

Talk to Hamas? Bad Idea

By Dr. Robert O. Freedman The Baltimore Jewish Times April 4, 2008

In the aftermath of the recent Israeli incursion into Gaza, which proved unsuccessful in stopping rocket attacks into Israel, and given the rising popularity of Hamas in Palestinian public opinion polls, suggestions have been made that the time has come for Israel to begin negotiations with Hamas. This has been heard in the United States, Europe, and even Israel. There have been three main arguments for this change in Israeli policy.

- First, it is argued, it is necessary to talk to a terrorist organization in order to get it to change its policy, just as Britain did with the Irish Republican Army.

- Second, for there to be a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians, Hamas, which represents a significant proportion of the Palestinians, must be brought into the peace process, lest it sabotage it with rocket fire from Gaza.

- Finally, for Israeli towns like Sderot to ever know peace, a negotiated agreement with Hamas is needed. All three arguments are fallacious.

Let's explore each issue. Talking to terrorists: The example of the IRA is a misleading one. The IRA never had as one of its goals the destruction of Great Britain. By contrast, the avowed goal of Hamas — a goal that has not changed in the more than two years since it won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January 2006 — is the destruction of Israel.

A better example to look at is the evolution of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The United States and Israel refused to have any negotiations with the PLO until it changed its policy calling for the destruction of Israel and also renounced terrorism, something that the organization finally did in November 1988.

Thus for Israel, the United States and/or the European Union to begin talks with Hamas before it met these requirements, would give diplomatic legitimacy to its call to destroy Israel, and reward its terrorist actions, something that would only encourage more terrorism in the future.

Promoting a Palestinian- Israeli peace agreement: Here the argument is that Hamas must be enticed into joining Fatah's efforts to make peace with Israel, and the way to do this is to negotiate with it. Given the fact that the organization is headquartered in Syria, and is strongly supported by Iran, the possibility that Hamas would change its policy before there was a Syrian- Israeli peace agreement is highly unlikely. In addition, the prospects for a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement, given the growing ties between Iran and Syria, are distant at best. Indeed, it is more likely, should Hamas and Fatah reconcile, that Hamas would pressure Fatah into taking a more militant position vis-a-vis Israel.

Providing peace to Sderot: There are a number of problems with this argument.

First, if Israel and Hamas negotiated a cease-fire, what would prevent Hamas from exploiting the time to further consolidate its hold over Gaza, and smuggle in the kinds of weapons through the porous border crossing with Egypt, which would not only threaten Sderot, but Tel Aviv as well?

Second, Israel's negotiations with Hamas would undermine the position of Mahmoud Abbas — a position that is not too strong to begin with — and possibly facilitate a Hamas takeover of the West Bank. Finally, the very act of negotiating with Hamas, if it were undertaken by Israel, would give diplomatic legitimacy to the Hamas call for the destruction of Israel.

Under the circumstances, what is needed is not negotiations with Hamas, but strong military action against it. This time, Israel should not undertake a brief incursion, but a major invasion of Gaza to uproot Hamas once and for all.

If the Israeli leadership doesn't take such action, it risks Hamas growing into an even greater menace to the State of Israel than it is today.

Dr. Robert O. Freedman is Peggy Meyerhoff Pearlstone professor of political science at Baltimore Hebrew University and visiting professor of political science at Johns Hopkins University.

Road Map to a Gaza War

By Jackson Diehl The Washington Post April 7, 2008

Seven years ago George W. Bush's incoming foreign policy team blamed the Clinton administration for an eleventh-hour rush for a Middle East peace

agreement that ended with the explosion of the second Palestinian intifada. Now, with less than 10 months remaining in office, Bush and Secretary of

State Condoleezza Rice are engaged in a similar last-minute push -- yet they don't seem to recognize the growing risk that their initiative, too, will end with another Israeli-Palestinian war.

Rice visited Jerusalem again last week to press for visible Israeli fulfillment of commitments made at last year's Annapolis conference, and she appeared to win some incremental steps, such as the dismantlement of a few dozen of the several hundred military roadblocks in the West Bank. Yet a more significant Israeli signal may have been delivered by the stream of senior officials who have quietly been visiting Washington in the past month: Israel, they have been saying, is on course for a major conflict with the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip.

That battle seemed on the verge of beginning a month ago, when Hamas for the first time began firing Iranian-made missiles at the Israeli city of Ashkelon -- in addition to the volleys of homemade rockets it has been aiming at the smaller town of Sderot for several years. After a punishing series of Israeli airstrikes the fighting subsided, and with the State Department's encouragement Egypt began to broker discussions about a more enduring truce. In previous columns, I've argued that such a cease-fire in Gaza is the least bad of Israel's limited options.

But officials portray Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak as having little interest in a deal with Hamas. They acknowledge that a suspension of attacks by both sides might make the ongoing peace talks easier -- and that the outbreak of an all-out conflict would almost certainly kill the Annapolis process. Yet, increasingly Israeli officials see the confrontation in Gaza with Hamas as more important in strategic terms than the talks with moderate Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The view in Jerusalem, as more than one official put it to me, is that there is no alternative to a military collision with Hamas in Gaza, probably before the end of the Bush administration.

The grim Israeli view is driven to a large degree by what officials say is the massive and continuing smuggling of weapons into Gaza, sponsored by Iran and tacitly allowed by Egypt, which despite considerable pressure from Washington shrinks from actions that might trigger its own confrontation with Hamas. Hamas is building hardened bunker systems and stockpiling missiles in

imitation of the infrastructure built in southern Lebanon by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement. The Israelis say hundreds of Hamas militants have traveled to Iran for training in targeting and firing Grad missiles, Iran's version of the old Soviet Katyusha.

Sobered by the bloody nose it suffered when it attacked Hezbollah's Lebanese base in 2006, the Israeli army has been training against Hamas's Gaza strong points. But officials say that the longer the army waits to take on what is now viewed as a strategic threat, the greater Hamas's chance will be to inflict heavy casualties or strike southern Israeli cities with missiles. The cease-fire Egypt seeks (and that Hamas sometimes says it wants) would only make the problem worse, in the Israeli analysis, by giving Hamas the opportunity to accelerate its buildup.

Bush and Rice would like Israel to hold off against Hamas until Olmert can complete an agreement on principles for a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement with Abbas. While Olmert still wants that deal, it's become increasingly clear to the Israelis that an Abbas-led government will never be able to implement it. Despite extensive international aid, the West Bank Palestinian administration remains little more than a shell kept in power by Israel's troops. Hamas, the Israelis say, can stop the peace process at any time by resuming missile attacks against Ashkelon. And whatever happens in Gaza -- whether an Israeli-Hamas truce or all-out war -- Abbas stands to be further damaged. His prime minister, Salam Fayyad, has hinted privately that he might favor an Israeli attack on Hamas, because it would allow Abbas's Fatah movement to take control of Gaza. But Abbas's security forces are unlikely to be strong enough to control Gaza's population of 1.5 million anytime soon.

The Israelis say the coming confrontation won't necessarily involve a full-scale reoccupation of the Gaza Strip. Given the predictable international backlash against any Israeli offensive, and the inevitable satellite television coverage of suffering Palestinians, Olmert is likely to wait for a clear provocation from Hamas. Perhaps it won't happen for a few more months. But what concerns some Israelis is the lack of readiness by the Bush administration for the possibility that its drive for Mideast peace will be overwhelmed by a Mideast war.

Shifting the blame in Gaza

By The National Post (Canada) editorial

Over the weekend, al-Qaeda released an audio message purporting to come from its deputy leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri. In it, the speaker called for attacks on American and Israeli interests in retaliation for Israel's recent raids on the Gaza Strip,

March 25, 2008

which Palestinians claim have killed nearly 100 residents.

Those raids have been harsh. Some innocent bystanders -- including children -- have died. So there are undoubtedly many in the Western world who believe Israel's actions were unjustified and who

accept the contention of Islamic extremists -- al-Qaeda included -- that Israeli actions are at the root of global Muslim rage. It is Israeli actions, terror apologists claim, that precipitate Islamist terrorism, and not the other way around.

But such beliefs are naive. Israel's attacks on Gaza over the last month have been far from unprovoked. In any case, even if the Jewish state were to cease all counter-terrorist operations immediately, jihadis would still target the West.

Since 2001, there have been more than 6,000 rockets and mortars launched from the Gaza Strip into Israel, an average of nearly three per day. Most have been aimed at the industrial-agricultural city of Sderot, whose 20,000 residents live under the constant threat of 15-second air raid warnings. Over 4,000 of the Palestinian-launched attacks -- more than two-thirds -- have occurred since the Israeli army forcibly removed nearly 7,000 Jewish settlers from Gaza, a gesture of good faith that, Israelis were repeatedly reassured, would end the bombardments. But in just the first two months of this year, there were nearly 900 attacks (15 per day). This was before Israel's army and air force began their recent reprisals. Israel has shown tremendous patience and restraint in the face of this daily, deadly fusillade. Islamic fundamentalists, such as Dr. al-Zawahiri, have willingly misinterpreted Israel's belated, self-defensive attacks as provocative first strikes. Twisting the facts helps them whip up Muslim anger worldwide, which aids their recruitment of new foot soldiers for their terror war against the West.

What puzzles us, though, is why so much of the world's media so easily swallows this cynical spin without even trying to ascertain the reasons behind Israel's counterstrikes. If and when al-Qaeda

manages to launch fresh attacks against Western targets, even inside North America, the groundwork will already have been laid for placing the blame on Israel. What response would Canadians demand of their government and Armed Forces if 6,000 bombs and missiles had been fired from Mississauga into Etobicoke in the past seven years, or from Surrey into Vancouver, or Longueuil into Montreal? It is unlikely we would have accepted such a long delay in reacting with force nor would we worry that some distant terrorist was threatening an escalation in attacks if we sought to stop the assault.

So far this year, school disruptions in Sderot have been a regular occurrence. Lessons or recess have been curtailed by the need for students to run frantically to bomb shelters on at least 22 different occasions. Canadians who show sympathy for the Palestinian cause might well think differently of Israel using troops and gunships to take out mortar placements and rocket launchers if their own children were under constant threat of injury or death.

Clearly, it is equally tragic when Palestinian children are hurt or killed by Israeli forces. But it is not the Israeli government that hides rocket launchers and mortars in apartment blocks and schoolyards, thereby making human shields of its own people.

We are optimistic Canadian security forces will uncover and dismantle any terror attacks on Canadian soil before they occur. But if Dr. al-Zawahiri and al-Qaeda are successful in carrying out acts of terrorism here or elsewhere in the name of Gaza, Westerners should blame the source rather than Israel.

Baghdad, Gaza aren't Birmingham

By Diana West The Washington Times April 4, 2008

I wonder if Condoleezza Rice was surprised by the headlines over her comment to The Washington Times that America suffers from a national "birth defect" — namely, the practice of slavery at the time of the nation's founding.

Make that the first founding. She said she considers the civil-rights movement to be the nation's "second founding." The secretary of state made another point. She said that "one of the primary things" that attracted her to the candidacy of President Bush "was not actually foreign policy." Really? Rather, she explained, "it was No Child Left Behind." She continued: "When he talks about 'the soft bigotry of low expectations,' I know what that feels like."

Miss Rice has actually said all of this before, including more emphatic remarks on "soft" bigotry. "I've seen it. Okay?" Miss Rice said in 2005 to the New York Times. "And it's not in this president. It is, however, pretty deeply ingrained in our system

and we're going to have to do something about it." Miss Rice offered as an example her own high-school teacher who suggested she was junior college material.

Maybe someone should inform the secretary of state that being underestimated, turned down or shunted aside is, alas, part of the human experience, not the exclusive function of race. But it's probably too late for that. As secretary of state — not, say, secretary of education — Miss Rice has long been doing "something about it" on the world stage. Instead of different states and school systems, she's been working with different countries and belief systems. Suddenly, things about the Rice Doctrine — better, the No Country Left Behind Doctrine — begin to fall into place.

I've written before about how Miss Rice makes faulty comparisons between the evolution of democratic principle (all men are created equal) in the United States and the introduction of democratic

procedure (ballot boxes) to the Middle East, always ignoring both the miracle of our 18th-century Constitution, which contained the blueprint for abolition, and the dispiriting reality of 21st-century Islamic constitutions, which charter Shariah states where freedom of conscience (among other things) doesn't exist.

I've written also about how she sees the transformation of her once-segregated hometown of Birmingham, Ala. as the blueprint for democratizing the Islamic world. Hers is a worldview personal to the point of autobiographical, as when she explains how, as a daughter of Birmingham (or "Bombingham," as she has called it), she can relate both to Israeli fear of Palestinian bombs, and Palestinian "humiliation and powerlessness" over Israeli checkpoints, which she sees as a form of segregation. What she never seems to realize is that such "segregation," far being the sort of prejudice she remembers, is actually an Israeli line of defense against the ultimate prejudice of Palestinian bombs.

Considering her remarks about America's "birth defect" — an egregious term for any secretary of state to use about a nation that has brought more liberty to more races, colors and creeds than any in history — I am struck anew how deeply Miss Rice's vision of race in America, or, perhaps, in segregated Birmingham, affects her vision of America in the

wider world. It is as if Miss Rice sees American influence as a means by which to address what she perceives as disparities of race or Third World heritage on the international level.

This would help explain her a historical habit of linking the civil rights movement to the Bush administration's effort to bring democracy to Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, in a 2003 speech to the National Association of Black Journalists, she argued that blacks, more than others, should "reject" the "condescending" argument that some are not "ready" for freedom. "That view was wrong in 1963 in Birmingham and it's wrong in 2003 in Baghdad," she said. In 2006, she made a similar point. "When I look around the world and I hear people say, 'Well, you know, they're just not ready for democracy,' it really does resonate," Miss Rice told ABC's Katie Couric. "It makes me so angry because I think there are those echoes of what people once thought about black Americans."

There's something shockingly provincial at work here. In seeing so much of the world through an American prism of race, Miss Rice has effectively blinded herself to historical and cultural and religious differences between Islam and the West. To put it simply, neither Baghdad nor Gaza is Birmingham. And nothing in all of history quite compares to Philadelphia.

Fear of Democracy By Caroline Glick The Jerusalem Post April 3, 2008

The West stands by idly as its foundations are rent asunder. Last Friday the UN's Human Rights Council took a direct swipe at freedom of expression. In a 32-0 vote, the council instructed its "expert on freedom of expression" to report to the council on all instances in which individuals "abuse" their freedom of speech by giving expression to racial or religious bias.

The measure was proposed by paragons of freedom Egypt and Pakistan. It was supported by all Arab, Muslim and African countries - founts of liberty one and all. European states abstained.

The US, which is not a member of the Human Rights Council, tried to oppose the measure. In a speech before the council, US Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Warren Tichenor warned that the resolution's purpose is to undermine freedom of expression because it imposes "restrictions on individuals rather than emphasiz[ing] the duty and responsibility of governments to guarantee, uphold, promote and protect human rights."

By seeking to criminalize free speech, the resolution stands in breach of the UN's Declaration of Human Rights. Article 19 of that document states explicitly: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

The Europeans' decision to abstain rather than oppose the measure seems, at first glance, rather surprising. Given that the EU member states are among the UN's most emphatic champions, it would have seemed normal for them to have opposed a resolution that undermines one of the UN's foundational documents, and indeed, one of the most basic tenets of Western civilization.

But then again, given the EU's stands in recent years against freedom of expression, there really is nothing to be surprised about. The EU's current bow to intellectual thuggery is of course found in its response to the Internet release of Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders' film *Fitna*.

The EU has gone out of its way to attack Wilders for daring to exercise his freedom of expression. The EU's presidency released a statement condemning the film for "inflaming hatred." Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende issued statements claiming that the film "serves no other purpose than to cause offense."

Then, too, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon blasted the film as "offensively anti-Islamic." These statements follow the EU's quest to restrict freedom of speech following the 2005 publication of cartoons of Muhammed in Denmark's *Jyllands Posten* newspaper. They also come against the backdrop of the systematic silencing of anti-jihadist intellectuals throughout the continent. These intellectuals, such

as Peter Redeker in France and Paul Cliteur in the Netherlands, are threatened into silence by European jihadists. And the governments of Europe either do nothing to defend the threatened thinkers or justify the intellectual blackmailers by sympathizing with their anger.

It is axiomatic that freedom of expression is the foundation of human freedom and progress. When people are not allowed to express themselves freely, there can be no debate or inquiry. It is only due to free debate and inquiry that humanity has progressed from the Dark Age to the Digital Age. This is why the first act of every would-be tyrant is to take control of the marketplace of ideas.

Yet today, the nations of Europe and indeed much of the Western world, either sit idly by and do nothing to defend that freedom or collaborate with unfree and often tyrannical Islamic states and terrorists in silencing debate and stifling dissent.

There are two reasons why this is the case. First, the political Left, which rules supreme in the EU's bureaucracy as well as in most of the intellectual centers of the free world, has shown through its actions that it has no real commitment to democratic values. Rather than embrace democratic values, the Left increasingly adopts the parlance of democracy cynically, with the aim of undermining free discourse in the public sphere in the name of "democracy."

Writing of the leftist uproar against Wilders' film in Europe in *Der Spiegel*, Henryk Broder noted that almost across the board, the European media has castigated Wilders as "a right-wing populist." As Broder notes, on its face this assertion is absurd, for Wilders is a radical liberal.

In *Fitna*, the outspoken legislator shows how verses of the Koran are used by jihadists to justify the most heinous acts of mass murder and hatred. His film superimposes verses from the Koran calling for the murder of non-Muslims with actual scenes of jihadist carnage. It also superimposes verses from the Koran vilifying Jews with footage of Islamic clerics repeating the verses and with a three-year-old girl saying that she learned that Jews are monkeys and pigs from her Koran classes. *Fitna* concludes with a challenge to Muslims to expunge these hateful, murderous religious tenets from their belief system.

While arguably, but not necessarily, inflammatory, Wilders' film serves as an invitation to Europe and to the Islamic world to hold an open debate. His film challenges viewers - both Muslim and non-Muslim - to think and to discuss whether Islam accords with the notions of human freedom and what can be done to stop jihadists from exploiting the Koran to justify their acts of murder, tyranny and hate.

As Broder notes, by calling Wilders a "right-wing populist," the Left seeks to silence both him and his call for an open discourse. The underlying

message of such labeling is that Wilders is somehow beyond the pale of polite company and therefore his message should be ignored by all right thinking people. If you don't want to be intellectually isolated and socially ostracized like Wilders, then you mustn't watch his film or take it seriously. Doing so would be an act of "right-wing populism" - and everyone knows what that means.

Like all anti-democratic movements, today's political Left seeks to silence debate and so undermine democracy, first, by demonizing anyone who doesn't agree with it and then by passing laws that criminalize speech or override the people's right to decide how they wish to live.

In the EU, the Lisbon Treaty effectively regurgitated by bureaucratic fiat the constitution that was rejected by voters in France and the Netherlands and was set to be defeated by the British. In Britain, Parliament has labored for years to pass a law that would criminalize insulting Islam. Then, too, one of the first actions the Brown government took after entering office last summer was to prohibit its members from talking about "Islamic terrorism."

As in Europe, so too in Israel, the Left goes to extraordinary lengths to undermine democracy in the name of democracy. In just one recent example, this week leftist law professor Mordechai Kremnitzer warned the Knesset not to pass a law enabling a referendum on any future partition of Jerusalem or surrender of the Golan Heights. As Kremnitzer sees it, "If the verdict of a referendum is determined by a small majority that includes Arab voters, then a certain sector whose view was not accepted is liable to attempt to reject the legitimacy of the referendum and may fight against it violently."

That "certain sector" Kremnitzer was referring to, of course, are the Jews who oppose the partition of Jerusalem and the surrender of the Golan Heights, by a large majority.

Kremnitzer's argument is both ridiculous and self-serving. It is ridiculous because he knows that in 2004, Likud members held a referendum on the government's planned withdrawal from Gaza and northern Samaria. Then-prime minister Ariel Sharon pledged to abide by the results of his party's vote. But when 65 percent of Likud members rejected his plan, he ignored them. And the public's reaction, while strong, was completely nonviolent.

The only force that used sustained force and intimidation in the run-up to the withdrawal from Gaza and northern Samaria was the government. It deployed tens of thousands of policemen to break up protests and bar protesters from travelling to lawful demonstrations, and jailed protesters without trial for months. In its overtly anti-democratic and legally dubious actions, the government was ably defended by Kremnitzer and his colleagues, who either stood by as the civil liberties of the protesters were trampled or enthusiastically defended the

government's abandonment of democratic values by calling the protesters "anti-democratic."

Indeed, in his testimony Wednesday, Kremnitzer parroted that argument by claiming that referendums "are a recipe for harming democracy."

Aside from being factually and theoretically wrong, Kremnitzer's argument - like the arguments of the EU bureaucracy that sidelined Europe's citizenry by passing the Lisbon Treaty - is transparently self-serving. Like his EU counterparts, he knows full well that his support for an Israeli surrender of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights is a minority view. So his actual concern is not the health of Israeli democracy, but the power of the political Left to determine policy against the interests and wishes of the public.

The second reason that the Left acquiesces to the silencing of speech is because its members are just as concerned about the threat of Islamic supremacy as their political opponents. But unlike their opponents, they are too cowardly to do anything about it. This point was made clear, too, in the wake of the release of Wilders' film.

This week a delegation of Dutch Christian and Muslim religious leaders travelled to Cairo to speak to religious Islamic leaders. Speaking to Radio Netherlands, Bas Plaisier, who heads the Dutch Protestant Church, said the delegation's mission was to "limit the possible consequences" of Wilders' film. The consequences he was referring to, of course, are

the prospects of violent Muslim rioting and attacks against the Dutch and against Christians worldwide.

Radio Netherlands reported that Plaisier "has been receiving disturbing reports from Dutch nationals all over the world, including ones about fear of repercussions among Christians in Sudan, the Middle East and Indonesia."

So the real reason the Dutch Protestant Church decries the film is not because it thinks Wilders is wrong, but because its leaders believe that Wilders is absolutely right. It's just that unlike Wilders, who has placed his life in danger to express his views, they are too cowardly to defend themselves, and so, they travel to Cairo to genuflect to religious leaders who daily oversee the preaching of hate and Islamic supremacy in Egyptian mosques. They go on bended knee to coo before those who coerced the institutionalization of Egypt's religious persecution of its Christian Coptic minority and its silencing of liberal critics of the Mubarak regime and the Muslim Brotherhood.

And that is the rub. By squelching debate - out of loathing for its non-leftist political opponents and out of fear of jihadists and the regimes that promote them - the West as a whole undermines not only its own values and foundational creeds. It also undermines the non-jihadists of the Islamic world, who, if ever empowered, would work to promote a form of Islam that does not respond to challenge with violence but rather with the discourse of reason and mutual respect for differences of opinion. .

Arabs Must Take a Long, Self-Critical Look in the Mirror

By Emilio Kerim Dabul The New York Daily News April 7, 2008

There was a time centuries ago in Arab countries when intellectual introspection was common and the culture produced searching, self-critical scholarship in various arenas.

That time is gone. Today, brave and questioning souls like Irshad Manji, who calls for an Islamic Reformation, receive death threats. Without the ability to look inward, Arab blame for problems is projected outward - meaning, at Israel and the U.S. That is very dangerous for the world.

As an Arab-American, recent events have reminded me in very stark terms why introspection needs to return to the Arab world in a big way, as quickly as possible, as a prerequisite for anything resembling peace, in the Middle East or elsewhere, to be a real possibility.

First, look at what Fatah just attempted to do regarding American victims of Palestinian terrorism. Because of the 1990 Anti-Terrorism Act, numerous lawsuits have been brought against Fatah and other Palestinian terrorist groups that have injured or killed Americans while in Israel. Recently, the State Department decided it might intervene in some of these judgments, which had found in favor of the defendants and held Fatah and other Palestinian

groups liable for millions of dollars in damages, because Fatah had complained that these judgments would bankrupt them and that this in turn would hurt the peace process.

Yes, you heard right. Fatah complained that they were being held financially liable for injuring and killing Americans in Israel, acts for which they had previously claimed responsibility!

And our own State Department wanted to support them in this complaint, supposedly in the interest of peace, by having these judgments nullified. Joseph Heller, the author of "Catch 22," couldn't have come up with a more surreal scenario.

Fortunately, advocates like the Endowment for Middle East Truth, made noise, and as a result of that pressure, the State Department has backed down for now. But where is the proper sense of shame that might stop a group like Fatah from lodging such a complaint to begin with?

The only explanation is that by having such a pathological, externally focused sense of blame, aimed exclusively at Americans and Jews, no such sense of reasoning or decency applies.

The recent massacre of the Yeshiva students in Jerusalem by a Palestinian Muslim fits the same

pattern. Gaza celebrated - yes, celebrated - the cold-blooded and ethnically motivated murders of these religious students, most of whom were teenagers.

Why are we, as Arabs and Arab-Americans, not lining the streets in Ramallah and all the way to New York to decry this sort of barbarism?

Let me say unequivocally that I am ashamed. And I am angry. Nothing, nothing in the world justifies these sorts of actions. Tell me, when have you ever heard of Israelis celebrating the killing of Palestinians?

Yes, there are a few glimmers of progress. Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah has issued a call for interfaith dialogue between Christians, Jews and Muslims. And The New York Times actually called Hamas out on its murderous, anti-Semitic rhetoric.

The alternatives are grim

By Yossi Alpher BitterLemons.com March 31, 2008

Hamas appears to have survived the boycott imposed by the Quartet, Israel and some Arab states, at least to the extent of generating widespread interest in a reassessment of the efficacy of the boycott policy. The US State Department website recently posted a suggestion that American diplomats reexamine whether engaging Hamas is good or bad for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. PLO and Hamas representatives met in Yemen to discuss the possibility of reconstituting a Palestinian unity government (the talks proved abortive). And a growing Israeli lobby composed of figures from the left and the right is advocating an attempt by Israel to talk to Hamas.

That the boycott has failed is painfully obvious. The economic deprivation of Gaza has not brought Hamas to its knees. Hamas is more popular than ever, not only in Gaza but in the West Bank as well. There, the other half of the western/Israeli strategy--bringing prosperity and stability to the population in order that the contrast between the two geographic parts of Palestine persuade the population to support the Abbas/Fayyad leadership and reject Hamas--has also failed. Palestinians in the West Bank enjoy painfully little prosperity and stability, and where they do the experience has not turned them against Hamas or made them enthusiastic supporters of President Mahmoud Abbas and the peace process he is identified with.

By the by, these developments warrant two insights concerning the conflict. First, the failure of the strategy of favoring the West Bank over Gaza to make the peace process attractive is but the latest in a 40-year series of abortive Israeli carrot and stick policies that mistakenly assumed it was possible to significantly influence Palestinian political behavior through economic means. You'd think we'd have learned.

Secondly, Palestinian opinion polls, and particularly the latest Palestinian Center for Policy

But these are drops in the bucket, not a rising tide. The centuries-old downward spiral of tyranny, poverty, fanaticism and finger-pointing is the rule, not the exception in most Arab countries.

At this point in Arab history, we must finally renounce these fatally flawed tendencies to blame everyone but ourselves. As Arab-Americans, we must lead the way, away from groups like the Council on American-Islamic Relations - which consistently claims big, bad America is the oppressor and poor Arabs are almost always the hapless victims.

Let us begin anew the path toward our own glorious Renaissance abandoned long ago, and pursue the higher road that will be ours when we finally look more deeply and critically at ourselves.

and Survey Research poll with its striking findings regarding rising support for Hamas and its leaders as opposed to Fateh and Abbas, have become a potent instrument for influencing policy. This is not always a good thing: opinion polls, assuming they are accurate, are a snapshot reflecting the public's reactions to specific events but not necessarily its inclination to respond to inspired leadership or breakthrough developments or, for that matter, the best policy options.

Were Abbas and PM Ehud Olmert to produce a dramatic new framework peace agreement tomorrow, would this enable Abbas to rally Palestinian public opinion and win the day over Hamas? Probably not--after all, Hamas is not likely to voluntarily give up power and might not permit free elections in Gaza if the objective is to vote it out of power. Yet precisely such a development is the desired corollary or end-product of the Quartet/Israeli/Abbas strategy and in this sense the strategy appears to have been flawed from the outset in its understanding of Hamas and that movement's aims. But a new peace agreement has not (yet?) been unveiled, hence we cannot unequivocally deem this approach a total failure. (In Israel, incidentally, the public would probably reject an Olmert-Abbas peace "breakthrough" at the polls; but that is another matter touching largely on Olmert's perceived shortcomings as a leader.)

Yet even without the test of a peace breakthrough end-product or payoff, the strategy appears to be coming apart at the seams. Broad international, Israeli and Palestinian concern over the apparent failure of the current strategy appears to be growing. Hamas in Gaza has not been discredited; Abbas' leadership has failed yet again; Israeli outposts and checkpoints have combined with Fateh corruption, Fayyad government security lacunae and American mismanagement to give the peace process a bad name. The latest Israeli security concessions in

the West Bank are not likely to make a difference. Hamas, with Syrian and Iranian backing, can be counted on to sabotage progress.

It is indeed time to look seriously at alternatives. We need a new strategy, but the prospects are grim. Are Israel's best options military or diplomatic? Do they lie in Damascus or Gaza City? Certainly, we should beware of dramatic Israeli policy changes that

further weaken Abbas, as long as there is any chance at all of a peace breakthrough.

Yossi Alpher is coeditor of the bitterlemons family of internet publications. He is former director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University and a former special adviser to PM Ehud Barak.

Teaching violent intolerance

By Suzanne Fields *The Washington Times*

April 7, 2008

'Tis education forms the common mind. Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined.- Alexander Pope

Parents, teachers, preachers and politicians have always understood the wisdom Alexander Pope boiled down to aphorism in the 18th century. What and how you teach the child determines his character and curiosity as a man or woman. Like plants, children require nourishment and demand care, and depriving them of the oxygen of countervailing ideas stunts their growth and warps their minds.

Alexander Pope is not on many reading lists in the Middle East, but there's abundant evidence, played out in Iraq and Iran and Palestine every day, that the Islamists have engraved these two lines of Pope's poetry on their culture. The result is in the textbooks of their schools, perverting knowledge and turning children into what one Middle Eastern scholar calls "tiny ticking time bombs." The cartoons aimed at small children, available on the Internet, are terrifying.

One depicts a little boy and George W. Bush as puppets. St. George he is not, but the little boy in the cartoon wields the sword of Islam, swearing at tender age to reap vengeance on the American president. When the president asks where his parents are, the child replies that the president has killed his father in Iraq, his mother in Lebanon, and his brothers in Gaza. When the president invites him to visit the White House for treats and toys, the boy tells him there is no White House because it has been converted into a mosque. Then the boy stabs the president, over and over again. The fantasy wish is fulfilled.

Unlike a fairy tale, using fictional characters to liberate a child's imagination to deal with issues of good and evil, this Islamist cartoon incites primitive blood lust. It's a theme not all that unusual in the propaganda, tracked by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), which monitors and translates newspapers, magazines, radio and television broadcasts and other media across the Middle East.

A new study of Iranian textbooks conducted by Freedom House reveals a consistent and pernicious doctrine of discrimination against the "infidel" world, a doctrine especially virulent against the United States and Israel but extending as well to include Europe and Russia. The survey examines the content of 95 compulsory textbooks covering the

sciences, humanities and religious curriculum as taught in eleven grades. These books discourage critical questioning; the harsh Islamic political order is "sacred" and to oppose it thwarts "divine will."

The study confirms the findings of an Israeli think tank that demonstrate how Iranian textbooks encourage martyrdom in children of tender years. The children are encouraged as early as the second grade to follow the malignant teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini, who led the Islamist revolution in Iran, urging Muslims to make use of "the passionate and the martyrdom-seeking youths." Iran is depicted as the model Muslim state and the protector of Palestinian rights. The Palestinians themselves are attentive students. The Palestinian Authority continues to publish textbooks teaching children in Gaza and the West Bank that a legitimate State of Israel does not exist. Western values of learning, tolerance of opposing viewpoints, democracy and brotherhood are roundly mocked and ridiculed.

Mahmoud Abbas managed to delete some of the hate language, but after Hamas came to power the emphasis on armed jihad was restored. A poem in a 12th-grade textbook is typical: "I swear by Al-Aqsa Mosque and those plains/I shall not return the sword to its sheath and shall not lay down arms."

"Palestinian Textbooks: From Arafat to Abbas and Hamas" follows studies of textbooks used in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran. This study is published by the American Jewish Committee and the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education. These studies show why the peace process in Palestine so often seems a vain and idle dream. Politicians and diplomats continue to talk of hope and a two-state solution. Palestinian children are taught only the audacity of violence.

None of these facts surprise, but they draw attention to the powerful indoctrination pervasive throughout the Middle East and show how changing the violent reality in the region will be a long and arduous task. Political solutions will be the easy part; first the culture must be changed. Violent cartoons against the West and disinformation purveyed in textbooks produce a forest of bent twigs.

Alexander Pope had another aphorism useful to temper expectations of the easy pursuit of peace: "Some people will never learn anything because they understand everything too soon."

Martyrdom and national identity

By Bassem Eid The Jerusalem Post March 5, 2008

Scholars have extensively researched the concept of nation for more than a century, and different definitions have emerged. Most of them, share the idea of that the nation is a "construction," as opposed to the idea that most national movements pretend to define themselves as continuation of an ancestral past. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an "imagined political community," meaning that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their nations." Ernest Gellner, puts it in the following terms: "Nations as natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent...political destiny are a myth; nationalism which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality."

Moreover, nations should not be considered as static, or an unchanging society entity, but rather a dynamic process depending on the specific historical context, continually redefining it. In this context, I want to outline certain elements of the Palestinian national identity which had emerged under the context of the Aksa intifada. Rashid Khalidi, the author of *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, traces the construction process of the Palestinian national identity. Firstly, before World War I, a national identity was shared by a restricted circle of urban educated elite. This circle itself formed a new elite composed by teachers, clerks, government officials and businessmen, during the Ottoman rule. The Palestinian identity, however, "competed and overlapped with Ottomans and Arabism, as well as older religious, local, and family loyalties." The shocks of War World I deepened a sense of common fate, "making it a primary category of identity for many, if not most, Palestinians."

In addition, the struggle against the British and Zionists during the Mandate helped to deepen this "sense of common fate," although certain differences persisted between urban areas, well-to do, and poor, and literate and illiterate.

Finally, the events of 1948 produced a "universally shared experience" - dispossession, the feeling that they were not masters of their own fate, defeat and exile. Khalidi is of the mind that "[o]n the Palestinian popular level the defeats, the dislocations, the dispossession, the flight and the expulsion...ultimately resulted in the universalization of a uniform Palestinian identity."

Since the beginning of the formation of the Palestinian national consciousness resistance played an important role. It constitutes a source for a sense of common experience and ideal. A significant example for this is what the Palestinian declaration

of independence stands for: "The massive national uprising, the intifada, now intensifying in cumulative scope and power on occupied Palestinian territories, as well as the unflinching resistance of the refugee camps outside the homeland, have elevated awareness of the Palestinian truth and right into still higher realms of comprehension and actuality. Now at last the curtain has been dropped around a whole epoch of prevarication and negation. The intifada has set siege to the mind of official Israel, which has for too long relied exclusively upon myth and terror to deny Palestinian existence altogether. Because of the intifada and its revolutionary irreversible impulse, the history of Palestine has therefore arrived at a decisive juncture." Since the beginning of the Intifada al-Aksa, as long as the repression tightened, the sense of resistance as a source for collective identification was reinforced and deepened. In March 2002, the BBC declared that when "despair runs high...so does a spirit of resistance."

Clarifying are the figures presented by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research: 87% of the Palestinian population support the armed attacks against Israeli soldiers, 86% against settlers, and 53% against civilians. Moreover, two thirds of the population believes that armed confrontations have helped Palestinians to achieve their national rights. It is worth mentioning that the vast majority support a mutual cessation of violence, in which both sides stop using arms against each other.

Nonetheless, resistance is perceived as not only "a right and duty," but as a "remedy for the oppressed" and a means through which Palestinians should express their "human dignity."

On April 3, 2002, within the context of the Israeli invasion to Palestinian territories, the PA, released a statement where it expresses the idea of resistance as a source for massive national mobilization: "The Leadership calls on our masses to organize their ranks in a long-term resistance to this occupation and to mobilize all potentials at all locations and to revitalize all popular and national energies and to unify the ranks of all our institutions and national forces..." Within Palestinian society there are voices which try to promote non-violent resistance, arguing that it is the "best form of resistance" and it should include both Palestinians and Israelis in order to "rise together against evil."

The prominent Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, expressed his concordance with initiatives that adopt non-violent ways of struggle, which he thought "is certain to take control of the already too militarized intifada, center it nationally on ending occupation and settlements, and steer Palestinians toward statehood and peace."

Some important Palestinian personalities called their people to "end militant attacks on Israel and

resort to a peaceful, wide-scale popular uprising." However, Ramzy Baroud, editor-in-chief of the Palestinian Chronicle, considers that "[n]onviolence as an alternative method of resistance is doomed for failure" and that the "savagery of the enemy is what in fact determines the level of resistance."

At any rate, violent or nonviolent resistance, apart of its pragmatic meaning, adopted a symbolic one; it is always addressed in nationalistic terms, expected to mobilize and unite Palestinians around their common national aim, namely to put an end to the Israeli occupation. Another central factor in shaping the Palestinian national identity is the idea of martyrdom. Palestinians perceive martyrs not only those who commit suicide bombings, but to all of those who died within the context of the struggle against the Israeli occupation. Since the beginning of the Aksa intifada, Palestinian figures indicate that 2,736 Palestinians were killed in clashes with Israeli security forces and 152 Palestinians - men and women - committed suicide taking with them numerous Israeli civilians - men, women and children.

Eyad El Sarraj, a psychiatrist, founder and director of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, and a human rights activist, summarizes the process through which suicide bombing and becoming a martyr constitutes an honorable act: "The people who are committing the suicide bombing in this intifada are the children of the first intifada - people who witnessed so many traumas as children. So as they grew up, their own identity merged with the national identity of humiliation and defeat, and they avenge that defeat at both the

personal and national levels... During the first intifada, studies showed that 55 percent of the children had witnessed their fathers being humiliated or beaten by Israeli soldiers. The psychological impact of this is stunning. The father, normally the authority figure, comes to be seen as somebody who is helpless, who can't even protect himself - let alone his children. So children became more militant, more violent." Sarraj considers that the symbol of power is the martyr, and "[i]f you ask a child in Gaza today what he wants to be when he grows up, he doesn't say he wants to be a doctor or a soldier or an engineer. He says he wants to be a martyr."

In another article by Sarraj, the nationalistic element in martyrdom is presented. He considers that in every country citizens who fight for their country are considered brave men, in the Palestinian side, those who die for their country will be remembered as martyrs.

Taking into consideration that the Palestinian society is facing an ongoing oppressive occupation, its sources for common identification are inevitably resulting from the common experience of oppression, humiliation and suffering. Within this context, resistance and martyrdom became not only the act itself of resisting or becoming a martyr, but also symbolic elements of common identification through which Palestinians define themselves: they constitute a proud resistant nation, whose members are ready to give their life for the national cause.

The writer is the founder and the director of Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group (PHRMG) based in east Jerusalem.

Mideast mayhem By The Baltimore Sun editorial February 29, 2008

Rocket fire into southern Israel and Israel's retaliatory attacks into the Gaza Strip are escalating into something perilously close to a border war. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who is expected in the region next week, has demanded an end to the unprovoked Hamas rocket fire. But unless an effort is made to broker a cease-fire, the violence will overshadow her trip and squelch any reason to talk about a peace deal. The Palestinian architects of this mayhem predictably have scored a tactical win: They have succeeded in intensifying the scope of Israel's military involvement - at the expense of their own people - and underscored the inability of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to do anything about it.

And while Israel's strategic airstrikes have resulted in the deaths of at least a dozen militants and destroyed the office of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, Palestinian civilians, including children, have been killed as well. An Israeli college student suffered a fatal shrapnel wound in the city of Sderot this week, with most residents there living a dodge-and-duck existence as a daily barrage of rockets rain down on them. Ms. Rice can't possibly advance

peace talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Mr. Abbas in this environment. Mr. Abbas has called for an end to the merciless rocket fire from Gaza, but it's an empty demand because he has no influence with its Hamas sponsors. Mr. Olmert, as we would expect, has said Israel's airstrikes will spare no one in the Hamas organization, and his defense minister had warned of a possible military incursion into the Gaza Strip, which would be playing into Hamas' hands.

President Bush's plan - push - to resolve some aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate before he leaves office doesn't have a chance of moving forward if the situation in the Gaza Strip is not addressed. And that means dealing in some way with Hamas leaders who have controlled the area since last June, when its fighters routed supporters of Mr. Abbas. Ms. Rice should reach out to U.S. allies in the Arab world for help in intervening with Hamas despite the skepticism of some voiced recently that the two-state solution - the bedrock of the U.S. peace plan - will ever materialize. It may not be how she planned to spend her week in the region, but it's doubtful that she can avoid it.