, their loyalty may be misplaced.

Israel, for example.

Like millions of Americans, many Jewish voters are concerned about the safety and security of Israel. It is a concern they share with George W. Bush, who presides over what is widely considered to be the most pro-Israel administration in history. That stands in contrast not only to his father's record -- the first Bush administration had a very strained relationship with Israel -- but in some ways to Bill Clinton's as well. During the Clinton years, no foreign leader visited the White House more frequently than Yasser Arafat. The current administration regards Arafat as an untrustworthy liar, and has never invited him to the White House.

Bush likewise broke with the past by insisting that Palestinian democracy and tolerance, and a leadership "not compromised by terror," are prerequisites to peace with Israel. Unlike John Kerry, who speaks of making the United Nations a "full partner" in US foreign policy, Bush is under no illusions about the UN's intense anti-Israel hostility. Nor has he had any difficulty recognizing the poisonous strain of anti-Semitism that runs beneath some of the most virulent denunciations of the Jewish state.

When the UN's self-styled "conference against racism" in Durban, South Africa, in 2001 turned into a grotesque anti-Semitic debauch, Bush ordered the US delegation to walk out. When the prime minister of Malaysia opened an international summit by declaring that "Jews rule the world by proxy," Bush personally rebuked him. In all this, he has come across not as a politician acting out of calculated expedience, but as a man acting on principle and conviction.

Bush got only 19 percent of the Jewish vote in 2000; he has known all along that most Jews would vote Democratic in 2004. Yet there is nothing anomalous about his ardent support for Israel or his firm stance against anti-Semitism. Unlike the Europe of Jewish memory, in the United States today it is the left that has increasingly set its face against Jewish interests. As poll after poll confirms, conservative Republicans are much more likely to self-identify as pro-Israel than liberal Democrats. It is no surprise that a man like Pat Buchanan has had to leave the Republican Party. Or that a man like Sharpton is at home among the Democrats.

Of course these are not the only issues that Jewish voters care about. For many voters, Jewish or otherwise, domestic matters - abortion, jobs, taxes, the environment - trump every other concern.

But those for whom these issues do weigh heavily have an obligation to look beyond party label. This isn't 1944. No one should be voting as if it is. (Boston Globe Sep 28)

The Great Refusal By Saul Singer

For the Israeli press, the man-bites-dog story from President George W. Bush's recent speech to the United Nations was his call to "impose a settlement freeze, dismantle unauthorized outposts, end the daily humiliation of the Palestinian people, and avoid any actions that prejudice final negotiations." This sort of State Department boilerplate, coming from a pro-Israel president, was a bit jarring. But the papers missed the real story, which is not what is left from the old paradigm, but how far Bush's foreign-policy revolution has come, and how far it has to go.

Look at the speech more carefully. Much of it was devoted to lauding the progress that Afghanistan and Iraq have been making on the road to becoming viable democracies. Then he came to this region, stating that "These two nations will be a model for the broader Middle East, a region where millions have been denied basic human rights and simple justice." Then, with unusual candor that deserved a headline somewhere, Bush said, "For too long, many nations, including my own, tolerated, even excused, oppression in the Middle East in the name of stability. Oppression became common, but stability never arrived".

Bringing this around to Arabs and Israelis, Bush began with a stinging slap to Yasser Arafat's regime, saying that "peace will not be achieved by Palestinian rulers who intimidate opposition, tolerate corruption, and maintain ties to terrorist groups." He also broke what may be new ground in calls on the Arab states to "end incitement in their own media, cut off public and private funding for terrorism, and establish normal relations with Israel." Even the line implicitly criticizing Israel was immediately followed by a call on Europe to stop cozying up to Arafat: "world leaders should withdraw all favor and support from any Palestinian ruler who fails his people and betrays their cause."

Bush has turned Mideast policy upside down from blame-Israel-first to one that places the main burden for peace on Arab, including Palestinian, leaders. Why then, on a certain level, is this revolution not being noticed, or not taken seriously?

The answer lies in that throwaway line about Israel that drew all the attention. The media, and to a great extent the world, do not pay attention to nice words about freedom and democracy. What they notice regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict is the balance of blame that Washington is assigning. If there is any balance, they highlight the criticism of Israel, yawn, and move on.

Bush has all but hollowed out the policy of "evenhandedness" he inherited, a policy that was harmfully Israel-centric, not only toward the conflict, but toward the region. But his alternative policy has not been fully transplanted - it is a bit like an artificial heart elaborately connected outside the body, while the old, diseased organ has been left ineffectively beating inside.

Two things must be done to complete the transplant. The first, Bush himself called for but won't do: cut off financial support to Arafat. Shin Bet head Avi Dichter has testified that 45% of the Palestinian Authority budget is composed of taxes collected by Israel from Palestinians and duly remitted. Arafat's own office, Dichter reported, receives \$8 million a month. During the height of the current war, Israel suspended these payments, but they were restored some time ago in response to American pressure.

There is, of course, no reason for Europe to take seriously Bush's call to financially cut off Arafat before the US stops pressuring Israel to maintain its money flow. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that either Israel, the US, or both, do not want to depose Arafat using the financial levers at their disposal. So long as these funds are not cut off, the US seems unready to help bring in the new leadership that it has called for.

The second step would be for Bush to identify the real source of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hint: it is not settlements, and not just the Arab penchant for dictatorship. It is the almost century-old Arab attempt to deny any Jewish right to self-determination in Israel.

It is great that Bush is now calling for the Arab states to normalize relations with Israel, but the first step is to address more clearly what Fouad Ajami calls "the great refusal" that "persists in that 'Arab street' of ordinary men and women, among the intellectuals and the writers, and in the professional syndicates among the secularists and the Islamists alike, in countries that have concluded diplomatic agreements with Israel and those that haven't."

The Palestinian predicament is the result, not the source of, the conflict. In fact, though partition is obviously at issue, what underlies it is not a "conflict" in the usual sense, meaning a fight over something to be divided. So long as there is a refusal to accept Israel in any borders, all other questions are moot. And so long as the United States dances around saying this, its policy will remain an ineffective hybrid between the old and the new. (Jerusalem Post Oct 3)

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