

Oceans apart, but closer than you'd think

By Marlene Moses The Jerusalem Post January 20, 2010

What do Israel and the Pacific island of Nauru have in common? A friendship based on mutual respect, commitment to democracy and human rights, and a conviction that Israel has a right to exist. Though far apart, Israel and my country are not so different. Nauru is a small, isolated island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Israel is an island in its own right, surrounded by a sea of unfriendly neighbors. Nauru lacks a diversity or abundance of natural resources, especially water and energy. Israel also grapples with a scarcity of these critical resources.

And both Nauru and Israel face threats to their very existence. Nauru's great challenge comes in the shape of climate change. Scientists warn that within our children's lifetimes, sea levels may rise by more than a meter. This would wipe out low-lying coastal areas, making many Pacific islands a distant memory. Israel is confronted by those who would deny its right to exist and attempt to relegate it to the history books.

The threats facing Nauru and Israel both have a human genesis. With Nauru, it comes from people's disregard for the consequences of their actions and the efforts of a few powerful interests to protect their destructive business practices. With Israel, the threat comes from overt aggression. In both cases, though, others are attempting to dictate our fates. Whether overtly or indirectly, others are depriving our communities of the peace and security that are the natural rights of all human beings.

When confronted by these powerful forces, it is important to have friends on whom you can rely. Nauru is proud of its record of supporting Israel at the United Nations. We have stood by Israel at times when other countries have not and we will continue to do so. A recent report by the American Jewish Committee, "One Sided: The relentless campaign against Israel in the United Nations," identified 19 resolutions introduced during the 2008 to 2009 session of the UN that targeted Israel. On those resolutions for which Nauru was eligible to vote, it sided with Israel 80 percent of the time and abstained from the rest.

I AM sometimes asked why we vote the way we do and if we suffer any negative repercussions. Without question, the pressure to vote against Israel is great, and we do not have the luxury of hiding

behind a secret ballot at the UN. I am quite sure that many countries fail to vote their conscience for fear of seeing their vote posted on the public tally. Nauru, with a long tradition of independence and voting our conscience, has no such qualms. In fact, we are often stunned by the cowardice demonstrated by countries far larger and more powerful than our own.

Many assume our votes are nothing more than the result of checkbook diplomacy or close ties to the US. That is simply not true. We receive not a single dollar in development aid from the US. Nauru votes with Israel because of its strong conviction that Israel has a right to exist. Together with the US, Israel and Nauru are united by a commitment to democracy and human rights. We recognize Israel's unique status in a region where these principles are not found in abundance.

I visited Israel personally in 2008 through Project Interchange, an institute of the American Jewish Committee. During my visit, I walked through the streets of Ashkelon and Sderot. I saw the menace to innocent civilians posed by the Kassam rockets. For me, the visit confirmed just how one-sided the UN has become. Why must Israel defend itself from political attacks at the UN every time it defends itself from violent attacks at home? I sincerely hope there comes a day when the international community stands behind the nation of Israel rather than behind the countries who deny the Holocaust and preach intolerance and hatred.

This week, I am honored to again visit Israel through Project Interchange and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the esteemed company of the President of Nauru, Marcus Stephen, the Naurun Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Kieren Keke as well as the President of the Federated States of Micronesia, Emanuel Mori and Minister of Foreign Affairs Lorin Robert to further enhance and expand the important ties between our countries.

Why does Nauru vote with Israel? Because Israel is the lone democracy in its neighborhood and therefore, it is the right thing to do. And doing the right thing is its own reward.

The writer is ambassador of Nauru to the United Nations.

The Rest of the World Can Learn a Lot From the Israeli Formula for Growth

By Irwin Stelzer The Wall Street Journal January 24, 2010

Now is the time to take a close look at models. No, not those who strut the catwalks of London, Paris and other rallying points of international fashionistas. Instead, those economic models that might contain clues for post-recession policy. The European Union wants to jack its growth rate up from a meager 1% to 2%, and the United States would like to see its economy grow at an annual rate of at least 3%. Faster growth means more jobs, and an increased flow of tax revenues with which to bring down the huge deficits many countries are running. On offer are the Anglo-Saxon, more-or-less free-market model, modified to account for what we have learned in the past two years; the EU-French model of increasing regulation and government involvement in the economy; the Chávez-Castro-Kim Jong-il state ownership model; and China's managed-economy model. And, attracting less attention, Israel's model of entrepreneurialism.

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, a.k.a. Bibi, is known more for his foreign policy positions than for his earlier role as the finance minister and economic reformer who rolled back regulation and impediments to the operation of market forces. He did not let the crisis created by the 2003 recession go to waste: he cut benefits, liberalized the banking sector, and removed currency and capital controls.

Mr. Netanyahu received considerable help from Daniel Doron's determinedly market-oriented think tank, the Israel Center for Social & Economic Progress. Arthur Seldon, co-founder of Britain's Institute of Economic Affairs, which played an important role in shaping Margaret Thatcher's policies, said that Mr. Doron's think tank in a short time "had more influence ... than we had in Britain in our first ten years."

Finally, Israel benefited from an intelligently crafted macro-economic policy, thanks to Professor Stanley Fischer, governor of its central bank, who was the first major central bank chief to raise interest rates after a successful recession-fighting loosening.

A reforming politician, backed by a think-tank director who helped change the intellectual climate, and a central banker who remembers what he taught when head of M.I.T.'s economics department weren't enough to produce some amazing results and an economy so advanced that it is on the verge of accession to the club of advanced countries, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Dan Senor and Saul Singer's new book "Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle," rattles off some interesting statistics that deserve consideration by policy makers in other countries.

Per-capita venture-capital investment in Israel runs 2.5 times that in the U.S. and 30 times that in Europe. Tiny Israel—population 7.1 million— attracts as much venture capital as Britain (population 61 million), and France and Germany combined (combined population 145 million). Israel has more companies listed on Nasdaq than any other country save the U.S. and has grown faster than the average for developed economies in most years since 1995. Between 1980 and 2000 7,652 patents were registered in the U.S. from Israel. That compares with 77 from Egypt.

Messrs. Netanyahu, Doron and Fischer were operating within a culture that is "skeptical of conventional explanations about what is possible" and characterized by "insatiable questioning of authority" according to Messrs Senor and Singer. And a willingness to accept failure is a necessary part of any economy heavily reliant on start-ups for its economic growth, a feature also characteristic of the U.S., where entrepreneurs say that if an entrepreneur has not gone bankrupt by the age of 35, he has not taken enough risks. A Harvard University study puts it more scientifically: entrepreneurs who fail in their first venture have a higher success rate in their next venture than first-time entrepreneurs. Credit Peter (now Lord) Mandelson for long ago recognizing that and leading an effort to reform U.K. bankruptcy laws to make second chances more possible for the country's risk-takers.

Throw in a superb university system and the obligation of all Israelis to serve in the military, the elite units of which have spawned many of the most successful high-tech entrepreneurs, and you have a recipe for world-class start-ups. These are firms that either end up selling shares in IPOs, or selling to Intel, e-Bay, Microsoft, or Google, among others. One unnamed e-Bay executive told Senor and Singer, "The best-kept secret is that we all live and die by the work of our Israeli teams.... What we do in Israel is unlike what we do anywhere else in the world." Obviously, no other country has Israel's combination of advantages and problems. But other countries can see what happens when a well-educated country allows failure and thereby encourages risk-taking, replaces pervasive government intervention with light-handed regulation, and benefits from intelligent management of its monetary policy. Job-creating start-ups flourish. The growth rate accelerates. Exports increase. Even in a country under continued threat from its enemies. Or perhaps because of that.

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Words, words, words By Moshe Arens Ha'aretz February 9, 2010

One might be inclined to brush off the recent verbal exchanges between Ehud Barak, Walid Moallem and Avigdor Lieberman as no more than Hamlet's "words, words, words" that have little meaningful content. Nevertheless, they are an indication of the thoughts running through the minds of Israel's defense and foreign minister and Syria's foreign minister. So just what are these thoughts?

Let's start with our defense minister. Barak is saying that if Israel does not negotiate a peace agreement with Syria - one that would lead to the return of the Golan Heights to Syrian control - Israel is risking a war with Syria; that after such a war, we would simply return to the present situation and the need to negotiate a peace agreement with Syria and give up the Golan. Really? Does that mean that in his opinion Israel's deterrent capability against Syria that has existed since the Yom Kippur War and was reinforced during the first Lebanon war has worn thin over the years and, in effect, no longer exists? Does that mean that after a war initiated by Syria, Syria's situation would essentially be no different than before it attacked Israel, that it would continue to remain a threat so that Israel would be forced to concede the Golan Heights? Well, that would be good news for Syrian President Bashar Assad, and if taken seriously by him might even put adventurous thoughts in his mind. Except that Assad knows better than that. He knows that a war with Israel would probably damage Syria severely and leave him with little chance to continue to make demands on Israel; that is, unless he places great reliance on the thousands of ballistic missiles he has accumulated over the years. Moallem hinted at their use. "Israel should know that a war will move to Israel's cities," he said. So maybe in fear of the destruction of its cities by Syrian missiles, Israel would prefer to concede the Golan Heights to Syria to prevent such a war. Is that really the balance of terror that now exists between Israel and Syria?

Israel did not need Moallem's warning to be aware of the thousands of missiles in Syria's

inventory accumulated in recent years. One can only hope that the preparations by the Home Front Command - distributing gas masks and readying shelters for the civilian population - are not the only or even the main answer that Israel has prepared against this threat. Israel has certainly had enough time to develop the weapons systems and an appropriate strategy that would remove from Syrian minds the thought of using these missiles against Israel's cities. Do they really need the statement by Lieberman that the current Syrian regime would not survive a war with Israel to put some sober thoughts into their heads?

One can only conclude that the avalanche of words by the leaders of Israel and Syria this past week was really intended for the Israeli public. The defense minister is using scare tactics to urge Israelis to prepare to abandon the Golan Heights. Rather than risking an inevitable war that will result in no more than a stalemate, Israel should now give up the Golan Heights, he tells us. Moallem echoes Barak's words by threatening the destruction of Israel's cities if a war were to occur. And Lieberman is saying - and it's most probably true - that if Syria were to go to war against Israel, under the impact of Israeli blows, Assad's Alawite ruling regime would probably not survive such a war. That is what deterrence is all about, so Israelis need not worry, Lieberman tells us, despite the defense minister's pronouncements.

As for a sober assessment of the Israeli-Syrian situation, by all indications the Syrians continue to be deterred from attacking Israel by their appreciation of Israel's military capability and the response they can expect to aggression on their part. Over the years they have amassed a large arsenal of ballistic missiles hoping to deter Israel from taking military action against Syria. This Syrian deterrent has been effective enough to keep Israel from calling Syria to account for its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. So far.

What to Do With the Settlements By Hillel Halkin The Wall Street Journal

There is one obvious solution for Israel's West Bank settlements that has been all but completely overlooked: Let the settlers continue living where they are, but in the state of Palestine.

As a conception, it's stunningly simple. Its very obviousness has rendered it invisible, like something in one's field of vision that goes unnoticed because it has been there all the time. If over one million Palestinian Arabs can live as they do in towns and villages all over Israel, why cannot a few hundred thousand Israeli Jews live, symmetrically, in a West Bank Palestinian state? The West Bank settlers have

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not only been a major obstacle to the success of peace negotiations in the past, they have now turned into an obstacle to negotiations taking place at all. Although Israel, under heavy American pressure, has agreed to a 10-month freeze on new settlement construction, it has refused to suspend construction already under way or in Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority, initially encouraged by American intimations of a more comprehensive Israeli gesture, has declared that it will not return to the negotiating table in its absence. Yet if the settlers could live under Palestinian sovereignty, what need would

there be for a freeze at all? And why wrangle endlessly over where a tortuous border between Israel and Palestine should run so that a maximum of settlers ends up on the Israeli side and a minimum gets evicted from the Palestinian side if there is no inherent necessity for any to be on the Israeli side or for any to be evicted?

Because, you may say, the settlers have no right to be on Palestinian land to begin with. Or because they would not tolerate living under Palestinian rule. Or because the Palestinians would not tolerate them. Or because they and the Palestinians could never get along even with the best of intentions.

"They," though, are hardly a monolithic group. They are a highly heterogeneous population, having in common only one thing: the fact that all live across the Israeli-Jordanian cease-fire line with which Israel's 1948-49 war of independence ended, on land wrested by Israel when it conquered Jordan's holdings west of the Jordan River in 1967. All are in "Area C," the part of the West Bank that has remained, according to the terms of the 1993 Oslo agreement, under temporary Israeli jurisdiction.

Beyond that, however, the differences are great. Some settlements were built on former Jordanian government-owned land that passed to Israeli jurisdiction, some on land purchased from Palestinians, some on land that was expropriated. Some are 40 years old and some were established recently. Some are isolated outposts, some small villages, some medium-sized towns with six- and eight-story apartment buildings. Some settlers are living where they are, often in the more isolated areas of the West Bank, for religious or ideological reasons; others, generally closer to the old 1967 border, because they have found well-located and pleasant surroundings at affordable prices. There are those who would willingly accept compensation in return for being evacuated as part of a peace agreement and those who would resist evacuation with all their might.

And there are settlers, roughly 225,000, who live on the "Israeli" side of the anti-terror West Bank security fence and settlers, about 75,000, who live on its "Palestinian" side. (Another 200,000 Israelis living in parts of former Jordanian Jerusalem that were annexed by Israel in 1967 are not listed by Israeli statistics as settlers at all.) Approximately 1/20th of Israel's Jewish population, the settlers' numbers have grown by over 5% a year, some three times the national average—a figure due to in-migration, mostly of young couples, and a high birth rate.

Indeed, given the political uncertainty and physical risk of living in the West Bank, where Palestinian terror has stalked the settlers repeatedly, their increase has been phenomenal. In 1977, the year in which the Labor government of Yitzhak Rabin, which had reined in settlement activity, was replaced by the pro-settlement Likud government of

Menachem Begin, the West Bank's Jewish population was barely 7,000. By 1988, it had grown to 63,000; by 1993, to 100,000; by 2006, to 230,000. And even with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's current freeze on new West Bank building starts, enough pre-freeze units are under construction to ensure that this rate of growth continues through 2010. By contrast, the Palestinian population of the West Bank, though also increasingly rapidly, has done so less spectacularly: it is currently guesstimated (agreed-on figures are impossible to come by) at about two million. Aren't the Palestinians, then, justified in their alarm over settlement growth and their insistence that it be stopped? How can they establish a state of their own with a swelling Jewish minority with whom they live in relations of hostility?

This is a fair question that deserves an honest answer—the first part of which is that, even if the settlements were indeed an insurmountable obstacle to peace, Jews would still have a right to live in the West Bank, the hill country south and north of Jerusalem that has always been called by them Judea and Samaria. It was there that the Jewish people was born; that the Hebrew language originated; that the Bible was written and most of the events described in it took place; that the kings of Israel reigned and the Prophets of Israel spoke out. By what principle should Jews be able to live anywhere in the world except for the most traditionally cherished part of their ancestral homeland?

Nor is it true, conventional wisdom notwithstanding, that the settlements are "illegal." The case for this belief rests almost entirely on the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, article 49(6) of which states that an occupying military power "shall not deport or transfer part of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." Yet not only has Israel "deported" or "transferred" no one to the settlements, whose inhabitants are there of their own free will, it did not come into possession of the West Bank as an occupying power.

This is because, after its 1967 victory, Israel had as good a legal claim on the West Bank as anyone. The Jordanian annexation of the area, while consented to by the same Palestinian leadership that rejected the 1947 United Nations partition resolution which would have created a Palestinian state then, was unrecognized by the rest of the world, and Jordan itself refused to make peace with Israel or accept the 1949 border as permanent. As the sole sovereign state to have emerged from British-Mandate Palestine, Israel, it can be maintained, was the West Bank's legitimate ruler pending final determination of the area's status.

Of course, it can be retorted that, however true, all this is irrelevant. In practice, Israel has behaved in the West Bank like an occupying power by systematically favoring the settlers over the

Palestinian population, with whose interests and welfare it has rarely been concerned. This is a major reason why the Palestinians need a state of their own. And if they do, and if the settlers are in the way of it, must not the settlers go, no matter how great their theoretical right to live in the West Bank may be? When theory clashes with reality, must not reality come first?

It certainly must. But there is another reality as well. Even if all the settlers living on the "Israeli" side of the security fence end up in Israel in the land swap that has come to be an assumed part of any peace deal, the 75,000 who would find themselves in a Palestinian state happen to be the very element of the settler population—the ideological and religious militants living deep in Palestinian territory—who are most committed to being where they are. What does one do with them? The standard answer is: one evacuates them by force, just as was done with the 8,000 settlers forcibly evicted in the summer of 2005 when Israel left the Gaza Strip. Whoever doesn't want to leave the Palestinian state on his own two feet can be carried by his arms and legs.

But this cannot be done—and it cannot be done because of what happened in Gaza. To carry out the Gaza operation, Israel had to undergo months of agonizing debate that fractured its political party system; to divert a large part of its army and police force to the task in expectation of settler violence; to experience the national trauma of witnessing men, women and children literally dragged from their homes as Jews were in the past only by their persecutors in their countries of exile; to find itself saddled with a bill of billions of dollars for the evictees' relocation and rehabilitation; and today, nearly five years later, to face the reality that many of them have had their lives severely disrupted and still lack permanent homes. If this is what happened with 8,000 settlers who did not resort to violence in the end, what will happen with 10 times that many who almost certainly will?

This is something the Israeli public is not prepared to find out. It is not going to let itself undergo a trauma 10 times greater than that of 2005 and it will not be pushed to, or over, the brink of civil war. It lacks the political will to oust the more militant settlers from their homes and it will not do so, no matter what the world expects of it or some of its own politicians say.

Clearly, these settlers do not want to be under Palestinian rule and would threaten violent resistance to it, too. But they would quickly find out that a Palestinian police force would not coddle them as Israeli governments have done, and paradoxically,

because they attach a greater value to the Land of Israel than to the State of Israel, many of them might ultimately be willing, if they could have their civil and property rights safeguarded and continue to be Israeli citizens, to live in the land but outside the state. So might many of the more politically moderate ultra-Orthodox and secular Jews in the settlements, whose approach would be more pragmatic. Were they offered a status analogous, say, to that of French Canadians living in Vermont a short drive from the Quebec border, they might well prefer it to giving up their homes.

Needless to say, the Palestinians are not Vermonters and have no love for the settlers. Yet they, too, might agree to such an arrangement if there were substantial benefits in it for them. And there could be: a return to the 1967 frontier, the dismantling of the security fence, open borders with Israel, and the reciprocal right of Palestinians to live and work there as Palestinian citizens. Nor would the continued presence of the settlements on Palestinian territory choke Palestinian development as it does now, for while Area C occupies close to three-fifths of the West Bank, once it were under Palestinian jurisdiction, the settlements themselves would remain with only a tiny fraction of the West Bank's land.

Granted, the settlers living in a Palestinian state would constitute a potential tinderbox that, given the built-in tensions between them and the Palestinian population, could flare up at any time. Preventing this from happening would depend on both them and on the Palestinian government, both of which would have to curb extremist elements. Yet the fact that the settlers would not have Palestinian citizenship would isolate them from the Palestinian political process and remove some points of friction, and if their Palestinian neighbors felt that they, too, were the recipients of a fair deal, the moderates among them might well prevail. And there would be an advantage in each country playing host to a large number of the other's citizens, for each would in effect be holding a body of hostages that it would have to treat well. It would be difficult. It would be complicated. It would be risky for both sides. But isn't it at least worth thinking about? Not a conventional two-state solution, and not a disastrous one-state solution, but a Palestinian-Israeli federation with Palestinians in Israel and Israelis in Palestine. It may be the only real solution now left.

Hillel Halkin is an American-born author and translator who has lived in Israel for the past 40 years.

Gays in the Militaries

By Bret Stephens The Wall Street Journal

Why gays serving openly in the military is a non-issue. There are some excellent arguments for

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ending the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. And there are some lousy ones. Leave it to the

people who mistake moral preening for thought to make the lousiest ones of all. For instance:

- *Ending the policy is the great civil-rights cause of our time.* As compared to what? On the scale of moral precedence, "don't ask, don't tell" is trivial compared to the abuse of women in the Muslim world, or of political dissidents in Cuba, or of homosexuals in Iran, or of American children in inner-city public schools.

- *The support of Defense Secretary Bob Gates and Joint Chiefs Chairman Mike Mullen for ending the policy is the last word on the matter.* The argument might have been more convincing if Adm. Mullen hadn't located his conscience at this moment of maximum political convenience, after saying he'd served alongside homosexuals since 1968.

- *"Don't ask, don't tell" is the moral equivalent of the military's pre-1948 policy of racial segregation.* Or not. "Skin color is a benign non-behavioral characteristic," Colin Powell noted in 1992. "Sexual orientation is perhaps the most profound of human behavioral characteristics."

By the same token, there are arguments good and bad for keeping the policy in place. Among the weakest is the notion that having openly gay service members will lead to some pandemic of escapades in a military that already forbids and punishes sexual liaisons of any variety except between married couples. Even less persuasive is that the erotic attachments of service members will adversely affect military decision making. If that were true, the military would not allow women to serve, nor would it permit husband-and-wife teams to deploy together. Yet the military allows both.

That leaves the best argument against lifting the policy, which is that doing so will have an adverse impact on military effectiveness. The armed services exist to defend the country, not reflect it. (If "reflection" is what we wanted, a third of the military would be obese.) Its value system of duty, honor and country is very nearly the opposite of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Spend an hour in the company of West Point's superb cadets; those high-collared uniforms aren't exactly keeping pace with our evolving social mores. Good thing, too, since if they were you probably couldn't count on them to jump on live grenades to save their buddies.

But does "don't ask, don't tell" contribute to military effectiveness? Probably not. One problem is that by demanding that gay and lesbian service members keep their sexuality a secret, it makes them uniquely susceptible to blackmail. It creates a security hazard where none need have existed.

More problematic is that it has meant the dismissal of more than 13,000 service members since the policy came into force. Assume that the presence of openly gay people in uniform poses real if intangible risks to morale or capability. It's still worth pondering whether those risks outweigh what amounts to the loss of an entire division of war-fighters.

Also worth pondering is the experience of countries in which gays and lesbians serve openly. Britain and Canada are often cited as cases in point, though the deteriorating overall capabilities of their armed forces do not inspire confidence. A better comparison is the Israeli military, which hasn't yet been deemed incompetent or pusillanimous even by those who otherwise routinely defame it.

"It's just a non-issue," says Israeli Army spokesman Capt. Barak Raz about the service of openly gay soldiers. "It's about as important as whether someone chooses to listen to hip-hop or classical music."

Israel lifted restrictions on gay soldiers in 1993 on orders from then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. If there were ill-effects, Capt. Raz says, nobody noticed. Openly gay soldiers have served with distinction in elite combat units and as senior officers. Most of the information is anecdotal, though last summer the army's weekly magazine published an edition for Gay Pride week highlighting a few openly gay officers.

Israel is not the U.S. It has a conscription-based army that can't idly turn people away. It has its own set of cultural assumptions. The most religiously Orthodox Israelis are the least likely to serve. But it remains an instructive case, especially to those who have sincere and reasonable doubts about the effects of lifting the policy and aren't persuaded by the cheap accusations of "bigotry" that pass for reasoned argument on the subject. As Capt. Raz says, "by not treating it as an 'issue,' it doesn't become one. That's the bottom line."

Hamas Insists Rockets Were Not Aimed at Civilians

By Isabel Kershner The New York Times February 6, 2010

Hamas insists that it did not intentionally aim rockets at Israeli civilians during the Gaza war last winter, according to a report submitted this week to a United Nations office in Gaza.

Hamas, the militant Islamic organization that controls Gaza, said accusations that it had deliberately made targets of Israeli civilians were unfounded. But a Gaza-based Palestinian human rights group said Friday that the Hamas

government's report was disappointing and lacked credibility.

Hamas also said in the report that it regretted any harm to Israeli civilians, but it defended Palestinians' right to respond to Israeli attacks. The report was meant as a response by the Hamas leadership to a harshly critical United Nations study of the three-week conflict that accused Israel, and to a lesser extent Hamas, of possible war crimes. The study was

researched and written by a fact-finding mission created by the Human Rights Council and led by Richard J. Goldstone, a South African judge and veteran war crimes prosecutor.

In November, the General Assembly endorsed the Goldstone report and asked the secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, to report back by Feb. 5 on Israeli and Palestinian progress in investigating their respective roles in the war.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which governs the Palestinians in the West Bank, submitted official responses to the secretary general in late January. (On Thursday, the secretary general indicated that he had not yet been able to determine whether Israel and the Palestinians had met the General Assembly's demands that they carry out credible, independent investigations into their own actions. It was unclear whether the Hamas report had been taken into account.

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights, which is based in Gaza, issued a statement on Friday expressing its "grave concern" about the credibility of investigations carried out by Israel and the Palestinians.

The organization rejected Israel's military investigation as inadequate and ineffective and said that efforts by the Palestinian Authority's commission of inquiry "came far too late and exhibited a lack of professionalism." And the Hamas report "merely confirmed that the government in Gaza has failed to establish a credible, impartial investigation committee to lead an inquiry into the allegations of the Goldstone report," the group said. Hamas delivered its 52-page report to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Gaza on Wednesday. The full version was published on Thursday.

Little more than a page dealt with the central question of whether Palestinian armed groups had

deliberately fired rockets from Gaza at civilian centers in southern Israel, which would constitute a war crime, along with the question of Hamas's responsibility as the governing authority in Gaza.

Hamas claimed in its response that armed Palestinian groups had aimed rockets only at military sites in Israel, and that any Israeli civilian casualties were the result of rockets that had gone astray.

Human Rights Watch, commenting after Hamas released a summary of its report in late January, rejected these claims and said that hundreds of rockets from Gaza "rained down on civilian areas in Israel where no military installations were located." Human Rights Watch also criticized Israel's conduct during the war. Israel launched its military offensive against Hamas in Gaza after years of rocket fire from militants on towns and cities in southern Israel.

Aside from recommending that Palestinian armed groups should renounce attacks on Israeli civilians, the Goldstone report also said that the Palestinian authorities should release all political prisoners, and that a captured Israeli soldier, Staff Sgt. Gilad Shalit, should be released on humanitarian grounds. Before his release, the report said, he should be recognized as a prisoner of war and be allowed visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Hamas denied that it was holding any political detainees, and said that Staff Sgt. Shalit had been treated well. It argued that a visit from the Red Cross could endanger the soldier's life, as it would reveal where he is being hidden and could prompt an Israeli military strike.

Much of the rest of the Hamas report dealt with the effects of the economic embargo on Gaza, the conduct of Israel during the war and the detention of Hamas members by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

From Economic Peace to Two State Solution

By Yisrael Ne'eman Mideast on Target February 11, 2010

Riveted by the Iranian race to develop nuclear weapons Israelis are completely focused on the need to halt Ahmedinejad & Co. Whether the supposedly tough sanctions to be imposed by the West and Russia will work is yet to be seen. President Obama is aware of the Iranian threat to world security and is taking action, even if belatedly. Whether he will lead a military strike against Iranian targets should sanctions fail, no one knows. But once the Iranian crisis ends Israel will return to business as usual, meaning confronting Palestinian issues, tussling over conflict resolution and the implementation of the "two-state solution".

Should the great Iranian distraction be neutralized to the satisfaction of Israel and the West, the Palestinian challenge will be next on the list. And even should there not be a full resolution to the Iranian crisis one can expect a diplomatic push on

the Palestinian front. Time does not stand still. Not only has Israeli Likud (supposedly right wing) PM Benjamin Netanyahu spoken about an economic peace with the Palestinians as a first step in solving the conflict but Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad has taken him up on the deal. During 2009 the Israel removed the vast majority of roadblocks in the West Bank, terrorism and Hamas have been contained to the point of close to zero attacks against Israelis as a result of joint security cooperation and the Palestinian economy is booming (estimated growth somewhere around 7% or higher). Netanyahu is implementing a construction freeze in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) and even though not total, it is stricter than anything seen in previous years.

Stage I of the famous Bush "Road Map" is coming to fruition. The Palestinians halt terrorism (with help from the IDF) and Israel ceases

settlement construction. Taking a full chapter out of the Zionist playbook Fayyad wrote up his game plan for the establishment of a Palestinian State in August of last year in his 37 page document entitled "Palestine: Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State". It is finally realized that statehood is built by civilians from the bottom up. Within two years (beginning August 2009) he envisions a two-state solution based on the 1949-67 armistice lines and encompassing all the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital. Reviling the "occupation" but realizing the inability to win militarily he advocates jettisoning the armed struggle in favor of massive economic development throughout the entire West Bank while living alongside Israel. As an economist he is confronted with a stark reality: Israel's GDP for 2009 was approximately \$200 billion while the Palestinian Authority economy is worth \$12.6 billion. The Israeli population (incl. 1.5 million Arabs) is 7.4 million and the Palestinian about 4 million. On a per capita level Israel's economy is more than 8.5 times larger than the Palestinian and in absolute terms is almost 16 times greater.

Concerning economic development Fayyad, Netanyahu, the EU, the US and all others interested in stability are in favor of this first step. Although PM in a Fatah government, Fayyad, known as a moderate and pragmatist, faces opposition from within the regime. There are those advocating refugee return such as Pres. Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) while others on the right wing still speak of an "armed struggle" if all their demands are not met. Hamas, the Jihad and other Islamists are all violently opposed to a two-state solution but are holed up in Gaza facing increasing restrictions as the Egyptians continue building an above and below ground barrier to halt the flow of weapons and other military contraband into the Strip.

The time of reckoning has arrived in Israel and many would be grateful there is a right of center government in power since they can cut the deal with little official opposition. Echoing the now defunct Israeli Left, the "intransigent", "extremist", "right wing" Netanyahu announced in June his acceptance of the two-state solution, and as usual with the conditions of demilitarization of the Palestinian entity.

With the Iranians seriously contained or even defeated the door will be thrown wide open for world scrutiny and involvement in ending the conflict. But of course "the devil is in the details". All will be parachuted into Stage II of the Road Map delineating a temporary Palestinian State developing state institutions and an economy, yet without permanent boundaries. Israel is to gain further security cooperation.

One can expect Netanyahu to hesitatingly move the process along in the West Bank. His underlying

motivation will be two fold – to avoid falling into a bi-national state and to ensure US/EU support leading to continued Israeli economic development. Today Jews are no longer a majority in the Land of Israel or what had been the Palestine Mandate from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. Both Jews and Arabs (Palestinian and Israeli) comprise a population of 5.6 million each. In the middle are several hundred thousand Eastern Europeans of non Jewish background who arrived in Israel during the Russian immigration in the 1990s. Israel's waning diplomatic position and economic development are intertwined, especially when it comes to Europe as Israel's largest trading partner. Add to that the Obama administration's focus on the need for rapprochement with the secular regimes in the Arab/Muslim world and it appears everyone is on the same page in working towards the two-state solution.

The sharpest internal issue in Israel will be how to handle those Jews living in the West Bank and outside whichever new borders will be drawn. For instance, one assumes the settlement blocs around Jerusalem will remain in Israel in a land swap with the Palestinians but at the minimum some 80,000 Jews (out of a population of a quarter million) will find themselves in the newly established Palestinian State. In July PM Fayyad, in answer to a question in Aspen, Colorado, announced that under his plan all Jews could remain in the Palestinian State, the same way the same way there is an Arab minority in the Jewish State. This was a welcome opening to solving the issue of the "settlements" only to be swept aside this past January when Fayyad speaking in Arabic in Ramallah nullified such a possibility. No government in Israel has the ability to remove such a large number of families and resettle them. Not only will Israeli/Jewish society be shredded but the financial burden will be unbearable. The hope is that Fayyad's former commitment overrides what he said just recently.

Jerusalem is a central issue. Most likely a borough system with Arab neighborhoods belonging to the Palestinians and Jewish neighborhoods being included in Israel will provide the beginning of an answer. A solution as to who controls the Old City (or is it split?) and the holy sites is a stickier issue, one which may be resolved with international involvement.

The other major issue for Israel is security - with the Jordan River serving as a natural boundary. Israel does not trust the UN or anyone else to ensure its security. When war threatens, peace keeping troops have a tendency to flee or bunker down under ground. Israel will need a permanent military presence along the Jordan River, even if in conjunction with other forces (US, EU, Palestinian, etc.).

Whether one likes it or not, the moment of truth is arriving and not just on the Iranian front. The Fayyad Plan is certainly worth a starting point for discussions, although it should not be taken only at face value. Yet tough negotiating lies ahead. Israel

must remain a physically secure Jewish and democratic state. Any other alternatives would undermine the original Zionist vision of Jewish national liberation.

Too Close to Home By Clark Hoyt

Late last month, a Web site called the Electronic Intifada reported that Ethan Bronner, the Jerusalem bureau chief of The Times, has a son in the Israeli military. Others, including Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a liberal media watchdog group, demanded to know if it was true and, if so, why it did not create an unacceptable conflict of interest for Bronner and The Times.

Bill Keller, the executive editor, confirmed that Bronner's son enlisted in the Israeli Defense Forces and said, "He's a 20-year-old who makes his own decisions." Bronner told me his son joined in late December for roughly a year of training and six months of active duty before he returns to the United States for college. Bronner said he had alerted his editors, as the paper's ethics guidelines require. Keller said the editors discussed the situation "and see no reason to change his status as bureau chief."

Bronner occupies one of journalism's hottest seats, covering the intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. As the top correspondent for America's most influential newspaper, everything he writes is examined microscopically for signs of bias. Web sites like the Angry Arab News Service have called him a propagandist for Israel. I have received hundreds of messages heatedly contending the opposite: that his coverage is slanted against Israel. Sometimes the "evidence" is a single word in one news article. Sometimes it is his "failure" to show how one side or the other is solely to blame for what is happening.

"No place, date or event in this conflicted land is spoken of in a common language," Bronner wrote in The Times last year after the three-week Israeli assault on Gaza, intended to stop rocket fire into southern Israel. "Trying to tell the story so that both sides can hear it in the same way feels more and more to me like a Greek tragedy in which I play the despised chorus."

Since the initial report of his son's enlistment, I have heard from roughly 400 readers, many of them convinced that Bronner could not continue in his current assignment. Linda Mamoun of Boulder, Colo., wrote that although she found Bronner's coverage "impressively well-written and relatively even-handed," his position "should not be held by anyone with military ties to the state of Israel." His son has the direct ties, not Bronner. But is that still too close for comfort?

The situation raises tough questions about how the paper best serves its readers, protects its

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credibility and deals fairly with a correspondent who has what I believe is an excellent track record.

Keller told me, "Ethan has proved himself to be the most scrupulous of reporters," despite intense scrutiny, "some of it honest and reasonable, some of it savagely partisan and distorted." He added, "We have the utmost confidence that his work will continue to meet the highest standards."

When Bronner wrote last year about the suffering of people in Gaza, I heard from readers angry because he did not say it was the Palestinians' own fault. When he reported on complaints by some Israeli soldiers about a permissive attitude toward the killing of civilians, I heard more criticism. When he wrote that Israel was preparing to rebut the Goldstone Report alleging war crimes by both sides in the Gaza fighting, he was accused of parroting the government's case. In these and many other instances, I found his reporting solid and fair.

Bronner said, "I wish to be judged by my work, not by my biography." He said he has been writing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for 27 years, and, "Either you are the kind of person whose intellectual independence and journalistic integrity can be trusted to do the work we do at The Times, or you are not."

If only it were that simple. The Times has extensive written ethics guidelines because even the best and most honorable journalists can find themselves in awkward circumstances that can affect their credibility — and the newspaper's — with a public that has little trust in journalists. In this case, the guidelines stop far short of dictating what should be done. They say that if a family member's activities create even the appearance of a conflict of interest, it should be disclosed to editors, who must then decide whether the staffer should avoid certain stories or even be reassigned to a different beat.

Keller said that if Israel launched a new assault into Gaza and Bronner's son were a foot soldier, "I don't think I'd have any problem with Ethan covering the conflict." It would be a tougher call if the son rose to a commanding role, he said, and if the son's unit were accused of wrongdoing, Keller said he thought he would assign another reporter.

I asked David K. Shipler, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, what he would do. Shipler was The Times's Jerusalem bureau chief a generation ago and its chief diplomatic correspondent until he left the paper in 1988. He said foreign correspondents operate in far more nuanced circumstances than readers may realize. They may rely on translators and

stringers with political ties or biases that have to be accounted for. They develop their own relationships that enrich their reporting, just as Bronner's son's military service could open a conduit for information that other reporters might not have.

"There are always two questions," Shipler said. "One is whether there is an actual conflict; the other is whether there is the appearance of a conflict. Given the high quality of Bronner's reporting, I don't see an actual conflict." He said he thought Bronner should remain in his post and The Times should disclose the situation. Keller and Bronner responded freely to my questions, but the paper has otherwise been tight-lipped so far.

Alex Jones, director of Harvard's Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy and a former Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for The Times, took a different view. "The appearance of a conflict of interest is often as important or more important than a real conflict of interest," he said. "I would reassign him." Jones said such a step would be an injustice to Bronner, "but the newspaper has to come first."

There are so many considerations swirling around this case: Bronner is a superb reporter. Nobody at The Times wants to give in to what they see as relentlessly unfair criticism of the paper's Middle East coverage by people hostile to objective reporting. It doesn't seem fair to hold a father accountable for the decision of an adult son.

But, stepping back, this is what I see: The Times sent a reporter overseas to provide disinterested coverage of one of the world's most intense and potentially explosive conflicts, and now his son has taken up arms for one side. Even the most sympathetic reader could reasonably wonder how that would affect the father, especially if shooting broke out.

I have enormous respect for Bronner and his work, and he has done nothing wrong. But this is not about punishment; it is simply a difficult reality. I would find a plum assignment for him somewhere else, at least for the duration of his son's service in the I.D.F.

A response from Bill Keller can be found online at The Public Editor's Journal.

Oren Heckled at US College By Jerusalem Post staff February 09, 2010

Eleven people were arrested as Ambassador to the US Michael Oren was repeatedly interrupted while trying to deliver an address at the University of California, Irvine, on Monday night. Oren was speaking about US-Israeli relations and was interrupted nearly a dozen times.

A young man began the outbursts, yelling, "Michael Oren! Propagating murder is not an expression of free speech!" The man's yelling was followed by both heavy applause and objections.

His words echoed a statement released by the university's Muslim Student Union prior to Oren's appearance, which said, "As people of conscience, we oppose Michael Oren's invitation to our campus. Propagating murder is not a responsible expression of free speech."

It was not clear whether those disturbing the speech were members of the Muslim Student Union. After the fourth protester began heckling him, Oren left the podium, surrounded by security personnel. He returned but was repeatedly harassed by students.

Oren took the stage again to complete his address and eventually a large number of those in the audience stood and exited, disrupting him for a final time. They then demonstrated outside the arena, chanting, "Michael Oren, you will see, Palestine will be free."

The Muslim Student Union said in its statement: "We strongly condemn the university for

cosponsoring, and therefore, inadvertently supporting the ambassador of a state that is condemned by more UN Human Rights Council resolutions than all other countries in the world combined."

The statement said Israel had "massacred" 1,400 people, including 700 women and children, in Gaza. The Muslim Student Union further said that "Oren took part in a culture that has no qualms with terrorizing the innocent, killing civilians, demolishing their homes, and illegally occupying their land. Oren is an outspoken supporter of the recent war on Gaza and stands in the way of international law by refusing to cooperate with the United Nation's Goldstone Report, a fact-finding mission endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council."

Prof. Mark P. Petracca, chairman of the university's Political Science department, chastised the protesters, telling them, "This is beyond embarrassing... This is no way for our undergraduate students to behave. We have an opportunity to hear from a policy-maker relevant to one of the most important issues facing this planet and you are preventing not only yourself from hearing him but hundreds of other people in this room and hundreds of other people in an overflow room. Shame on you! This is not an example of free speech."

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