



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee
of Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

Events...

Thursday January 17, 7:30pm

*Bnai Brith Canada and the Legal Forum for the Land of Israel presents
International lawyer Jacques Gauthier speaking of Israel's legal right to the
City of Jerusalem.*

Commentary...

Mr. President, Would You Divide New York? By Nadav Shragai

If Ehud Olmert as we knew him when he was mayor of Jerusalem could speak to U.S. President George W. Bush, he would almost certainly say the following: "Mr. President, Ehud Olmert may be prime minister today, but his mandate is limited. Neither the Jewish people worldwide nor the citizens of Israel have authorized him to negotiate over Jerusalem, the Old City and the Temple Mount. No one authorized him to restrict construction in the city's new neighborhoods. Even during the Camp David negotiations with the Palestinians in 2000, it was agreed that they would continue to exist and develop. We built Har Homa, former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and I, to prevent the Arabs of Bethlehem from overflowing into Jerusalem. We must complete this process. Don't hinder us from doing so.

"Look at the map, Mr. President. Look at what is happening even now: Construction of the separation fence north of the city caused tens of thousands of Arabs to flock to Jerusalem, and they are beginning to settle in Jewish neighborhoods. Consider how many Palestinians will flock to the Israeli side of the fence when additional Palestinian neighborhoods are severed from Israeli Jerusalem under the agreement that you and Prime Minister Olmert are discussing.

"I circulate through these neighborhoods. Their residents are very worried by the possibility that they will become border neighborhoods, that they will come under fire from the Palestinian side as happened to residents of Gilo seven years ago after Israel transferred Beit Jala to the Palestinian Authority.

"Mr. President, do you know what happened in Jerusalem the last time it was divided, in 1948? About one quarter of its Jews left - more than 25,000 people! They weren't willing to live in border neighborhoods and be exposed to rifle and machine-gun fire. Today as well, the Palestinians have rifles and machine guns. And today, even if an agreement is signed, many Palestinians will be motivated to continue to fight, especially over Jerusalem. Many of them have never given up the dream of returning to their former homes in the western part of the city. Many are unwilling to give up even an inch of the Old City, the Temple Mount, the Western Wall. In their view, terror was and remains a legitimate tactic.

"Division will expose some 200,000 Jews, who live a mere few dozen or few hundred meters from Arab neighborhoods, to this terror, to this fire, just as happened in Gilo. Would you agree to divide New York and hand part of it over to a foreign government that hesitates to fight elements such as Hamas, Hezbollah or Bin Laden because it views them as brothers?

"It pains me to say this, Mr. President, but Prime Minister Olmert is pulling the wool over your eyes. Check for yourself what Arab residents of East Jerusalem really want. Ask your experts what has happened to the Christians and their holy sites under Palestinian Authority rule - how many Christians have abandoned the PA and fled to South America? What will happen to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, to hundreds of other churches and to Judaism's holy sites if the PA controls Jerusalem?

"As mayor, I remember then prime minister Ehud Barak and his public security minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, handing the Temple Mount over to Palestinian security forces for a mere few hours, as an experiment. Do you know what a panic occurred in the Old City? Look for yourself at the

בס"ד
photographs taken then: Jews fleeing the Western Wall as showers of stones and rocks were hurled down at them from the Temple Mount. What an embarrassment!

"Would any other country in the world give up the right to pray at its holiest site, the Temple Mount, as Israel has done, out of respect for members of another faith who also pray at that site? And in exchange - look at how the Palestinians 'respect' our holy

sites: Joseph's Tomb, Rachel's Tomb ...

"Mr. President, I am admittedly only a mayor, but what I said to then prime minister Barak in 2000, I am saying now to you, and to Prime Minister Olmert: 'It's dangerous. It's irresponsible. Life in this city will become hell, for Jews and Arabs alike.' Please explain this to the prime minister of Israel."
(Haaretz Jan 7)

Bush's Historical Parallels By Caroline Glick

During his tenure as President George W. Bush's defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld often likened the administration's foreign policy decisions to those of the Truman administration during the first years of the Cold War. As President George W. Bush makes his way to Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states with a stated agenda of advancing the goal of Palestinian statehood, it is worth examining president Truman's achievements and comparing them with those of President Bush.

President Harry S Truman was in some ways an accidental president. Elected vice president in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's fourth term in office, he assumed the presidency when Roosevelt died in April 1945, a month before the Allied victory in Europe and four months before the surrender of Imperial Japan.

As the war wound down, Truman was quick to understand the threat that Soviet imperialism and communist ideology posed to US national security. A world dominated by communism was a world in which America, as the beacon of human freedom and liberty, could not be safe. Consequently, he recognized that the rising Cold War between the Soviet Union and the US would be the defining contest of the postwar era.

During his tenure, Truman established the instruments of government and international affairs which, in the years to come, would counter and contain the Soviet threat. He also took military action to begin to combat the Soviets with the intention of rolling back Soviet domination of East-Central Europe and preventing the Soviet Union from expanding its influence globally. Truman established the Defense Department, the National Security Council, the Air Force and the Central Intelligence Agency. He set forth the Truman Doctrine, which prevented Soviet domination of Greece and Turkey and stemmed the political advance of the communists in France and Italy. He established the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to provide for the military defense of Western Europe. Through the Marshall Plan, he enabled the postwar economic recovery of Western Europe.

Militarily, Truman conducted the Berlin airlift to ensure the economic development of western Germany as the anchor of postwar Western European unity against the Soviets. He also waged the Korean War to contain communist expansion in Asia.

After the Soviets surprised the US with their acquisition of the atom bomb in 1949, Truman moved speedily to test the hydrogen bomb. Moreover, quick to realize that with the advent of Soviet nuclear power the US could no longer rely simply on its nuclear deterrent to fight the Soviets, Truman revamped and expanded US conventional forces which had been largely scrapped in the rapid demobilization after WW2.

On the ideological and political front, Truman worked to educate the American people about the threat of communism and took steps to root out Soviet agents from the US government. Truman also set up the infrastructure to combat the Soviets in a war of ideas inside of the Soviet bloc. He founded Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty which brought American ideals, culture and credible news directly into the Soviet Union and Soviet-controlled East-Central Europe.

Beyond all that, Truman willingly took on his foreign policy bureaucracy when he felt that its members were wrong. Against the virulent opposition of his popular secretary of state George Marshall and what Truman referred

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to as the "striped pants conspirators" in the State Department, he recognized the State of Israel.

By the time he left office, then, Truman had ensured that the US had the institutional wherewithal and the political and ideological will to fight the Cold War, and had upheld the principle of presidential control over US foreign policy.

Like Truman, Bush too was in some respects an accidental president. His electoral victory in the 2000 presidential race came despite his failure to win the popular vote. Like Truman also, Bush has been forced to contend with a foreign policy establishment openly hostile to his stated foreign policy objectives. Truman left office with the lowest popularity ratings in modern US history. The war in Korea was overwhelmingly unpopular and his successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, based his campaign for office on his pledge to take US forces out of Korea.

Although Bush was considered a foreign policy lightweight when he entered office, the September 11, 2001 jihadist attacks on America made it clear that foreign policy would dominate his presidency. And, like Truman, Bush's legacy would be determined by his conduct of the war against the new epochal struggle with Islamic fascism and global jihad.

Bush clearly understands this. In his interviews with the Israeli and Arab media ahead of his trip to the Middle East this week, Bush claimed that, like Truman in his day, he hopes that history will remember him as the leader who clearly identified the threats of the 21st century and set up the institutional, military and ideological foundations for the current epochal struggle.

Yet although the historical parallels between Bush and Truman are clear, unlike Truman, Bush has not yet struck a clear course for fighting the war and so, with a year left in office, he has not ensured that those who follow him will have either the administrative and international tools to fight the war, or the ideological and political clarity to understand that the war with Islamic fascism is in fact the central security challenge of the new century.

Since September 11, Bush has made numerous speeches that have indicated that he does indeed grasp the challenges of our times. In a speech before the National Endowment for Democracy in October 2005 for instance the president said, "The murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals is the great challenge of our new century."

In that address and several others like it, Bush argued that jihadists must be denied control over any territory; that there can be no distinction between jihadists and their state sponsors - both have to be defeated - and that the message of democracy and human liberty has to be communicated clearly in an ideological war against those preaching jihad.

Bush eschewed appeasement, claiming, "No act of ours invited the rage of the killers - and no concession, bribe or act of appeasement would change or limit their plans for murder.

"On the contrary: They target nations whose behavior they believe they can change through violence. Against such an enemy, there is only one effective response: We will never back down, never give in, and never accept anything less than complete victory."

Yet speeches like this one have been in large part superseded by the president's actions. With al-Qaida and the Taliban resurgent in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and with Iraq's borders with Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia still unsecured, the president's sometimes assertive definition of the road to victory has been largely obscured by bumps in that road.

THEN TOO, although Bush, like Truman, set out to form institutional tools to fight the long struggle against the forces of jihad, these institutions have done little to advance the cause. The Department of Homeland Security has not stymied the strength of Islamic agents of subversion in the US. And the National Intelligence Directorate has caused grave harm to Bush's foremost objective of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. In what has been cast as a bureaucratic assault on presidential power to determine US foreign policy, the National Intelligence Estimate on Iran stripped Bush of the political capacity to act forthrightly to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The Defense Department's decision last week to sack Stephen Coughlin, the only expert on Islamic law in the Pentagon's joint staff, because his documented report on American Muslim institutional support for jihad angered pro-Muslim forces in the Pentagon, is another indication that the foreign policy bureaucracy is successfully scuttling the president's agenda.

Most important, though, is the fact that the new centerpiece of Bush's foreign policy agenda is to establish a Palestinian state. Bush's support for Palestinian statehood, stated first just two months after 9/11, has always been difficult to square with his recognition of the global jihad and its radical Islamic ideology as the central challenges of our age.

After all, when America was attacked the Palestinians were entering the second year of their jihad against Israel. The Palestinians greeted those attacks with open delight. And now, after the Palestinian people popularly elected Hamas to lead them and transformed Gaza into an operating base for global terrorists; while Fatah leaders like Mahmoud Abbas refuse to accept Israel as a Jewish state and official Fatah security forces wantonly murder Israeli civilians, Bush's main foreign policy goal in his last year in office is to

establish a Palestinian state.

WHILE BUSH argues that the Palestinians have to be shown what they can achieve if they eschew terror and accept Israel, he never mentions what price they must pay for their continued, open support for Israel's destruction and support for and involvement in the global jihad. In his treatment, then, of the Palestinian war against Israel and its central role in the global jihad, Bush has done more to undermine the coherence of his recognition of the challenges of the 21st century and his own legacy in shaping the free world's war against the forces of terror and jihad than anyone else.

Truman is today considered one of the great American presidents because his forthright clarity and consistent policies in office set the US on a steady course for victory against Soviet communism even as specific actions - like the Korean War - were deeply unpopular.

In his last year in office, Bush's central challenge is to clarify what he himself has allowed to become muddled about the nature of the current generational struggle. Unfortunately, though his commitment to Palestinian statehood, and his refusal to assert his own foreign policy against the wishes of a hostile bureaucracy, he calls to mind not Truman, but another American president who led his country at the cusp of another formative crisis. Like Bush, James Buchanan - the last president to serve before the Civil War - understood the nature of the gathering storm; yet rather than confront the dangers, he was overwhelmed by them. (Jerusalem Post Jan 7)

From One Texan to Another By Stewart Weiss

This is a historic moment for Israel. President George W. Bush - leader of the free world, a champion of the fight against terrorism, and arguably the best friend Israel has had in the White House since Ronald Reagan - is making his first visit as president to our country.

No doubt, Mr. Bush (and I hope you are reading this in The Jerusalem Post, Israel's English-language newspaper of choice), you will hear any number of diverse opinions from all kinds of people while you are here: about Israel, the Middle East peace process, terrorism, etc.

But I would like to offer you a perspective that is perhaps different from any other you will encounter on your visit. It's the viewpoint of a young man, born and bred in the great city of Dallas, Texas, just down the road a piece from your family ranch in Crawford.

He was proud to be an American, and a Texan, too. He even met you on one occasion at the ballpark, when you were managing partner of the Texas Rangers baseball team.

I wish that boy could be writing this article himself, instead of me, but Sgt. Ari Weiss, our beloved eldest son, was killed five years ago in a battle against Palestinian terrorists.

Ari loved sports and was an excellent athlete. He was a big fan of the Dallas Cowboys - "America's Team" - and I'm sure he would have wanted to be at this weekend's playoff game. But he accompanied us to Israel when we moved here, and came to love this land, volunteering for an elite combat unit when he reached military age, and bravely, selflessly fighting our enemies, until he fell.

Ari believed that this country was akin to the Alamo, that quintessential San Antonio monument to Texas independence and courage. I took Ari to see the Alamo as a young boy, and later explained to him that the State of Israel was a similar kind of fortress, a symbol of Jewish resolve to reclaim our ancient heritage and create a future in the homeland of our past. Ari believed that Jewish destiny would be played out here, in Israel, and not anywhere else, and he wanted to be a part of that great adventure, no matter the risks he had to take.

Ari - whose name means "lion" - saw the world a lot like you, Mr. President: a struggle between Good and Evil, Democracy and dictatorship, an unceasing battle between those who would subjugate others and those who just want to live a free and happy life.

I told Ari a lot about you before he fell. How you were resolute and strong-minded, determined to hold the course you felt was right despite vicious opposition from others around you. We both admired how you "stuck to your guns" like a real Texan, and called a terrorist a terrorist - not a "freedom fighter" or "activist" - and would give them no clemency or quarter.

I sure hope you haven't changed. I hope you won't pay too much attention to some on the lunatic fringe that we encounter in these here parts sometimes. Like the editor of Haaretz, who told Dr. Rice that Israel "wants to be raped"; or addle-headed members of the government who lose their resolve and talk about freeing mass-murderers like Marwan Barghouti; who propose "giving away the farm" in exchange for useless promises of peace.

I suspect that, away from the cameras and tape-recorders, you'd admit you have your own share of crackpots in Congress, with their own nutty ideas. And I love how you smile your smile and just ignore them, dismissing their negativity with perfect Texan phrases like "That dog won't hunt!"

You're a model for us, an inspiration, really. You've taught us to draw a bead on what we know is right and never stray from that path, to draw a line

in the sand and never yield, despite the pain or pressure. You held back from squeezing Israel - as some of your predecessors did - to make all the concessions, to give in to every demand put upon us. You waged war against terrorists when it was mighty unpopular.

You may not have found any weapons of mass destruction, but we certainly have: They're called Hamas, Hizbullah, Iran and Syria - and they're pointed directly at our heart.

You know, we folks here have a lot in common with folks like you. Why, even our two flags, those of Texas and Israel, are strikingly similar. Both have a single star, a shining light in the darkness, representing a beacon of justice and morality in an all-too-dark world. We each are Lone Star States, standing in the breach, defending what's right, ignoring the threats against us and moving forward, despite the odds.

So, Mr. President, here's a plea - a prayer, even - from one Texan to another: Don't lean too hard on the good guys in the white hats (or kippot). Convince the other side, the ones shooting the rockets into our cities every day, the ones who refuse to disarm the terrorists, the ones who blame everybody except themselves for their problems, to stop whining and get busy making their people into respectable citizens of the world.

We have faith in you, because you are definitely one of the "good ol' boys." In an age of shrinking volunteerism and flagging idealism, in a world where values and justice are often turned on their heads, you - and Ari - showed us that some things in this world are worth fighting, and dying, for. (Jerusalem Post Jan 8)

When Nothing but Bluntness Will Do By Isi Leibler

Prime Minister Olmert has announced that in the course of his meetings with President George W. Bush, besides discussing Iran, he intends to reassure the president that Israel will remain highly flexible and make every effort to enhance the status of our "peace partner," Mahmoud Abbas.

Such a message would be utterly inappropriate. Now is the time for our prime minister to speak the truth to President Bush. He should alert him that under current circumstances, no meaningful outcome from our negotiations with the Palestinians is likely, and that raising false expectations could be highly counterproductive.

President Bush is a true friend of Israel. In contrast to his predecessors, once he recognized the evil and duplicitous nature of Yasser Arafat, he severed relations and effectively marginalized him. He also brought to an end the era of moral equivalency during which Palestinian murderers and Israeli victims were both regarded as equal components of a senseless cycle of violence. In addition, Bush endorsed Israel's right to defensible borders and became the first Western leader to state that when boundaries are finalized, demographic facts on the ground will need to be taken into account - a clear endorsement for Israeli retention of the major settlement blocs. And at Annapolis, despite all its ambivalences, the president unequivocally reiterated that Israel is a "Jewish state," bluntly contradicting the Palestinians, who vowed that they would never come to terms with a Jewish entity.

Indeed, unless the White House reverses these policies, history will judge President Bush as the most pro-Israeli president to date, a leader who resisted pressures from many of his allies to appease the Palestinians and courageously maintained a principled approach toward the Jewish state.

Regrettably, over the past year there have been ominous indications that the State Department has begun tilting its policy against Israel and reverting to its former failed strategy of appeasement.

The offensive remarks recently expressed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, comparing Palestinian suffering with the discrimination she as an African-American underwent from white supremacists, exemplify a new confrontational stance. She has also been adopting language reminiscent of moral equivalency, implying that both parties to the conflict are equally culpable.

The atmosphere became further strained when, on the eve of the Presidential visit, Rice described Jewish suburbs of east Jerusalem - specifically mentioning Har Homa - as "settlements." With Olmert having impulsively ceded to the Americans the role of determining adherence to the road map, a real confrontation with the US is looming.

In a similar vein, the brutal pressures exerted over the past year by Rice against Israel have, for the first time, led to a questioning of her role as an honest broker. This followed a series of tough demands on Israel to "ease the suffering of the Palestinians" by making further unilateral concessions which impacted disastrously on Israel's security.

The most glaring example was the insistence that Israel give up the Philadelphi Corridor, which enabled the flood of armaments into Gaza from Egypt. But even as the arms continued to pour in, Rice demanded that Israel reduce checkpoints, release terrorists and provide arms to PA security forces, arms that were subsequently employed against Israelis.

These actions have already resulted in the murder of innocent Israeli civilians, and will inevitably lead to more bloodshed.

Some of these disastrous changes may have been avoided had the Israeli government displayed a modicum of resistance to the initial American pressures. Regrettably, Israel frequently anticipated and even exceeded American demands. For example, it was Prime Minister Olmert, not the Americans, who dispensed with the road map requirement that the terrorist militias be dissolved before the commencement of final status negotiations. It was Israel which requested that Congress waive conditions it intended imposing in relation to financial aid to the PA.

Public support for Israel may be at a peak in the US, but one cannot expect the US administration to be more supportive of Israel's security requirements than its own government.

Were it anyone other than Ehud Olmert, one would expect the prime minister of Israel to urge President Bush to uphold the fundamental principles relating to fighting terror and Islamic fundamentalism which he has promoted over the years. Instead of groveling to illusionary peace partners and automatically succumbing to every American demand, our prime minister should appeal to the president to frustrate State Department initiatives designed to make Israel a sacrificial lamb to compensate for the "bigger picture."

President Bush should be reminded that the Israeli presence in Judea and Samaria is not the by-product of an Israeli invasion but the response to an Arab invasion designed to wipe Israel off the map. Even so, the majority of Israelis would today support the creation of a Palestinian state; but certainly not an extended Hamastan.

Our prime minister must surely urge President Bush to demand that the Palestinians now confront reality. In recent weeks, three young Israelis have been brutally murdered by members of the Fatah militia under the control of Abbas. Surely President Bush will appreciate that if, under such circumstances, Israel continues making unilateral concessions, all the wrong messages will be conveyed to the Palestinians. If there is to be a serious process, President Bush must demand that Abbas now substitute action for his duplicitous words and belatedly dismantle the terrorist militias under his jurisdiction.

The president should also be reminded that vicious incitement against Israel continues unabated at every level of Palestinian society. And that it is unconscionable to demand that Israel collaborate in creating a state under whose jurisdiction, shaheeds (suicide bombers) will continue to be sanctified and their families compensated with state pensions. Not to mention an educational system which encourages Palestinian children to accept martyrdom while killing Jews as a noble sacrifice.

Above all, our prime minister should impress upon President Bush that before Israel considers further concessions in the framework of a final status agreement, the Palestinians must come to terms with Israel as a Jewish state. Having recently proclaimed that he would not renege on this issue, it is surely outrageous for Prime Minister Olmert to now publicly proclaim that he is satisfied because he "thinks" that Abbas "accepts Israel in his soul." So long as the Palestinians persist with their so-called Arab right of return, they are effectively proclaiming that they will never reconcile themselves to coexisting with Jewish sovereignty. That remains the source of the conflict.

President Bush must now take a public stand. He would demonstrate that he is no lame duck by bluntly telling Abbas the truth, insisting that if he remains either unwilling or unable to undertake steps to curb terrorism and incitement, he can no longer qualify as a peace partner.

Finally, President Bush should be reminded of his repeated declarations warning that the appeasement of jihadism has in every instance only served to embolden terrorists everywhere. Appeasement not only contradicts the president's own agenda and threatens to destroy his legacy, it also symbolizes a violation of all that our civilization represents.

(Jerusalem Post Jan 9)

Lebanon's Lessons for Gaza By Evelyn Gordon

The most stunning element of last week's Knesset report on the Second Lebanon War was its unanimity: Following 16 months of study, all 17 members of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, representing the entire political spectrum, signed a document stating that the war's major failure was the delay in launching a large-scale ground operation.

"Locating Katyusha [rockets] from the air was an almost impossible task, nor could they be neutralized solely from the air," the report stated. "Despite this, no comprehensive ground campaign was launched until the end of the war. The IDF [thus] failed in achieving the war's main operational goal - suppressing the Katyusha fire."

Instead of exploiting its vastly superior size and technology, the report continued, the army adopted tactics that "played into Hizbullah's hands": sending in relatively small forces and confining them to a few kilometers near the border, thus enabling Hizbullah's far smaller "army" to meet them on almost equal terms. Moreover, the IDF's refusal to attack the "nature reserves," or fortified areas where most Hizbullah forces were concentrated,

left these forces free to strike at our soldiers - and civilians.

Two left-wing MKs signed the report with the reservation that they nevertheless opposed a major ground operation (preferring a swift cease-fire). Yet 15 Knesset members - 10 coalition and five opposition, from Labor on the left to National Union on the right - declared that such an operation should have been launched.

This conclusion has obvious implications for the other front where Israeli civilians are under ongoing rocket fire. And the committee did not shy away from them: At a press conference on the report, Committee Chairman Tzahi Hanegbi, of the prime minister's Kadima party, stated that while no formal vote was held on the subject, a majority of panel members favor a major ground operation in Gaza to suppress the Kassam rocket fire on Sderot.

In Gaza, the army has been trying for years to suppress this fire through a combination of aerial attacks and small ground operations near the border, with the same notable lack of success these tactics had in Lebanon: The number of missile strikes on southern Israel soared from 270 in 2005 to over 1,000 in both 2006 and 2007.

"I start from the assumption that everyone who signed this report, which states that reliance on [these tactics]... was a mistake, assumes that it is equally a mistake on another front," Hanegbi explained.

Moreover, another major flaw identified by the report was the inaction of successive governments as Hizbullah positioned itself along the border, constructed fortifications and massively expanded its arsenal following Israel's pullout from Lebanon in 2000. That inaction, the report said, "reduced the army to paralysis and weakness."

In Gaza, too, Hamas has exploited Israel's pullout to smuggle in massive quantities of arms and construct fortifications. "An absolute majority of committee members believes that we must not repeat in Gaza the mistake we made for years in Lebanon, and that there's no escaping a frontal operation," Hanegbi said.

Unfortunately, the government disagrees. Instead, it is reportedly discussing another tahadiyeh (cease-fire) with Hamas - an absurd idea on two counts.

First, the last truce (which began in November 2006 and gradually disintegrated) was a total failure: While Hamas largely stopped firing rockets - except on special occasions such as Israel's Independence Day - it allowed other groups, such as Islamic Jihad, to fire at will. Thus throughout the "cease-fire" Israel continued to suffer almost daily rocket attacks.

Second, Hamas has been explicit that all it wants is a brief lull to enable it to prepare for the next round. As one senior Hamas official told Haaretz, a tahadiyeh is "of short duration, only a few months" - and would be conditional on Israel allowing Gaza's borders to reopen. In other words, Hamas wants a few blockade-free months in which to stockpile arms and materiel, after which the war will resume with it in a stronger position.

Yet should the cease-fire initiative fail, the government's fallback plan is equally intolerable: simply continuing the same ineffective tactics for another 30 months or more until the missile defense system whose development it finally budgeted last month is deployable (mid-2010 at the earliest).

Beyond the obvious problem that since the system does not yet exist nobody knows if it will ever be practicable, much less when, Sderot cannot simply be left to endure daily missile attacks for another several years. Granted, the Kassams have thus far caused few casualties, but living in constant fear - never knowing when and where the next rocket will hit - is simply not tenable long-term.

In Lebanon, a major ground operation might well have failed, given that our chief of staff at the time was a pilot who had no clue about what ground forces were for or how to use them, and that the troops were scandalously untrained in the relevant maneuvers. For the same reasons, such an operation in Gaza would have been inadvisable a year ago. However, our new chief of staff is a ground forces veteran, and has devoted the past year to intensive troop training. Thus what was unfeasible before is now a viable option.

The most basic obligation any country owes its citizens is protection. Most Israelis understand that; consequently, a solid majority supports a major operation in Gaza to suppress the Kassams (69 percent, according to last August's Peace Index poll). Now a bipartisan Knesset panel has confirmed, following an in-depth investigation, that this is indeed the correct tactic and expressed bipartisan support for applying it in Gaza.

Upon announcing the panel's backing for a Gaza operation, Hanegbi declared: "The government must take the committee's position into account." Yet the government has proven repeatedly that protecting Sderot is low on its priority list; left to its own devices, it will continue doing nothing. Hence the committee's job now is to use its parliamentary power to force the government to act on its findings. Otherwise, it may as well start preparing its next report - on how and why the south, too, was abandoned to enemy fire. (Jerusalem Post Jan 9)

Bush's Betrayal By Jacob Laksin

Saul Bellow once observed that a great deal of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep. President Bush's ill-advised trip to Jerusalem and the West Bank this week to promote a "two-state solution" would seem to underscore the wisdom of Bellow's insight.

The presumed aim of Bush's visit, the first of his presidency, is to revive the goals of November's all-but-forgotten Annapolis summit. There the president imperiously decided that all that was needed for a final peace settlement to be reached between Israel and the Palestinians was for two leaders with no popular constituency on their respective sides to decide that it should be so. Bush duly met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, and read from a statement in which the parties promised, not a little ambitiously, to resolve "all outstanding issues, including core issues, without exception" in 2008.

It all might have ended happily at that point, with both sides having savored their share of the international spotlight, were it not for Bush's hopelessly naive conviction that the grand promises of the summit had any foundation in reality.

That they do not is made tragically clear by the events of the past few weeks. In late December, two off-duty Israeli soldiers, Cpl. Ahikam Amihai and Sgt. David Rubin, were gunned down while hiking in the West Bank. At least of two of their murderers, Ali Hamid Dandanes and Amar Badad Khalim Taha, are Fatah operatives -- that is, employees of Abbas' political organization. It is thus unsurprising that to avoid capture by Israeli security, both men turned themselves in to the PA's intelligence service, where they received understanding treatment.

This is not news, exactly. The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, closely affiliated with Fatah, have continued to carry out terrorist attacks on Abbas' "moderate" watch. But one is again left to wonder how the PA's official tolerance for killers comports with President Bush's professed view that Abbas "is a man devoted to peace" and that his faction is ready and willing to address Israeli security concerns.

For its part, the Bush administration has elected to look past the PA's complicity in terrorism. Choosing hope over experience, the administration seems to have concluded that, for all their faults, Abbas and his organization are nonetheless the enemies of the Islamists in Hamas, and thus potential allies. But this optimistic assessment is starkly at odds with Abbas' pronouncement on January 1 that he is ready to "open a new page" by negotiating with the terrorists of Hamas. Showing an aptitude for the double talk in which his predecessor Yasir Arafat specialized, Abbas urged Hamas to accept the normalization of relations with Israel. At the same time, he called for a "partnership in the heart of the fatherland and around the struggle for its liberations," stressing that "no party should supplant another." Given that Hamas equates "liberation" with the annihilation of the Jewish state, Abbas' appeal was more an inducement to terror than a condemnation of it.

No more propitious for the possibility of a final settlement is the history of the last sixty years. In that time, of course, the Palestinians, backed by their Arab patrons, repeatedly have rejected Israel's right to exist, both as a geographic entity and as a majority-Jewish state.

Offered generous terms of settlement -- including Ehud Barak's 2000 offer of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and 97 percent of the West Bank, as well as Palestinian control over East Jerusalem and \$30 billion in compensation -- the Palestinians have, in Abba Eban's famous phrase, never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. Loathe to come to terms with the reality of an Israeli state, they have placed their faith in leaders who sought to accomplish with terrorism and duplicitous public relations what Arab armies had failed to do with Soviet-made artillery.

President Bush boldly recognized the fact when, in 2002, he called on Palestinians to elect "leaders not compromised by terror." The 2006 election of Hamas should have been sufficient proof that Palestinians were not equal to the task. But instead of confirming Bush in his sober realism, the violent aftermath seems to have encouraged the president in the dangerous illusion that peace is within reach. Dangerous is the only appropriate word. Whatever the merits of the "two-state" solution in the long run, the fact remains that now is the worst possible time to put this vision into practice. Gaza, left to the untender mercies of Hamas, is today one of the most violent places in the Middle East. So intense has been the rocket barrage of Israeli cities from "Hamastan" that Israeli troops in recent days have been forced to intervene to stop the endless assault.

Against this chaotic backdrop, the administration's insistence that Israel turn over full control of the West Bank to the Palestinian authorities looks like a prescription for disaster. It is something the president would do well to keep in mind as he tours the territory under the kind of impeccable security that Israeli citizens will not be afforded once the West Bank becomes Palestinian domain.

President Bush legitimately can claim to be the most pro-Israel president in history. It would be a shame if he now sacrificed that impressive legacy for the promise of an illusory peace. (FrontPageMagazine.com Jan 8)