

A Modest Proposal for Middle East Peace, The U.N. need only take five simple steps By Victor Davis Hanson National Review January 29, 2008

There seems to be a growing renewed animus against Israel lately. Arun Gandhi, grandson of the purported humanist Mahatma Gandhi, thinks Israel and Jews in general are prone to, and singularly responsible for, most of the world's violence. The Oxford Union is taking up the question of whether Israel even has a right to continue to exist. Our generation no longer speaks of a "Palestinian problem," but rather of an "Israeli problem." So perhaps it is time for a new global approach to deal with Israel and its occupation.

Perhaps we ought to broaden our multinational and multicultural horizons by transcending the old comprehensive settlements, roadmaps, and Quartet when dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, a dispute which originated with the creation of Israel.

Why not simply hold an international conference on all of these issues — albeit in a far more global context, outside the Middle East?

The ensuing general accords and principles could be applied to Israel and the West Bank, where the number of people involved, the casualties incurred, and the number of refugees affected are far smaller and far more manageable.

Perhaps there could be five U.N. sessions: disputed capitals; the right of return for refugees; land under occupation; the creation of artificial post-World War II states; and the use of inordinate force against suspected Islamic terrorists.

In the first session, we should try to solve the status of Nicosia, which is currently divided into Greek and Turkish sectors by a U.N. Greek Line. Perhaps European Union investigators could adjudicate Turkish claims that the division originated from unwarranted threats to the Turkish Muslim population on Cyprus. Some sort of big power or U.N. roadmap then might be imposed on the two parties, in hopes that the Nicosia solution would work for Jerusalem as well.

In the second discussion, diplomats might find common ground about displaced populations, many from the post-war, late 1940s. Perhaps it would be best to start with the millions of Germans who were expelled from East Prussia in 1945, or Indians who were uprooted from ancestral homes in what is now Pakistan, or over half-a-million Jews that were ethnically cleansed from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria following the 1967 war. Where are these refugees now? Were they ever adequately

compensated for lost property and damages? Can they be given promises of the right to return to their ancestral homes under protection of their host countries? The ensuring solutions might shed light on the Palestinian aspirations to return to land lost sixty years ago to Israel.

A third panel would take up the delicate issue of returning territory lost by defeat in war. Ten percent of historic Germany is now part of Poland. The Russians still occupy many of the Kurile Islands, and Greek Cyprus lost sizable territory in 1974 after the invasion by Turkey. The Western Sahara is still annexed by Morocco, while over 15 percent of disputed Azerbaijan has been controlled by Armenia since 1994. Additionally, all of independent Tibet has been under Chinese occupation since 1950-1. Surely if some general framework concerning these occupations could first be worked out comprehensively, the results might then be applied to the much smaller West Bank and Golan Heights.

In a fourth panel, the international conference should take up the thorny issue of recently artificially created states. Given the tension over Kashmir, was Pakistan a mistake — particularly the notion of a homeland for Indian Muslims? North Korea was only created after the stalemate of 1950-3; so should we debate whether this rogue nation still needs to exist, given its violent history and threats to world peace?

Fifth, and finally, is there a global propensity to use inordinate force against Muslim terrorists that results in indiscriminate collateral damage? The Russians during the second Chechnyan War of 1999-2000 reportedly sent tactical missiles into the very core of Grozny, and may have killed tens of thousands of civilians in their hunt for Chechnyan terrorists — explaining why the United Nations later called that city the most destroyed city on earth. Syria has never admitted to the complete destruction of Hama, once home to Muslim Brotherhood terrorists. The city suffered the fate of Carthage and was completely obliterated in 1982 by the al-Assad government, with over 30,000 missing or killed. Did the Indian government look the other way in 2002 when hundreds of Muslim civilians in Gujarat were killed in reprisal for Islamic violence against Hindus? The lessons learned in this final session might reassure a world still furious over the 52 Palestinians lost in Jenin.

In other words, after a half-century of failed attempts to solve the Middle East crisis in isolation, isn't it time we look for guidance in a far more global fashion, and in contexts where more lives have been lost, more territory annexed, and more people made refugees in places as diverse as China, Russia, and the broader Middle East?

The solutions that these countries have worked out to deal with similar problems apparently have proven successful — at least if the inattention of the world, the apparent inaction of the United Nations, and the relative silence of European governments are any indication.

So let the international community begin its humanitarian work!

Greek Cypriots can advise Israel about concessions necessary to Muslims involving a divided Jerusalem. Russians and Syrians can advise the IDF on how to deal properly and humanely with Islamic terrorists. Poland, Russia, China, and Armenia might offer the proper blueprint for giving back land to the defeated that they once gained by force. A North Korea or Pakistan can offer Israel humanitarian lessons that might blunt criticisms that

such a recently created country has no right to exist. Iraq and Egypt would lend insight about proper reparation and the rights of return, given its own successful solutions to the problems of their own fleeing Jewish communities.

But why limit the agenda to such a small array of issues? The world has much to teach Israel about humility and concessions, on issues ranging from how other countries in the past have dealt with missiles sent into their homeland, to cross-border incursions by bellicose neighbors.

No doubt, Middle East humanitarians such as Jimmy Carter, Arun Gandhi, and Tariq Ramadan could preside, drawing on and offering their collective past wisdom in solving such global problems to those of a lesser magnitude along the West Bank.

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Truth in Advertising

By Jay Lefkowitz The Wall Street Journal

Guess what Ms. magazine, a feminist publication with a circulation of 110,000, cares about even more than celebrating successful professional women? Making sure the magazine doesn't give Israel credit for anything.

Ms. recently rejected an advertisement submitted by the American Jewish Congress to laud the achievements of three prominent women in Israel. Photographs of Tzipi Livni, the foreign minister; Dorit Beinisch, the Supreme Court president; and Dalia Itzik, the speaker of the Knesset, appeared above a bolded text that read "This is Israel."

At first glance, it may be hard to understand the magazine's hostility to such an ad. After all, when Nancy Pelosi became speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, she was the cover girl for a Ms. article titled "This Is What a Speaker Looks Like." And Ms. regularly publishes profiles of prominent women in public life. A few years ago, it ran a cover story about Queen Noor of Jordan. In the wake of the AJC controversy, Ms. even announced that it plans to run a feature about Ms. Livni in a future issue. But while it is one thing to celebrate the foreign minister as a woman, it is an entirely different matter to celebrate what Ms. Livni's success says about her country.

So why did Ms. really refuse to print the American Jewish Congress ad? Listen closely to what the magazine has said about the issue. First, Susie Gilligan, an employee in the publisher's office, told Harriet Kurlander, the director of the AJC's

January 25, 2008

Commission for Women's Empowerment, that "there are very passionate feelings on the subject" and that printing the ad would have "set off a firestorm" -- although the magazine declined to elaborate on what the "subject" was and why it was so controversial. Then, to demonstrate that it harbored no bias against the AJC, the magazine told the organization that it "would love to have an ad from you on women's empowerment, or reproductive freedom, but not on this."

Finally, Ms. put out a statement claiming that it rejected the ad because, as two of the women pictured were from the same party, the ad could be seen as "favoring certain political parties within Israel over other parties." Moreover, added the magazine, the ad implied that Israeli women "hold equal positions of power with men," a premise Ms. rejects. The formal press statement was even accompanied by reference to a survey showing that women constitute only 14% of the members of the Knesset, Israel's legislature. (This compares with 16% of the U.S. Congress.)

But, of course, the point of the ad was never to suggest that Israel satisfies some perfect standard of equality for women. Rather, it was to extol the achievement of three extraordinary women and to observe that such advancement for women is possible in Israel. Evidently, the magazine's editors just didn't like the message of the Jewish organization's ad, which is that Israel offers women far more opportunities, especially in public life, than its neighbors in the Middle East.

That, in and of itself, can hardly be a controversial position. After all, Israel was led by a female prime minister more than 30 years ago, while in some Muslim nations women are still not permitted to vote, drive cars or even appear with their husbands in public, and many are subjected to genital mutilation, honor killings, and execution if they are victims of rape.

Despite the magazine's efforts to elide the real reason it found the ad so offensive, it is hardly a secret. The editors simply decided that no one would be permitted to use its pages to praise a nation that the left views as an oppressor state, even to highlight a historic achievement for women. Now if Ms. magazine were a publication expressly devoted to the advancement of Palestinian nationalism, its refusal to run a pro-Israel ad would be understandable. But Ms. holds itself out as a beacon for the rights of

women -- all women. And from a feminist perspective, it clearly is praiseworthy that in a region of the world that barely knows what democracy is, Israel has afforded three professional women the opportunity to hold positions of enormous power in its government.

It is surely a difficult time to be a supporter of Israel. But what is an especially troublesome aspect of this whole affair is that, among certain elements within the American left, praise of any kind for Israel is now verboten. As feminist Phyllis Chesler presciently observed several years ago: "Many feminists are totally blind to their own Jew hatred and are now more obsessed with the occupation of disputed lands in the Middle East than they are with the occupation of women's bodies worldwide."

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An impossible peace

By Joel Mowbray *The Washington Times*

January 30, 2008

With yet another round of Middle East peace talks underway and on the heels of the first presidential visit by arguably the most pro-Israel American head of state ever, the natural assumption is that ordinary Israelis would be abuzz with discussion of politics and the "peace process." That was the scene almost a decade ago, when Bill Clinton came here. But that was a different era.

of the cease-fire were already in place — to order a major ground offensive.

President Bush's visit obviously received significant local media coverage, but to most Jerusalem residents, it carried more meaning as a de facto holiday. Traffic was so chaotic due to increased security that many stayed home. And to people in western cities along the Mediterranean Sea, such as Tel Aviv and Haifa, Mr. Bush was the subject of little more than passing conversation.

On the recent cover of Ma'ariv, Israel's second-largest newspaper, were family members of the 33 Israelis killed during the ill-fated ground offensive. Their anger is squarely directed at Mr. Olmert, and the Israeli public is deeply sympathetic.

No number of presidential promises could convince Israelis that there are legitimate prospects for a deal with Palestinians. Hope once abounded in the Jewish state, but reality has been sobering. It is not lost on Israelis that their Palestinian neighbors elected Hamas just two years ago and that most in the society treat suicide bombers as heroes.

Within the next two weeks, the Winograd Commission will be releasing its final report on the handling of the war. Sharp criticism of Mr. Olmert's conduct and mounting pressure from the grieving families could finally bring about his political demise.

But don't bet on it.

Outside of the politicians in Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's governing coalition, in fact, it is hard to find any Israelis who feel that "peace" is even a possibility, or that this latest round of talks will produce anything tangible. Even among those politicians who tout talks with the Palestinians, few likely believe their own words.

On paper, Mr. Olmert long ago should have been finished. His poll numbers cratered by the end of the war with Hezbollah and have never recovered. Worse, he has become the face of what many Israelis see as a hopelessly corrupt system. In a recent poll, a solid majority of Israelis voted Mr. Olmert the most crooked member of a notoriously shady political class. That is akin to being the drunkest patron in an Irish pub.

Israeli society today is not marked by despair, but the disillusionment is palpable. Nowhere is this more evident than with Israelis in their 20s and 30s.

Yet despite Mr. Olmert's depressed popularity, there isn't a real clamor for new elections. In no small part, it is an indictment of the political skills of Mr. Olmert's chief rival, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Israeli security was robust during his tenure, and he later helped kickstart a sagging economy as finance minister, yet he lacks enthusiastic support.

In this tiny nation, most under 40 know someone who was involved in often-hellacious warfare against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. "For what reason?" many of them ask. Mr. Olmert waited until the final weekend — after the outlines

While young Israelis are largely disenchanted by politics, they are not ambivalent. In a recent poll conducted by Kevoon for B'nai Brith International, the age group most opposed to carving up Jerusalem is 18-24 year-olds, with 78 percent believing that the holy city must remain the undivided capital of Israel. This compares to 68 percent of Israeli Jews overall

who oppose handing the eastern half of Jerusalem over to a future Palestinian state.

Nor do Israelis have much faith in Palestinians. Asked in the same poll about how international aid will be used by the Palestinian Authority, just seven percent believe that funds will be used for humanitarian purposes. Fully 80 percent believe that the money will go "mostly for terrorist attacks against Israel." Given that former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat pilfered billions in aid and funneled the rest into terrorism, Israeli skepticism is sadly warranted.

At least most Israelis no longer live in fear that a ride on the bus or a meal in a restaurant will end

with a bombing. In the southern border town of Sderot, however, normality is a distant memory. Located less than a mile from Gaza, Sderot suffers from a constant barrage of Qassam rockets, with warning sirens going off throughout the day, every day.

Mr. Olmert paid a surprise visit to Sderot and surrounding communities last Thursday, and three days later he told the legislature that he "heard fewer complaints" about his government.

To which an Israeli taxi driver remarked to me, "He obviously wasn't listening."

George in Jihadland

By Caroline Glick **The Jerusalem Post** January 10, 2008

US President George W. Bush arrived in Israel at the start of an eight-day tour of the Middle East at an interesting moment. In the lead-up to his trip, enemy forces, of both the terrorist and state variety, clarified their strategic outlook and the scope of their ambitions. Unfortunately, the president seems not to have noticed.

For the past several weeks, the leaders of the global jihad and their state sponsors in Syria and Iran have escalated their rhetorical and military attacks against Israel and the US. Osama bin Laden, his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri and his American lackey Adam Gadahn all issued video and audio appeals on the eve of Bush's trip. Their messages were devoted mainly to the campaigns against US forces in Iraq and against Israel. Bin Laden labeled Iraqi opponents of al-Qaida in Iraq apostates and called for Iraqis to rally around his allied forces. Gadahn called for Bush's assassination. All three men called for Israel's annihilation and for the unification of the forces of global jihad.

Then there is the al-Qaida affiliate Fatah al-Islam. Fatah al-Islam is considered a creation of Syrian intelligence. It is led by Shaker al-Absi, a Palestinian and a former member of the Syrian military. Syrian intelligence dispatched Absi to Lebanon last year to launch a campaign against the Lebanese military. Under his command, Fatah al-Islam took over the Nahr el-Bared Palestinian refugee camp where it pinned down the Lebanese Army for four months before being overrun.

Despite assertions by the Lebanese military that Absi had been killed, his body was never found. This week, ahead of Bush's trip, Absi surfaced alive with a videotape attacking the Lebanese army, calling for a jihadist takeover of the Levant and announcing his allegiance to Osama bin Laden.

Western intelligence agencies have claimed that he is currently operating from Syria. Jihadist Web sites claim that Absi has based himself in northern Iraq. There, they reported that he is combining forces with al-Qaida in Iraq.

Whether he is in Iraq or Syria, allegations that he is collaborating with al-Qaida terrorists in Iraq make sense given that Absi was formerly allied with Abu Musab Zarkawi, who led al-Qaida forces in Iraq until he was killed by US forces in June 2006.

Absi's Syrian-supported operations have also extended to Gaza. Over the past several months, Gazan terror cadres claiming membership in Fatah al-Islam have been actively involved in recruitment and propaganda activities. Last month, the organization in Gaza claimed it fired missiles at southern Israel.

Absi's videotaped message was followed by Monday night's Katyusha attack on the Galilee and Tuesday's roadside bombing of UNIFIL forces near Sidon. When seen as component parts of a larger whole, it is clear that Fatah al-Islam's various groupings are acting to unify al-Qaida forces in Iraq, Gaza and Lebanon under one banner.

Like al-Qaida, Hamas too spent the period leading up to Bush's visit escalating both its missile offensive against southern Israel and its anti-Israel and anti-American rhetoric. The massive anti-American protests in Gaza on Wednesday were followed by an RPG attack against an American school in northern Gaza early Thursday morning. Moreover, Bush's visit was greeted by a ferocious shelling of southern Israel with rockets and mortars.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority government led by Mahmoud Abbas stepped up its own anti-Israel propaganda drive in December. According to a Palestinian Media Watch report, Abbas's television station intensified its rhetoric calling for the destruction of Israel by advocating the "liberation" of Haifa, Tiberias, Acre and Tel Aviv. Then too, in his press conference with Bush, Abbas restated his hope of renewing negotiations with Hamas over control of Gaza.

Noting that his government spends 59 percent of its Israeli- and internationally-funded budget in Gaza, Abbas stated that if Hamas were to agree to roll back its control over Gaza, "recognize

international legitimacy, all international legitimacy, and... recognize the Arab Initiative, as well... we will have another talk."

Then too, Fatah's own terrorist forces in Judea and Samaria have not ceased their efforts to join their Gazan and Lebanese counterparts in their missile war against Israel. Last week's major IDF operation in Nablus was directed against Fatah terror squads which had begun producing rockets to attack central Israel.

With Bush's arrival in Israel on Wednesday, the Sunni terrorist groups' Shi'ite counterparts launched their own rhetorical attacks against the US and Israel. Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah gave a televised speech excoriating Bush for his support and recognition of Israel. Against the backdrop of "Death to America and Israel" chants from the crowd, Nasrallah intoned, "Bush is a faker, who fails to protect the Arabs from the real murderer and instead argues that he wishes to defend them from a fictitious enemy. He is attempting to convince our Arab and Muslim people of a bogus danger. It's a deception."

Nasrallah's Iraqi counterpart Muqtada el-Sadr made a call on Wednesday for Arab leaders to boycott Bush. Sadr condemned Bush and the US stating, "You brought the wars and you can't bring peace.... Get out of our land and you will be safe from us." Addressing Arab leaders, Sadr said, "Don't be partners responsible for the blood of your own people. If you will accept his visit, then you are collaborating with him on the blood of your brothers in Palestine, Iraq and others."

The jihadists' state sponsors - Syria and Iran - also took pains to demonstrate their anti-American and anti-Israel animus. As Bush landed in Israel, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's representative Ali Larijani was rounding off a week-long official visit to Syria. There he met with Syrian dictator Bashar Assad and reasserted Iran's strategic alliance with Syria. He also met with representatives of Iran's terrorist and political proxies headquartered in Syria and Lebanon. Larijani held talks with the heads of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian groups as well as representatives of Hizbullah and the Lebanese Shiite Amal militia and political party.

Finally, a week after US military spokesmen in Iraq released contradictory statements about Iran's continued support for the insurgency in the country, Iranian forces directly challenged US naval forces in the Straits of Hormuz. Although US leaders angrily referred to the Iranian operation as a dangerous provocation, a more constructive way to view the Iranian attack on US naval ships is as a probe.

The Iranians probed both the US's defenses and its willingness to take action against Iranian aggression. Whereas the ships apparently demonstrated their readiness to engage, in their decision not to open fire on the Iranian boats, they

signaled clearly that the US is unwilling to actually fight Iran.

Today in Iraq US forces are concentrating their efforts not on Iranian proxies but on Syrian-supported al-Qaida in Iraq units and cells. After flushing al-Qaida forces out of their former sanctuaries and operating bases in Anbar Province and Baghdad, Tuesday US forces mounted a major offensive against al-Qaida in its current operational hub in Diyala province. Apparently tipped off in advance of the attack, most of the terror operatives reportedly fled the area ahead of the US offensive after laying roadside bombs and booby traps in the towns they abandoned.

Rather than contend with the destructive power and influence of Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias in southern Iraq to US strategic interests, US military commanders and US diplomatic chiefs in Iraq brush them off as an internal Iraqi affair. US diplomats maintain open relations with Sadr's representatives in Baghdad in spite of his overt incitement against the US and its efforts in Iraq.

And after the confrontation between the US navy and Iranian forces in the Straits of Hormuz, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari announced that the US would soon begin a fourth round of talks with Iran about the situation in Iraq. Zebari announced that these talks - the most intensive to date - will include discussions of how to control militias, how to cooperate in fighting militant networks and monitor the border and how to prevent the flow of weapons, money and fighters through Iraq's borders. Given Iran's bellicosity in threatening US naval ships in one of the most vital waterways in the world, it is hard to see why the US would believe that Iranian cooperation in policing and defeating its own proxy forces in Iraq would advance US interests in the country or in the larger war.

Bush stated that he has come to the Middle East to promote peace between Israel and the Palestinians and to ensure US allies that the US is committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Yet on both scores US actions do not accord with the president's message.

On the Palestinian front, his calls for Israeli concessions to the Palestinians and for Palestinian statehood make little sense given the central role that Palestinians play in the global jihad. Bush repeatedly stated that he will not support a Palestinian state that will serve as a base for terror operations against Israel. And yet, under the current circumstances when all Palestinian forces - from Fatah to Hamas to al-Qaida - are committed to Israel's violent destruction, there is no chance that a Palestinian state will be anything other than a base for terrorist attacks and not only against Israel.

Even if Israel were to conclude an agreement with Abbas that sets out the contours of a

Palestinian state in the next year, such an agreement would not engender peace. Given the current jihadist state of Palestinian society as a whole, such an agreement would simply serve to empower jihadists still more.

As to Iran, Bush's decision to visit the Middle East was made immediately after the National Intelligence Estimate effectively removed his most potent threat against Iran's nuclear ambitions. The thought was that by visiting the region, Bush would be able to convince US Middle East allies that America is still serious about thwarting Iran's nuclear and regional ambitions despite the NIE. Unfortunately, the US navy's refusal to open fire on the Iranian boats in the Straits of Hormuz and

America's continued refusal to combat Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias in Iraq send the opposite message.

In their statements and actions in the run-up to Bush's visit, jihadist groups and state sponsors made clear that they are serious about fighting their war for regional and indeed global domination. Had Bush acknowledged their plans and expressed a strategic plan for countering their actions and intentions, his visit here could have gone a long way towards cementing alliances to combat and defeat them. Unfortunately, both Bush's statements and US actions on the ground give the jihadists every reason to believe that they will be able to continue their war without fear of America.

Deep inside the plucky country

By Greg Sheridan The Australian January 19, 2008

In a land of stark, powerful and sometimes bizarre images, as Israel is, perhaps the most ghostly for an Australian are the countless gum trees that populate Israel, the north especially.

Israelis brought in the gum trees to drain the swamps. Now they are not so sure whether the fast-growing and thirsty trees are an ecological plus or not. But these exotic Australian settlers in the land of the Bible are now too numerous to eradicate, and too beautiful.

Their presence is almost surreal in the much bombed and fought over land of Israel. But the gum trees are friendly, especially to an Australian visitor. It's as if a single ghost gum represents every Australian soldier who ever fell in the Middle East, through all the many decades that Australian soldiers have been fighting and dying there.

The Middle East is an indelible part of Australia's past and of its future. Our strategic engagement there is in the direct defence of our national interests, for the Middle East is the pivot of global conflict.

Three weeks in Israel recently presented a compelling series of images. Often enough it's images that are fought about in the Middle East. Yet in the context of Israel, it is seldom images of Israel that attract attention. It is images instead of the Palestinian territories. These are indeed compelling and they are among the most reported, seen and discussed images in the world. They deserve attention. But here's something else.

Alongside the territories is a much under-reported but fascinating and unique country. It's called Israel.

The world media makes a mistake by using the same reporters to cover the Palestinian territories as well as Israel. They can't do both, and most don't try to.

They cover the territories and they only cover Israel as a brooding and malign presence in the territories.

Naturally the reporting is one-sided. But it is worse than that. It omits from the equation Israel and the Israelis, and all the countless enthralling and diverse aspects of Israeli politics and society.

It is ever the fate of stable, democratic countries, even those involved in a conflict, to be under-reported. Israel was more reported a few years ago, when terrorists were murdering 1500 of its citizens a year. Now, with the security barrier, wrongly labelled a wall when it is mostly a fence, terrorist infiltration is much more difficult and perhaps a dozen or so Israelis are killed a year by terrorists.

Although Israel is a physically small country - it's one-third the size of Tasmania - most of its seven million people distribute themselves over incredibly diverse cities.

Jerusalem is an eternal city: the centre of Judaism, the fountainhead of Christianity and an important site for Islam. Visually it is stunning, its character maintained by the most enlightened civic ordinance on record: that all new buildings must be constructed of white Jerusalem stone. Like most Israeli cities it has several diverse communities: ultra-orthodox religious Jews who don't serve in the army and often don't work, Arab Muslims, Arab Christians (a small and diminishing minority), secular Jews, and national religious Jews who serve in the army and participate in the modern economy.

Tel Aviv, Israel's biggest city, is entirely different. It is a sensuous Mediterranean city that offers every decent amenity of any cosmopolitan European city. Its hedonism and its sensuousness are tempered by the strategic gravity of Israel's situation, by everyone doing their military service and by the cultural depth of Judaism, the traditions of the book. Tel Aviv is predominantly secular Jewish, with very few Arabs and ultra-orthodox Jews.

Haifa, the port city to the north of Tel Aviv, is different again. It has the largest Arab minority of a

big Israeli city and is where Arabs and Jews most easily and fully mix together, although such mixing occurs all across Israel. Haifa is also the world headquarters of the Bahai faith, which was founded in Iran and has suffered terrible persecution there and so has fled to two countries where religious minorities are not persecuted: Israel and India.

Israel is full of such anomalies. The Druze are a small, separate, Arab religious group found in Lebanon, Syria and Israel. Within Israel, they are fiercely loyal to the state of Israel (the Druze in Syria are loyal Syrians and in Lebanon loyal Lebanese) and serve in the Israeli army with great distinction, so that many have been represented in its most elite fighting units.

I caught a glimpse of another Muslim minority, the Bedouin, from the air when I flew in a small plane over the Negev Desert, south and east of Tel Aviv. There I spied dozens of small makeshift settlements, more or less completely outside legal regulation. But these were not the illegal Jewish settlements of media legend. They were Bedouin encampments, often of a few caravans or houses, seemingly impossibly isolated, scattered through the desert. The problem they cause is for those trying to get education and social services to their children.

To the east of the Negev, on the edge of the Dead Sea, I got an aerial glimpse of Masada, the astounding mountain-top fortress where a group of Jews made their last stand against the Roman Empire. On another day, visiting a northern part of the Dead Sea, I came upon a group of tourists cavorting joyfully in the strange, viscous, mineral-filled water. Their accents were unmistakable. They were a group of Malaysian tourists; yet Malaysian passports bear the absurd restriction that says Malaysian citizens may not visit Israel.

One night I dined at the home of a local Israeli Arab leader in the almost entirely Israeli Arab town of Abu Ghosh, just west of Jerusalem. It has always been identified with the Israeli state. My host had his complaints about the Israeli Government but he was also a proud Israeli. And every night his town, which has many restaurants, is full of Israeli Jews at the countless eateries because, and here I'll make a clear statement of cultural preference, Arab food is generally a little more interesting than Jewish food.

I spent days in the north of Israel and visited the town of Metulla, on the tiny tip of a finger of Israeli territory that juts into southern Lebanon. Until the 2006 war with Hezbollah, its people were repeatedly attacked by rockets from southern Lebanon. The municipality organised field trips away from the town for the children, but mostly the residents stayed. I visited the town's Canada Centre to try the odd practice of pistol shooting on the gun range. Here's another paradox of Israeli society. Many people have guns but it is not remotely a macho society. Its murder rate is low. Binge drinking is not

part of the culture. Nobody fires a gun into the air at a wedding. Although the shortest time in Israel is between the light turning green in front of you and the car behind you honking, people don't settle traffic disputes with gunplay. Israelis argue - loudly, abrasively, obsessively - at endless length, but they seldom resort to fisticuffs.

I saw Gadot, the now disused network of bunkers and tunnels constructed by the Syrian soldiers in the Golan Heights. Before Israel seized the Golan Heights, Syrian soldiers would fire from the bunkers at workers on the kibbutz below.

But I also sought out the controversial images of Israel, in particular those of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. A word on definitions. After the 1967 war, when Israel was attacked by a coalition of its Arab neighbours, Israel took territory in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Some of this, Israelis argue, is necessary for security.

It has since left Gaza. Israel is constantly urged to go back to its 1967 borders, but the two places where it has done that, in southern Lebanon and Gaza, the result has been disastrous. It was subject to thousands of rocket attacks from southern Lebanon until it went to war with Hezbollah and now every day Qassam rockets are fired from Gaza at nearby Israeli civilian towns, especially Sderot.

The final borders between Israel and a putative Palestinian state have yet to be worked out. Every inch of territory with a Jewish inhabitant beyond the 1967 borders is commonly referred to as a Jewish settlement. I spent days driving up and down the West Bank and visited as many Jewish settlements as I could. These included suburbs of Jerusalem such as Gilot and Har Homa, big settlements just outside Jerusalem such as Gush Etzion and Ma'ale Adumin, and the biggest, distant settlement, the town of Ariel.

Although I think Israel will be prepared to give up numerous settlements in the West Bank, I don't think any of those named above will be given up under any circumstances. The stereotype of the Jewish settler, as columnist and author Hillel Halkin has written, is of "a belligerently bearded Jew with a knit skullcap on his head, a Bible in one hand and a rifle in the other". It's a stereotype I didn't meet at all in any of these settlements, and not for want of trying, although of course I met only a fraction of the nearly 400,000 Jews who live beyond the 1967 lines.

There are certainly ideologically militant and intolerant settlers, but they are a minority. While committed to Israel like virtually all its citizens, the settlers I met lived where they did for a variety of reasons, mainly the lower cost of housing, the communal lifestyle and educational opportunities, and sometimes because of a desire to be connected to biblical lands.

The status of the different communities routinely lumped into the single category of

settlements varies enormously. Israel officially annexed some parts of East Jerusalem straight after 1967. Although there may one day be a compromise on Jerusalem, no Israeli government will give up central suburbs such as Har Homa and Gilot.

For an Australian it is almost impossible to imagine the smallness of the distances involved. Gilot was routinely fired on by snipers in Bethlehem several years ago, and so, well before the security fence was put up, Gilot had its own system of walls and shields, especially for children's playgrounds. For Gilot to be fired on from Bethlehem is like Sydney's Surry Hills being fired on from Redfern, or Richmond being fired on from the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Jerusalem, in the view of many Israelis, becomes indefensible without its Jewish suburbs developed since 1967.

The status of Gush Etzion, a little distance to the southwest of Jerusalem, is also intriguing. It was a Jewish area before 1948, when the UN divided the land of Israel into Jewish and Palestinian states, which the Palestinians and their surrounding Arab neighbours declined to accept, so that several Arab nations launched a war on Israel. The Jordanian army took control of Gush Etzion at that time.

After 1967 it was re-established as a Jewish settlement. Gush Etzion as a Jewish settlement has a 20th-century history long pre-dating 1967. Before the intifada, to get to Gush Etzion you would drive through Bethlehem. Israelis in those days commonly went to dentists in Ramallah, because it was cheaper. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians earned a good living working in Israel.

The need to prevent terrorism has compromised everyone's quality of life. Now, to get to Gush Etzion from Jerusalem, you drive through a tunnel road. When you emerge from the tunnel, a good deal of the subsequent road is behind walls. The road is Israeli, the land on either side is Palestinian territory, and of course there are checkpoints to get back into Jerusalem as well as armed guards at the entrance to Gush Etzion.

And yet life in Gush Etzion is normal. Behind the gates people hitchhike routinely (as they do in much of Israel) because they all trust each other. On the day I visit, a group of American Jewish teenagers are there as part of a program to acquaint diaspora Jewish youth with their cultural heritage. They are the normal loud-mouthed, good natured, overbearing American kids.

The only odd thing about them is that they are accompanied by two security guards, in this case Israeli girls who look barely older than the teenagers they are guarding and carry rifles as tall as themselves.

The mayor of Gush Etzion, Shaul Goldstein, tells me that many people live there because of the availability of quality housing. They can buy a good apartment for \$US200,000 (\$228,000) and for a little

more, a house with a garden. That's impossible in Jerusalem proper. And the settlement has renowned schools. Says Goldstein: "We thought during the intifada that people would leave. But people didn't leave. Instead they kept coming, even from Australia, even from Bondi Beach.

"One reason is the community lifestyle. People's children can walk safely from house to house. People also feel they are part of history. I'm driving to work through the path of King David. It's important to me as a religious man."

The most emphatic settlement I visited was Ariel. It's a Jewish town of about 30,000 people, deep in the West Bank. Ariel University College has about 10,000 students, 3000 of them doing pre-undergraduate courses. The student population is racially diverse, as is Israel. The Ethiopian presence is noticeable. But Ariel officials tell me some local Palestinians attend as well, although of course they are under pressure not to.

Ariel is a small but substantial city. It is a beautiful place, full of public gardens and garden homes, and it has a distinctly European air and style. People don't like to use the back road to Jerusalem because even in these relatively calm days there is the danger of attacks. Just a few days before I visit, a Jewish settler, not from Ariel but from nearby, was killed on the road, as it turns out by two Palestinian Authority policemen who simply waited for a victim to come along.

I attend a seminar at Ariel on the international media's treatment of Israel. Leonard Asper, the Canadian part-owner of Network Ten in Australia, delivers an alternately witty and fiery denunciation of the media's bias and hostility against Israel. Later Asper, former Israeli defence minister Moshe Arens and I tour the university. It is doing remarkable, cutting-edge work on laser technology. It is able to do this because of the one million Russian Jewish immigrants who have come to Israel in the past 15 years.

Among them were many brilliant scientists and intellectuals. Some Israeli universities were cautious about hiring them, unsure whether their budgets could sustain rapid academic expansion. Ariel went ahead and hired the best Russians it could get, and the research funds have followed.

I comment to Arens that it is a good time, a calm time, in Israel. He replies: "It is calm only because of the efforts of the Israeli Defence Forces, not for any other reason."

Of course the settlements and their future are endlessly debated in Israel, as is everything else. I left Israel profoundly optimistic about the morale of the society and the resolve of the people, but profoundly pessimistic about the peace process. If there were peace, any compromise on borders might be possible. But too many Arab leaders, and too many Palestinian leaders, are playing for the very long term

and still believe that in time they will wipe Israel off the map.

Apart from the overwhelming experience of visiting the Yad Vashem museum recalling the Holocaust, the most powerful image I saw in Israel was in a small office in the Knesset (parliament) building in Jerusalem. I had gone to see Ephraim Sneh, a white-haired veteran Labour Party politician and soldier, a former cabinet minister and a former general.

Israel's Lebanon Disaster

By Michael Oren *The Wall Street Journal*

I had fought in war before but had never seen such intensive fire -- tracer bullets, rockets, artillery shells -- nor been assigned a more horrific detail. My unit was escorting the bodies of Israeli soldiers killed on the last night of the Second Lebanon War, a few hours before the U.N. cease-fire agreement took effect. None of us understood the purpose of this last-minute offensive or, indeed, many of the government's disastrous decisions during the war. We agreed that the burden of these failures would be borne by our leaders, military and civilians alike.

Now, a year and a half later, veterans of the war are demanding that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert accept responsibility for its conduct -- or risk unraveling the consensus on which Israel's survival depends.

The war began on July 12, 2006, when Hezbollah gunmen ambushed an Israeli border patrol, killing eight and kidnapping two. Mr. Olmert's response, a large-scale campaign intended to crush Hezbollah and secure the soldiers' release, was supported by most Israelis until serious mismanagement of the war surfaced. While receiving inadequate or faulty equipment -- my rifle literally fell apart in my hands -- Israeli forces were denied permission to invade Southern Lebanon and neutralize the katyusha rockets that were pummeling Israeli cities. Instead, Israeli jets bombed the Lebanese routes through which Syria resupplied Hezbollah and destroyed the organization's Beirut headquarters.

These attacks obliterated much of Hezbollah's infrastructure and killed a fourth of its fighters, but they also laid waste to a large part of Lebanon, killing civilians and squandering Israel's initial international backing. Hundreds of rockets, meanwhile, continued to smash into northern Israel, displacing a half-million civilians. Only on Aug. 13, after a month of fighting and with a U.N. ceasefire already approved, did the government authorize a ground offensive into Lebanon. The operation achieved nothing, either militarily or diplomatically, and cost the lives of 33 Israeli troops.

In another country, perhaps, such blunders might result in the resignation of senior officers but not necessarily elected officials. In Israel, though, no

He points to a picture on the back wall of his office. It is of two Israeli F-15 fighters flying over Auschwitz. "When we didn't have F-15s, we had Auschwitz," he says.

His grandparents, he tells me, were killed by the Polish farmers they had paid to shelter them. You learn the lessons of trusting other people with your security.

Israel will certainly make compromises. But it will not commit suicide.

January 30, 2008

one is above blame. Accountability for decision making is a tenet of the Zionist ethos on which the Jewish state is based and, unlike most nations, Israel has a citizens' army in which the great majority -- politicians included -- serve. Most uniquely, Israel confronts daily security dangers and long-term threats to its existence. Israelis can neither condone nor afford a prime minister who passes the buck to their army or shirks the onus of defense. The person who sends us into battle cannot escape responsibility for our fate.

No sooner had the war ended than Israelis began demanding an official inquiry into its handling. Why did the government set unrealistic goals for the operation? Why were no orders given for an invasion, and why were no measures taken to protect the home front from missile attack? Above all, Israelis insisted on knowing why Mr. Olmert authorized a final offensive with no apparent objective other than enhancing his image.

Mr. Olmert resisted these demands, but public pressure forced him to appoint an investigative panel headed by Supreme Court Justice Eliyahu Winograd. While not empowered to recommend resignations, the commission issued a preliminary report that compelled Defense Minister Amir Peretz and Chief of Staff Dan Halutz to step down. The second Winograd report, scheduled for publication tomorrow, will focus on the prime minister's performance during the war, but Mr. Olmert has sworn not to cede power, irrespective of its findings. At stake is not merely the government's future but rather the fabric of Israeli society.

Israel lacks a constitution but is bound by an unwritten social contract. Israelis defend their country with their lives and their leaders' pledge not to send them to war heedlessly. Prime Ministers Golda Meir and Menachem Begin resigned in the aftermath of disappointing wars, though both were exonerated of incompetence. By ignoring these precedents, Mr. Olmert, whose culpability began before the war, when he appointed a defense minister devoid of military experience, threatens to break the contract. Israelis will think twice before following his orders -- and perhaps those of future prime ministers -- into battle. The cohesiveness that

enabled Israel to survive 60 years of conflict will unwind.

Thousands of Israelis are calling for Mr. Olmert's resignation. Rightists convinced that the prime minister cannot safeguard the country's security have joined with leftists who understand that leaders who fail at war will never succeed at peacemaking. All are united by a willingness to shoulder the burden of Israel's defense. This was the commitment that united us that last night in

Lebanon, as we took up the stretchers bearing the remains of somebody's son, somebody's husband, and brought them home for burial.

Mr. Oren is a senior fellow at the Shalem Center in Jerusalem and the author of "Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present" (Norton, 2008).

The enemy within By The Chiago Tribune editorial January 24, 2008

Last week, Israel closed border crossings into Gaza and blockaded some supplies of fuel and food, a response to rocket fire into Israel from the Palestinian territory. Electricity was reported to be in short supply in some places. Hospitals were warning of tragic consequences if power lapsed or medical supplies ran low. The Red Cross and UN issued warnings of a potential humanitarian crisis.

Israel eased the blockade on Tuesday. And on Wednesday, thousands of Palestinians flooded into Egypt after masked gunmen blasted huge holes in the border wall.

Sound familiar? It should. These kinds of flash points have been increasingly common since Hamas took control of Gaza. So have the warnings against the "collective punishment" of Gazans. And the potential solutions: There is talk, again, of an Israeli military incursion to stop the rockets that rain down on southern Israel from Gaza.

As always, Gazans look around, see how terrible conditions are, and point fingers. Many blame Israel. Or they blame the U.S. Or they blame Fatah, rival to Hamas.

If things are to improve in Gaza -- and we hope they do -- then that reflexive attitude is one of the first things that must change. Until most Gazans fix the blame for their miserable living conditions where it belongs -- on their elected leaders of Hamas -- Gaza will remain poised on the brink of crisis, sending rockets into Israel and then complaining bitterly when its foe retaliates.

This really isn't all that complicated. It's quiet for quiet. If the Palestinians stop lobbing rockets into Israel, there will be no retaliation.

This is not a matter of the "cycle of violence," as bedraggled a phrase as there is in the Middle East.

Israel withdrew its settlers from Gaza in 2005. That was supposed to end the "provocation" of the settlements and stop the rocket fire. But it hasn't. There's also no doubt Hamas could stop the rockets. After Israel imposed its recent measures, for instance, five rockets were fired on Sunday, down from 53 in the prior two days, the Associated Press reported.

So why doesn't Hamas clamp down, to show it can effectively govern the territory? Unfortunately, the leaders of Hamas find it to their political and economic advantage to allow their people to suffer while they smuggle arms and money from Iran and elsewhere to continue the campaign of terror against Israel.

While Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas negotiates a peace deal with Israel, Hamas has pledged never to recognize the Jewish state. Hamas leaders have vowed not to abide by earlier agreements or renounce violence as a means to achieving their goals. With no prospect for negotiations, there's no prospect for reviving the economy and no prospect for improving people's lives. No wonder they'd rather fire rockets.

Who else benefits from this always-simmering crisis? One answer: Iran. Tehran gains influence as it builds up a terror ministate on Israel's border. Another answer: Syria, which hosts Hamas' headquarters and some of its top leaders. Increasing chaos in Gaza could play into Damascus' hopes for regaining sway over Lebanon.

Who suffers? That's easy: The people of Gaza. As long as Hamas is in power, Gaza will be driven further into misery, further from the path that would lead to an independent state. For Gazans, the real enemy is within.

If anyone would like to receive this newsletter by a weekly e-mail, please drop us a line at sheldonb@rsfchart.com and we will be glad to add you to our growing list of subscribers.

All of the newsletter archives can be found on the Suburban Orthodox webpage (Israel Action section) at www.SuburbanOrthodox.org/iacn.php.

You can now hear Rabbi Riskin's moving lecture at Suburban Orthodox last month sponsored by my family entitled "Is Judaism a missionary religion" at the Suburban Orthodox webpage at www.SuburbanOrthodox.org/media.php.