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Commentary...

Saddam on Trial By Rafael Medoff

As the United States prepares to put Saddam Hussein on trial, it may find it useful to examine Israel's experience in bringing a notorious war criminal to court.

In May 1960, Israeli agents captured Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in Argentina and flew him to Israel to face trial for his senior role in the genocide of six million European Jews. Israel immediately faced a torrent of international criticism.

The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously – with US support – to condemn Israel for "endanger[ing] international peace and security." The Washington Post asserted that Israel's capture and planned prosecution of Eichmann were "tainted by lawlessness," and that Israel had no right to act in the name of Holocaust victims or the Jewish people as a whole, which the Post called an "imaginary Jewish ethnic entity." Time magazine accused Israel's leaders of "inverse racism" for their position that Israel could speak for the Jewish people.

The New York Times rejected the Israeli claims that Eichmann's role in the Nazi genocide justified Israel's intrusion into Argentina, on the grounds that "no immoral or illegal act justifies another." The Times also denounced the idea of trying Eichmann in Israel. It preferred that he be brought before an international tribunal since "it was not against Israel but against humanity that his crimes were committed."

This position echoed the Times' policy during the Holocaust of deliberately obscuring the Jewish identity of Hitler's victims. Times publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger believed that American Jews should keep their Jewishness as hidden as possible, and made it clear to Times editors that their coverage of Nazi atrocities should likewise play down the Jewish angle. They faithfully complied.

SOME US church publications were particularly bitter in their attacks on Israel's prosecution of Eichmann. An article in The Unitarian Register compared "the Jew-pursuing Nazi and the Nazi-pursuing Jew." The Catholic newspaper The Tablet said the Eichmann trial was a reminder "that there are still some influential people around who – like Shylock of old – demand their pound of flesh."

Some leaders might have wavered under such withering attacks. President George W. Bush may start to have second thoughts if he faces strong criticism for his handling of Saddam. But Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion was unbending.

"American journalists, who have not suffered from the Nazi atrocities, may be 'objective' and deny Israel's right to try one of the greatest of the Nazi murderers," Ben-Gurion rebuffed his challengers. "But the calamity that the Nazis inflicted on the Jewish people is a specific and unparalleled act – an act designed for the utter extermination of the entire Jewish people... Historic justice and the honor of the Jewish people demand that this should be done only by an Israeli court in the sovereign Jewish State."

As the opening of the Eichmann trial approached, the critics took aim again. State Department officials "deplored" the prosecution of Eichmann because, they claimed, the trial was making some Western democracies "less responsive to the Berlin crisis than desired."

An editorial in the Times of London warned that while the trial might be fair, it was tainted because it "springs from an admittedly illegal act—the abduction of Eichmann from Argentina." The paper warned ominously that the trial would have "profound effects [on Israel's] relations with the rest of the world [and they] will not necessarily be good."

Yet another round of criticism erupted after Eichmann was convicted and sentenced to death.

The New York Times asserted that "Eichmann's crimes are so enormous" that "hanging becomes meaningless." Novelist Pearl Buck urged that Eichmann be kept alive so that he might be studied. The Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis declared its opposition to all capital punishment as a matter of principle. Martin Buber and a group of fellow Hebrew University professors argued that some young Germans had recently shown humanistic tendencies, and executing Eichmann would "retard" the flowering of their humanity.

The New York Times' final editorial on the subject, published following Eichmann's execution, went so far as to argue that while Eichmann was guilty, others were also guilty of "murderous hatred" – citing the Soviet Union, Franco's

ISRAEL NEWS

A collection of the week's news from Israel

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Spain, and even "our own country, where the power of the Federal Government has had to be invoked to secure equal justice for a racial minority."

Not many pundits today will compare the United States to Saddam Hussein as the N.Y. Times compared the US to the Nazis in 1962. But President Bush will surely find himself challenged for having Saddam prosecuted and punished. What remains to be seen is whether he will follow

Ben-Gurion's example and stand fast, or bend to the pressure of his critics. *The writer is director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies near Philadelphia. (Jerusalem Post Dec 16)*

Egypt, a Grave and Gathering Threat By Caroline Glick

One week after Egypt scuttled Israel's proposed UN resolution condemning the murder of Israeli children by terrorists, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom met with Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak in Geneva.

Commenting on Wednesday's meeting on Israel Radio, Shalom explained, "The very existence of the meeting... show[s] more than anything that the Egyptians have tried to warm up relations with Israel."

Shalom met with Mubarak ahead of the autocrat's trip to Washington. In so doing, while Shalom received nothing for his trouble of meeting with Mubarak, Mubarak received Israeli cover ahead of his meetings with US President George W. Bush. And Mubarak could use such Israeli legitimacy. This week, Egypt absorbed a public relations blow when the UN's Human Rights Report lambasted its miserable human rights record.

It is a shame that our foreign minister felt it necessary to confer such legitimacy on Mubarak. One of the worst-kept secrets in our region is that aside from Iran's nuclear weapons program, Egypt is the greatest looming threat to Israel's national security. As our governing officials pander to Mubarak and his top brass, these men oversee diplomatic and military policies that endanger the very existence of the Jewish state.

Egypt is generally applauded for what is considered its "constructive" role in attempting to end the Palestinian terror war. Mubarak's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman's efforts to secure a temporary cessation of terrorist attacks are viewed in a positive light.

In the Foreign Ministry's press release about the meeting in Geneva, the ministry said that Shalom "found that the Egyptian president was committed to the peace process." And yet Egypt plays a pivotal role in enabling, justifying, and prolonging the Palestinian terror war against Israel.

As Chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee MK Yuval Steinitz points out, the Egyptian initiative to achieve a temporary cease-fire among the various Palestinian terrorist organizations is aimed not at achieving peace, but at "preserving Hamas's terror capabilities."

"In pushing for the so-called hudna, the Egyptians are trying to force a temporary cease-fire that will save Hamas from the demand that it be dismantled as is dictated by the road map," Steinitz explains. "Doing so is not only counter to the expressed demands of the road map.

It is antithetical to the objectives of the US war on terror. These call explicitly for an end to state sponsorship of terrorism and for the denial of safe havens and bases of operation for terrorists," he adds.

For the past three years, the Egyptian military has turned a blind eye to the constant smuggling of weaponry to Palestinian terrorist forces through tunnel networks in the Sinai Desert. "In enabling the continuation of the smuggling operations, Egypt has become the logistical base for Hamas," Steinitz argues.

Egypt's support for the continuation of the Palestinian terror war is part and parcel of an overall strategy of weakening Israel politically, diplomatically, and defensively while building up the Egyptian armed forces to a level of parity with the IDF. Dr. Arieh Stav, director of the Ariel Center for Policy Research, explains, "Egypt is an impoverished country. Its per capita income is \$870.

And yet, it spends a quarter of its GDP on its military. Egypt has 450,000 men in uniform and another 450,000 men in its paramilitary units. This battle roster does not include its reserve forces. By way of comparison, at the height of World War II, Nazi Germany did not spend such a large proportion of its GDP on its war efforts."

Egypt's military capabilities include a sophisticated and well-stocked arsenal of chemical and biological weapons as well as advanced ballistic missiles capable of targeting Israel.

According to Dr. Dany Shoham from Bar-Ilan University's Begin Sadat

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Center, the Egyptian chemical arsenal includes VX, sarin, mustard gas, and luisite. "Egypt was the first Middle East country to develop and use chemical weapons. It did so effectively in its war with Yemen between 1962-67," Shoham notes, adding, "Egypt's chemical and biological weapons procurement programs reached their height in the 1970s and 1980s."

While in the 1990s, Egypt claimed alternately that its non-conventional arsenals were of a defensive nature or that it had no such arsenals, the fact is that there are no indications whatsoever that their chemical and biological weapons were dispensed with - to the contrary. Their weapons were also not rendered obsolete with the passage of time. There is in fact no certainty whatsoever that the Egyptians ceased their development programs."

Egypt's biological arsenal contains advanced strains of toxins, bacterial and viral agents. Egypt possesses varied and advanced dispersal systems for its unconventional weapons. These include chemical mines, artillery shells, aerial bombs, and ballistic warheads. Egypt's ballistic missile systems include advanced Scud and Nodong missiles. As late as this year, Egypt continued its ballistic missile collaboration with North Korea and there have been scattered reports of cooperation with Libya as well.

In the 1980's Egyptian scientists and engineers actively participated in Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapons programs. This Egyptian-Iraqi cooperation continued, with less publicity during the 1990's according to US government sources at the time. In the lead-up to the US-led invasion of Iraq, the Egyptian government refused US and British requests that those engineers and scientists be interviewed by US officials.

Egypt has continued to cultivate its weapons of mass destruction programs while modernizing its conventional armed forces. The \$2 billion in annual US military assistance has allowed Egypt to transform its armed forces from a Soviet era force to a modern and sophisticated Western military.

Egypt has built local production facilities for the US M1A1 Abrams main battle tank. Israeli pilots have noted with alarm over the years that the US-trained Egyptian pilots in US-supplied F-16 fighter jets may well have achieved operational parity with the IAF.

And, Steinitz notes, "While Egypt has achieved near parity with Israel in ground and air forces, its naval power has outstripped Israel's. Today, the Egyptian navy has 2-3 times the number of naval platforms as Israel."

A former senior IDF intelligence officer allows that "Egypt's military buildup is beyond any proportion to conceivable external threats to Egypt and is a cause for alarm." Yet, at the same time, he argues that under Mubarak's dictatorship, Egypt has no interest in moving towards open warfare with Israel. "The problem will arise if a succession crisis ensues after Mubarak's death."

This argument, that 75-year-old Mubarak's despotic rule of Egypt acts as a barrier to protect Israel from his own massive buildup of Egypt's military forces, is the conventional wisdom on Egypt. It is voiced by officials throughout the political spectrum in Israel and accepted unquestioningly in Washington. The problem is that Egypt's military is explicit in naming Israel as the intended recipient of the full brunt of its massive might.

Starting in 1996, the order of battle at Egypt's annual Bader combined forces exercise has explicitly named the opposing force as "a small nation to the country's northeast." Unless the Egyptians are referring to the Gaza Strip, that nation is of course Israel.

"The Egyptian military has already achieved absolute superiority against any Middle Eastern and African state. Egypt has no military threat to deal with from anywhere. It does not even have border disputes with any of its neighbors," Steinitz notes. "It is clear that Egypt is working to achieve military parity with Israel. This is made all the more dangerous when one bears in mind that in the event of a war, Egypt will not be fighting by itself but rather as part of a coalition of Arab states."

Steinitz also notes with worry the recent intensification of cooperation between the Egyptian and Saudi Arabian air forces. The Saudi air force has drawn recent attention because since the US-led invasion of Iraq it has stationed F-16 squadrons at Tabuk airfield, within striking distance of Israel. This deployment is in contravention of US pledges to Israel that the Saudi F-16s, flown by US-trained pilots, would be prohibited from using the Tabuk air base.

The US, which has almost singlehandedly overseen Egypt's conventional military ascendancy, has not made any serious attempt to alter Egypt's behavior. Again, the common wisdom is that Mubarak is a moderate who, regardless of his personal view of Israel, understands that it does not serve his interests to abrogate his country's peace treaty with Israel. And yet, largely as a result of the actions of officially-sponsored incitement, Egypt is one of the most anti-Semitic countries in the world.

As Steinitz notes, "Mubarak, through years of incitement, has prepared his people psychologically for war against Israel and has even brought them to assume that such a war is inevitable."

By signing a peace agreement with Israel, Egypt became the second-largest recipient of US military assistance in the world. It has received a pass for its anti-Semitism and active support of Palestinian terrorist organizations. Its massive militarization, non-conventional arsenal, and its refusal to develop its civilian economy or grant political freedom to its subjects have been systematically ignored.

In many ways, the Egyptian experience is mirrored by that of the PLO, itself an organization founded by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1964. After signing the 1993 Oslo Accord with Israel, the PLO benefited from Israeli arms and US training of its forces.

Its incitement was ignored. Its corrupt autocracy in the territories was encouraged in the interest of "stability." The fact that on paper the PLO remains committed to peace with Israel preserves its international legitimacy in spite of

its actions and declarations that prove unequivocally that it is still bent on Israel's destruction as its principle aim.

In Egypt's case, as Steinitz explains, "It is an alarming irony that while Israel has a peace agreement with Egypt, but remains in an official state of war with Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Syria, and Libya, Egypt causes Israel more damage diplomatically and constitutes a larger threat militarily than all these states that are still our declared enemies." (Jerusalem Post Dec 12)

Facing Olmert's Demographic Fears By Aryeh Halivni
The Israelites are becoming too numerous and strong for us. We must deal wisely with them.—Pharaoh to the Egyptian people, Exodus 1:9-10

It has been a while since Israel's demography was the subject of such acute debate. Suddenly it is the center of Israel's latest political storm. Long relegated to the ivory towers of academia, the discussion of demography surfaced with a vengeance in an interview Ehud Olmert gave in Yedioth Aharonot on December 5.

Olmert's suggestion of a unilateral withdrawal from the territories based on demographic considerations has been met with horror and suspicion from Israel's right wing; how could a prince from the Likud's "Fighting Family" make such a blasphemous suggestion? His criterion for setting our borders: Withdraw to a line where 80% of the population will be Jewish and 20% Arab and, presto! You've got Israel's first permanent eastern border.

No doubt, the demographic concerns are real. University of Haifa demographer Arnon Sofer – whose 2001 monograph *Israel and Demography, 2000–2020* was the opening bell for the whole demography craze – told Israel Radio that there is already a non-Jewish majority in the land situated between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. With the Arab birthrate almost twice as high as the Jewish one in Israel, the crisis only becomes more severe.

The question is, what ought to be our response to this alarm? Talking heads, opposition politicians, and now government ministers have begun to panic into retreat. The mantra goes something like this: If Israel wishes to remain both a Jewish and democratic state, it must withdraw from the territories in order to ensure a Jewish majority.

THE long-term question of Israel's policy toward the territories is politically charged and complex. But is beating a quick retreat the Zionist response to a demographic challenge? To begin with, since when has traditional Zionism based its decisions on statistical projections? The whole of Jewish history has been a rejection of scientific predictions.

As Ariel Sharon pointed out this week, the Jewish community in Israel numbered just 56,000 at the time of the Balfour Declaration and nearly 650,000 at the founding of the State. Yet today there are 5.5 million Jews in the country. Zionist considerations are based on the ability to defy rational expectations.

Rather than retreat, the Zionist response ought to be threefold: First, encourage natural growth in the country. There are countless anecdotes of prime ministers from David Ben-Gurion to Golda Meir to Menachem Begin lecturing Jewish leaders on the importance of having more children, rather than granting them an audience for their political requests. Yet the present government, instead of encouraging Israelis to have more children, has eliminated the incentives used to promote this value. There is no need to create a dependency on state welfare, but when having more children ought to be a national priority, Israel should be enacting laws to further support population growth.

Second, recent studies place the number of non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union at upwards of 300,000. Conversion efforts, both reaching out to potential candidates for conversion and making the process more accessible to those who are interested, are critical steps in this challenge. Not only is it important that these citizens, who serve in the army and shoulder national responsibilities, integrate into Jewish society, but the conversion of several hundred thousand people who are already citizens will go a long way toward preserving a Jewish majority in Israel.

Finally, the largest potential for Israeli population growth lies in aliya. While the government has paid lip service to the idea of bringing more immigrants to Israel from Western countries, no practical measures have been implemented to further this goal. Benefits for immigrants have been cut and the combination of unemployment, strikes and slowdowns have made Israel an even harder sell for Western Jews.

Worse than that, brain drain stories abound, as talented contributing members of society are leaving for Europe and the US to search for opportunities.

Israel must do its part to attract new immigrants, but aliya is one area where the Jewish communities of the Diaspora have the responsibility to play an integral part. It is time that Jews around the world who want to help Israel meet its next challenge vote with their feet and settle in Israel.

Pharaoh's solution to his demographic problem with the Israelites was extreme and barbaric. He focused, as many after him have, on oppression of the Jewish people. Zionism has always believed that we control our own destiny; we can shape our collective future. If we "deal wisely" with the issues that confront us, we have the power to overcome any crisis – even a statistical one – we encounter. (Jerusalem Post Dec 15)

The author is a freelance writer living in Gush Etzion.

Anti-Israel and Anti-Semite By Jonathan Tobin

It's time to stop defending Israel's tactics and start talking about its right to exist.

While sitting in a local synagogue banquet hall listening to speeches about the Arab-Israeli conflict this past weekend, it occurred to me that I had spent most of my adult life doing just that.

As I scribbled my notes, I thought that it could just as easily have been 10, 15 or 20 years ago. We could just as easily have been discussing how to combat media bias against Israel in 1983 or 1988, as in 2003. The endless argument about Israel, its foes, and the rights and wrongs of the conflict drags on and on.

Those of us who care about Israel seem doomed, like Sisyphus, to continue pushing the rock up the hill.

To note this is no slight to the hundreds of activists who came together in the Philadelphia area for a conference of the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America. Their zeal is pure, and their cause is just.

Combatting media distortions is a serious business, and Camera has played its role as the tireless gadfly well. Their campaigns pointing out the bias against Israel in the reporting of offenders such as National Public Radio and ABC anchorman Peter Jennings have been commendable, if not heroic.

But my sense of d[?] vu about of what was said at the conference leads me to conclude that much of the rhetorical back-and-forth over how the media is covering the latest permutations of the conflict - be it Israel's security fence or the new Geneva peace plan - misses the point.

Indeed, the plain truth is that a lot of the debate about these issues within American Jewry, coupled with attempts to make our case to the media establishment, is getting us nowhere. Most pro-Israel advocates have been arguing vociferously for the last three years that the Palestinian rejection of Israel peace offers in 2000 - and their decision to answer it with a terrorist war of attrition - is proof of their unwillingness to make peace.

This remains entirely true, and should give us a great deal of insight about the myth that the next peace agreement lurking around the corner will succeed. But given the limited attention span of most Americans, Jews included, this fact is as much a piece of ancient history as the similar decision of the Arab world in 1947. At that time, the Arabs also rejected the offer of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, and chose war instead. Indeed, the refusal of the Palestinians to make peace at every point in the last 55 years is still pertinent, though few seem to care.

But to speak about 1947 or even 2000 is to go over the heads of much of our intended audience. The lack of a sense of history - or even a basic comprehension of the recent history of the Middle East - is endemic among journalists and most ordinary observers these days. And as much as we labor to enlighten the ignorant, to say that we have been making much progress along these lines is to engage in mere optimism, not fact.

So what do we do?

The answer was provided by Gerald Steinberg, an Israeli think-tank scholar and a keen observer of the conflict and the oceans of rhetoric about it. Steinberg, one of the speakers at the Camera event, pointed out that it was vital for pro-Israel activists to "shift the agenda" from one of arguing over whether or not "Israel is stealing Palestinian land," to one that goes back to basics.

What we need to do is to focus on the fact that the conflict is not about the fence or the settlements, or even why the democratically elected Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the Israeli army, are not the moral equivalent of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and his terrorist thugs. The fundamentally moral basis of having a Jewish state must be our cause because, as Steinberg put it, the "argument is still about that." The conflict is still about the right of the Jews to have their own state, and to live in it in peace and security.

The keynoter of the Camera conclave, the formidable Harvard scholar Ruth Wisse, made the same point, albeit slightly differently. Wisse, who famously wrote many years ago that "Anti-Semitism was the most successful ideology of the 20th century," noted that if she were to amend that sentence today, it would read that it was also "the most successful political instrument" of the last 100 years. Her point was that it was the use of Jew-hatred by Arab rulers, who employed it to distract their populations from their own nations' lack of freedom, that had perpetuated the war against Israel.

This "magician's trick," as she put it, enabled them to stay in power, but it also fostered a terrorist culture now beyond their control.

Attempts to appease this terrorist mindset by pressuring Israel are futile - all of which should lead us to conclude that what we should still be focusing on is not so much specific issues, but the core principle of support for Israel's existence.

The assault on Israel from the Arab world and in much of the international media has as its goal, not the changing of some Israeli policies, but the delegitimization of Israel.

Many in the European and Arab media who engage in hate against Israel are quick to assert that they are not anti-Semitic, just anti-Zionist. But as much as we should be careful not to recklessly accuse all journalists who are critical of Israel of being anti-Semites, the anti-Zionist dodge must be exposed.

Anyone who isn't willing to allow the Jews the same rights of self-defense and sovereignty granted to every other population is a Jew-hater, not a legitimate critic.

This is a position shared by Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, a man who often differs with Camera on tactics. In his new book, *Never Again? The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism*, Foxman writes that "what some like to call anti-Zionism is in reality, anti-Semitism - always, everywhere and for all time. Anti-Zionism is ... an expression of bigotry and hatred."

He goes on to note that "most of the current attacks on Israel and Zionism are

not, at bottom, about the policies and the conduct of a particular nation-state. They are about Jews."

Seen in this context, it is readily apparent that much of the time the pro-Israel community spends arguing about details that divide along left- and right-wing lines is wasted. What's at stake here is still the survival of the Jews and their state. It's as simple as that.

While many of us may be weary of the struggle, we must persist. This "war of words" as Wisse put it, continues. It is, as she says, "a struggle that we dare not lose." (Jewish World Review Dec 11)

The writer is executive editor of the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent.

Back to Brooklyn for a Solid Jewish Majority? By Michael Freund

Now, I am really confused.

After ten years of telling us that Israel had to withdraw from the territories in order to "save its soul", the Left has now shifted gears, training its sights on our bodies instead, arguing that demographics leave us with no choice but to carry out a unilateral pullback.

Citing claims made by various academics to the effect that the number of non-Jews west of the Jordan river now equals, or even surpasses, the number of Jews, everyone from Shimon Peres to Ehud Olmert has come out in favor of abandoning Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

This, they say, will ensure that Israel maintains a strong Jewish majority, preserving the Jewish character of the state as well as its democratic ideals.

At first glance, this might sound reasonable enough. But, like most of the Left's policy prescriptions in the ten years since Oslo, it does not withstand even a few moments worth of scrutiny.

To begin with, an Israeli withdrawal would necessarily entail forgoing control over who enters the territories, since by default they would be under total Palestinian rule. Hence, the moment Israel leaves, there would be nothing to prevent the millions of Palestinian refugees from around the Middle East from pouring into Judea, Samaria and Gaza, sharply increasing the non-Jewish majority west of the Jordan river still further.

Indeed, according to statistics compiled by the United Nations, there are some 2.5 million Palestinian refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan alone. A nascent Palestinian state would most certainly do its utmost to bring the majority of them back to "Palestine", and the euphoria surrounding its establishment would likely draw many to return, driven by the hope of improving their lives and leaving behind the misery of the refugee camps.

The result would be that by withdrawing in order to counter the demographic threat, Israel might actually find itself facing a Palestinian entity equal to, or greater, in size in terms of population.

At least now, by maintaining control over all of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, Israel can regulate the number of people entering the territories. But once we leave, we would no longer be able to do so.

Moreover, if we take the demographic argument to its logical conclusion, then there is no reason to stop redrawing the border at the 1967 Green Line. For if, as the Left suggests, Israel should limit its sovereignty to areas with a strong Jewish majority, while pulling back from heavily populated Arab regions, then why focus only on Judea, Samaria and Gaza?

After all, the population of the Galilee has an Arab majority, so perhaps Israel should lower the flag over the north of the country as well?

And large sections of the Negev in the south are dominated by local Beduin tribes, so why not get rid of that too? Then, of course, there are towns in central Israel, such as Ramle and Jaffa, with large Arab populations, as well as Acre along the northern coast.

To be frank, if we are going to insist on limiting our national reach to areas with a solid Jewish majority, then perhaps we should confine the State of Israel to the downtown Tel Aviv area. Or, we might want to go one step further: declare Brooklyn, New York to be the Jewish state and call it quits in the Middle East altogether.

The fact of the matter is that over the past century, demographics have thankfully never played much of a role in determining the future of the Jewish state. Thankfully, because if they had, the State of Israel might never have been declared in the first place.

In 1922, for instance, the British mandatory authorities conducted a survey of Palestine and found that the Jewish population was just 84,000, while the number of Arabs was 643,000, or nearly 8 times as large. Had world Jewry resigned itself to the demographic realities of the time, they would never have campaigned for Israel's establishment.

In 1948, on the eve of independence, Arabs actually outnumbered Jews by more than 2 to 1 in the area under British mandatory rule. Had David Ben-Gurion allowed the dictates of demographics to prevail, he would never have declared the formation of the Jewish state.

This is not to say that numbers are not important, because they clearly do need to be taken into account when formulating policy. But it does suggest that demography should not be given undue weight in deciding on fateful issues such as the future of the country's borders.

Indeed, with just a little bit of creative thinking, even the issue of demography can be solved without having to resort to measures such as withdrawal.

For, in addition to all the standard ideas already out there, such as encouraging world Jewry to make aliyah, or providing Israeli mothers with incentives to be more fruitful and start multiplying, there remains a vast, untapped resource that has been largely overlooked: descendants of Jews

seeking to return to the Jewish people.

Groups such as the Bnei Menashe of northeastern India, who claim descent from a lost tribe of Israel, or the crypto-Jews of Spain, Portugal and South America, whose ancestors were converted to Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition, are clamoring to return to Judaism, and many wish to make aliyah.

The potential is immense. Thousands of Bnei Menashe wish to move here, while the Spanish-speaking world is said by academics to contain millions of people with Jewish blood coursing through their veins.

Nevertheless, neither the Israeli government nor the Jewish Agency are willing to reach out to such groups, perhaps because doing so requires "thinking outside the box", which is not what bureaucracies typically excel at.

But these groups constitute a large, untapped demographic and spiritual reservoir for Israel and the Jewish people. They are knocking on our national door, pleading to be let in.

So if Israel's policymakers are truly concerned with numbers, let them take up the task of addressing this challenge forthwith.

Enabling "lost Jews" to return will not only restore these precious souls to our people, but it might just provide the answer to our demographic needs as well. Qualitatively and quantitatively, Israel has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, from doing so. (Jerusalem Post Dec 17)

Break the Histadrut Jerusalem Post Editorial

Each weekday evening the leaders of the civil service unions decide which public service will be open to the public for just a few hours the next day.

In order to minimize advance notice, announcement is withheld till 9 p.m., accompanied by the claim that the short respite from the sanctions, imposed on the public more than two-and-a-half months ago, is a token of solidarity with the suffering of ordinary folks. The unions portray themselves as altruistically seeking to ease the public's inconvenience, while Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, is cast as the villain of the piece. Each weeknight, desperate people queue up, hoping to gain access to the bureaucratic service of the day. Beneficiaries of Histadrut largesse spend long hours on drafty sidewalks or in dark courtyards to be among the lucky few whom omnipotent officials will receive the next day.

Last week, 30,000 people – all jobless – were humiliated in front of the state labor exchanges. They cannot receive unemployment benefits unless registered. They cannot register because the Histadrut, which ostensibly protects the proletariat, directed all government staff to show up at their desks, but not receive the public.

Hence, the unemployed cannot register, real estate deals cannot be transacted, driver's licenses cannot be obtained, and passports aren't issued. The Histadrut thereby puts numerous spokes in the economy's already slowed-down wheels, all in the name of upholding pension rights.

Yosef Arazi, 61, of Holon, is unimpressed with the pretext. "I'm a few years from retirement and had the Histadrut not mismanaged my pension funds, I wouldn't have to worry about getting less in my old age. I am one of the Histadrut's victims, not the object of its concern."

More than a month ago Arazi lost his wallet, along with all the documents it contained. At 10 p.m. Sunday night, he arrived at Holon's large motor vehicle bureau, which serves much of the Dan region. It was due to open the next morning. He needed to replace his driver's license. Yet despite the night and half a morning spent in line, he still can't drive legally.

He never managed to gain entry. All he got for his wait is a swollen knee and a badly bruised right arm. Arazi describes a freezing night, terrible disorder, squabbles that developed into fisticuffs, and then "terrible crowding at the entrance. There was such unimaginable shoving that I could have used a towel to mop up my sweat."

Eventually the frenzied throng broke the doors down, tearing one of them off its hinges. The few guards on duty were helpless, as the outraged human mass pressed forward, without any security checks. Young fellows climbed through windows and others strong-armed their way in. Oldsters were pushed and squeezed out. This is what happened to Arazi, but not before he was knocked down and trampled.

Above all he felt used and humiliated: "I realized I was a pawn. My distress was supposed to be a weapon against the Treasury. I feel ashamed to have been put in this situation, brutalized and abused."

Like others, he was toyed with, cynically taunted in order to generate an apparent popular outcry against Netanyahu.

It's difficult to come up with a legislative formula against cruel ploys. But it's also essential. The inventiveness of those deliberately aiming to punish the public seems boundless. We urge lawmakers to be equally inventive in suppressing such mischief. Interior Minister Avraham Poraz had the right idea when he announced, after the farce at his own ministry's outlets yesterday, that to forestall future shenanigans he won't permit further brief irregular service. Beyond this, serious legislation needs to be considered to de-unionize public-service employees, perhaps by expanding the category of "critical services" which the government cannot allow to be shut down.

The public not only deserves proper, efficient, and polite service, but also accessibility and predictability. Taxpayers deserve to know when the government offices they finance are open, so they can plan their visit their ahead of time, without being sadistically reduced to a stampeding herd, just to enable union chiefs to impressively flex their muscles. (Jerusalem Post Dec 17)

The Leadership Is Spent, Not the Nation By Israel Harel

The Herzliya Conference, which focused on the national resilience, comes to an end today. But the statements voiced there by the politicians - on Tuesday, Ehud Olmert reiterated the unilateral escape initiative; and today, the prime minister will put forward a position that, in principle, does not appear to differ much from that of his deputy - do not actually testify to resilience.

In contrast, the results of studies presented at the conference by economists, security experts and even social affairs specialists, prove that there is a high degree of optimism among the public with regard to the future. In other words, the national resilience is a lot higher than depicted by the leadership, the media or a fair number of Israelis who belong to the despondent elites. From the point of view of many among the latter, Israel is a hard-pressed and exhausted country without morals and without a future. It is no wonder that many of their offspring are leaving the country.

David Ignatius is an influential publicist as well as a former editor-in-chief of the International Herald Tribune whose articles have appeared in Haaretz. He is now a Washington Post columnist. From talks he had in Tel Aviv with friends, members of academia and journalists, he concluded that Israel is despondent and spent. The daughter of a well-connected Israeli friend who has lived in this country all her life, for example, "doesn't see any future here... The violence has affected everything in our lives... and the values based on which we live. We are very, very tired."

This man, who is well-versed in how to gather material for a representative article, chose to speak to people who reflect only one side of the coin - the tired side - which dedicates whatever energy it has left to slandering the evil land. All the people he mentioned and on whom he based his mistaken conclusions are from that side of the coin.

Because of his professional standing, and the influential status of his newspaper in particular, he should know that such a list, which offers an essentially flawed description of a country downtrodden and exhausted by terror whose sons do not want to live in it, hardens the hearts of the Arabs and encourages - even if the writer didn't intend to do so - a continuation of the terror, meaning the death and injury of more Jews, and Arabs.

Had he wanted, Ignatius could have interviewed optimistic Israelis. Alternatively, he could have spoken to researchers, who would have shown him studies - such as the one conducted by a team from the National Security Council headed by Dr. Reuven Gal that was presented at the Herzliya Conference but didn't, for some reason, get much play in the media - with essentially different findings: "About two-thirds report that they are in good spirits and better. The vast majority, 82 percent, are optimistic about the future. Some 74 percent are proud of their country."

And since the aforementioned survey also included Arabs, one can assume that the percentage of Jews who are proud of their country is a lot higher.

And when, in addition to the sentiments expressed in The Washington Post, Arafat and his ilk report that the children of the elite - together with those of other leaders who lead the despair and self-flagellation - have left Israel, can there be any better encouragement for those who plan the terror attacks not to let up until Israeli society folds completely?

The following Jewish folk tale will perhaps teach the the decision-makers, like Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert, as well as the media, that the measure of the spirit must be taken from the public at large and not, as it has been, from a social, media and "professional" environment that conveys - in the case of the latter, under the guise of "strategic thinking" - the same kind of feebleness and despair that the selective interviewees conveyed to Ignatius.

In a small town in Lithuania, a young genius served as a yeshiva head and the town's rabbi. One day, he received an offer to serve as the head of a yeshiva in Vilna, where the most important yeshivas at the time were located. The town's residents were very disappointed, but he allayed their concerns: We will send two delegations to check whether it would be worth my while to take up the offer, he told them.

If the rabbi decided on two delegations, the town's residents thought, he must have a hidden and important reason for doing so.

A few days later, the first sled returned to the town and made its way straight to the synagogue, where, with almost the entire town listening on tenterhooks, the delegation said: Rabbi, with all the sorrow and pain it entails, we have no right to stop you. The yeshiva that has invited you has many hundreds of students, and all study Torah day and night. Your future lies there; and from there, you will lead the world of the Torah.

Two days later, the second sled returned, with the faces of its occupants reflecting satisfaction. You are staying here, they told their rabbi in front of the entire congregation. We may be a small town, but here at least you are respected by everyone, and the sins of the community are few. In the big city of Vilna, we found brothels that are frequented, spare us, by Jews as well - including students from the yeshiva that has invited you. Vilna is also filled with thieves and loan sharks, many poor people, and bitter conflicts; and the pupils of one rabbi boycott the pupils of another; and there are curses and abuse. Why would you want to get mixed up in all that?

Everyone turned to face the rabbi. True, he said; both delegations have reported the truth. Each delegation chose to go to the place that suited the nature of its members; and as is the way of man, to project what it saw and experienced onto Vilna in its entirety. (Ha'aretz Dec 18)