

The Tel Aviv Cluster

By David Brooks The New York Times

Jews are a famously accomplished group. They make up 0.2 percent of the world population, but 54 percent of the world chess champions, 27 percent of the Nobel physics laureates and 31 percent of the medicine laureates.

Jews make up 2 percent of the U.S. population, but 21 percent of the Ivy League student bodies, 26 percent of the Kennedy Center honorees,

37 percent of the Academy Award-winning directors, 38 percent of those on a recent Business Week list of leading philanthropists, 51 percent of the Pulitzer Prize winners for nonfiction.

In his book, "The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement," Steven L. Pease lists some of the explanations people have given for this record of achievement. The Jewish faith encourages a belief in progress and personal accountability. It is learning-based, not rite-based.

Most Jews gave up or were forced to give up farming in the Middle Ages; their descendents have been living off of their wits ever since. They have often migrated, with a migrant's ambition and drive.

They have congregated around global crossroads and have benefited from the creative tension endemic in such places.

No single explanation can account for the record of Jewish achievement. The odd thing is that Israel has not traditionally been strongest where the Jews in the Diaspora were strongest. Instead of research and commerce, Israelis were forced to devote their energies to fighting and politics.

Milton Friedman used to joke that Israel disproved every Jewish stereotype. People used to think Jews were good cooks, good economic managers and bad soldiers; Israel proved them wrong. But that has changed. Benjamin Netanyahu's economic reforms, the arrival of a million Russian immigrants and the stagnation of the peace process have produced a historic shift. The most resourceful Israelis are going into technology and commerce, not politics. This has had a desultory effect on the nation's public life, but an invigorating one on its economy.

Tel Aviv has become one of the world's foremost entrepreneurial hot spots. Israel has more high-tech start-ups per capita than any other nation on earth, by far. It leads the world in civilian research-and-development spending per capita. It ranks second behind the U.S. in the number of companies listed on the Nasdaq. Israel, with seven

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million people, attracts as much venture capital as France and Germany combined.

As Dan Senor and Saul Singer write in "Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle," Israel now has a classic innovation cluster, a place where tech obsessives work in close proximity and feed off each other's ideas.

Because of the strength of the economy, Israel has weathered the global recession reasonably well. The government did not have to bail out its banks or set off an explosion in short-term spending.

Instead, it used the crisis to solidify the economy's long-term future by investing in research and development and infrastructure, raising some consumption taxes, promising to cut other taxes in the medium to long term. Analysts at Barclays write that Israel is "the strongest recovery story" in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Israel's technological success is the fruition of the Zionist dream.

The country was not founded so stray settlers could sit among thousands of angry Palestinians in Hebron. It was founded so Jews would have a safe place to come together and create things for the world. This shift in the Israeli identity has long-term implications.

Netanyahu preaches the optimistic view: that Israel will become the Hong Kong of the Middle East, with economic benefits spilling over into the Arab world. And, in fact, there are strands of evidence to support that view in places like the West Bank and Jordan.

But it's more likely that Israel's economic leap forward will widen the gap between it and its neighbors. All the countries in the region talk about encouraging innovation. Some oil-rich states spend billions trying to build science centers. But places like Silicon Valley and Tel Aviv are created by a confluence of cultural forces, not money. The surrounding nations do not have the tradition of free intellectual exchange and technical creativity.

For example, between 1980 and 2000, Egyptians registered 77 patents in the U.S. Saudis registered 171. Israelis registered 7,652.

The tech boom also creates a new vulnerability. As Jeffrey Goldberg of The Atlantic has argued, these innovators are the most mobile people on earth. To destroy Israel's economy, Iran doesn't actually have to lob a nuclear weapon into the country. It just has to foment enough instability so

the entrepreneurs decide they had better move to Palo Alto, where many of them already have contacts and homes.

American Jews used to keep a foothold in Israel in case things got bad here. Now Israelis keep a foothold in the U.S.

During a decade of grim foreboding, Israel has become an astonishing success story, but also a highly mobile one.

Can Hamas Be Stopped from Seizing West Bank?

By Khaled Abu Toameh **Husdon, New York** January 5, 2010

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and his prime minister, Salam Fayyad, are hoping that Israel will withdraw to the pre-1967 lines within the next two years to enable the Palestinians to establish an independent state with half of Jerusalem as its capital.

But under the current circumstances, an Israeli pullout from these areas could, ironically, mark the beginning of the end of the Abbas-Fayyad era.

In an interview published this week in a Kuwaiti newspaper, Abbas revealed that he had solid proof and “verified information” that Hamas was planning to take over the West Bank.

It could also see the Iran-backed Hamas movement and its allies sitting on the outskirts of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

If Israel wants to pull back from any territory, it needs to make sure who is going to be in control of that area. The last time Israel withdrew from a territory was in the summer of 2005, when it handed the Gaza Strip over to forces loyal to Abbas.

Two years later, Hamas managed to toss Abbas’s people out of the Gaza Strip in less than a week.

If Israel repeats the same mistake and hands over the West Bank to Abbas and Fayyad when they are still weak and do not enjoy much credibility among their own people, there is no doubt that Hamas will end up sitting on hilltops overlooking Ben Gurion Airport outside Tel Aviv, and the Prime Minister’s Office in Jerusalem.

Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority say that Hamas has never abandoned its dream of extending its control from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank. Hamas, on the other hand, has never hidden its intention of overthrowing the Abbas-Fayyad regime and replacing it with a government that reports directly to Bashar Assad in Damascus and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Tehran.

Abbas and Fayyad are in power in the West Bank largely thanks to the presence of the Israeli security forces in these territories. Abbas and Fayyad

know very well that had it not been for the presence of the Israeli army in the West Bank, it is highly likely that Hamas would have been able to achieve its goal a long time ago.

Many Palestinians are convinced that if a free and democratic election were to be held in the West Bank these days, Hamas would win again for two reasons: first, because the US-led sanctions against Hamas have earned the movement greater sympathy among Palestinians and, second, because of Fatah’s failure to implement major reforms and get rid of icons of financial corruption among its top brass.

Despite ongoing efforts to reconstruct the Fatah-dominated security forces, they are still far from being able to assume full responsibilities in the West Bank.

Over the past few years, the IDF, in cooperation with the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), has been waging a relentless war on Hamas and other terror groups in the West Bank, including Abbas’s armed militia, the Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

This war has resulted in the killing or detention of hundreds of terror suspects and the confiscation of large amounts of weapons and ammunition. But the war has not yet ended and there is still a lot that needs to be done to clean the area.

While Israel has been struggling to eliminate hard-core terror cells in the West Bank, the security forces controlled by Abbas and Fayyad have been focusing their efforts mainly on Hamas’s political activists and supporters.

Those suspected of involvement in terror activities end up in Israeli prisons and detention centers, while the Palestinian security forces are busy rounding up mosque preachers, university professors and students, as well as charity workers suspected of being affiliated with Hamas.

The massive clampdown on Hamas may have caused serious damage to its terror infrastructure, but it has by no means affected popular support for the movement among Palestinians in the West Bank.

Israeli Robots Remake Battlefield

By Charles Levinson **The Wall Street Journal** January 13, 2010

Nation Forges Ahead in Deploying Unmanned Military Vehicles by Air, Sea and Land

Israel is developing an army of robotic fighting machines that offers a window onto the potential future of warfare.

Sixty years of near-constant war, a low tolerance for enduring casualties in conflict, and its high-tech industry have long made Israel one of the world's leading innovators of military robotics.

WSJ's Charles Levinson reports from Jerusalem to discuss Israel's development of robotic, unmanned combat systems. He tells Simon Constable on the News Hub how they are deploying unmanned boats, ground vehicles and aerial vehicles.

"We're trying to get to unmanned vehicles everywhere on the battlefield for each platoon in the field," says Lt. Col. Oren Berebbi, head of the Israel Defense Forces' technology branch. "We can do more and more missions without putting a soldier at risk."

In 10 to 15 years, one-third of Israel's military machines will be unmanned, predicts Giora Katz, vice president of Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd., one of Israel's leading weapons manufacturers.

"We are moving into the robotic era," says Mr. Katz. Over 40 countries have military-robotics programs today. The U.S. and much of the rest of the world is betting big on the role of aerial drones: Even Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite guerrilla force in Lebanon, flew four Iranian-made drones against Israel during the 2006 Lebanon War.

When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, it had just a handful of drones. Today, U.S. forces have around 7,000 unmanned vehicles in the air and an additional 12,000 on the ground, used for tasks including reconnaissance, airstrikes and bomb disposal.

In 2009, for the first time, the U.S. Air Force trained more "pilots" for unmanned aircraft than for manned fighters and bombers.

U.S. and Japanese robotics programs rival Israel's technological know-how, but Israel has shown it can move quickly to develop and deploy new devices, to meet battlefield needs, military officials say.

"The Israelis do it differently, not because they're more clever than we are, but because they live in a tough neighborhood and need to respond fast to operational issues," says Thomas Tate, a former U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who now oversees defense cooperation between the U.S. and Israel.

Among the recently deployed technologies that set Israel ahead of the curve is the Guardium unmanned ground vehicle, which now drives itself along the Gaza and Lebanese borders. The Guardium was deployed to patrol for infiltrators in the wake of the abduction of soldiers doing the same job in 2006. The Guardium, developed by G-nius Ltd., is essentially an armored off-road golf cart with a suite of optical sensors and surveillance gear. It was put into the field for the first time 10 months ago.

In the 2006 Lebanon War, Israeli soldiers took a beating opening supply routes and ferrying food and ammunition through hostile territory to the front

lines. In the Gaza conflict in January 2009, Israel unveiled remote-controlled bulldozers to help address that issue.

Within the next year, Israeli engineers expect to deploy the voice-commanded, six-wheeled Rex robot, capable of carrying 550 pounds of gear alongside advancing infantry.

After bomb-laden fishing boats tried to take out an Israeli Navy frigate off the coast off Gaza in 2002, Rafael designed the Protector SV, an unmanned, heavily armed speedboat that today makes up a growing part of the Israeli naval fleet. The Singapore Navy has also purchased the boat and is using it in patrols in the Persian Gulf.

After Syrian missile batteries in Lebanon took a heavy toll on Israeli fighter jets in the 1973 war, Israel developed the first modern unmanned aerial vehicle, or UAV.

When Israel next invaded Lebanon in 1981, the real-time images provided by those unmanned aircraft helped Israel wipe out Syrian air defenses, without a single downed pilot. The world, including the U.S., took notice.

The Pentagon set aside its long-held skepticism about the advantages of unmanned aircraft and, in the early 1980s, bought a prototype designed by former Israeli Air Force engineer Abraham Karem. That prototype morphed into the modern-day Predator, which is made by General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc.

Unlike the U.S. and other militaries, where UAVs are flown by certified, costly-to-train fighter pilots, Israeli defense companies have recently built their UAVs to allow an average 18-year-old recruit with just a few months' training to pilot them.

Military analysts say unmanned fighting vehicles could have a far-reaching strategic impact on the sort of asymmetrical conflicts the U.S. is fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan and that Israel faces against enemies such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

In such conflicts, robotic vehicles will allow modern conventional armies to minimize the advantages guerrilla opponents gain by their increased willingness to sacrifice their lives in order to inflict casualties on the enemy.

However, there are also fears that when countries no longer fear losing soldiers' lives in combat thanks to the ability to wage war with unmanned vehicles, they may prove more willing to initiate conflict.

In coming years, engineers say unmanned air, sea and ground vehicles will increasingly work together without any human involvement. Israel and the U.S. have already faced backlash over civilian deaths caused by drone-fired missiles in Gaza, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Those ethical dilemmas could increase as robots become more independent of their human masters.

Corrections & Amplifications General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. manufactures the Predator unmanned aerial vehicle. A previous

version of this article incorrectly stated that General Dynamics Corp. manufactured the UAV.

Branding the noughties

By Gil Troy The Jerusalem Post December 31, 2009

Israel's last 10 years have been marked by dashed hopes of peace, terrorism, two wars and the uprooting of 7,000 people. What would you call this decade in Israel's history? Center Field. The writer is professor of history at McGill University on leave in Jerusalem. He is the author of *Why I Am a Zionist: Israel, Jewish Identity and the Challenges of Today* and *The Reagan Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*.

As we approach 2010, we should say good riddance to this past decade. For Israel, this decade began with great hopes of peace that Palestinian suicide bombers blew to bits. What quickly became a decade of death ends with at least some improvement, as a decade of disengagement.

On January 1, 2000, thrilled that their TVs and computers worked despite Y2K millennium bug warnings, millions welcomed the new decade watching a seemingly inspiring scene in Bethlehem. The Palestinian Authority celebrated what reporters called "a new dawn" by releasing 2,000 doves into the air.

The doves probably were pigeons. And the fireworks shot off immediately thereafter terrified the birds. Many plunged to their deaths in Manger Square to the sounds of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." Maad Abu-Ghazalah, a Palestinian-American witnessing the scene, noted the irony that the birds' value as symbols of peace caused their deaths. Bethlehem residents responded: "The PA doesn't respect its own people! Why do you expect it to respect a few pigeons?"

Nine months later, Yasser Arafat's PA showed even more contempt for its own people - and its neighbors - by launching what Palestinians called "the intifada," and what we should call Arafat's war of terror against the peace process.

With Arafat's war in September 2000, terrorism became one of the decade's defining forces. In a cruel betrayal that still haunts Israel, the world blamed it for the Palestinian turn from negotiations to terror - and condemned every response to the violence. Even worse, for months Israel failed to protect its citizens on the streets and in cafes, on buses and at bat mitzvas. The violence peaked in March 2002, when terrorists slaughtered 134 innocents, including 30 celebrating a Passover Seder. Israelis remember the sick feeling from those days, desperately calling in loved ones after each massacre, guiltily relieved that someone else's life had been shattered - this time.

Following that March of mayhem, prime minister Ariel Sharon changed the dynamics. Rather than simply reacting to terror, he launched Operation Defensive Shield, taking the fight to the terrorists on the West Bank. We forget that Sharon had already been flailing as prime minister for a year, as civilians were murdered. We also forget that it took September 11 to mobilize American Jewry and sensitize president George W. Bush to the problems. And only after Arafat lied to Bush in January 2002, denying knowledge of the Karine A arms shipment, did Bush give up on Arafat as a "peace partner" and give Israel the green light to attack.

Israel eventually won this war against the Palestinians. The death toll of over 1,000 was so great and its position in the world so compromised, that the country never celebrated this hard-fought victory. The Palestinians' worldwide anti-Zionist campaign triggered an ugly resurgence of anti-Semitism, embraced by too many intellectuals. And suicide bombers forced the country into building a separation barrier. The barrier is the burial ground of the delusions of the Right that Israel could ignore Palestinian aspirations and of the Left that the Palestinians were ready to compromise.

ARAFAT DIED in November 2004. In August 2005, Sharon tried locking in the cold peace that had settled in by withdrawing 7,000 Israelis from Gaza. The half-decade of death ended; the half-decade of disengagement began.

Tragically, the disengagement misfired. Although the number of soldiers killed in Gaza plummeted, the unilateral disengagement emboldened Hamas to take over Gaza as a barrage of rockets pounded the Negev - for years before Israel responded effectively. Moreover, in what will be remembered as an act of tremendous shortsightedness by the Left, rather than ensuring the settlers' smoothest possible reintegration to ease future withdrawals, the resettlement was sloppy, traumatic. Four years later, many of the disengaged Gaza settlers remain unsettled.

With Sharon's incapacitating stroke in January 2006 and Ehud Olmert's emergence as prime minister, Israelis experienced a different kind of disengagement in these aptly-named oh-ohs. Israelis wallowed in a defensive, post-traumatic mental state wherein individuals disconnect from memories, emotions, actions. According to Dr. Patti Levin, a Boston-based psychologist, even when people do not experience traumas directly, mass disasters such

as the terror wave become "vicarious traumas," puncturing individuals' myth of the "just world," as they discover that "no longer do bad things only happen to bad people - or to others - but they can happen to anyone, including themselves."

Some then succumb to a "detached, hopeless [not even daring to hope] state of passive victimhood," what Dr. Martin Seligman termed "learned helplessness." The Olmert era was an era of collective post-traumatic stress, with too many Israelis resigned to a stalled peace process, corrupt leaders and the world's growing hostility. Many Israelis no longer dropped everything to listen intently when the "beep, beep, beep" announced the hourly news on Kol Yisrael. Increasingly, the West's individualistic, shop-till-you-drop mentality trumped the traditional collective Zionist ethos. The outbreak of two wars under Olmert - in Lebanon in 2006 and in Gaza in 2008 - engaged Israelis temporarily, and unevenly, as one region in each of those conflicts suffered directly, while others thrived.

Israelis' passive, amusement imperative amid such great disasters and threats reflects both political weakness and social resilience. Amid such trauma, despite a depressing level of political dysfunction, Israel is proving to the Palestinians and the world that living well truly is the best revenge. The

economy proved more buoyant than most during the global economic crisis. The country continues to rock the hi-tech world, as Dan Senor and Saul Singer recently illustrated in their inspiring book *Start-Up Nation*. Moreover, Harvard Prof. Ruth Wisse accurately calls Israelis "reverse hypocrites." Hypocrites' actions fail to live up to their noble rhetoric; Israelis act more nobly than their rhetoric, as many denigrate their country yet fight valiantly when necessary.

The US, too, suffers from collective post-traumatic stress, and experienced a far more disconnected "whatever decade."

As Israelis leave this decade of death and disengagement, the challenge is to follow the biblical imperative - choose life! - while following the democratic dictate - engage! Israelis have emerged from the cauldrons of terrorist hell. Hopefully, this coming decade will be an opportunity to apply the genius Israelis have demonstrated in developing software to nurturing a society that is just, strong, caring and engaged.

Please e-mail your own suggestions of what to call this decade in Israel's history to namethatdecade.israel@gmail.com. The person sending in the best suggestion will receive a free book.

Fateful Decision By Steve Forbes Forbes Magazine January 18, 2010

The new year focus is on the economy, but foreign policy will generate big headlines: Israel is going to come to a decision regarding Iran's getting the bomb. Most Israelis see this as an existential issue. They know their vaunted military can only set back, not eliminate, the Iranian project. Iran's dictator, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is setting up facilities in Venezuela, and who knows where else, to help Iran fulfill its nuclear ambitions. The U.S. State Department and the Pentagon are resigned, as western Europe became long ago, to a nuclear-armed theocratic regime in the Middle East. Russia and China figure the U.S. and Israel will deal with the Iranians, but in the meantime they'll rake in proceeds from commercial and military contracts. It's clear to all that the West hasn't the stomach to impose serious sanctions.

So that leaves two big questions: Will the Israelis strike? And, if they do, what will be the repercussions?

Some experts argue that oil markets will be roiled only in the short term. They figure that since the rest of Iran's economy is in shambles the Iranians will need the cash they can realize from selling their crude. The U.S. Navy will make sure the Strait of Hormuz remains open if Iran attempts to close it, just as it did in 1987-88, when Iran's navy tried to attack tankers from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Pessimists argue that economic calculations will go out the window and that the political fallout from an Israeli strike will be substantial and serious. Although Sunni regimes in the region would be quite happy to see Tehran humbled and its ambitions temporarily blocked, they are not going to jeopardize their own survival by publicly being anything less than totally outraged. The heavily armed Hezbollah in Lebanon could certainly wreak havoc by firing thousands of rockets into Israel--something that can't be ruled out, since Iran pays virtually all of Hezbollah's bills.

The crisis could hit us bloodily: Who knows what sleeper terrorist agents and cells in the U.S. and Europe might do?

Israel is painfully aware that the Obama Administration is adamantly opposed to a strike against Iran, that it wants Jerusalem to stay its hand in the hope that Iran will some day get a regime change. The mullahs are roundly despised by the populace.

Israeli intelligence knows more than any other outside agency just how far along Iran's nuclear program truly is, particularly since it has a number of agents working on the project inside Iran. Bottom line: Despite the horrific risks, the Netanyahu government will attack if it concludes Iran's manufacture of a bomb is imminent.

Look for the strike to happen by Labor Day.

www.jihad.com

By Thomas L. Friedman The New York Times December 16, 2009

Let's not fool ourselves. Whatever threat the real Afghanistan poses to U.S. national security, the "Virtual Afghanistan" now poses just as big a threat. The Virtual Afghanistan is the network of hundreds of jihadist Web sites that inspire, train, educate and recruit young Muslims to engage in jihad against America and the West. Whatever surge we do in the real Afghanistan has no chance of being a self-sustaining success, unless there is a parallel surge — by Arab and Muslim political and religious leaders — against those who promote violent jihadism on the ground in Muslim lands and online in the Virtual Afghanistan.

Last week, five men from northern Virginia were arrested in Pakistan, where they went, they told Pakistani police, to join the jihad against U.S. troops in Afghanistan. They first made contact with two extremist organizations in Pakistan by e-mail in August. As The Washington Post reported on Sunday: " 'Online recruiting has exponentially increased, with Facebook, YouTube and the increasing sophistication of people online,' a high-ranking Department of Homeland Security official said. ... 'Increasingly, recruiters are taking less prominent roles in mosques and community centers because places like that are under scrutiny. So what these guys are doing is turning to the Internet,' said Evan Kohlmann, a senior analyst with the U.S.-based NEFA Foundation, a private group that monitors extremist Web sites."

The Obama team is fond of citing how many "allies" we have in the Afghan coalition. Sorry, but we don't need more NATO allies to kill more Taliban and Al Qaeda. We need more Arab and Muslim allies to kill their extremist ideas, which, thanks to the Virtual Afghanistan, are now being spread farther than ever before.

Only Arabs and Muslims can fight the war of ideas within Islam. We had a civil war in America in the mid-19th century because we had a lot of people who believed bad things — namely that you could enslave people because of the color of their skin. We defeated those ideas and the individuals, leaders and institutions that propagated them, and we did it with such ferocity that five generations later some of their offspring still have not forgiven the North.

Islam needs the same civil war. It has a violent minority that believes bad things: that it is O.K. to not only murder non-Muslims — "infidels," who do not submit to Muslim authority — but to murder Muslims as well who will not accept the most rigid Muslim lifestyle and submit to rule by a Muslim caliphate.

What is really scary is that this violent, jihadist minority seems to enjoy the most "legitimacy" in the

Muslim world today. Few political and religious leaders dare to speak out against them in public. Secular Arab leaders wink at these groups, telling them: "We'll arrest if you do it to us, but if you leave us alone and do it elsewhere, no problem."

How many fatwas — religious edicts — have been issued by the leading bodies of Islam against Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda? Very few. Where was the outrage last week when, on the very day that Iraq's Parliament agreed on a formula to hold free and fair multiparty elections — unprecedented in Iraq's modern history — five explosions set off by suicide bombers hit ministries, a university and Baghdad's Institute of Fine Arts, killing at least 127 people and wounding more than 400, many of them kids?

Not only was there no meaningful condemnation emerging from the Muslim world — which was primarily focused on resisting Switzerland's ban on new mosque minarets — there was barely a peep coming out of Washington. President Obama expressed no public outrage. It is time he did.

"What Muslims were talking about last week were the minarets of Switzerland, not the killings of people in Iraq or Pakistan," noted Mamoun Fandy, a Middle East expert at the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London. "People look for red herrings when they don't want to look inward, when they don't want to summon the moral courage to produce the counter-fatwa that would say: stabilizing Iraq is an Islamic duty and bringing peace to Afghanistan is part of the survival of the Islamic umma," or community.

So please tell me, how are *we* supposed to help build something decent and self-sustaining in Afghanistan and Pakistan when jihadists murder other Muslims by the dozens and no one really calls them out?

A corrosive mind-set has taken hold since 9/11. It says that Arabs and Muslims are only objects, never responsible for anything in their world, and we are the only subjects, responsible for everything that happens in their world. We infantilize them.

Arab and Muslims are not just objects. They are subjects. They aspire to, are able to and must be challenged to take responsibility for their world. If we want a peaceful, tolerant region more than they do, they will hold our coats while we fight, and they will hold their tongues against their worst extremists. They will lose, and we will lose — here and there, in the real Afghanistan and in the Virtual Afghanistan.

The first economic peace in the Holy Land

By Seth Frantzman The Jerusalem Post January 6, 2010

One of the cornerstones of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's policy has been his belief that economics is an integral part of any peace process. He has claimed that "we must weave an economic peace alongside a political process... [It] will support and bolster the achievement of political settlements down the line."

The idea that free-market principles and a strong economy mitigate both nationalism and political extremism - especially the resort to violence - has long been a staple of those who argue for democratization and free trade. What Netanyahu and his advisers may not know is that the theory of economic peace has been alive and well in the Holy Land since the 19th century, among Jewish, Arab and Christian Masons.

Few are aware of the connections that exist between Masons, Jews and the conflict in the Middle East. The fascists, such as Francisco Franco, and the Nazis were fervently anti-Mason. The militant Islamist movement has typically seen the Masons as a threat. Hamas describes Freemasonry as a "secret society" controlled by Zionism, and the term "Freemason" is mentioned three times in the Covenant of Hamas adopted in 1988. Israel's most potent enemy in the 1960s, Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, closed all the Masonic lodges of Egypt in 1962.

THE MASONS are an international fraternal order whose beginnings are traced to Scotland in the 16th century. The movement spread quickly to England and thence to the Americas, where many of the founders were Masons. Freemasonry has been influential in inspiring westernization and secularism among military and political elites in such diverse places as Mexico, Russia and Liberia. However, it has been perceived as deeply threatening to religious groups and conspiracy theorists.

Since its inception, Freemasonry has welcomed Jews as members, and initially most Jewish Masons were from prominent Sephardi families. One of these, Moses Montefiore, is important because of his connection to 19th-century Palestine, where he helped improve the living conditions of local Jews. However, the first Masonic ceremony held in Jerusalem was conducted by a Kentucky-born Mason named Robert Morris at the Cave of Zedekiah (popularly known as King Solomon's Quarries) near Damascus Gate in east Jerusalem. Another Masonic lodge, the Royal Solomon Mother Lodge, was founded in Jaffa in 1873 by American settlers of the Adam's colony. The colony failed, and the lodge was maintained by Rolla Floyd, a survivor of the colony. Another lodge was founded in 1890 in Jaffa by middle-class Jews and Arabs.

The Masonic lodges at this time included Jewish and Arab notables. One example of these, according to an article written by Israeli Mason Leon Zeldis, was a Christian Arab hotel owner named Iskander Awad who was also an agent for the Thomas Cook travel agency. Lodges were founded in Haifa (1911) and Jerusalem (1931), and in each case the membership was composed of leading Jews, Arabs and Europeans.

Dr. Daniel Farhey, a Mason based in Haifa, has written that "Freemasonry is one of the few institutions that actively promotes better understanding between the different ethnic and cultural segments of Israel society, particularly between Jewish and Arab brethren, and also assists in the social integration of immigrants."

During the British Mandate, the Masons in Palestine experienced a huge influx of British members. It may be no surprise that many of the leading voices behind the establishment of the Mandate, such as Lord Arthur Balfour, and Mandatory administrators such as High Commissioner Herbert Samuel were Masons. The lodge in Jerusalem attracted Jerusalem's business and political elite, among them David Abulafia (Sephardi Jewish leader), Daniel Auster (a General Zionist politician and Jerusalem mayor), the Yeshaya family (Jewish businessmen), S.T. Rock (Arab Catholic businessman), Nagib Mansour (Christian Arab engineer) and members of the Muslim elite who, according to information supplied to the author, may have included the Dajani family. This was a coexistence fraternity based on shared economic values.

Reports from the period state that the lodges "stand for peace." A clipping from The Palestine Post published in 1939 describes the death of Samuel Hashimshoni, who was a "fine exponent of Masonry" and who did not travel with a firearm "as an example to his colleagues of his faith in his fellow man. He maintained and sought contacts with Arab friends."

Prof. Ruth Kark of the Hebrew University and Dr. Joseph Glass have documented how the Sephardi Valero family were prominent Masons and maintained close relationships with Arabs throughout the Mandate. This was the essence of Freemasonry in the Holy Land, and is maintained today in the Grand Lodge in Israel where the Koran, Bible and Torah are displayed together.

Freemasons have been integral to the Land of Israel from the time of Charles Warren (archeologist in 19th-century Jerusalem) to the continued activities of the dozens of lodges, including eight in Jerusalem alone.

However as history has shown, the early attempts at "economic peace" enshrined in the Masonic ideology did not prevent the 1948 war. Communal leaders like Abulafia, Auster and their

Arab counterparts stood by as war engulfed their communities.

The question is whether Netanyahu will be more successful at achieving economic peace than his forebears.

Popular Fatah Leader Complicates Prison Swap

By Charles Levinson The Wall Street Journal December 8, 2009

Imprisoned by Israel Since 2002, Marwan Barghouti Tops List of 1,000 That Hamas Demands in Exchange for Sgt. Gilad Shalit

Marwan Barghouti, the popular imprisoned Palestinian leader, embodies the promise and the peril Israel faces as it negotiates with Hamas to trade hundreds of Palestinian prisoners for a long-held Israeli soldier.

Islamist Hamas says Mr. Barghouti tops the list of approximately 1,000 prisoners it is demanding Israel free in exchange for Sgt. Gilad Shalit, who Hamas has held captive in Gaza for more than three years.

Senior Israeli and Hamas officials said late last month the two sides were close to a final deal. But since then, Hamas officials have told Arabic media that Israel objected to a handful of prisoners on their list and insisted on deporting many freed prisoners abroad, causing a delay. Hamas officials now say they think a deal is possible by month's end.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is under intense pressure to win Sgt. Shalit's freedom. But giving in to Hamas demands to free top Palestinian leaders and militants carries significant political and, some say, security risks.

The highest-profile name on Hamas's list, and a likely sticking point, is Mr. Barghouti, a leader of Palestine's Fatah faction. His supporters compare him with South Africa's Nelson Mandela, who at various stages in the fight against apartheid advocated peaceful coexistence and armed resistance. To his critics in Israel, he is a terrorist, serving six life sentences in prison for a 2004 conviction on five counts of murder in relation to attacks on Israelis.

"Barghouti is one of the many prisoners who, if they are included in the deal, it will hand a great victory to terror," said Israeli technology minister Daniel Herschkowitz, who, as a cabinet member, will be required to approve any prisoner release. "On the other hand, the state has an obligation to stand behind its soldiers."

Mr. Barghouti's release could have a far-reaching impact on domestic Palestinian politics and the peace process. The Fatah leader could help heal the rift between his secular party, which holds sway over the West Bank, and Hamas, which has effective control of the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian opinion polls show Mr. Barghouti is capable of handily defeating current Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, who represents the old

guard of Fatah, and is also more popular than any likely Hamas candidate. His popularity also could provide impetus for a Palestinian-wide vote, which has been delayed in part by the rift between Hamas and Fatah.

Hamas Prisoner List Some prisoners, in addition to Marwan Barghouti, Hamas demands Israel release in exchange for Sgt. Gilad Shalit: **ABDULLAH BARGHOUTI**: Senior Hamas bomb maker, no close relation to Marwan Barghouti, is serving 67 life sentences on charges related to attacks on Israel, including one at a Sbarro Pizzeria that killed 15 in Jerusalem in 2001. **IBRAHIM HAMED**: Commander of Hamas military wing in Ramallah was arrested by Israel in May 2006 on charges he masterminded suicide attacks killing 100 Israeli civilians. **AHMED SAADAT**: Secretary-general of the militant Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was arrested by Israel in March 2006 and sentenced to 30 years on charges he plotted the 2001 assassination of Tourism Minister Rehavam Zeevi, among other attacks. **AHLAM TAMIMI**: A Hamas woman serving 16 life sentences in Israel on charges she transported the suicide bomber for the 2001 pizzeria attack.

Some Israelis and Palestinians believe the secular, Hebrew-speaking Mr. Barghouti is among the few Palestinian leaders who could effectively engage with Israel in any serious peace deal, and have the political legitimacy to sell the deal to Palestinians. From his jail cell, Mr. Barghouti helped broker a cease-fire with Israel in 2003 and spearheaded an effort to reconcile the warring Fatah and Hamas factions in 2006.

Mr. Barghouti touches a raw nerve in Israel, however. Though he supports a negotiated two-state solution, he continues to advocate the right of Palestinians to resist Israel's occupation, by force if necessary. He condemns targeting civilians inside Israel proper, a position that implicitly supports attacks on Jewish settlers and soldiers in the West Bank.

The 46-year-old Mr. Barghouti was born in the West Bank and emerged as a young activist leader in Yasser Arafat's Fatah in the late 1970s and 1980s. He became fluent in Hebrew during four years in Israeli prison beginning in the late 1970s and was exiled abroad for his role in the first Palestinian intifada, or uprising, in 1987. In 1994, he returned to the West Bank after the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords and was elected to the Palestinian parliament.

During the latter half of the 1990s, he worked closely with Israelis. "He was an educator and very cooperative partner working with us to build a new reality between the young people of both societies," recalls Janet Aviad, an Israeli peace activist.

But Mr. Barghouti also represents many Israelis' sense of betrayal and disillusionment after peace efforts in 2000 failed, and Palestinians turned to violence in what became known as the second intifada.

Washington over Wallerstein

By David Horowitz The Jerusalem Post

Binyamin Netanyahu must have felt himself being torn apart. He had always evinced an ideological commitment to the growth of the settlement enterprise as a prime national interest. But this most America-sensitive of our prime ministers also fully appreciated the irreplaceable strategic value of the US-Israel relationship.

And US President Barack Obama, without being so indelicate as to put it in quite such stark terms, was essentially requiring him to make a choice of sorts between the two.

The president, leading a hitherto unsuccessful effort to pressure Iran into halting its nuclear weapons drive, was emphatically of the opinion that Israel needed to call a settlement freeze in order to generate Middle Eastern goodwill - goodwill for Arab states to bolster international leverage against Teheran, and goodwill for some of those same Arab states to begin the process of normalizing their ties with Israel.

The Palestinian Authority, under Mahmoud Abbas, was refusing to so much as return to the negotiating table unless or until building came to a halt in Judea and Samaria.

And Abbas, though no ideal partner himself, was about to lose even more popularity to the extremists of Hamas, as Israel and the Islamists neared a massively asymmetrical deal for the release of Palestinian prisoners, unrepentant terrorists among them, in exchange for Gilad Schalit.

The prime minister may doubt Obama's capacity and will to galvanize sufficient international pressure to force an Iranian nuclear climbdown. He may not believe for a moment that a settlement freeze will have any impact whatsoever on Arab states' attitudes to Iran. He may be skeptical that a settlement freeze will prompt significant progress on Arab normalization with Israel. And he may feel aggrieved that the US's own public demands for the freeze created the climate in which Abbas was unwilling to negotiate - unwilling, that is, to be more forgiving of Israel than its own US ally.

But forced to decide between the demonstrative maintenance of construction, prompting a real crisis in ties with Washington and exacerbating Israel's accelerating international isolation, on the one hand,

Mr. Barghouti emerged as the uprising's most visible leader. He urged Palestinians to take up arms and led protests and marches that often ended in clashes with Israeli forces.

In 2002, Israel arrested Mr. Barghouti and charged him with 26 counts of murder, convicting him on five counts two years later. He has denied the Israeli accusations.

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and a moratorium that would infuriate Pinhas Wallerstein's Council of Jewish Communities and others on the Israeli Right while placing the negotiating ball firmly in the Palestinian and Arab court, on the other, Netanyahu on Wednesday made his choice.

His bitter, almost apologetic choice. Last week's hyped headlines about new building in Gilo marked a final public act of semi-defiance - a case of Israel signaling that, where Jewish neighborhoods over the Green Line but inside Jerusalem were concerned, it would not bow to US dictates. But outside the city limits, the prime minister has, very reluctantly, now given Washington most of what it wanted.

For all that goes on behind closed doors, public events like the prime minister's Wednesday evening announcement often yield real insights into our leaders' thinking. And whereas, at Bar-Ilan University five months ago, it was an upbeat, confident, commanding Netanyahu who offered his dramatic endorsement of Palestinian statehood, it was an unhappy, almost battered prime minister we saw on Wednesday night, accepting Obama's formula for progress toward that state.

Netanyahu acknowledged that the freeze was "not easy," that "it was a very difficult step for me."

And while he urged the Palestinian leadership, and the wider Arab world to "take the opportunity" to now move toward a full and final resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict - and presumably the US is now trying to twist Arab arms as firmly as it twisted his - the prime minister's closing remarks spoke volumes about his expectations.

When the 10-month freeze was over, he said, previous construction policies would be resumed. Not might, but would. Yet even that sentence was said without too much conviction. Because an awful lot can happen in 10 months - in the Schalit saga, in the Abbas-Hamas rivalry, in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, in the face-off against Iran.

And, of course, if the Americans feel that a second period of suspension would further US and Israeli interests, they could always press Netanyahu to hold back the bulldozers a while longer.

After all, in what the prime minister defined as the wider "mix of national interests," he has set his

dramatic precedent.

Implications of Turkish shift

By Claude Salhani *The Washington Times* December 13, 2009

Can Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan play the role of a viable interlocutor in the Middle East peace process after his verbal attacks against Israel during his visit to Washington last week?

Mr. Erdogan, whose country was once Israel's only friend in the Middle East, lambasted the behavior of the Jewish state for its actions during the war against the Hamas-led resistance in Gaza last December.

The Turkish prime minister also sharply criticized Israel for possessing nuclear weapons while calling for Iran to suspend its nuclear program. (In a later interview with an Egyptian journalist, he warned of an "earthquake" reaction in Turkey if the nation's airspace were used by Israel to launch an attack on Iran.)

"This is a situation where we clearly have double standards," Mr. Erdogan said, much to the consternation of Israeli diplomats and supporters in the audience. His statements even upset many Turks who see this shift in Kemalist policy as a dangerous step for Turkey.

Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, the architect of modern Turkey, intended to distance the nation from its Ottoman past by aligning it more with Europe and away from the Middle East. Indeed, Turkey has been fighting an uphill battle with the European Union for the good part of 1 1/2 decades.

Turkey says it has met all the requirements put forward by the EU but Brussels keeps changing the rules. Mr. Erdogan compared the EU's attitude toward Turkey to "changing the rules for the quarterback in a football game in the 36th minute." Mr. Erdogan went on to say, "Turkey has been in limbo during the past 15 years."

In that context, therefore, it should come as no surprise to anyone - least of all the Europeans who have opposed Turkey's entry into the EU - to see Turkey begin to gradually realign its foreign policy in favor of the Arab and Muslim East. At least in that region, Turkey is regarded as a regional powerhouse and a force to be reckoned with, as opposed to the West, where many Turks are tired of being seen as the poor man trying to gain entry into an elite club.

The Turkish prime minister, however, said that there was "no change in the axis" of his country's foreign policy. In two consecutive speeches earlier last week, Mr. Erdogan said his country would continue to be an intermediary and try to mediate between Palestinians and Israelis and between Syrians and Israelis.

Of course, after his diatribes against Israel Monday and Tuesday drew considerable criticism from Israel's supporters (although the Israeli Embassy declined to comment) it is highly questionable whether the Turkish prime minister will be accepted by the Jewish state as an honest interlocutor in the Middle East peace process.

This change of attitude on Turkey's part comes as no surprise to this reporter, who predicted in numerous columns over the years that the European Union could not continue to treat Turkey as it had and not expect Ankara at some point to turn away from Brussels and begin a rapprochement with countries of the Middle East and Central Asia.

Mr. Erdogan's speech no doubt was designed to demonstrate to his followers back home his political independence from Washington. The Turkish prime minister's speeches will win him many points both at home and in the Arab/Muslim world.

While the prime minister's discourse on Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories was received with stupor by Israeli diplomats, Arab diplomats were more than pleased. "He said what Arab leaders should be saying but don't dare say," said an Arab diplomat who asked not to be identified. The diplomat told this reporter that the Turkish prime minister's speech was "courageous."

In another clear jab at Israel, Mr. Erdogan called for a "legitimate order" in the Middle East, saying that "forcing paranoia based on the fear of the other does not work. We will not be able to solve our problems through military interventions and sheer power." Mr. Erdogan added that the solution should come through diplomacy.

The Turkish prime minister said that Iran producing nuclear weapons "is not just a threat for the region, but for the entire globe." But, Mr. Erdogan added, "if a country possesses nuclear weapons, it cannot ask others to give them up. ... "Everyone should look in the mirror," he said, referring to Israel's policy of refusing to discuss the issue. Indeed, while it is no secret that Israel has long possessed a nuclear arsenal, the country's leadership has never allowed inspections by international observers from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog.

Claude Salhani is the editor of the Middle East Times and author of "While the Arab World Slept: The Impact of the Bush Years on the Middle East" (Xlibris, 2009).