

On the Jewish Question

By Bernard Lewis *The Wall Street Journal*

November 26, 2007

Herewith some thoughts about tomorrow's Annapolis peace conference, and the larger problem of how to approach the Israel-Palestine conflict. The first question (one might think it is obvious but apparently not) is, "What is the conflict about?" There are basically two possibilities: that it is about the size of Israel, or about its existence.

If the issue is about the size of Israel, then we have a straightforward border problem, like Alsace-Lorraine or Texas. That is to say, not easy, but possible to solve in the long run, and to live with in the meantime.

If, on the other hand, the issue is the existence of Israel, then clearly it is insoluble by negotiation. There is no compromise position between existing and not existing, and no conceivable government of Israel is going to negotiate on whether that country should or should not exist.

PLO and other Palestinian spokesmen have, from time to time, given formal indications of recognition of Israel in their diplomatic discourse in foreign languages. But that's not the message delivered at home in Arabic, in everything from primary school textbooks to political speeches and religious sermons. Here the terms used in Arabic denote, not the end of hostilities, but an armistice or truce, until such time that the war against Israel can be resumed with better prospects for success. Without genuine acceptance of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish State, as the more than 20 members of the Arab League exist as Arab States, or the much larger number of members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference exist as Islamic states, peace cannot be negotiated.

A good example of how this problem affects negotiation is the much-discussed refugee question. During the fighting in 1947-1948, about three-fourths of a million Arabs fled or were driven (both are true in different places) from Israel and found refuge in the neighboring Arab countries. In the same period and after, a slightly greater number of Jews fled or were driven from Arab countries, first from the Arab-controlled part of mandatory Palestine (where not a single Jew was permitted to remain), then from the Arab countries where they and their ancestors had lived for centuries, or in some places for millennia. Most Jewish refugees found their way to Israel.

What happened was thus, in effect, an exchange of populations not unlike that which took place in

the Indian subcontinent in the previous year, when British India was split into India and Pakistan. Millions of refugees fled or were driven both ways -- Hindus and others from Pakistan to India, Muslims from India to Pakistan. Another example was Eastern Europe at the end of World War II, when the Soviets annexed a large piece of eastern Poland and compensated the Poles with a slice of eastern Germany. This too led to a massive refugee movement -- Poles fled or were driven from the Soviet Union into Poland, Germans fled or were driven from Poland into Germany.

The Poles and the Germans, the Hindus and the Muslims, the Jewish refugees from Arab lands, all were resettled in their new homes and accorded the normal rights of citizenship. More remarkably, this was done without international aid. The one exception was the Palestinian Arabs in neighboring Arab countries.

The government of Jordan granted Palestinian Arabs a form of citizenship, but kept them in refugee camps. In the other Arab countries, they were and remained stateless aliens without rights or opportunities, maintained by U.N. funding. Paradoxically, if a Palestinian fled to Britain or America, he was eligible for naturalization after five years, and his locally-born children were citizens by birth. If he went to Syria, Lebanon or Iraq, he and his descendants remained stateless, now entering the fourth or fifth generation.

The reason for this has been stated by various Arab spokesmen. It is the need to preserve the Palestinians as a separate entity until the time when they will return and reclaim the whole of Palestine; that is to say, all of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Israel. The demand for the "return" of the refugees, in other words, means the destruction of Israel. This is highly unlikely to be approved by any Israeli government.

There are signs of change in some Arab circles, of a willingness to accept Israel and even to see the possibility of a positive Israeli contribution to the public life of the region. But such opinions are only furtively expressed. Sometimes, those who dare to express them are jailed or worse. These opinions have as yet little or no impact on the leadership.

Which brings us back to the Annapolis summit. If the issue is not the size of Israel, but its existence, negotiations are foredoomed. And in light of the past record, it is clear that is and will remain the

issue, until the Arab leadership either achieves or renounces its purpose -- to destroy Israel. Both seem equally unlikely for the time being.

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Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East" (Oxford University Press, 2004).

The historical fact of Israel

By David Warren The Ottawa Citizen (Canada) November 17, 2007

Along the latest fork in the "roadmap to peace," the Palestinian side has declared that, while it is true Yasser Arafat "recognized" the "state of Israel" as part of the "Oslo accords" in September 1993, neither he then, nor they today, recognize it as a "Jewish state."

The reader will recall that Arafat's recognition of Israel was the precondition for the PLO leadership to enter the West Bank and Gaza, and begin negotiating for a Palestinian state. No Oslo, and Arafat would never have been in a position to blacken Israel's eye with repeated Intifadas.

According to Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator to the impending round of "roadmap" discussions in Annapolis, Maryland: "No state in the world connects its national identity to a religious identity."

This statement is untrue of the 57 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and so forth.

It is untrue of the Palestinian Authority, whose constitution recognizes Islam as present authority, and future state religion, with the Shariah as the ultimate basis of that state's laws. It is also untrue of several countries in Europe with established churches.

The statement further contradicts mandates of the United Nations, and the League of Nations before it, for the establishment of an explicitly "Jewish state" in Israel's present location.

I have yet to hear any outcry against Mr. Erekat's vicious, bare-faced lie, which carries with it a disavowal of the conditions upon which the Palestinian Authority he represents exists in international law, and thus any commitment whatever to the current "peace process."

On the other hand, that Oslo agreement of 1993 must have some authority, for Condoleezza Rice -- the American secretary of state for whom my patience continues to diminish -- told the Israelis this week that they must not only freeze settlement activity in Judaea and Samaria, but begin actively preparing to withdraw all Israeli presence from the West Bank.

Let me parse that out. There are to be no Jews on the West Bank, just as there are now no Jews in Gaza (except on the days when the IDF is

responding to one of innumerable Hamas missile attacks on Jewish civilian settlements in Israel proper). Jews are to remain entirely within the "green line." But the Palestinian Fatah leadership, which is to inherit control over the entire West Bank (after losing it to Hamas in Gaza), do not recognize Israel as the world's only Jewish state. Instead they recognize it as the 22nd Arab state, presently under illegal Jewish occupation.

That is the moderate position. For the more radical position, we refer to Hamas, whose constitution calls for the annihilation of the Jews.

I am not a Jew, incidentally, but a "Jew lover," in the words of various strangers who have taken the liberty of telephoning me from time to time, from Canadian area codes. I would probably have opposed the foundation of Israel in 1948, had I been around in that era -- and on the grounds that, given its prospective neighbours, a State of Israel would be hard to sustain.

Notwithstanding, Israel is there, by the fact of history. And it is also there, as the only reliably free, democratic, pro-Western state in a dark region where the most open societies (Jordan, Egypt) are arbitrarily ruled by moderate tyrants, and the worst are unspeakable. Where the best hope for the future, after Israel, is, quite frankly, presented by Iraq.

There are today more than five million Jews living in Israel, who have no citizenship anywhere else. The overwhelming majority were born there. This is what I mean by an historical fact.

There may well be as many Palestinians, in the West Bank and Gaza, and scattered through the region under subsidy from the United Nations, who claim the "right of return" to what is now Israeli territory, but who were not born there.

It should be remembered, constantly, that they descend from Palestinian ancestors who were one half of a population exchange that happened in the 1940s. And that, an approximately equal number of Jews were uprooted from their homes throughout the Arab world -- under pressure of both the state and the mob -- many of whom found refuge in Israel. The Palestinians are ill served by the failure of Ms. Rice and all other diplomatic authorities in the West to remind them of the facts, plainly.

Gang rape in Annapolis

By Frank J. Gaffney, Jr. The Washington Times November 27, 2007

It is fitting Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice chose the U.S. Naval Academy for the venue of today's so-called Mideast peace conference. The reputation of that extraordinary institution in Annapolis has been sullied in recent years by a succession of rapes of young women.

Despite official efforts to low-ball its significance, Miss Rice's conclave is shaping up to be a gang-rape of a nation on a scale not seen since Munich in 1938, when the British and French allowed Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini to have their violent way with Czechoslovakia.

This time, the intended victim is Israel. As with the effort to appease the Nazis and Fascists nearly 70 years ago, however, the damage will not be confined to the rapee. The interests of the Free World in general and the United States in particular will suffer from what the Saudis and most of the other attendees have in mind for the Jewish State — namely, its dismemberment and ultimate destruction.

Millions of Americans have lately been introduced to the Saudis' attitude toward gang-rape, pursuant to the theocratic code known as Shariah that they seek to impose on us all. We learned that a 19-year-old Saudi woman identified only as the Girl of Qatif was kidnapped and raped by seven men. The rapists were to receive prison sentences and whippings. The woman was sentenced to receive 90 lashes for the crime of sitting in a car with a male who was not a relative. When she had the temerity to appeal her barbaric sentence, it was increased to six months in prison and 200 lashes.

There will, of course, be no punishments for the perpetrators of the coming gang-rape of Israel at Annapolis. To the contrary, the Bush administration feels deeply indebted to the Saudi foreign minister for his participation and that of a representative of a country Miss Rice's department lists as a state-sponsor of terror: Syria.

In fact, as an inducement for attending, a host of nations who have never formally and concretely abandoned their historic determination to bring about Israel's liquidation have been assured by their U.S. hosts they will be able to use this event to promote their agendas. As one American official blithely put it: "No one's microphone will be turned off."

Consequently, it seems likely that Annapolis will feature an outpouring of sentiment — in fact, near unanimity — on the following points: Israel must relinquish to its Palestinian and Syrian enemies territory essential to the defense and security of the Jewish State. Hard experience in southern Lebanon and Gaza leaves no doubt the vacuum thus created will be used by terrorists to attack Israel, and perhaps America.

The gang assembled at the Naval Academy — Europeans, Russians, nongovernmental organizations as well as Arabs — will largely insist that the Israelis allow the capital of a new Palestinian state to be established in the section of Jerusalem most holy to Jews (and Christians). Never mind that from East Jerusalem, the Israeli-controlled remainder of the city can be shelled at will with Kassam rockets or even mortars.

At Annapolis, virtually everyone will also agree that Israel must accept some arrangement affording rights to millions of Arabs who have been, as the esteemed historian Bernard Lewis pointed out in yesterday's Wall Street Journal, deliberately condemned to refugee status (in some cases, for as many as five generations) by their regional "brothers" and U.N. enablers. Everyone understands this demand will translate demographically into the end of the Jewish State.

By virtue of its sponsorship of the event and its actions, both there and subsequently, the United States will once again assume the role of "honest broker." This mutation of Israel's one ally makes it still less likely America will block such international demands.

Even before Annapolis, Miss Rice found it inexpedient to do more than mouth platitudes of the kind that once governed George Bush's policies on the Jewish State and its enemies. Today, Palestinians can remain in the terror business — can even officially and explicitly refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish homeland — and still enjoy the administration's political support and access to U.S. military equipment, training and vast amounts of taxpayers' funds.

The bigger problem is that the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert seems disposed to go along with the emerging "international consensus." Indeed, Mr. Olmert has already signaled a willingness to compromise his country's future security and integrity as a Jewish state in the hope of rescuing his failed premiership and avoiding prosecution for corruption. For their part, his people seem to be sleepwalking, unable to believe every one of their longstanding national requirements (for example, a unified Jerusalem, secure borders, no "right of return" for "refugees," etc.) is being abandoned in the pursuit of a "peace" no one can seriously believe is in prospect from the Saudis and their friends.

Sadly, like the Girl of Qatif, the people of Israel stand to be punished for putting themselves in such a compromising position. Unfortunately for them and for others who will be victimized in the future by Israel's emboldened Islamist enemies, the penalty for the "process" resuscitated at the Naval Academy

and the concessions that will flow from it will not be the lash. It may well prove to be a death sentence.

Another piece summit

By Cal Thomas TownHall.com November 28, 2007

Just as Thanksgiving and Christmas come around with predictable regularity, so, too, do Middle East peace summits arrive near the end of modern presidencies.

Bill Clinton had his and now the Bush administration is treading where previous fools have trod with what appears to be the diplomatic equivalent of a shotgun wedding in Annapolis, Md.

These gatherings never bring peace between Israel and the Palestinians because only one side wants peace. The other wants pieces of Israel, chipping away until it can gobble up what remains of the country.

Liken it to a neighborhood plagued by gang violence. After repeated assaults on the residents and a rash of home burglaries, the gangs propose a deal. If homeowners remove their burglar alarms, dispose of any weapons they have and vacate their houses, allowing gang members to move in, the gangs promise to forgo further violence. Who would make such a deal?

The so-called Palestinian side brings nothing to the table. It has yet to fulfill a major pledge made at previous summit meetings. If the Palestinian side were applying for a bank loan, it would be turned down for defaulting on prior loans. Only in the twisted logic of Middle East "diplomacy" is its credit undamaged.

How deep into denial is Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice when she promotes a charade that can only damage Israel and bring the region closer to war? What could possibly persuade her that the Palestinian side is serious about making war no more and living in peace with Israel? Certainly not their actions, or their Holocaust denial, textbook and media slander of Jews and repeated assertions that Israel must be destroyed.

There are 22 Arab states. Will a 23rd bring stability to the region? There is no evidence — none — that establishing a Palestinian state will end the violence. On the contrary, it will signal the end of Israel, because it will show Israel's enemies that the perpetrators of violence and the breakers of

Strengthening them again

By Natan Sharansky Haaretz November 23, 2007

One of the high points at which the drama could have turned into a farce within seconds occurred nine years ago at the Wye Plantation summit. After exhausting and debilitating efforts, we received from Yasser Arafat a promise (even if half-hearted and unwilling) to delete from the Palestinian Charter the sections calling for the destruction of Israel.

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promises are never held accountable. Why shouldn't those who hate Jews and other "infidels" regard Annapolis and every other such gathering as steps on the road to Israel's oblivion?

It is Israel — and Israel alone — that is pressured to make concessions. The only pressure on the Palestinian side is to show up at these road shows to be handed another pound of Israeli flesh.

It isn't a piece of land that the Palestinians want. It is all the land. They say so. Through six wars and numerous intifadas and other terrorist attacks, the Palestinian Charter, sermons, newspaper editorials and many other outlets, the message is clear: Israel is an illegal occupier of Muslim land and must be evicted by any means necessary.

The United States and the rest of the diplomatic world that believes there is an as-yet undiscovered formula that will tame Israel's enemies are self-deluded to the point of self-destruction. Having destroyed Israel, it won't end there. Crazy Islamic fanatics will sign up in droves for the "honor" of coming to America to blast away at our foundations.

In fact, according to our ludicrously named Department of Homeland Security, they are already here because we willingly let them in under the same misguided creed that guides U.S. policy in the Middle East. If we just show them how welcoming and wonderful we are, they will see we mean them no harm and change their minds about killing us.

Republicans mocked such sentiments when the left in the '80s suggested unilateral disarmament would persuade the Soviet Union we meant them no harm. Now, Bush administration officials are applying this same illogic in Annapolis and expect a positive response. It, too, deserves derision.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert faces possible indictment at home for allegedly trading political favors for a large discount on a home he purchased in Jerusalem. If he buckles in Annapolis to pressure for more concessions without first demanding the Palestinian side live up to previous agreements, his actions will move from alleged malfeasance to a sellout of his country's interests.

Upon leaving the conference room, we saw one of the closest advisers of President Bill Clinton and proudly told him about our achievement.

"Are you out of your minds?" he shouted. "He's going to be killed because of that. He is too weak for dramatic steps like that. First he has to be strengthened!"

I recalled this tragicomic story a few days ago as I was talking with a player from the international elements engaged in building up the destroyed Palestinian economy. When I asked him why they weren't making aid to Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) contingent on stopping the anti-Israeli incitement on the official television channel and in the Palestinian education system, he replied, "Abu Mazen is so weak, and this is not a popular step. First of all, it is necessary to strengthen him and afterward it will be possible to demand something of him."

I have never understood this strange reasoning: First strengthen the weak leader, by giving legitimization to anti-Israeli actions that he allows (or encourages, and sometimes even operates) and then, once the anti-Israeli positions have made him popular, expect that he will suddenly change his spots and lead his people determinedly toward the desired peace.

This distorted approach has become a kind of sacred cow. "We must strengthen Abu Mazen," say Israel's leaders as a kind of mantra. It is of no importance that along the way they are educating another generation of Palestinians to hatred, violence and the aspiration to destroy Israel. It is of no importance that the way to the strengthening is the diametric opposite of peace and dialogue. The main thing is that we are strengthening Abu Mazen.

The old argument of President Shimon Peres and Meretz MK Yossi Beilin and Defense Minister Ehud Barak on "with whom to make peace, a strong leader or a weak leader" is no longer relevant. A look back over the years since the Oslo Accords shows clearly that the direction in which Palestinian society has marched is not the direction of peace. It was all

Normalization left out in the rain

By David Horowitz The Jerusalem Post

Saudi Arabia may be attending Tuesday's Annapolis summit, but its determined refusal to countenance even the slightest normalization of relations with Israel and Israelis was all too evident in the driving rain at its embassy here on Monday afternoon.

Several enterprising Israeli journalists managed to make their way into the premises as Arab League foreign ministers and officials were convening for consultations ahead of the summit. Some even got through a security check. Udi Segal of Channel 2 showed his Israeli government press card when asked for accreditation - successfully, at first.

However, the Saudi Embassy staffers ultimately cottoned on to the presence of Israelis on their diplomatic territory, and, somewhat unceremoniously, escorted the journalists off the premises. Israeli camera crews then filmed the Arab leaders driving in from outside the embassy security barrier, in the rain, while other media crews filmed

in all just a hudna (truce) before another intifada. And when the society is becoming more extreme, what difference is it to us if the leader is strong or weak?

It is true that to carry out courageous reforms and educate the people to peace, a strong and bold leader is needed. Leaders like that, who understand the need for education toward peace and reforms, do exist - but not in the Muqata in Ramallah. These are people who are not afraid to challenge the tyranny of the weak leader and who believe in building a civil society as a necessary foundation for any progress on the road to peace.

As chairman of the Institute for Strategic Studies, I meet them quite frequently. It is true that they are weak, but for one reason only: We ourselves are weakening them by giving unreserved support to "moderate" tyrants. The justification that support for these troublemakers weakens the only element that is capable of stopping Hamas doesn't hold water: It is precisely the strengthening of an antidemocratic regime and the absence of an alternative that are pushing the public into the arms of fundamentalists, into the arms of Hamas. Annapolis is doomed to failure not because we or the Palestinians have not made enough concessions - it is doomed to failure because it is built on distorted reasoning to the effect that it is possible to move ahead and make a deal with some leader and totally ignore what is really happening in Palestinian society. In this, to our regret, Annapolis has become another tragifarcical Middle Eastern scene.

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the notables from the covered comfort of the embassy's entrance.

It had already been made plain to this reporter that he would not be admitted to a limited press briefing held at the embassy by Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal just before the Arab League gathering. The best I could do was to ask one of the American reporters who had been invited to put a question on my behalf to Faisal: "What steps are you prepared to take right now toward normalizing ties with Israel?"

His answer, relayed to me, was simple, and later confirmed by the scene in the rain: "None."

Faisal elaborated that the Arab peace plan makes plain that "normalization will come after peace is established." And peace, he went on, entailed full Israeli withdrawal.

The Saudi foreign minister also told the American reporters that the Arab presence at Annapolis was not about producing a concerted

front against Iran. "We have to worry about Israel first," he said, and deal first with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That was a separate priority, he said, from the question of "whether Iran is developing weapons of mass destruction or interfering in Iraq."

Earlier Monday, Faisal's declared refusal to shake hands with Israeli leaders was shrugged off by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who said he was not going to try to "impose" a handshake on someone who didn't want to take it up.

"I represent a glorious people with a glorious history and I won't push any of that on someone who doesn't want to shake my hand," said Olmert.

Nonetheless, he added that he was "glad" that Faisal was attending the summit. Until recently, people had been saying it would be "monumental" were the Saudis to come at all, he noted. Now, he said lightly, people were saying it would be disappointing "if they don't kiss you on both cheeks for the cameras, and invite you to a weekend's entertainment in Riyadh."

Olmert said that while he hoped the Arab world would begin the process of normalization with Israel in parallel to peace efforts with the Palestinians, he recognized that the Israeli-Saudi relationship would have to "take its course." When the Saudis were ready, he said, they would move forward.

Faisal reiterated at his briefing and in a Time magazine interview on Monday that he would not shake hands with Olmert, but said he would shake hands with Israel once Israel was truly embarked upon peacemaking.

"This is not theater," he told Time. "We are going [to Annapolis] seriously for peace negotiations. We are not going there just to take pictures of somebody shaking somebody's hand. The hand that

has been extended to us has been a fist so far. Once it opens for peace, it will be shaken," he said.

He said the Annapolis effort "is really a turning point. The next conflict will be very dangerous," he said. "One of the elements of optimism is the sense of determination of the United States to see this through."

Asked if he believed a comprehensive peace agreement was achievable by the time President Bush leaves office in January 2009, he said "of course... Every man on the street and every woman on the street, not only the politicians, knows what the settlement will look like in the end. It just needs the action to bring it about...It is a very simple equation. Either Israel wants peace or territory. It can't have both."

The United States on Monday indicated that it was willing to accede to the Saudis' desire not to shake hands or otherwise be seen making overtures to the Israelis.

"That's going to be up to all of the representatives, how they decide to interact. We will of course be respectful of the various relationships, of the various states of relationships among the participants," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said. "They're going to be focused on the tasks at hand. As the Saudi foreign minister put it, nobody's interested in these uncomfortable situations where there are theatrics for the sake of photographs. We'll of course be respectful and mindful of that as we'll put together the various events."

Other diplomatic sources have said that the Saudis don't want any contact whatsoever with the Israeli delegation at Annapolis, and therefore the respective delegations will even use different doors to enter the meeting room.

Oasis or Mirage?

By Thomas L. Friedman The New York Times November 28, 2007

The Middle East is experiencing something we haven't seen in a long, long time: moderates getting their act together a little, taking tentative stands and pushing back on the bad guys. If all that sounds kind of, sort of, maybe, qualified, well ... it is. But in a region in which extremists go all the way and the moderates usually just go away, it's the first good news in years — an oasis in a desert of despair.

The only problem is that this tentative march of the moderates — which got a useful boost here with the Annapolis peace gathering — is driven largely by fear, not by any shared vision of a region where Sunni and Shiite, Arab and Jew, trade, interact, collaborate and compromise in the way that countries in Southeast Asia have learned to do for their mutual benefit.

So far, "this is the peace of the afraid," said Hisham Melhem, Washington bureau chief of Al Arabiya, a satellite news channel.

Fear can be a potent motivator. Fear of Al Qaeda running their lives finally got the Sunni tribes of Iraq to rise up against the pro-Al Qaeda Sunnis, even to the point of siding with the Americans. Fear of Shiite thugs in the Iranian-backed Mahdi Army has prompted many more Shiites in Iraq to side with the pro-U.S. Iraqi government and army. Fear of a Hamas takeover has driven Fatah into a tighter working relationship with Israel. And fear of spreading Iranian influence has all the Arab states — particularly Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan — working in even closer coordination with America and in tacit cooperation with Israel. Fear of Fatah collapsing, and of Israel inheriting responsibility for the West Bank's Palestinian population forever, has brought Israel back to Washington's negotiating table. Fear of isolation even brought Syria here.

But fear of predators can only take you so far. To build a durable peace, it takes a shared agenda, a

willingness by moderates to work together to support one another and help each other beat back the extremists in each camp. It takes something that has been sorely lacking since the deaths of Anwar Sadat, Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein: a certain moral courage to do something “surprising.”

Since 2000, the only people who have surprised us are the bad guys. Each week they have surprised us with new ways and places to kill people. The moderates, by contrast, have been surprise-free — until the Sunni tribes in Iraq took on Al Qaeda. What I’ll be looking for in the coming months is whether the moderates can surprise each other and surprise the extremists.

The Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, announced even before he got to Annapolis that there would be no handshakes with any Israelis. Too bad. A handshake alone is not going to get Israel to give back the West Bank. But a surprising gesture of humanity, like a simple handshake from a Saudi leader to an Israeli leader, would actually go a long way toward convincing Israelis that there is something new here, that it’s not just about the Arabs being afraid of Iran, but that they’re actually willing to coexist with Israel. Ditto Israel. Why not surprise Palestinians with a generous gesture on prisoners or roadblocks? Has the stingy old way worked so well?

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process has been so starved of emotional content since the Rabin assassination that it has no connection to average

people anymore. It’s just words — a bunch of gobbledygook about “road maps.” The Saudis are experts at telling America that it has to be more serious. Is it too much to ask the Saudis to make our job a little easier by shaking an Israeli leader’s hand?

The other surprise we need to see is moderates going all the way. Moderates who are not willing to risk political suicide to achieve their ends are never going to defeat extremists who are willing to commit physical suicide.

The reason that Mr. Rabin and Mr. Sadat were so threatening to extremists is because they were moderates ready to go all the way — a rare breed. I understand that no leader today wants to stick his neck out. They have reason to be afraid, but they have no reason to believe they’ll make history any other way.

President Bush said in opening the Annapolis conference that this was not the end of something, but a new beginning of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. You won’t need a Middle East expert to explain to you whether it’s working. If you just read the headlines in the coming months and your eyes glaze over, then, as the Israeli columnist Nahum Barnea put it to me, you’ll know that Annapolis turned the ignition key “on a car with four flat tires.”

But if you pick up the newspaper and see Arab and Israeli moderates doing things that surprise you, and you hear yourself exclaiming, “Wow, I’ve never seen that before!” you’ll know we’re going somewhere.

Sham, here we go again

By Salim Mansur The Toronto Sun (Canada) November 24, 2007

The upside about the Mideast conference to be hosted by the Bush administration at Annapolis, Md., is the low expectation of all parties for any dramatic breakthrough to bring to an end the Palestinian-Israeli dispute over land and refugees prior to establishing the Palestinian state.

The downside is predictable. Failure on the part of the United States to meet the one-sided Palestinian demands -- by leaning on Israel -- without any assurance or evidence that Palestinians cease supporting terrorism, will be grist for terrorists, their supporters and apologists in the region.

The plain truth about such Mideast conferences is the ganging up of the Arab states against Israel as a show of verbal force on the diplomatic front to compensate for their miserable record on wars they have precipitated with the one lonely outpost of democracy in their midst.

For anyone with a sense of Mideast history, there is irony in the timing of the Annapolis conference.

This month marks several anniversaries for Arabs and Jews. It was 90 years ago in November 1917 that Britain, through the Balfour declaration,

committed itself to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Then 60 years ago in November 1947 the UN passed the resolution on partitioning Palestine, held by Britain under the League of Nations mandate into two states: One Arab and one Jewish. Twenty years later in November 1967, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242 as the basis of mediating an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Finally, 30 years ago in November 1977, president Anwar Sadat of Egypt visited Jerusalem, addressed the Israeli Knesset, and opened negotiations with prime minister Menachem Begin resulting in the peace accord between Egypt and Israel.

At any time during this period the Arab states could have acknowledged the rights of Jews to a state in Palestine, accepted the UN resolution on partition, negotiated the details of coexistence, assisted the Palestinians with their state, and received support of the great powers, including the United States, in meeting the needs of their people and bringing prosperity to the region given the resources available.

But the Arab position was a resounding "three nos" as duly spelled out after the over-reaching ambition of the Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and his supporters crashed in the humiliating defeat of the June 1967 war: No peace and no negotiation with and no recognition of Israel.

The great lie repeatedly told in the Mideast, and swallowed whole or in part in the West, is that the United States' unconditional support for Israel stands in the way of just peace in the region.

What is implicit in this lie is the meaning of just peace. For the Arab and Muslim supporters of Hamas, Hezbollah, al Qaida and the Iranian acolytes

of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, just peace requires the rollback of Israel and returning Jews to the secondary status of "dhimmi" (protected people) as provided by Islamic laws when Arabs were empire builders.

Until and unless there is a change of mind and heart among Palestinians and Arabs as demonstrated by president Sadat in acknowledging the Jews as equal partners, and reconciling with Israel, public diplomacy as arranged for Annapolis will remain an illusory exercise in which Arab states one-sidedly seek American appeasement and Israeli concessions as vindication of their rightness.

Address by Israeli Prime Minister at the Annapolis Conference By Ehud Olmert The Israel Foreign Ministry November 27, 2007

The Honorable President of the United States, George Bush, My colleague, President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, Heads of delegations, Distinguished guests,

I came here today from Jerusalem at your invitation, Honorable President, to extend, on behalf of the people of Israel and the State of Israel, a hand in peace to the Palestinian people and to our neighboring Arab states, many of whose representatives are here with us in Annapolis.

I had many good reasons to refrain from coming to this meeting. The memory of the failures of the near and distant past weighs heavy on us. The dreadful terrorism perpetrated by Palestinian terrorist organizations has affected thousands of Israeli citizens, destroyed families and attempted to disrupt the lives of all the citizens of Israel. I witnessed it personally during my term as Mayor of Jerusalem, at times of bombings at cafes, buses and recreational centers in Jerusalem and other cities in the State of Israel.

The continued shooting of Qassam rockets against tens of thousands of residents in the south of Israel, particularly in the city of Sderot, serves as a warning sign- one which cannot be overlooked. The absence of governmental institutes and effective law-enforcement mechanisms, the rule of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the ongoing activity of murderous organizations throughout all the territories of the Palestinian Authority, the absence of a legal system which meets the basic criteria of a democratic government- all these are factors which deter us from moving forward too hastily.

I do not ignore all the obstacles which are sure to emerge along the way. They are right in front of me. I came here, despite the concerns and doubts and hesitations, to say to you, President Mahmoud Abbas, and through you, to your people and to the entire Arab world: it is time. We no longer, and you no longer, have the privilege of clinging to dreams which are disconnected from the sufferings of our peoples, the hardships they experience daily and the

burden of living under ongoing uncertainty, with no chance for change or hope.

We want peace. We demand an end to terror, incitement and hatred. We are willing to make a painful compromise, rife with risks, in order to realize these aspirations. I came here today not to settle historic accounts between us on what caused the conflict and hatred and what, for many years, stood in the way of compromise and peace.

I wish to say, from the bottom of my heart, that I know and acknowledge the fact that alongside the constant suffering which many in Israel have experienced because of the history, the wars, the terror and the hatred towards us – a suffering which has always been part of our lives in our land – your people have also suffered for many years, and some still suffer. For dozens of years, many Palestinians have been living in camps, disconnected from the environment in which they grew, wallowing in poverty, neglect, alienation, bitterness, and a deep, unrelenting sense of deprivation.

I know that this pain and deprivation is one of the deepest foundations which fomented the ethos of hatred towards us. We are not indifferent to this suffering. We are not oblivious to the tragedies you have experienced. I believe that in the course of negotiations between us we will find the right way, as part of an international effort in which we will participate, to assist these Palestinians in finding a proper framework for their future, in the Palestinian state which will be established in the territories agreed upon between us. Israel will be part of an international mechanism which will assist in finding a solution to this problem.

The negotiations between us will not be here in Annapolis, but rather in our home and in yours. It will be bilateral, direct, ongoing and continuous, in an effort to complete it during the course of 2008.

It will address all the issues which have thus far been evaded. We will do it directly, openly and courageously. We will not avoid any subject, we will deal with all the core issues. I have no doubt that the

reality created in our region in 1967 will change significantly. While this will be an extremely difficult process for many of us, it is nevertheless inevitable. I know it. Many of my people know it. We are ready for it. The negotiations will be based on previous agreements between us, UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the Roadmap and the April 14th 2004 letter of President Bush to the Prime Minister of Israel.

On conclusion of the negotiations, I believe that we will be able to reach an agreement which will fulfill the vision of President Bush: two states for two peoples.

A peace-seeking, viable, strong, democratic and terror-free Palestinian state for the Palestinian people.

A Jewish, democratic State of Israel, living in security and free from the threat of terror – the national home of the Jewish people.

It is clear that the implementation of an agreement will be subject to the implementation of all obligations in the Roadmap, on all its phases and according to its sequence, as concluded between us from the very beginning. We will abide by all our obligations, and so will you.

The agreement with you and its gradual implementation, cautiously and responsibly, is part of a much wider complex, which will lead us, hopefully, to peace with all the Arab states. There is not a single Arab state in the north, east or south with which we do not seek peace. There is no Muslim state with which we do not want to establish diplomatic relations. Anyone who wants peace with us, we say to them, from the bottom of our hearts: welcome!

I am pleased to see here, in this hall, representatives of Arab countries, most of which do not have relations with Israel, The time has come for you as well. You cannot continue to stand by indefinitely and watch the peace train go by. It is time to end the boycott and alienation towards the State of Israel. It is not helpful for you, and it hurts us. I am familiar with the Arab peace initiative, which was born in Riyadh, affirmed in Beirut and recently reaffirmed by you in Riyadh. I value this initiative, acknowledge its importance and highly appreciate its contribution. I have no doubt that it will be referred to in the course of the negotiations between us and the Palestinian leadership.

The Arab world represented here by many countries is a vital component in creating a new reality in the Middle East.

The peace signed between Israel and Egypt, and subsequently between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is a solid foundation of stability and hope in our region. This peace is an example and a model of the relations which we can build with Arab states.

My close relations with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan are extremely significant for the process of building trust and understanding with the Arab states.

However, these relations, as important as they may be, are not enough. We aspire for normalization with those Arab states which eschew, as much as we do, radical and frantic fundamentalism, and which seek to grant their citizens a more moderate, tolerant and prosperous world.

This is a common interest of all of us. There is a lot which separates us – memories and a heritage which do not emanate from the same historic roots, different ways of living, different customs, and our emotional, spontaneous sense of solidarity with our neighboring Arab countries, which have long been trapped in this age-old bloody conflict between us.

However, there is also a lot which brings us together. You, like us, know that religious fanaticism and national extremism are a perfect recipe for domestic instability, violence, bitterness and ultimately the disintegration of the very foundations of coexistence which is based on tolerance and mutual acceptance.

We are a tiny country with a small population, but rich in good will and with a significant ability to create a partnership which will lead to prosperity, growth, economic development and stability for the entire region.

The prospect of a new political horizon, and renewed hope, not only for Palestinians and Israelis, but also, together with you, for the entire region, can come from here, from Annapolis.

Honorable President of the United States, my colleague Mahmoud Abbas, distinguished guests,

Almost two years ago, under very sad circumstances, Prime Minister of Israel Ariel Sharon was no longer able to carry the heavy responsibility of leading the State of Israel, and this responsibility was passed on to me – first, as a result of formal procedures and subsequently on the basis of an election in Israel's democratic system of government.

Prior to my election I stated that my heart's desire and that of my people, was to achieve peace, primarily with the Palestinian people. This is what I believed then and it is what I continue to believe in now, with all my heart.

The past two years have been difficult for all of us. The hardships have not been alleviated, the terror organizations have not weakened, the enemies of peace have not disappeared, and we are still anxiously awaiting the return of our missing and captive sons who are held by terror organizations. I long for the day when I can see Gilad, Eldad and Udi back with their families, and I will not falter in my efforts to achieve their release.

I believe that there is no path other than peace. I believe that there is no just solution other than the solution of two national states for two peoples. I believe that there is no path which does not involve painful compromise for you, Palestinians, and for us Israelis. I want to thank you, President George Gush, an ally in the path of peace, for your

willingness to assist in the historic process of peace and reconciliation between us and our neighbors.

I believe it is time. We are ready. I invite you, my friend Mahmoud Abbas, and your people, to join us in this long, tormenting and complex path, for which there is no substitute.

Together we will start. Together we will arrive.

The Annapolis summit By The Washington Times editorial November 26, 2007

It would be hard to envision a more daunting political challenge than what the Bush administration has set out for itself: achieving progress at the Middle East peace conference which begins tomorrow in Annapolis. The administration has sent out invitations to more than 40 international organizations and countries. Arab invitees range from Egypt and Jordan, which have signed peace treaties with Israel, to countries like Syria, Saudi Arabia and Sudan, which have not. Last week, President Bush telephoned Saudi King Abdullah in an effort to persuade him to send Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal to Annapolis — which would mark the first time that such a high-level Saudi representative sat at the same table with an Israeli. Prince Saud says he will attend, but will not participate in any stage-managed public event in which he is expected to shake hands with an Israeli representative. Syria said it would come in order to make its case that Israel needs to relinquish the Golan Heights, captured in 1967.

The goal of the Annapolis conference is to set the stage for meaningful peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, with the goal of creating an independent Palestinian state that would live in peace with Israel. This has been official U.S. policy since June 24, 2002, when President Bush declared publicly that "A stable, peaceful Palestinian state is necessary to achieve the security that Israel longs for."

Initially, Mr. Bush set a goal of creating such a state by 2005. He now hopes to achieve this by 2009. Much has changed since the president spoke at the Rose Garden on that early summer afternoon five years ago. Two of the most powerful, polarizing figures in the conflict — Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasir Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon — have departed. In their place are much weaker leaders: Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas. Mr. Olmert, elected prime minister in March 2006, has been in a political free fall ever since last summer's war with Hezbollah ended in stalemate. His popularity ratings have ranged between zero and 20 percent, and he is the subject of as many as seven police and judicial investigations of corruption.

Mr. Abbas's political situation is even more precarious. In January 2006, his Fatah organization

was decisively beaten by Hamas in PA elections. Then, just five months ago, Hamas (which receives substantial Iranian and Syrian backing) staged a bloody coup in Gaza, routing Mr. Abbas's security forces and relegating him to the West Bank, where Hamas is much weaker. But even in his West Bank stronghold, Mr. Abbas faces huge security challenges, not the least of which are preventing Hamas and disgruntled members of his own Fatah organization from assassinating him or seizing power there as well. Since June, Mr. Olmert has attempted to bolster Mr. Abbas, giving amnesty to scores of Fatah gunmen long hunted by Israeli security forces and releasing hundreds of prisoners affiliated with Fatah.

As for the negotiations the administration wants to launch in Annapolis, Mr. Abbas ultimately wants to create an independent state and find a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. Israelis of every political persuasion want to ensure that any refugees be resettled in Arab nations — not in Israel. But public opinion polls have shown a large bloc of Israeli support for creation of a Palestinian state — if it is willing to live in peace and if Israeli security is not endangered. Right now, Mr. Olmert is attempting to take a number of small steps forward by giving Mr. Abbas security control in West Bank cities. (Israeli has repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempted to do this dating back to 2003.) Two weeks ago, Palestinian Authority security forces were deployed in Nablus in an effort to combat criminal gangs that dominate the city.

In the days leading up to the summit, terrorists sent a message of their own to Mr. Olmert, Mr. Bush — and especially Mr. Abbas. Last week the al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an affiliate of Mr. Abbas's Fatah organization, claimed responsibility for the fatal shooting of an Israeli father of two as he drove through the West Bank, calling it in part "a protest against the Annapolis conference." Meanwhile, Mahmoud Zahar, a senior Hamas leader, has said that if Israel withdrew from the West Bank, his group would take over there as well, and Mr. Olmert's security services warn that Syria and Iran are working to encourage Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to carry out more attacks. With the Annapolis parley starting tomorrow, don't be surprised if they try again very soon.