



ISRAEL NEWS
A collection of the week's news from Israel
A service of the Bet El Twinning Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

Commentary..

Pinhas Lit 'The Spark of History' By David Horovitz

On Christmas precisely 25 years ago, Israel Harel, then in his mid-30s, was making his way from his home settlement of Ofra, north of Jerusalem, to Rosh Tzurim, in the Etzion Bloc south of the capital. His purpose: to preside over the founding conference of the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

There were no bypass roads in those pre-Oslo days, and his route took him straight through Bethlehem, or would have done but for the Christmas festivities. Bethlehem was closed, he was told by the troops who stopped him on the northern outskirts. He would have to turn back.

But, as a former paratrooper who'd participated in the liberation of the Old City in 1967 and crossed the Suez Canal with Ariel Sharon in 1973, Harel had plenty of strings to pull, and got himself waved through – with a guarantee that the soldiers would also defer to other attendees heading to the same 80-strong landmark gathering.

I've heard people say that the opponents of Sharon's disengagement plan effectively "lost the rest of Israel" in the past three days with the now aborted "Orange Star" campaign – the co-option of a Holocaust image to imply an obscene parallel between the planned removal of the Gaza settlers and the Nazis' mass murder of European Jews.

Harel, much as he empathizes with the plight of Gush Katif, shares the horrified rejection of such "terrible" gimmickry. "Madness," he calls it.

But far from considering this to be the week, consequently, in which disengagement essentially triumphed, he believes the reverse. In the 48 hours before the Orange Star made its lamentable entrance, he argues, Pinhas Wallerstein's written call for mass civil disobedience "lit the spark of history" – a spark that, if kept burning, will see the government rendered impotent by the sheer scale of resistance.

HAREL SERVED as secretary-general of the council for its first 15 years. It was the period in which the settlement enterprise burgeoned from fewer than 20 locales to almost 140. In presiding over that expansion, and since, he gained a reputation for pragmatism. But it's one he insists applies to the movement as a whole.

Talking on Wednesday, this passionate, droopy-eyed settler pioneer asserts that "we wouldn't have attained what we have attained if we weren't pragmatic, if we hadn't known how to work with Labor politicians. We took them to the limits," he allows. "But where we were stopped, we stopped."

Gush Katif, he points out, "is solely a Labor creation. There was a view, especially held by Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Dayan, that we should build between north and south Gaza, so they [the Palestinians] couldn't be a unified, uncontrollable group."

The pioneers were mainly from large Sephardi families in Negev moshavim, whose ideology was agriculture. "At first, they really felt the council was too ideological for them," he recalls. "But with time, and as things got harder, they got more ideological."

And the real firming of that ideology came after the Sinai withdrawal, "when Orthodox Israelis who had moved to Sinai in 1979 and 1980 to try and prevent that evacuation came to Gaza," and made their influence felt.

Even today, Harel argues at one point, the pioneering spirit among Gaza settlers is such that, had Sharon come to Netzarim and Kfar Darom, and persuasively explained to residents why their presence was no longer beneficial and shown them where they were truly needed now, "they'd have cried, but they'd have packed up."

But then again, Harel later acknowledges, Sharon could never have done that – because of his personality, and because there is, in Harel's mindset, no

conceivable persuasive argument.

First, the deficient personality. Harel has a long and delicate relationship with the prime minister, and so chooses his words with particular care. They are all the more damning for that.

"Sharon always has to prove his strength... Wisdom is to win without giving those you overcome the sense that they've lost. The prime minister, the leader of the people, shouldn't have

given his opponents, the Jews, the sense that he's about to knock them out."

Second, the absent argument: "Two months before he unveiled disengagement, Sharon declared Netzarim to be as important as Tel Aviv. By which he meant that leaving Netzarim was as dangerous as leaving Tel Aviv – in terms of the impact it would have on the mindset of the enemy. The chief of General Staff said the same thing – not in terms of ideological Zionism, but in terms of the security conception. And they were right."

But now Sharon, in Harel's conception, has "capitulated to the attacks. Gush Katif hasn't. They've absorbed 6,000 mortar shells and hundreds of Kassams and lost dozens of dead – but they've held firm. They see a weak country and a weak prime minister, and they feel that if they don't hold firm, the whole country will fall. The terrorists will know they have won. That's the *raison d'etre* of all the opposition... The PA Web sites are already celebrating victory."

Sharon's previous position of "Netzarim as important as Tel Aviv" was justified and real, Harel insists. "He won the elections on it. And laughed at [Labor's leader Amram] Mitzna for saying the opposite. And then he became Mitzna."

And now, if he had something real to say to justify disengagement, "he would have come and said it, and succeeded in convincing them [the Gaza settlers]." But he hadn't, so he couldn't, and he didn't.

A full year after disengagement was unveiled, Harel is still palpably hurting, even disbelieving.

"To have changed so radically in one day..." he exclaims at one point, the man with a self-declared "reputation for moderation" unhesitatingly branding the prime minister's shift "a betrayal."

And it is here, amid that terrible sense of grievance, that he sounds less pragmatic and much more emotional.

"You simply can't change such profound ideological and strategic paradigms, and ask the public that has made such sacrifices for the sake of those paradigms to accept the change... After four years of war – those who paid the highest price, they have to give up their homes? It should have been the opposite," he almost wails. "They should have been the heroes."

So is it Harel the savvy pragmatist who considers the defeat of Gush Katif as still likely be averted? Or Harel the betrayed, emotional pioneer?

ANGUISHED BY the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, Harel in the late 1990s strove to establish a dialogue between Israelis of all views in the "Forum for National Responsibility."

And it was that Harel, moderate Harel, whom radio producer after producer sought out this week when news of the Wallerstein letter broke. They called up to broadcast his anticipated condemnation of his Ofra neighbor's brazen call for law-breaking. He never made it on air.

"I said I agreed with Pinhas. They said, 'oh, sorry,' and hung up." He smiles wanly.

For all the glorious tradition of civil disobedience, doesn't Harel fear an escalation into terrible violence?

"There is no potential for civil war here, David," he assures me, the gentle tones belying the dismissive certainty, "because the Left doesn't care enough about anything to go to war, and the Right won't because it loves the people of Israel too much."

Actually, he immediately clarifies, "that's not to say that there aren't some youths on the hills who will use guns, but these are criminals."

And, actually, "yes, there'll be violent resistance, but not live fire" at the confrontation points – "like there was on the hilltops [at the West Bank outposts], but much wider-scale."

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The scale, for Harel, is everything, the source of his conviction that Sharon can yet be thwarted on the ground.

"A government that will have to fight tens of thousands of people can't win." Up to a certain limit, such protests can be handled, lawbreakers jailed. "But look what's happening now in Ukraine. When enough people break the law – 5,000, 10,000 people – what can you do against them? Putin had to order new elections."

And the Gaza settlers will have tens of thousands of settlers from the West Bank with them, and a few thousand from inside Israel, too. "And now you have 3,000 soldiers and officers who have already signed a petition [advocating refusal to evacuate settlers]. And I know there's three times that many [soldiers who feel the same], a vast number who will refuse orders. That's a split in the army.

"And the chief of General Staff can lecture forever about the need to follow orders." Harel himself has always loudly opposed those who advocate refusal. "But on this scale, the lectures are irrelevant. It becomes the prime minister's problem. The defense minister's. If the best of his people [in the army] are saying it, and so many of them, the quantity changes perceptions.

"So Sharon can be euphoric that he has a Knesset majority. But on the ground that doesn't matter. That's what Pinhas, without even planning it, did this week... Four hundred thousand people heard about it [on the radio]. And suddenly all the settlers felt instinctively that this reflected them. This was their voice."

What does the pragmatist in Harel say to Sharon's demographic argument – about relinquishing control over substantial proportions of the Palestinian people to keep an Israel that is both Jewish and democratic? Again, he is dismissive.

"There is no demographic problem" in the territories, he says. "The demographic problem is in Umm el-Fahm, Taibe" – the Arabs in Israel, with a birthrate twice as high as the Jews, and a 32 percent share of this year's first-grade pupils, and 68% of their population aged under 20, compared to 36% of Jews.

"Uzi Dayan, a friend of mine, knows that he's lying when he says we're losing our majority between the Jordan and the sea."

How so?

"Ninety-six percent of the Arabs in Judea, Samaria and Gaza are under PA control, in areas A and B. It's a de facto Palestinian state, by order of an internationally recognized government agreement, Oslo II. So the concern of a parliament with an Arab majority just doesn't apply."

But the Palestinians don't accept that. And neither does the international community.

Harel is withering. "And they won't argue even if we do pull out?"

What if he's right, and the democratically elected government of Israel, having sought and won approval for its policies from its sovereign parliament, proves unable to implement them? What then for Israel, its democracy, social fabric, future?

"That's an answer the prime minister has to give," he says first, his mouth a thin line of disapproval. "There'll be elections. He'll lose. And we'll have a government with a different policy. Because this move is unacceptable from a Zionist, democratic, strategic and humane point of view..."

"We have to reverse that, because the terrorists' knowledge that they have won is more dangerous, perhaps, than the Iranian nuclear bomb."

How will the tens of thousands even get to Gaza to resist? The army has plans to seal the area off far in advance.

He smiles indulgently at the naiveté. "We'll find a way to get there. Half of Ofra was in Sinai."

Not the best precedent.

"Aah, but there the residents didn't want to stay. They wanted compensation. The media plays up the [mainly secular] settlements that want compensation today. But the Orthodox settlements are the hard core. There are families who have absorbed 20 mortar shells. They're not moving."

And just like those soldiers outside Bethlehem in 1979, the government, and its divided army, says Harel, will ultimately defer to them. (Jerusalem Post Dec 26)

With Love – Let the Settlers Think Again By Dov Shilansky

I have always been opposed to exploiting the Holocaust for mundane issues. I have expressed this opinion consistently in the Knesset and in every other possible forum.

We have commercialized the Holocaust as if it were a trivial matter, when the Holocaust is unique.

The yellow patch that I, too, was forced to wear in the ghettos and the

concentration camps is one of the symbols of the Holocaust. It should only be used in issues related to the Holocaust.

In yesterday morning's paper I saw a picture of a Holocaust survivor demonstrating against the attempt to expel her from her home. She was wearing a yellow – actually orange, the color of Gaza – Star of David on her breast.

This star, known popularly as a yellow patch, is one of the symbols of the Holocaust.

During the course of the day I learned that many of those who are opposed to tearing off parts of the homeland liberated in the Six Day War of Redemption and Salvation, and handing them over to foreigners, also intend to wear the yellow patch in their demonstrations.

When I expressed my disapproval I was asked if I was angry. I am not angry at them.

My heart is so full of love, admiration, and support for the settlers, that there is no room left for any anger against them.

I am not angry, but I am suffering – as a Jew, as an Israeli, and as a Holocaust survivor.

Yet my suffering does not justify the unbridled attack being made against the settlers regarding the yellow patch that began first thing in the morning and continued all day.

I have not seen nor heard any of those people who so strongly criticized the settlers yesterday raising their voices in the past against exploitation of the Holocaust for political purposes.

Only a few weeks ago, all the media highlighted the story of the Arab who played his violin at a checkpoint, comparing this to the music played in the death camps when Jews were led to the gas chambers.

This is impudence. It is cheapening and a malicious exploitation of the Holocaust.

Even if the Arab musician's claim is correct, and he was forced to play the violin at the checkpoint, there is no comparison between his music and the music the Jews were forced to play while their brethren were being led to their deaths.

I heard no mention in the media of this distortion. Those who remained silent regarding the association of the Arab's music with the Holocaust now have no moral right to criticize the settlers, who in their great suffering are considering wearing a yellow patch.

However, I have contacted my dear friends the settlers, and asked them to think again, despite their pain, and avoid wearing a yellow patch in their legitimate demonstrations. (Jerusalem Post Dec 27)
The writer is a former speaker of the Knesset.

Tunnel Diplomacy By Yosef Goell

Now that the hoopla over Azzam Azzam's release from the trumped-up charges for which he was held in an Egyptian jail is over, it is time to start looking at our relations with Mubarak's Egypt with a measure of balance.

I long ago learned from the master, Abba Eban, that the task of ambassadors and foreign ministries is very often to lie for the good of their country. As with many other things, Eban did it elegantly.

For the vast majority of our 56 years, however, Israeli diplomacy has failed to master that complex and admittedly embarrassing task of speaking out of both sides of its mouth.

It is essential that we at long last learn.

It was, indeed, a wonderful thing that Egypt's dictator, Mubarak, finally decided to release Azzam. It is important to remember, however – and to impress upon others – that it was the self-same Mubarak who sent Azzam to jail and kept him there, unjustly, for eight years.

Neither Ariel Sharon nor any previous Israeli prime minister who attempted to intervene on Azzam's behalf made any impact.

Mubarak decided that the time was ripe because of the parlous state of his relations with the US following the reelection of President George W. Bush.

Bush has a quirk for insisting on democratizing the Arab world, including an Egypt in which Mubarak is currently doing his best to get himself reelected for an unconstitutional fifth term.

So what does all of this, which is certainly not new, have to do with us?

Our weak-kneed tendency to go along with Mubarak's determination to play both the role of America's (not Israel's) "peace partner" in the Middle East, along with intensifying anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic policies wherever possible, is now not only intellectually obscene but costing Israeli lives daily.

Our military commanders and their political masters, from Prime Minister Sharon down, insist on treating the arms-smuggling tunnels into the Gaza Strip as if they have only one end, and no origin – when the fact is that they

all originate in Egyptian-controlled Rafah.

You can be sure that if they enabled the smuggling of deadly arms and explosives from Gaza into an anti-Mubarak underground in Sinai, there would be no trace of a tunnel left, or of the tunnellers.

Sharon, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and the IDF commanders whose mouths they control like to pride themselves on the fact that the fence around the Gaza Strip has proven effective in defending the adjoining Israeli communities in the Western Negev.

Well, certainly not the security of the township of Sderot, or of the neighboring kibbutzim, ever since the Palestinians, with the collusion of the Egyptians, have turned those tunnels into major suppliers of arms and Kassam rockets.

We have so far failed to deter the Palestinians because we have been unwilling to force the entire population of Rafah out of that town.

It would be well to recall the time it took for Sharon to finally screw up his courage to defend the Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo from attack at the beginning of the intifada by ordering the IDF to shoot at the sources of Palestinian fire in Bethlehem and Beit Jalla. And then it worked like a charm.

The best answer to the continued smuggling through the tunnels is not to make nice noises at Mubarak but to launch, and persist in, a long-term campaign in the US to stop its aid to Egypt unless Mubarak puts an end to the tunnels. Not out of love for Israel, but in his own self-interest.

In the quarter of a century since a misguided president Jimmy Carter decided to give the Egyptians over \$2 billion a year to buy peace with Israel, the US has given Egypt over \$50 billion. In recent years there has been chafing against this gigantic outlay in the Congress.

This growing Congressional discontent should be encouraged by Israel.

It doesn't necessarily have to be official Israel. We have enough extra-governmental sources to press such a campaign on the American political community and its media.

The purpose should not be to get Mubarak to say how much he loves Israel, or even to get him at long last to restore his ambassador in Tel Aviv and himself to visit Israel. It should be to make Egypt and Mubarak pay for the loss of Israeli lives as a result of their double game.

True, Israel faces a dilemma. A fundamentalist Islamic takeover of Egypt after Mubarak departs could very well be worse than Mubarak.

The only way out of that dilemma is to persuade the Egyptian military that Israel and the IDF would never permit such a takeover, even at the cost of a reinvasion of Sinai.

By the same token, Israel would be prepared for a new deal whereby a post-Mubarak military would stop colluding with the Palestinians.

A meaningful warming of relations with Egypt requires no less.
(Jerusalem Post Dec 27)

An Islamic Reformation By Nonie Darwish

Born and raised a Muslim, I grew up in Gaza and Cairo at a time when Gamal Abdel Nasser committed Egypt to unifying the Arab world and destroying Israel.

Egypt mobilized the Arabs of Gaza and encouraged the fedayeen to make cross-border attacks into Israel.

My father, a high-ranking Egyptian officer, was killed as a result of one of these operations in Gaza.

After my father's death attention was lavished on our family - for a few weeks. However, widows of shahids, like my poor mother, were left holding the bag alone in a culture that respects only families headed by men.

In Gaza elementary schools we learned hatred of Jews, vengeance and retaliation. Peace with Israel was never mentioned as an option. I was told not to take candy from strangers since it could be a Jew trying to poison me.

I lived in the Arab world until the age of 30, witnessing three major wars and the ever-growing influence of fundamentalist Islam. Freedom of speech was suppressed.

Citizens developed a degree of comfort in being ruled by dictators. Their statues and pictures were everywhere; songs praised them on every radio station.

I witnessed the oppression of women, honor killings of girls, female genital mutilation, and polygamy, with its devastating effects on family dynamics.

I was happy, finally, to leave all this behind and move to America in 1978. Suddenly I enjoyed freedom of religion and equality between classes and races.

My first job was given to me by a Jewish businessman. I witnessed Christians and Jews practicing their faith peacefully. Among my Jewish and Christian friends I heard the words love, compassion, forgiveness and shalom.

Sincerely they asked: What can we do to have peace with Arabs?

I felt betrayed by my culture of origin for advocating violence or talking about peace only in the presence of Westerners.

I realized that I had grown up behind a wall of fear, media lies and deception that separated us from the rest of humanity. But I did not yet dare verbalize these thoughts.

When I visited Egypt in 2001 the situation there had become even more difficult. Pollution, hazardous materials and garbage were to be found along the banks of the Nile. I witnessed extreme poverty, unemployment, high inflation, widespread corruption and mismanagement.

We returned to the US on September 10, 2001. Next morning, the whole world changed.

I knew - the very instant I saw the second plane hit the Twin Towers - that jihad had come to America. To my horror, the country that had given me shelter, protection and hope was under a monstrous attack from my own culture of origin.

I immediately telephoned a number of Muslim friends. Without exception, they made excuses for terrorism, denied the responsibility of Muslim culture, and concluded that 9/11 was an Israeli conspiracy.

These were not radical fundamentalists but moderate, educated and well-traveled Muslims.

I began to reflect on the society in which I had grown up.

Those who do not practice Islam fervently enough become the target of radicals. The result is domestic turmoil, political assassinations, fatwas, and terror.

Arab governments constantly struggle to maintain internal stability. An external non-Muslim enemy is essential to divert popular attention.

I remember, as a young woman, visiting a Christian friend in Cairo during Friday prayers. We both heard the attacks on Christians and Jews from the loudspeakers outside the mosque: "May God destroy the infidels and the Jews, the enemies of God. We are not to befriend them or make treaties with them."

We also heard worshipers responding, "Amen."

My friend looked scared, and I was ashamed. That was when I first realized something was very wrong in the way my religion was taught and practiced.

It is these preachers who are responsible for turning vulnerable young men into terrorists. No government is "Muslim enough" for them. In this dynamic, only tyrannical regimes can survive.

Yet reforming how Islam is taught is not going to be easy, especially because the change must come from within. So far, Muslims do not seem genuinely interested in reformation.

A huge, well-funded PR campaign, in operation since 9/11, is concerned with the image and reputation of Islam. But it does not confront the fundamental need for an Islamic Reformation.

After 9/11, I had to break my silence. A few other Arabs and Muslims also found the strength, commitment and honesty in their hearts to speak out - to say America and Israel were not the enemy.

I have been privileged to meet with many people across America. I have shared tears and embraces with many women and young students.

Americans, simply puzzled by Muslim culture, often ask me: "Why are Muslims not outraged over 9/11? Why are moderate Muslims not speaking out?"

With time I began receiving e-mails from Muslims who agreed with me. They wanted to live in peace with Israel, but were afraid to speak out.

I realized there was a need for a forum to exchange ideas and speak freely, either anonymously or openly. And so I founded the Web site arabforisrael.com.

Recently a Palestinian woman, now living in the US, who shares my views sent an e-mail, which I posted on the site. Out of habit I protected her by signing it "Anonymous."

She wrote back: "No, put my name on it. My full name."

It is time for Arabs to set ourselves free from the taboo against self-criticism. A reformation movement within the Muslim world is desperately needed. There is plenty of virtue and goodness in Islam that needs to be pushed to the forefront.

It is the duty of good Muslims to bring out the compassion and tolerance in Islam, not only verbally but also through action.

We need a Middle East culture that reflects the diversity of its people and respects equal rights for all - Jews, Christians and Muslims.

One goal should be to welcome the people of Israel as neighbors and invite them to flourish with us in an atmosphere of coexistence and peace.

I am cautiously optimistic that the good side of human nature will prevail.
The writer, who spoke at the Jerusalem Summit in November, is founder of

Bigotry's Harvest By Caroline B. Glick

This week, Maj.-Gen. (res.) Doron Almog, who commanded the IDF's Southern Command from 2000-2003, wrote a paper for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs entitled "Lessons of the Gaza Security Fence for the West Bank." In his paper Almog explains that the fence around Gaza has blocked 30 percent of the attempted terror attacks on Israel, while IDF offensive operations inside the Strip have accounted for the other 70 percent of Israel's successes.

Although his paper is intended to be instructive for Judea and Samaria, his point raises the obvious question for Gaza: If the government goes through with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to unilaterally withdraw, thereby ending the IDF's offensive operations in the area, how will such attacks be prevented? Furthermore, today the IDF has a defensive perimeter one kilometer long inside Gaza. According to Almog, this perimeter, along with monitoring equipment that can see six kilometers into Gaza, accounts for most of the success of the fence. Who will be manning the perimeter and maintaining the observation equipment if the IDF pulls out?

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Ya'acov Amidror, the former head of the IDF War Colleges and Military Intelligence analysis division, warned last week that in the absence of an Israeli military presence in Gaza, the area will become a focal point for global jihad. Just this week, the Shin Bet announced the arrest of Jordanian national Muhammad Abu Juyad in Tulkarm this past August. Abu Juyad was recruited by Fatah and Hizbullah. He received terror training twice in Syria and also took part in the terror war against American forces in Iraq before turning up here with a plan to recruit Israeli Arabs to blow up trains, kidnap soldiers and attack Israeli facilities in Jordan. Abu Juyad is emblematic of the global and regional face of the war. Luckily our forces are deployed in Judea and Samaria. If he or one of the thousands of terrorists like him were to come to Gaza after Sharon's proposed withdrawal goes through, who would arrest him?

More than 5,000 rockets and mortar shells have now fallen on Israeli communities in Gaza since the Palestinian terror war began. In anticipation of the proposed expulsion of their 8,000 Jewish residents, the Palestinians have dramatically increased their attacks. They want to make it look like we are running away. And the IDF is doing little to dissuade them. IDF incursions into Khan Yunis have been as ineffective as IDF operations against Hizbullah in southern Lebanon were in the months that preceded the withdrawal in May 2000. Like Hizbullah in Lebanon, the terrorists in Gaza will be viewed by the entire global jihad network as having defeated Israel. The price we paid for our precipitous withdrawal from Lebanon was the Palestinian terror war. What should we expect after we have Hamas, Fatah and Hizbullah terror cells operating openly five kilometers from the power station in Ashkelon?

THOSE WHO oppose the withdrawal have sought to make these arguments. But no one will listen. Ariel Sharon, the great military leader of yesteryear, says that it will be okay. And so, as we did when the late prime minister and former IDF chief of General Staff Yitzhak Rabin scoffed in 1994 at the notion that the Palestinians would use the territory he transferred to their control to shoot mortar shells and rockets at Israeli communities, we now believe that our lives will be better and safer if we eject Jews from their homes and farms and villages as our military withdraws to the 1949 armistice lines.

The residents of Gaza themselves are at their wits' end. Over the past several weeks they have been absorbing volley after volley of rockets and mortar shells, antitank shells and rifle fire. Their homes and synagogues have been bombed. Their children's nurseries and community centers have been hit. Their hothouses have been shelled. In a meeting Thursday in Netzer Hazani, residents spoke of the prospect of taking measures into their own hands with village residents manning any gun post that the IDF abandons. Speaking to Ynet, Yaki Yisraeli, treasurer of the community in Gush Katif, said, "If there isn't a suitable response to the mortar fire, people will start defending themselves. The residents serve in all the IDF units and the fear is that they will take the law into their own hands. If the IDF evacuates positions, the residents will take them over."

Aside from the fact that the IDF is clearly failing in its mission to defend them, the residents of Gaza have another problem on their hands. How are they to deal with the fact that the government and the Knesset seem determined to expel them from their homes? How are they to imagine that the lands they have cultivated, the communities they have built and the homes where they have raised their families are set to be turned over to the same people who are bombing them around the clock?

The moral dimension of the proposed destruction of Israeli communities in Gaza and northern Samaria is one that has received scant attention over the past year since Sharon adopted the Labor Party's plan of retreat and expulsion as his

own. Indeed, although it was one of the implicit assumptions of the 1993 Oslo process, the fact that a precondition for a final peace accord with the PLO was that all Jewish residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza would be ethnically cleansed has rarely been mentioned. As for Sharon's withdrawal plan for Gaza and northern Samaria, everyone from US National Security Council Middle East Adviser Elliott Abrams to Labor Party leader Shimon Peres to Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak to British Prime Minister Tony Blair have all noted that the plan, if enacted, will provide a precedent for the destruction of all or most of the remaining Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria with their population of some 250,000 Israelis.

The point of the protest was that Israel is the first Western state to call for the forced removal of Jews from their homes, simply because they are Jews, since the Holocaust and that there is something morally atrocious about the notion that for peace to come - to Israel and to those bombing Israel - it is necessary for entire regions to be rendered Judenrein.

THIS WEEK, the public debate shifted its attention for the first time in 11 years to the question of whether it is moral to ethnically cleanse the territories of their Jewish residents and force all Israelis to live within the cease-fire lines from 1949. With the publication of an open letter from Binyamin Regional Council head Pinchas Wallerstein calling for mass civil disobedience against the proposed ethnic cleansing of Jews from Gaza and northern Samaria, the question of the morality of the plan has exploded onto the public stage.

Wallerstein wrote, "The government of Israel has approved the first reading of the immoral law that paves the way for the crime of the displacement of Jews from their homes. The law does not provide those targeted for expulsion with even the minimal human right - to oppose their displacement from their homes. I call for the public to break the expulsion law and to be ready to pay the price of going to jail."

Wallerstein's call, which was adopted by the entire organized leadership of the Israeli communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, caused some dozen members of Knesset to sign a declaration stating that they will oppose the enactment of the law even at the price of losing their parliamentary immunity from prosecution and going to jail.

Gaza residents caused a public outcry when they taped orange Stars of David to their clothes this week. The hue and cry of the politicians on the Right and on the Left said that in using symbols from the Holocaust they were besmirching the memory of the victims of Europe's genocide of its Jews. It would seem that those who decried the residents' symbol have forgotten what a metaphor is.

The point was not that Sharon is Adolf Hitler or that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz is Adolf Eichmann. The point of the protest was that Israel is the first Western state to call for the forced removal of Jews from their homes, simply because they are Jews, since the Holocaust and that there is something morally atrocious about the notion that for peace to come - to Israel and to those bombing Israel - it is necessary for entire regions to be rendered Judenrein. And again, as leaders in Israel and throughout the world have stated, the expulsion from Gaza and northern Samaria is simply a preview of coming attractions for what awaits those who live in Judea and the rest of Samaria.

The security implications of the planned withdrawal of the IDF from Gaza and northern Samaria are entirely separate from the moral dimensions of the policy for what it means for Israel to be a free and secure Jewish state. But they share a common root. This root is to be found in those who are shooting off the mortars and rifles and rockets. It is found in Abu Juyad; it is found in the murder of Ariela Fahima outside her home near Beit Shemesh this week; and it is found in the attempted murder of an Israeli motorist who accidentally drove into Ramallah Monday night and had to be saved by the IDF as a lynch mob gathered around him. This common root is Palestinian rejection of Israel.

There would be no reason for the IDF to be operating in Gaza if the Palestinians weren't conducting a war against Israel from Gaza. And there would be no question about the right of Jews to live in Gaza or northern Samaria or anywhere else they have lived for thousands of years if Palestinian nationalism weren't predicated on genocidal anti-Semitism. .

The writer is the senior Middle East Fellow at the Center for Security Policy in Washington, DC and the deputy managing editor of The Jerusalem Post.
(Jerusalem Post Dec 24)
