

Like it or not, the Temple Mount is key to Israeli-Palestinian peace

By Marvin Hier and Abraham Cooper The Jerusalem Post October 6, 2009

Here we go again. As Jews celebrate in their tens of thousands the festival of Booths, Succot, religious extremists like Sheikh Raed Salah incite Palestinian masses to recapture Jerusalem with "blood and fire." Not to be outdone, the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah rushed in to pour fuel on the fire as it protests a "plan by Jews to perform religious rituals" on the Temple Mount, and called on the international community to "force Israel to put off its attempts to take over Jerusalem."

So as Israel struggles to stop the stone throwers' verbal assaults, and the next spate of resolutions, it's worth reminding the world that ever since the Six Day War in 1967, when Israel captured the Old City of Jerusalem, millions of people have safely streamed to the Western Wall to offer their prayers and insert hand written supplications to the Almighty. While most visitors shedding their tears adjacent to Judaism's holiest site - the Temple Mount - are Jews, not all pilgrims are. Witness Pope John Paul II inserting his own kvittel (written prayer) within the Wall's cracks; pilgrims from Africa, tourists from Indonesia, Swamis from India, Evangelicals from the Americas, Buddhists from across Asia - all come and go to the Wall.

The only price of admission: donning a cardboard yarmulke or scarf. Presidents and prime ministers flock to the Western Wall as well, armed with the latest great hope for peace in the Holy Land. From the Oslo Accords to the Quartet Middle East road map for peace, every official, regardless of religious denomination, or lack of one, finds a welcome private moment of silent prayer or reflection at the Western Wall.

And yet earlier this week, in the midst of the Jewish High Holy Days, French tourists on the Temple Mount were pelted by irate Palestinian worshipers who "mistook" them for Jews. And the stones, and orchestrated crescendo of violence have continued unabated. During this seemingly annual exercise, has any diplomat, foreign minister, religious icon, or political pundit asked himself, or better yet the Palestinians, one simple question - why? Why can we all pray in peace at the Western Wall, but the very notion of a Jew praying on the site of Solomon's Temple begets only violence, denial and threats?

The centrality of Jerusalem to the Jewish people was never lost on friend or foe.

Two thousand years ago the Romans, after destroying the Temple, plowed under its remains and banned Jews from returning. Emperor Hadrian tried to bury the very name of City of Peace, renaming Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina. Later, Christians, for theological reasons, extended that painful ban and it was only conquering Muslim leaders who recognized the right of Jews to "return" to live in this small area of land.

Indeed, the Christian patriarchs unsuccessfully lobbied conquering Caliph Omar in the seventh century, and again when Saladin drove out the Crusaders in the twelfth, to prevent Jews from living in or returning to Jerusalem after the Christians had expelled them from the city. Such efforts by Christians were to be repeated and denied by various Muslim authorities for hundreds of years.

How to explain Muslim attitudes over the centuries? Because the Koran itself recognized Solomon's Temple as a "Great place of prayer," and Muslim leaders saw no theological problem with Jews praying adjacent to the Dome of the Rock and the nearby Al Aqsa Mosque. Indeed, in its 1924 guide to Al-Haram Al- Sharif (the Temple Mount) the Supreme Muslim Council wrote "Its identity with the site of Solomon's Temple is beyond dispute," adding this quote from the Book of Samuel: "This, too, is the spot according to the universal belief on which David built there an altar unto the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings." That language would remain until the 1950s.

So why are things so dramatically different in 2009?

Simply put, generations of Palestinians, "educated" by Yasser Arafat and company, have been taught not believe there ever was a Solomon's Temple. Textbooks and Palestinian media all repeat the self-delusionary canard denying any historic Jewish continuity or legitimacy in the Holy Land. Indeed, president Bill Clinton was reportedly shocked when Arafat called the Western Wall - the Jewish people's holiest place - "a Muslim shrine" and the Palestinian leader's chief negotiator at the make-or-break Camp David peace talks denied the ruins of Solomon's temple lay beneath the Dome of the Rock.

Tragically, ever since Israel magnanimously turned over religious control of the Temple Mount to the Muslim Wakf in June 1967, successive

generations have been taught that Israelis are Nazi-like invaders, illegitimate neighbors and enemies.

And "friends of peace," far from urging Palestinians to deal with reality, help feed the delusion of denial. Witness the World Council of Churches, the largest umbrella group of Protestants, which recently launched the so-called Bern Initiative at its "Promised Land" conference in Switzerland. Its answer to Israel's alleged "apartheid situation" in the Holy Land is to reinterpret the Bible by differentiating between "biblical history and biblical stories . . . as well to distinguish between the Israel of the Bible and the modern State of Israel."

The current violence and rabble rousing by the Palestinians won't make it any easier for US President Barack Obama, but the first thing he must

do is not stop illegal nursery and bathroom add-ons in east Jerusalem but admonish the Palestinian leadership to stop denying the legitimacy of the Jewish people.

Simply put: There can be no peace in the Holy Land without the Arab and Muslim world acknowledging what their Holy Book and ancestors recognized as the historic link of the Jewish people to its land and its Holy sites. Unless and until that happens, there will be no peace in our time.

Marvin Hier is the founder and dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Abraham Cooper is the associate dean of the center.

Please join Suburban Orthodox, Ner Tamid and the Baltimore Zionist District in welcoming Dr. Daniel Gordis of the Shalem Center in Jerusalem to Baltimore on November 13 – 14. His topic is “Not a Moment’s regret: Reflections of an Unabashed Zionist” on Saturday night November 14 at 7:00 pm at Suburban Orthodox Synagogue, 7504 Seven Mile Lane, Pikesville – Free, sponsored the Berman family!

The Rise of Nuclear Iran: How Tehran defies the West

By Ambassador Dore Gold The Henry Jackson Society October 12, 2009

By kind invitation of Patrick Mercer MP, Dore Gold, Dore Gold, Israel's former UN Ambassador and special advisor to Prime Minister Netanyahu, spoke of the very real threat posed to global security by Iran's nuclear ambitions. He explained how a nuclear armed Iran poses a very different threat to other nuclear armed states. The world's biggest sponser of international terrorism, a nuclear armed Iran would provide an umbrella of protection to numerous terrorist organisations, greatly reducing the ability of states to deal with these threats effectively. The meeting was held at the Houses of Parliament on 12 October 2009.

This subject, the rise of nuclear Iran, relates to the security of all of us. Iran's ambitions, Iran's missile programme, Iran's nuclear programme, relate to the security not just of Israel but of the entire Middle East and I would say the world.

Let me begin with a fundamental question: Why do we suspect Iran? Why do we think Iran is developing nuclear weapons? When the October talks in Geneva were about to begin there were Western diplomats who were still saying, "Let Iran convince us that this is a civilian nuclear programme".

Why is it that I don't buy that Iran's nuclear programme is purely civil? The easiest answer to that is the fact that Iran today has the third largest reserves of oil in the world and the second largest

reserves of natural gas in the world, so why the desire to develop nuclear power to provide electricity?

Nonetheless, I'm going to accept half the Iranian argument because in 2006, the Iranian energy minister noted that Iran is not investing sufficiently in the maintenance of its oil fields, and a lot of that has to do with Western sanctions on Iran. As a result, he predicted that by 2015 the decline of the Iranian oil fields will lead to a situation where Iran no longer exports oil and all production will be solely for internal purposes. So if we take his argument, one could understand that maybe they have to turn to nuclear energy. It also turns out that Iran has domestic uranium ore that they can mine, so if they were seeking a nuclear alternative to petroleum, they would have uranium as a source of electricity.

Why, even if we accept the argument that their oil fields are declining, is that still a phoney argument? Because it turns out that if you look at the size of the uranium deposits in Iran, they aren't that great. Those working in the US state department have estimated that if Iranians built six reactors for domestic production, their uranium reserves would be sufficient to run those reactors for just 12 years. You don't build a whole industry if all you're going to get is 12 years out of it.

So my argument is that the uranium in Iran may not be sufficient for producing electricity, but it is

certainly sufficient for manufacturing of atomic bombs.

Let me add one other element. The concern of the international community since the disclosure of the first uranium enrichment plant in 2002 at Natanz, has been the question of why Iran has to enrich uranium domestically. Most countries with civilian nuclear programmes don't enrich their own uranium, they import enriched uranium; Spain and Sweden for example. Indeed, if all its stock is sufficient for just 12 years with six reactors, they're going to have to import anyway, so why go through this expensive process now of building enrichment reactors? Again, all this points to a different intent. It has to do with developing an atomic weapons programme.

A number of other pieces of information have come together that should cause a great deal of alarm in people who follow this subject. First of all the quantities of uranium that have already been enriched. At the time of US elections in 2008, the IAEA said Iran had produced 839kg of low-enriched uranium. By August 2009, that number had reached 1,508kg. What you need for an atomic bomb is 700kg of low-enriched uranium which you put back into modified centrifuges to reach the higher-enriched weapons grade uranium. That 700kg of low-enriched uranium will yield about 20-25kg of weapons-grade uranium, meaning that Iran can now produce two atomic bombs.

The second element that has us concerned has to do with the sensitive information the IAEA has been disclosing, provided to it by various Western intelligence agencies. For instance, the CIA laptop containing detailed drawings of how to build a nuclear warhead and optimum altitudes for flight. You can say that's information the CIA put forward for its own reasons, but the IAEA, in 2008, lectured to ambassadors about that information and other information it received. Some of you may have heard of the secret annex to that report that was not disclosed to the public. I can only read a few lines: "The agency has information, known as the 'alleged studies', that the Ministry of Defence of Iran has conducted, and may still be conducting a comprehensive programme aimed at the development of a nuclear payload, to be delivered using the Shahab 3 missile system"

The Shahab 3 is a 1,300km-range missile with the capacity to hit Saudi Arabia and Israel and here the IAEA is saying that Iranians seem to be designing how to outfit the warhead of that missile with nuclear weapons. We are also seeing in Iran the development of a robust ballistic missile system that goes far beyond what many people believe.

When you put these elements together, it all points to a full-blown nuclear weapons programme, and nothing else. I think what's also a concern is the fact that Iran is not a "status-quo" country. There

are countries in the world that are happy with what they have, that aren't interested in expansion or intruding on their neighbours and basically just want to be left on their own. Then there are states that are active, that are actively intervening in the affairs of their neighbours and have interests well beyond their own borders and Iran is really in that latter category. It is Iran that is engaged in the insurgency in Afghanistan, providing the Taliban, who were their enemies 10 years ago with weaponry and other forms of assistance to fight US and UK forces in that country. It is Iran that has been engaged in Iraq, particularly through the Shiite militias in southern Iraq. It is Iran which declared, earlier this year that Bahrain, an independent kingdom, is a province of Iran. And that came from individuals very close to the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Iran is active in Lebanon; it created and sustains Hezbollah. It's involved in the Gaza Strip, in Egypt, Sudan and Yemen.

So if you take the fact that Iran is one of the largest supporters of international terrorism today, and you team that up with the nuclear capabilities that I've been describing, you have a security situation which the West has not yet seen. This is an entirely new situation that we have to anticipate and understand. And it makes the handling of the Iranian issue all the more urgent.

What makes the problem all the more difficult is that we have been facing in the last few years a number of influential organisations and individuals who have been purposefully understating the problem. First and foremost among these is the US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) from December 2007.

It stated, "We assess with high confidence that until the fall of 2003, Iran was working to develop nuclear weapons, but we judge that in the fall of 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons programme."

When the US NIE says the programme's been halted, most people think that's the problem solved. The problem with the report is that it deals only with certain aspects of the programme. Now with hindsight, looking at recent reports of a secret uranium enrichment site constructed near Qom, these words should be outrageous to us. When President Obama disclosed this new facility, senior members of his administration gave a briefing that they put on the website saying, "We have known about this secret facility for several years".

That takes us back to 2007 at least, and yet the NIE said that uranium enrichment work had halted. In other words, the US probably knew about the Qom facility, and yet chose to pretend it was finished.

This is just one example of how this whole problem has not been properly dealt with. We were even told that the supreme leader had issued a fatwa

declaring the acquisition of nuclear weapons to be immoral. So the message was, be calm and don't worry. Yet there is no nuclear fatwa. I asked a top Iranian scholar in the US, and he could not find the fatwa. This is a falsehood, but it's another example of the falsehoods that have been misleading people on this issue.

I want to ask you the following question: What does it mean to have an Iran with nuclear missiles? Most people think of it like Russia and the US having nuclear weapons. You press a button to launch; they work as a deterrent and so on. I have a different, more realistic scenario. I think we have the problem that the world's biggest supporter of international terrorism is about to get a nuclear umbrella, and that means that terrorist groups will have a protective umbrella over them.

The whole point of George W. Bush's decision to remove the Taliban after 9/11 was to send a very clear message: "You attack the American homeland and we will take down your regime".

This is probably why the US is so determined to stay in Afghanistan in spite of all the difficulties. But fast forward to 2012. Iran has operational nuclear weapons that can strike deep into Europe, and eventually towards the Eastern seaboard of the US. Will the US, UK and NATO as a whole have the same freedom of manoeuvre to say to states that support terrorism, "We will take you down if you attack us?" Will, the US Congress authorise sending forces abroad against a state armed with nuclear weapons? In other words the entire balance in the War on Terror shifts, because the state that is the largest global sponsor of terrorism today now has nuclear capabilities.

One further, crucial mistake people make is to believe that Iran's protective umbrella will only extend to Shi'ite terror groups. But Iran supports the Taliban in Afghanistan. When Al-Qaeda had to find new sanctuary after the 2001 invasion, it went to two places immediately: Pakistan and Iran, and there was a huge al-Qaeda presence in Iran, and there is still an al-Qaeda presence today.

In Azerbaijan, which is a Shi'ite state, there's a Sunni insurgency fighting the Shi'ite regime, but for reasons of geopolitics, Iran supports the Sunni insurgency against the Shi'ite government of Azerbaijan because it's pro-American.

What I am trying to suggest is that this nuclear umbrella of Iran will unfurl and will be able to provide protection, not just to Shi'ite Hezbollah, but to Sunni organisations such as al-Qaeda and Hamas.

In terms of how this threat is viewed not just in the West, but in the Arab world, for instance Saudi Arabia, I have no doubt that if the doors were closed, the Saudis would agree with most of what I have just said. People forget that in 1996, there was an organisation called Hezbollah al-Hejaz, or 'Saudi Hezbollah' operating inside Saudi territory, which

killed 19 US airmen helping train the Saudi air force, and a number of Saudis in an attack.

I believe there is a lot of common interest in the Middle East to see Iran halted. I personally believe this is best facilitated through discussion with Israelis and regional security forces, but we shouldn't make this all very public. It should be handled quietly.

In fact, a major problem comes from Europe in the form of EU funding for NGOs that are involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, but which pursue agendas which are incompatible with member state policies. I like transparency, but there is an extensive amount of EU intervention in our conflict that is incompatible with the security of Israel.

As for Russia, for its own commercial reasons, it has decided to complete the shared reactor at Bushir that was begun with the Germans during the time of the Shah. The Russians claim they have an arrangement with the Iranians to supply them with uranium and to take out the used fuel rods from that reactor so they cannot be reprocessed to produce plutonium. I simply would not rely on Iran to be honest on this.

If the international community doesn't act, could Israel act alone, without the US? I will say that Israel has been thinking about this problem for a very long time. A country does not develop advanced satellite technology if it's just concerned with monitoring Hezbollah operatives across the border. The Israeli air force has been training for action and all options are on the table, but I would say the official position is that there is hope, even at this late date, that the key players in the international community will take action. This is not just a security interest for Israel, but the Arab states and I would say Europe as well.

So how can we stop Iran without military force? Iran is dependent upon imports for 40 per cent of its consumption. If the EU and US said, "You cannot do business in the EU and US if you sell gasoline to Iran," that would drastically reduce the gasoline supply, push up the prices internally and destabilise the regime. That's effective action that doesn't require a Security Council resolution; that doesn't require Russian acquiescence and that doesn't require the firing of a single shot. What it requires is the political will.

I will finish by asking you to remember North Korea. In 2002, it suddenly made a decision to evict the IAEA nuclear monitors and tear the seals off their nuclear reactors. By 2006, it conducted its first nuclear test and in 2009 we saw the second. In other words, North Korea succeeded in breaking out of the IAEA's limitations and conducting tests.

Iran followed all this closely and unfortunately, what they are internalising today is that the West has little will. In July, the G8 declared Iran had until September to put forward a serious proposal on their nuclear programme. The Iranians sent a five-

page memo which frankly was mostly drivel. Now the deadline has passed and nothing has happened. The next thing that has happened has been the disclosure of the secret nuclear facility at Qom. So what have the Iranians learned? They have learned that they can break every deadline and every barrier and nothing happens.

You might think that Iran's behaviour at present is brazen and risky. It looks much less brazen and risky if you recall how often Iran has already defied the West and got away with it. It is my belief that Iran is now not far from the short sprint to developing weapons-grade uranium.

Painful Mideast Truth: Force Trumps Diplomacy

By Ethan Bronner The New York Times October 20, 2009

As the Obama administration tries to broker a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a dark truth lurking: force has produced clearer results in this dispute than talk.

The results of the violence may prove short-lived — and possibly counterproductive; condemnation of Israel and Hamas is likely to grow after the United Nations Human Rights Council voted Friday to endorse a report detailing evidence of war crimes in Gaza.

But the reality that war can work is playing a crucial role in the region's festering conflicts. Some Palestinians are talking again about armed struggle. And Israeli officials, who say their censured military operations have been highly successful, are keeping track of a series of ticking clocks as they ponder still another military endeavor — against Iran.

The payoff from the use of force in the struggle between Israel and the Palestinians is evident. It was only after the first Palestinian uprising in the late 1980s that Israel recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization and started to consider a two-state solution, and after the second — and very bloody — uprising that it left Gaza in 2005.

Meanwhile for many Israelis, the past decade looks like a model of the primacy of military action over diplomacy.

Through relentless commando operations and numerous checkpoints, the Israeli Army ended suicide bombings and other terrorist acts from the West Bank; since its 2006 war with the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, widely dismissed as a failure at the time, the group has not fired one rocket at Israel; and Israel's operation against Gaza last December has greatly curtailed years of Hamas rocket fire, returning a semblance of normality to the Israeli south.

Two years ago, Israeli fighter planes destroyed what Israel and the United States say was a budding Syrian nuclear reactor; and last year in Syria, Israeli agents assassinated Imad Mugniyah, the top military operative for Hezbollah and a crucial link to its Iranian sponsors, a severe blow to both Hezbollah and Iran.

Diplomatic efforts, whether the Oslo peace talks of the 1990s or the Turkish-mediated negotiations with Syria last year have, by contrast, produced little. Every Israeli military operation of recent years —

including the December invasion of Gaza that was condemned Friday by the United Nations Human Rights Council by a vote of 25 to 6 and referred to the Security Council following a report by a committee led by Richard Goldstone — has come under international censure.

Today all are viewed here as having been judged prematurely and unfairly but having delivered the goods — keeping Israel safe through deterrence.

Of course the military successes may be of limited value — a battle won but a war lost. The Palestinians may have driven Israel out of Gaza, but they ended up living in a vast network of barriers and military outposts of Israeli occupation in the West Bank and under harsh siege in Gaza.

And for Israel, while the country is safer today, quieter and more prosperous than ever, it is facing a severe diplomatic crisis. As the storm over the United Nations report on Israel's attack on Gaza shows, not only are the country's tactics under assault but so is its very legitimacy as calls for boycott and criminal prosecution grow. Its important relationship with Turkey, a moderate Muslim country, is under threat.

Ari Shavit, a columnist for the liberal newspaper Haaretz, wrote on Thursday that both Britain in 1917 and the United Nations in 1947 recognized the Jewish people's right to establish a Jewish state. Yet "as Israel gets stronger, its legitimacy is melting away," he wrote. "A national movement that began as 'legitimacy without an entity' is becoming 'an entity without legitimacy' before our very eyes."

Many Israelis respond that their self-preservation comes ahead of their reputation, that the swiftness and harshness with which their actions are condemned show that the world judges them by a double standard. Others say the isolation looks worse abroad than here.

Maj. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot, who leads Israel's northern command, said in an interview that the border with Lebanon was "more peaceful than it has been since the 1960s." Still, Israel's enemies "want us gone, so they have pursued a two-part strategy — terror and delegitimization."

He added that Hezbollah had more than 30,000 rockets in dozens of villages in southern Lebanon being held in reserve for retaliation against Israel should it attack Iran.

Israeli officials say no decision to attack Iran has been made, and they hope Iran's nuclear program will be stopped by other means, like international sanctions.

But they say they believe that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, the region will grow far more dangerous for Israel, spurring an arms race and offering immunity to Hezbollah and Hamas. And for Israel, whose unofficial motto is "Never Again," denial of the Nazi Holocaust by Iran's leaders and their rejection of Israel's right to exist add up to an existential risk.

Israel is trying to determine the moment beyond which an attack on Iran would be ineffective. It knows an attack cannot end Iran's nuclear program, only delay it by several years. And if Washington opposes taking military action, it will be very hard to do.

The first ticking clock Israel is watching is Iran's enrichment of uranium. Although the process creates low-enriched uranium for electricity but not for weapons, the more low-enriched uranium Iran produces, the less time it will need to turn it into enough high-enriched uranium for a weapon. Israeli analysts say that if Iran were to decide to build a bomb, it would need about 10 months. But after another year of low enrichment, it would need half that time, and after a third year, even less.

Israel is also watching several other indicators of how long it can delay action. That list includes

whether Iran bolsters its ability to withstand an attack by building and acquiring anti-aircraft systems and whether Israel's own scientists can design a missile defense system that could shield the country from retaliation in the form of Hezbollah and Hamas rockets.

The other ticking clocks focus on internal Iranian politics — whether antigovernment sentiment after June's election will lead to a slowing or an end to the nuclear program — and on the American-led diplomatic process aimed at getting Iran to abandon the program. Those talks resumed on Monday.

How fast any of the clocks are ticking is a matter of intense study here. If Iran's program is stopped, Israel says, it will be far easier for it to make concessions that would lead to a Palestinian state on its border.

But many of its leaders add something else — over the long term, only the Israeli military's presence on its borders can ensure the country's survival. Diplomacy, they say, can go only so far, and the Palestinian state will have to submit to severe restrictions on its military activities and pacts with foreign states.

For their part, the Palestinians reject such restrictions but have similar sentiments about the importance of force. Armed struggle remains central to Hamas doctrine; the rival Fatah movement says it remains an important option.

The Goldstone Mission vs. The Peace Process

By Danny Ayalon The Jerusalem Post October 19, 2009

For eight years, while Hamas indiscriminately shelled Israeli civilians with rockets provided by its patrons in Iran, the UN stood silent. Only when Israel, after years of restraint, moved to put an end to the terror, did the Human Rights Council act - by condemning Israel. This one-sided body passed a one-sided resolution calling for a one-sided investigation. Last month, the results of this "investigation" were presented by Justice Richard Goldstone to the HRC. Yet instead of dealing responsibly with the report, HRC members engaged in yet another anti-Israel travesty, which even Goldstone acknowledged as one-sided.

There have been dozens of international inquiries into events in the Gaza operation, and Israel has cooperated fully with almost all of them, including one undertaken by the UN Secretary General. Only in those instances where it was clear beyond any doubt that an inquiry was motivated by a political agenda - and not concern for human rights - did Israel decide not to cooperate. Unfortunately the HRC's Fact-Finding Mission was one of these.

Sadly, what was clear to Israel from the outset, has only now become clear to Goldstone. He is now

trying to distance himself from the results of his own handiwork.

Last Friday he discussed his disappointment with the action taken by the HRC, telling the Swiss daily *Le Temps*: "This draft resolution saddens me as it includes only allegations against Israel, there is not a single phrase condemning Hamas."

We must now deal with the consequences. The council's adoption of the Goldstone report constitutes nothing less than a prize for terrorism in more ways than one.

First, the resolution adopted Friday perverts the reality of Hamas criminality, blaming the victim, rather than the true perpetrator of war crimes in Gaza. For the HRC, it was totally irrelevant that Hamas committed grave war crimes by openly calling for Israel's destruction, purposely firing thousands of missiles at Israeli civilians, endangering Gaza civilians by firing from populated areas and abducting Gilad Schalit.

It was likewise irrelevant to the HRC that Israel had a responsibility to protect its citizens, made every effort to avoid confrontation and did all that it could to minimize civilian casualties. The only relevant consideration for the HRC was the fact that

an opportunity had presented itself to demonize Israel in the international arena.

Second, the resolution undermines moderate Palestinians who are interested in peace with Israel. There is a power struggle going on within Palestinian society. It is a zero-sum game, in which any gain for extremism comes at the expense of support for moderation. When the Hamas "tail" is allowed to wag the Middle East "dog," the Palestinian street takes heart and the entire region takes heed. In our neighborhood, everybody loves a winner. So when an international body upholds Hamas's atrocious behavior and exploits it once more to bash Israel, Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority loses face, moderate Arab states lose ground and the Hizbullah-Syria-Iran axis gains strength.

Thirdly, the resolution creates a new obstacle in the global battle against terrorism. A new form of warfare has emerged, in which terror groups launch attacks against "enemy" civilians from behind a shield of "friendly" civilians. This resolution grants immunity to the terrorists and prevents law-abiding states from defending their citizens. With the blessing of the HRC, this tactic will be repeated by terrorists throughout the world, to the detriment of all other democracies struggling against terrorism, putting millions of innocent civilians in danger.

Finally, and most tragic, this whole episode has led Israelis to doubt the underlying assumptions that have guided them until now in their internal debate on how best to achieve peace. Most Israelis

supported the willingness of their leadership to take calculated risks to advance the peace process, with the understanding that the "world" would support such efforts and "hedge their bets." Israelis assumed that if, after making compromises, things didn't work out, they would at least retain the right to defend themselves and the world would support them in their struggle.

Yet now, a nightmare has come true. After taking the tangible risk of leaving contested territory for the sake of advancing peace, Gaza was turned into a lawless enclave of Hamas-led, Iranian-backed terrorism. Yet, when Israel was forced to defend itself, the world reacted not with support and understanding, but with accusations of "crimes against humanity." Damned when they do and damned when they don't, Israelis are now asking themselves "Was the sacrifice worth it?"

While Israelis consider their options, the Goldstone snowball is threatening to gain momentum. From Geneva, the issue has now been passed to the UN General Assembly in New York for further action. But, it is still not too late. An international rejection of the HRC's treatment of the Goldstone report would signal to the Israeli public that the world indeed supports its compromises toward peace.

The writer is deputy foreign minister of Israel and former ambassador to the US.

Israel Tries Less Disruptive Tactics in West Bank

By Charles Levinson The Wall Street Journal October 11, 2009

Israel's military, taking a page from the Pentagon's counterinsurgency playbook, has changed tactics in the West Bank by emphasizing improvements in Palestinian living conditions, rather than focusing solely on killing and capturing militants.

The shift, however, is threatened by personnel changes: Three generals who were instrumental in planning it are on the way out.

Under their guidance, the Israeli Defense Force, which has occupied and administered the West Bank since its capture in 1967, has pulled back its soldiers from the enclave's cities, turned over security responsibilities to Palestinians, and lifted many of the checkpoints and roadblocks that had shackled the economy.

Israeli forces are refraining from airstrikes or shelling, tactics they once used frequently to attack suspected militants. Instead of daytime raids with large battalions, commanders have turned to more surgical strikes by commandoes, which are less disruptive to the civilian population.

"Part of our philosophy is to fight the terrorists with M-16 [rifles], not F-16 [jets]," said Brig. Gen. Noam Tivon, one of the leaders of the shift.

Gen. Tivon ended his tour as commander of Israeli forces in the West Bank this week. Maj. Gen. Gadi Shamni, head of Israel's Central Command, is changing jobs in the coming weeks, and the Department of Defense's Civil Administration commander Brig. Gen. Yoav Mordechai is due to finish up within the next year.

Some officers have voiced concern about the continuity of the trio's policies. One incoming general has little experience in the West Bank and came up through the ranks as a tank commander; some military analysts say that background means he could be the wrong person to oversee a strategy that calls for using less force and keeping a lower profile.

The change in tactics in the West Bank came after these top Israeli generals took to heart lessons learned by American commanders in Iraq, officials from both sides said.

The strategy, coupled with recent success by U.S.-trained Palestinian security forces, is being credited with curbing West Bank violence and boosting the local economy. Israeli military operations last year, before the new strategy, led to

78 civilian casualties; 12 civilians were killed in the first six months of this year.

Previously, soldiers would shut down whole neighborhoods for days at a time while conducting less-discriminating sweeps when looking for suspected militants.

"Now they only arrest Palestinians during the night," said Sattar Kassem, a Palestinian political-science professor in Nablus who is a longtime resident of the West Bank. "The occupation continues and this is what matters most, but there is less friction for now."

After the Islamist group Hamas violently overran the Gaza Strip in 2007, Israeli generals decided they needed a strategic rethink if they wanted to keep Hamas at bay in the West Bank, which is governed by the more moderate Fatah party.

The re-evaluation coincided with the arrival to Israel of a handful of U.S. generals with the task of bolstering peace efforts.

"The Americans brought to this region a lot of new ideas," Gen. Tivon said.

At the time, America's top commander in Iraq, Army Gen. David Petraeus, was having success with a classic counterinsurgency strategy called the "ink blot." The strategy calls for focusing resources on a single neighborhood or village. As conditions improve, the efforts are slowly expanded, like an ink blot seeping across a sheet of paper.

"The U.S. military had just had its own bruising internal debate about how to fight an insurgency," said a former adviser to retired U.S. Marine Gen. James Jones, who at the time had the task of strengthening security for Israelis and Palestinians. "It was clear to us that Israel needed to have a similar debate of its own if there was any hope for making progress here," the adviser said.

Gen. Jones, now President Barack Obama's national security adviser, declined to comment for this article.

"The thing that Jones did was change the Israeli thinking from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency," said a U.S. official in Tel Aviv.

U.S. advisers preached that capturing and killing the bad guys -- counterterrorism's methods -- hadn't been enough in Iraq and probably wouldn't be

enough in the West Bank, either, according to Israeli and U.S. officials. To instill lasting peace, they promoted economic engagement and reliance on local security forces.

At the time, militants and criminals controlled the West Bank's lawless cities. Some Israeli officials feared Hamas, fresh from seizing Gaza, was gaining strength and preparing a similar offensive in the West Bank.

The Israeli army had Palestinian cities and villages locked down with a rigorous checkpoint regime, part of a response to suicide-bomb attacks that followed the outbreak of the second Intifada, or Palestinian uprising, in 2000. Frequent "cordon and sweep" operations shut down Palestinian cities for days at a time.

The northern West Bank city of Jenin became a test case. In 2002, at the height of the second Intifada, Jenin was a militant hub where suicide bombers plotted and launched attacks against Israel. It was the first town Israeli targeted in its military offensive to reoccupy West Bank towns.

But in 2008, Israel agreed to pull back its soldiers, turn over security responsibilities to Palestinians, and lift many of the checkpoints and roadblocks that surrounded the city.

"Jones brought the idea for the Jenin project, which came directly from Petraeus in Iraq," Gen. Tivon said.

Israeli generals had to overcome the skepticism of the country's political leadership and other officers who were reluctant to trust the Palestinians with handling security.

"For years officers had been told not to trust the Palestinians, and then suddenly we're being ordered to pull back and call them before we want to conduct a raid," said another Israeli army officer serving in the West Bank.

Today, Jenin's streets are quiet, militants have turned in their guns, and crime is down. Uniformed police hand out traffic fines. In June, a \$5 million home store opened its doors, offering Palestinians imported espresso machines and plasma-screen TV sets.

"I think we can say today that the Jenin project is a success," Gen. Tivon said.

Even the "Good" Arabs come across as Anti-Israel and Anti-Semites (ed)

Islam, Israel and the United States

By Sheikh Ali Gomaa The Wall Street Journal October 7, 2009

Peace among the Abrahamic faiths will be built on respect and the law. America and the West have been victims of violent extremists acting in the name of Islam, the tragic events of 9/11 being only the most egregious of their attacks. Western officials and commentators are consumed by the question, "Where are the moderates?" Many, seeing only the

extremism perpetuated by a radical few, despair of finding progressive and peaceful partners of standing in the Muslim world.

However, reconciling Islam with modernity has been an imperative for Muslims before it became a preoccupation for the West. In particular, the process dates back to the 19th century, when what

became known as the Islamic reform movement was born in Al Azhar University in Cairo, Islam's premiere institution of learning.

At the Dar al Iftaa, Egypt's supreme body for Islamic legal edicts over which I preside, we wrestle constantly with the issue of applying Islam to the modern world. We issue thousands of fatwas or authoritative legal edicts—for example affirming the right of women to dignity, education and employment, and to hold political office, and condemning violence against them. We have upheld the right of freedom of conscience, and of freedom of expression within the bounds of common decency. We have promoted the common ground that exists between Islam, Christianity and Judaism. We have underscored that governance must be based on justice and popular sovereignty. We are committed to human liberty within the bounds of Islamic law. Nonetheless, we must make more tangible progress on these and other issues.

We unequivocally condemned violence against the innocent during Egypt's own struggle with terrorism in the 1980s and 90's, and after the heinous sin of 9/11. We continue to do so in public debates with extremists on their views of Islam, in our outreach to schools and youth organizations, in our training of students from all across the world at Egypt's theological institutions, and in our counseling of captured terrorists. As the head of the one of the foremost Islamic authorities in the world, let me restate: The murder of civilians is a crime against humanity and God punishable in this life and the next.

Yet, just as we recommit to reinforcing the values of moderation in our faith, we look to the United States to assume its responsibility for the sake of a better relationship between the West and Islam.

First, it is essential that the U.S. confront the fear and misunderstanding that has often pervaded

the public discourse about Islam, especially in the media.

Second, while we must strive to reinforce the common principles that we share, we must also accept the reality of differences in our values and in our outlook. Islam and the West have distinct value systems. Respect for our differences is a foundation for coexistence, and never for conflict.

Finally, there must a true commitment to the rule of law, and to sovereign equality, as the legitimate basis for international relations. While some of the divide between Islam and the West lies in the realm of ideas, it lies mostly in the realm of politics. The violence and the aggression to which many Muslim countries have been subjected are the main sources of a deep and legitimate sense of grievance, and they must be addressed.

Israel's occupation of Palestine must be brought to an end; its continuation is an affront to the fundamental tenets of justice and freedom that we all seek to uphold. In Iraq and Afghanistan, full sovereignty and independence must be restored to their people with the withdrawal of all foreign forces. President Barack Obama's historic address to the Muslim world from Cairo on June 4 was a landmark event that opened the door to a new relationship between Islam and the West, precisely because it acknowledged these imperatives. Yet much work needs to be done by both sides.

This week in Washington I am participating in the Common Word Initiative, a group of religious leaders hosted by Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. While the focus of this initiative has been to foster dialogue between Islam and Christianity, I will call for its expansion to include representatives of all the Abrahamic faiths. The road ahead will be difficult, but we can, God willing, arrive at a more peaceful future together.

Dr. Gomaa is the Grand Mufti of Egypt.

Israelis place high value on even one life

By Ofer Bavly The South Florida Sun-Sentinel September 27, 2009

Three weeks ago, the parents of Gilad Shalit marked his 24th birthday, but he wasn't there to celebrate. Gilad Shalit, abducted from Israeli territory by Hamas terrorists while serving in the Israel Defense Forces and standing watch over the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip, has spent the last 40 months in captivity.

All international humanitarian laws as well as moral standards and basic decency have been trodden upon by Gilad's captors. In over three years of captivity, they have allowed absolutely no access to him - neither to his family nor to the Red Cross or any other humanitarian organization. Like any common criminal organization, they are demanding a high ransom for the release of this young man.

The ransom that Hamas demands is the release of over 1,000 Palestinian terrorists presently serving jail sentences in Israel, guilty of having killed innocent Israelis in terrorist bombings or planning and helping to carry out such attacks.

One cannot escape the irony of this situation: 1,000 terrorists and radicals are serving prison sentence after having stood a fair and just trial, represented by lawyers. They had recourse to a due process of the law. Their families have full visitation rights and the prisoners enjoy a list of privileges including correspondence with their families, the receipt of packages from them, access to television, computers and telephones, and granted the most humane treatment.

At the same time, in Gaza, there is a young Israeli man, in isolation for over three years. All his rights are denied and no sign of life has been given to his parents. He was never accused of anything, never tried for anything.

And yet, despite these blatantly asymmetrical circumstances, a deal may very well be near, in which Hamas will release Gilad Shalit in exchange for close to 1,000 convicted terrorists.

We know that many of them will return to their terrorist activities. We know that they will perpetuate the cycle of violence. And we know that there will be more attempts to kidnap Israelis and to exchange them for terrorists.

Unfortunately, this is the neighborhood we live in and this is the people we are facing on the other side of the fence. People who do not respect nor value human life and liberty - people who send

suicide bombers to kill themselves in Israeli cities and towns, fueled by an inconceivable hatred that blinds them to the possibility of actually reaching an agreement with Israel.

Gilad was not home for Rosh Ha-Shana, the Jewish New Year. Hopefully, he will get to celebrate his 24th birthday with his parents. The price that Israel will pay for that to happen will be a heavy one.

Thousands of Israeli victims of terrorism will be offended when they see their attackers set free. Such is the value that we place on the life of every single one of our citizens.

When the day comes and the Palestinians value their own lives as much as we do, we will have true peace between our peoples.

Ofer Bavly is Consul General of Israel to Florida and Puerto Rico.

The U.N. sides with terrorists

By The Washington Times editorial October 19, 2009

Suppose a United Nations investigation team found that the United States had committed war crimes in its response to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The report finds that while al Qaeda may have been culpable for the attacks and the carnage they wreaked, America was equally to blame - if not more so - for the civilian deaths caused during Operation Enduring Freedom. The U.N. instructs the United States to conduct an internal investigation and punish the perpetrators, or face action from the International Criminal Court.

This is the framework established by the Goldstone Commission Report, which is the product of an investigation led by South African judge Richard Goldstone. Its target was Israel's war against the Hamas terrorist group in Gaza last January. The United Nations Human Rights Council endorsed the report on Friday, and it will now move to the international body's New York headquarters for further action.

On a factual level, the Goldstone report is notoriously flawed and one-sided. Much of the 575-page document was cut and pasted from unsubstantiated and suspect reports from nongovernmental organizations with openly anti-Israel sentiments. Some of the "witnesses" interviewed by the mission were disguised Hamas officials. The fact that Hamas loves the report should raise eyebrows about its contents.

Even more troublingly is the report's fatal moral blind spot, which is ignoring the differences between Israel, a sovereign state, and Hamas, a terrorist organization. The Israeli armed forces are professional organizations governed by strict policies to limit civilian deaths during the conduct of war. Israel is a signatory to the Geneva conventions and

respects the rights of noncombatants. After the conflict, Israel conducted some 100 investigations into reports of misconduct by its troops.

Killing civilians is central to Hamas' military doctrine. Hamas launched 7,000 rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli cities between the pullout from Gaza in 2005 and 2009. During the ground fighting in Gaza, Hamas routinely used mosques, schools and hospitals as military sites and employed civilians as human shields. Hamas exploited the chaos of the conflict to round up Palestinian political opponents, some of whom were crippled with shots to the legs, while others were reportedly executed.

There is no moral equality between Hamas and Israel any more than there is between al Qaeda and the United States. Yet under the Goldstone logic, terrorists and sovereign states are identical. The incidental, unintentional civilian deaths Israel caused during the Gaza conflict are condemned as war crimes; the widespread and intentional Hamas attacks on Israeli civilians are basically ignored. The Goldstone model makes it impossible for civilized states to strike effectively against the world's barbarians who are fighting a shadow war against decency that views innocent noncombatants as both legitimate targets and useful shields.

The United States voted against the report and will presumably use its veto power if action is taken before the Security Council. America would do well to make it clear, publicly and privately, that it will not countenance the report or its twisted logic, nor endorse any moves to level the playing field between terror organizations and civilized states. If this movement gains traction, one day the United States will be in the dock.