



Commentary...

The Public's Turn Editorial Jerusalem Post

In the days ahead, the Winograd Report on the Second Lebanon War will be dissected, largely from a political perspective. The prime minister and his allies will point to its positive aspects, his opponents to negative ones. Both exist and should not be ignored. The bottom line, however, has not changed.

In what passes for good news, the report endorses as "almost inevitable" the fateful cabinet decision of August 9, 27 days into the war, to authorize Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and defense minister Amir Peretz to launch a major ground offensive at the moment of their choosing. We also have the committee's judgment that the debate between Peretz and Olmert over the timing of the operation was "legitimate" and backed by "evidence ... and serious support among members of the General Staff and others."

This is good news because the thought that the 33 soldiers who lost their lives in this offensive "died for spin," as some placards attest, is intolerable and, evidently, not true.

At the same time, the final report, like its predecessor, is a devastating indictment of both the political and military echelons. The same "serious failings and flaws" found regarding the first few days of the war continued throughout the rest of the campaign in "quality of preparedness," "strategic thinking and planning," and of course in the defense of the civilian population.

To this list we would add another major and costly failure not even mentioned in the Winograd summary: the failure to anticipate and to coherently prosecute the war for international public opinion - which, as it always does, had a profound impact on the military and political latitude of the government and hence on the outcomes of the war.

The summary read by the committee's chairman did not go into much detail, but to the extent it did, it tended to contradict the relatively sanguine assessment of decisions taken toward the end of the war. The committee, for example: 1) found no "serious consideration" of whether any of the goals of the ground operation were achievable in the 60 hours allotted to it, 2) saw no discussion, at the military or political level, of whether to stop the operation after the UN Security Council resolution was adopted, and 3) found no explanation of "the tension between the effort to obtain additional time for a ground operation and the decisions not to go on fighting until the cease-fire itself."

These examples illustrate the fundamental tension that the report attributes to the entire war: an inability to decide between the "only" two coherent options available once an immediate military response was decided upon. One was a "short, painful, strong and unexpected blow against Hizbullah, primarily through standoff firepower." The other was "to bring about a significant change in the reality in south Lebanon with a large ground operation ... in order to destroy Hizbullah's military infrastructure."

Instead, Israel did neither. This led to Winograd's conclusion, widely shared by the public, that the war was "a serious missed opportunity," "did not result in military gains," and therefore "had far-reaching implications for us, as well as for our enemies, our neighbors, and our friends in the region and around the world."

After the interim report, this newspaper concluded that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert needed to take personal responsibility for these failures and resign. We see nothing in the final report - including its partial exoneration of some of the most egregious public charges - that would change this conclusion, and much that would reinforce it.

Our conclusion would stand even if Olmert had done a perfect job of learning the war's lessons, because the principle of personal responsibility is critical to the fabric of any democracy, even one not as threatened as ours. But Olmert has not learned: he has allowed the Hamas regime in Gaza to arm itself in almost identical fashion to the Hizbullah buildup that led to the last war, and will lead to the next one.

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*

No less importantly, Winograd could not have been clearer regarding how much more work there is to do, and that the nation simply cannot afford a government that has lost the trust of our public and ability to act effectively against and deter our enemies. Olmert has brought the democratic principle of personal responsibility to new lows. The question now is whether other leaders and the public will step in so that we

can make real progress on the long road back to national recovery. (Jerusalem Post Jan 31)

Grimacing to Victory and Grinning to Defeat By Caroline Glick

For leaders in democracies, perhaps the most difficult decision is to change course. Decision-making is hard enough. Revisiting decisions and acknowledging mistakes is simply beyond the capabilities of most leaders. Once they have chosen a strategy, they stick with it for better or for worse.

For a leader to change strategic course, he must first be convinced that his own fortunes are inextricably linked with maintaining failure or moving on towards success. He must believe, in other words, that he has no choice other than to change course.

The current issue of the Weekly Standard contains two articles which lay bare this basic truth. In one, "How Bush decided on the surge," Fred Barnes describes how US President George W. Bush decided to adopt a new strategy for winning the campaign in Iraq. In the other, "Ehud Olmert's Israel," Peter Berkowitz describes how Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has refused to revisit his own strategies for contending with the burgeoning threats to Israel's national security.

Barnes's article depicts a president who at the end of 2006 found himself isolated from the military, Congress and his own Secretary of State as the campaign in Iraq appeared increasingly unwinnable. The going consensus asserted that the reason the war was unwinnable was because US forces themselves were the cause of the fighting. If the US left, or simply hid in big bases outside the population centers and sufficed with training Iraqi forces, then the war would end.

Bush didn't believe them. And he couldn't accept the view that victory was unattainable. As he put it to Barnes, "Failure was no option.. I never thought I had to give up the goal of winning."

So he didn't. Instead, working with his National Security Council and relying on the work of people outside the administration and the Pentagon, he embraced the view that the war was the fault of the terrorists - not the US. Bush recognized that far from wishing for the US forces to withdraw from the country, the Iraqis wished for the Americans to stay and protect them. The surge strategy - which involved an increase in forces, and an intimate engagement of the forces in securing the lives and property of Iraqi civilians - has done just that. And the results have been dramatic.

As Max Boot reported in the Weekly Standard, "Iraqi and American deaths fell by approximately 80 percent between December 2006 and December 2007, and life is returning to a semblance of normality in much of Baghdad." Wherever the Americans are operating, al-Qaida is being defeated, the Shi'ite militias are fading away and life is changing for the better as more and more Iraqis come to trust and support the Americans and the Iraqi security forces working with them.

With the presidential race moving into full swing, the sustainability of Bush's new strategy into the next administration is a key concern. The media's coverage of the campaign in Iraq has been so negative for so long that in spite of the transformation of the security situation in the country over the past year, the public still considers the war to have been a failed endeavor. More Americans trust the Democrats, who have pledged to withdraw from Iraq, to handle the war than Republicans, who have pledged to see it through to victory.

On the other hand, in spite of the media's condemnation of the war, Americans today believe they are winning the war in Iraq. According to an NBC News - Wall Street Journal poll, 39 percent of Americans believe that the situation in Iraq has improved over the last six months and only 16 percent believe it has gotten worse. Even if the Democrats win the White

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House in November, it is hard to see the next president convincing the American people to turn their backs on victory.

Barnes is impressed by Bush's courage to move forward, almost alone and change the war-fighting strategy in order to enable victory in Iraq. If Bush hadn't acted as he did when he did, there can be little doubt that the US would have lost in Iraq. The public was willing to accept defeat. Congress was positively demanding defeat. The New York Times might have even granted Bush 15 minutes of sympathetic coverage if he had behaved "pragmatically" and embraced defeat in Iraq.

The fact that a failed leader can expect to find public support for his weakness was manifested in Berkowitz's portrait of Olmert. Just as the media has manufactured false realities to convince some 60 percent of the American public that the Iraq campaign is not only unwinnable but that the US doesn't deserve to win, so too, the media has labored for years to convince the majority of Israelis that we cannot win and indeed have no right to victory.

Berkowitz's opening paragraph attests to the success of their labors. He began his profile of Olmert by noting that some 70 percent of Israelis support the establishment of a Palestinian state. He asserted, as the media does, that the only people in Israel who don't support the establishment of such a state are right-wing extremists who no one would want to be associated with.

Having established that the only socially and morally acceptable view of Israel's conflict with the Palestinians is that Israel must feel bad for controlling Judea, Samaria and united Jerusalem, and that Israelis must feel happy that Israel no longer controls Gaza, Berkowitz goes on to uphold Olmert as a competent and socially acceptable leader.

This is the same Ehud Olmert who led Israel to defeat in the 2006 war in Lebanon. This is the same Olmert who has exhibited unconscionable incompetence in contending with the Hamas caliphate in Gaza, its rocket and mortar war against southern Israel and its takeover of Gaza's international border with Egypt. And this is the same Olmert who now fervently advocates surrendering Judea, Samaria and parts of Jerusalem to Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas. Such a land handover would place all of Israel within Palestinian and Lebanese rocket, mortar and missile range.

Moreover, Olmert has done nothing to stem the Bush administration's abandonment of Israel as a strategic ally and has been so feckless in his handling of Iran's nuclear weapons program that Israel finds itself completely alone to face Iran as the mullahs surge toward nuclear capabilities.

To defend Olmert as a competent leader, Berkowitz turned to political consultant Eyal Arad who served as former prime minister Ariel Sharon's and Olmert's public relations guru and strategic counselor. This was a reasonable move. Arad oversaw the infantilization of Israeli politics and the trivialization of the national discourse. It was Arad who together with his fellow public relations consultants convinced Sharon that his political survival was contingent on adopting the radical Left's strategy of surrender and appeasement. Arad, and his partner Reuven Adler, convinced Sharon to withdraw from Gaza and northern Samaria. They then convinced him to destroy Likud and form the Kadima party. After Sharon was felled by a stroke two years ago, they managed Olmert's campaign as the head of Kadima in the 2006 elections.

As Yediot Aharonot reported after the elections, Arad and Adler viewed Kadima not as a political party, but as an ad campaign. They viewed its candidates not as leaders of a threatened country, but as products they had to sell like chocolate bars to Israeli consumers at the ballot box. And indeed, like actors in candy commercials, Kadima's candidates were taught to parrot the Arad and Adler line that if they formed the next government, they would make Israel a country that's "fun to live in."

Speaking to Berkowitz, Arad kept to his script portraying Israel as an amusement park. He downplayed the significance of the fact that thanks to Sharon and Olmert Israel is threatened as never before. What is really important, he said, is that Israelis - particularly in Tel Aviv - are enjoying the economic benefits of the free market and buying all sorts of fancy gadgets as the Tel Aviv skyline grows taller and shinier. And Berkowitz believed him.

Berkowitz extolled Olmert's assertion at the Herzliya conference last week that the fact that Hizbullah hasn't been fighting Israel in 18 months means that Israel restored its deterrent capabilities in 2006 war. The fact that Hizbullah is currently otherwise engaged in taking over Lebanon is apparently of little concern or relevance to either Olmert or Berkowitz.

What the contrasting tales of Bush and Barnes and Olmert and Berkowitz show clearly is that strategic shifts, even when necessary, can never be foregone conclusions. Bush would have had no trouble finding a reporter to extol his prudence in accepting defeat in Iraq if he had decided not to buck the media and indeed his own administration in order to win in Iraq and secure his place in history. There would have been a multitude of reporters like Berkowitz willing to tell the 60 percent of Americans who want to leave Iraq within a year that they are right to believe that you can win a war by losing it.

The articles though also show something else. They show the difference between leaders who believe in using their power to advance ideas and leaders

who use their power to advance themselves. While Bush recognizes that historians will judge him not by whether he was liked, but by whether he left America safer than he received it, Olmert couldn't care less how history judges him. He just wants to be prime minister, and to maintain power he finds it more convenient to tell Israelis to have a good time than to ask us to join him in defending the country from those who seek our destruction. It is easier to tell us that defending our country is socially unacceptable and that good Israelis choose to empower terrorists instead -- in the name of peace.

Or maybe Olmert has it right and Bush is a fool. After all, if he could convince Berkowitz to trust him, perhaps future historians will truly believe that the best way to secure one's country is to accept defeat with a grin. (Jerusalem Post Jan 28)

Don't Give a Platform to Israel-Bashing By Isi Leibler

During a recent visit to London, I was depressed to observe that the utterly distorted PC-thinking about Israel prevailing in Britain has now begun to influence Anglo-Jewish leaders. This is reflected in the growing trend of providing respectability to marginal Jewish defamers of the Jewish state by honoring them with invitations to participate in leading community cultural and educational events.

The prime example is Limmud, the wunderkind of Anglo Jewry, a highly successful annual gathering involving thousands of Jews in educational seminars and lectures covering the entire range of Jewish civilization. If one accepts the premise that Jewish education is designed to strengthen Jewish identity, it is incomprehensible that Limmud organizers are now regularly inviting speakers who represent the antithesis of Jewish values.

The precedent originated some years ago, when an invitation was extended to the non-Jewish anti-Israeli journalist Robert Fisk. It was followed at a subsequent session, when Limmud invited Jacqueline Rose, the Jewish author of a fiercely anti-Zionist book which is today an established icon in the promotional literature of enemies of the Jewish state. Rose was also one of the founders of Independent Jewish Voices, a considerable proportion of whose members only became actively involved in Jewish life as a by-product of condemning mainstream Jewish support for Israel.

At the December 2007 Limmud conference, one of the keynote speakers was Avrum Burg, former head of the Jewish Agency and a previous speaker of the Knesset. Even Burg's closest former Israeli political allies have unequivocally condemned him for repeatedly bracketing the behavior of Israelis with Nazis and urging his kinsmen to obtain European passports.

Limmud organizers took evenhandedness a step forward by inviting PA spokesman Saeb Erekat, boasting that this would be "the first time that Erekat had addressed an exclusively Jewish audience." Erekat had just proclaimed his determination never to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, prompting London Jewish Chronicle columnist Geoffrey Alderman to express his "disgust... dismay... and outrage" that Limmud could invite as a keynote speaker "one of the most prominent living enemies of the Jewish people." Erekat initially accepted the invitation but declined at the last moment, presumably in deference to his anti-Semitic constituency.

It is surely grotesque for Limmud to justify such participation on the grounds that "for the sake of learning... we try to get a wide range of presenters." Even more bizarre is the suggestion "that politicians, ours and theirs [Palestinians], take a hard line in public statements" and "it is important to emphasize informal human contact."

The same approach is manifested at Jewish Book Week (JBW), another premier Jewish cultural event that encompasses many talented Anglo-Jewish and international Jewish writers and scholars. Here again, the organizers saw fit to invite a number of guests who would never previously have participated at such an event. They include Jacqueline Rose, who is billed to discuss the concept of evil and suicide bombers. To chair that session, the organizers invited Dr. Anthony Lerman, the controversial head of the Jewish Policy Research (JPR) think tank.

Last year Lerman was the center of a major controversy when he refused to step down from his position after having adopted a public stance calling for the dismemberment of the Jewish state - which he termed a failed Zionist vision - and its replacement with a binational state.

To top it off, the keynote speaker at the concluding JBW session titled "The Last Word" is Alan Rusbridger, editor of the Guardian, a newspaper which has developed a somewhat notorious reputation in relation to its coverage of Israel. To "balance" Rusbridger, the respondent on the panel is not other than Haaretz editor David Landau, who was recently involved in a global media stir when it was disclosed that he had told US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that Israel needed to be "raped" into a settlement with the Palestinians.

The participation of these individuals is disconcerting. Not because their presence will persuade participants to reject Israel, and not because the programs are one-sided since a wide variety of viewpoints are represented.

But Jewish values are debased when Jewish gatherings elevate and provide respectability to those who consistently demonize and delegitimize Israel - especially in today's climate of post-modernism.

Nor is this an issue of freedom of expression. In the UK, Israel-bashing is sufficiently prevalent without needing to promote it at Jewish cultural events. If reputable Jewish institutions provide platforms for those who demonize Israel, it becomes next to impossible to protest when mainstream media bodies such as the BBC utilize marginal anti-Israeli Jews as de-facto spokesmen for the Jewish community.

The recent debate at the Oxford University Union on the motion "This House Believes that the State of Israel Has a Right to Exist" is another example. Outrageous as the title is, even more preposterously, all four participants - those for the motion and those against - preach the delegitimization and boycott of the Jewish state. Norman Finkelstein, who "defended" Israel (but voted against the motion), and Ilan Pappé, who argued against Israel's right to exist, have long qualified as defamers of the Zionist enterprise.

Providing Jews against Zion with platforms at mainstream Jewish events also provides an imprimatur for such scandalous acts as the British Council appointment of Judy Price, an activist for Jews for Justice to Palestinians, as curator for archival film screenings for the Israel's 60th anniversary film festival.

This lamentable state of affairs unquestionably also relates to the Israeli leadership crisis. Twenty years ago, without doubt, Israeli leaders and Israeli ambassadors would have intervened and encouraged local Jewish leaders to find the courage to stand up and be counted.

Over the years I have been critical of the failures of the Anglo-Jewish leadership, exemplified by the British Board of Deputies, which is reluctant to engage in public protest and insists that the most effective means of combating adversaries of Israel and anti-Semites is by "whispering" rather than "shouting." Regrettably, the Board has also avoided raising its voice in the above matter also, failing to condemn or even pass judgment on the morality of inviting Jewish demonizers of Israel to assume leading roles at Jewish communal or cultural events.

The responsibility for taking remedial action therefore rests with the silent majority of British Jews who continue to support Israel and are unquestionably sickened by these developments. It is imperative that they make themselves heard and insist that their leaders act.

Failing that, they should demand those leaders' dismissal. Unless this rot is soon reversed, the decline of Anglo-Jewry will, alas, accelerate.

The writer is a veteran international Jewish leader. (Jerusalem Post Jan 28)

The Gaza Breakout By Bret Stephens

What if Gaza were to conquer Egypt? The possibility is not as remote as it may seem just by glancing at the map.

Egypt has more than 50 times the population of its former colony and 2,800 times the landmass. But Gaza is sovereign Hamas territory, Hamas is the Palestinian branch of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, and Egypt -- not Israel -- is the country that has most to fear from a statelet that is at once the toehold, sanctuary and springboard of an Islamist revolution.

No wonder liberal Egyptians are reacting with near-hysterical alarm to last Wednesday's demolition of the border fence between the Gaza Strip and the Sinai. The Brotherhood organized at least 70 demonstrations throughout Egypt early last week to protest Israel's economic blockade of the Strip, itself a reaction to Hamas's rocket barrages into Israel. "Arm us, train us and send us to Gaza," chanted the demonstrators, along with "O rulers of Muslims, where is your honor, where is your religion?" The independent Egyptian daily *Almasry Alyoum* also described conversations between Hamas leader Khaled Mashal and Mohammed Mahdi Akef, the Brotherhood's Supreme Guide, to coordinate their activities. "We will take to the streets and defend our brothers in Gaza, even if we are all tried in military courts," Mr. Akef was reported as saying.

As Middle Eastern power plays go, Hamas's decision to dismantle the Gaza-Sinai border was a masterstroke. Gaza's economic woes are almost wholly self-inflicted, but they are real. Dynamiting and bulldozing the border of a neighboring country is legally an act of war, but it was made to seem like a humanitarian necessity and a bid for freedom. Flooding that neighbor with hundreds of thousands of desperate people is a massive economic burden on Egypt, but one that it shirks at its political peril.

Above all, Hamas exploited the myth of pan-Arab solidarity with the Palestinians in order to explode it. Having whipped itself into its usual frenzy over Israel's "siege" of Gaza, it was a delicate matter for the state-run Egyptian press to make the government's case for deploying truncheon-wielding police to turn back the Palestinian human tide. It's an equally delicate matter for the Egyptian government to arrest Brotherhood protesters peacefully demonstrating "for Palestine," even if the Brotherhood's real target is Hosni

Mubarak's regime and the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty that it supports.

For Palestinians who have spent squalid decades in the refugee camps of Lebanon (which forbids Palestinians from owning property or having any sort of gainful employment), or have been systematically abused as laborers in the Gulf sheikdoms (Kuwait expelled its Palestinian population en masse following its 1991 liberation from Iraq), or have had a country denied to them by a Hashemite regime in Jordan, the lies of the Arab world are well known.

Still, it must have seemed to Palestinians an especially galling contrast that Israel announced the resumption of fuel supplies to Gaza just as Egypt was cutting its deliveries of fuel and foodstuffs to its border towns of Rafah and El Arish in the Sinai, in order to keep the Palestinians out. For good measure, Egyptian sources tell me that yesterday the government also arrested 3,000 Gazans who had made their way to Cairo -- yet another betrayal that will surely linger in Palestinian memory for a long time.

For the Brotherhood all this is excellent news. Yesterday, Nabil Shaath, a Palestinian minister in President Mahmoud Abbas's cabinet, reportedly sought a meeting in Cairo with Supreme Guide Akef in order to negotiate a new border arrangement. Mr. Akef declined to see him, a telling indicator of the Brotherhood's newfound political confidence. It can now lay firm claim to the Palestinian cause, never mind that its "brothers" in Hamas are the real source of current Palestinian misery.

By contrast, the Egyptian government faces a serious quandary, and not just as a matter of rhetoric. By its treaty with Israel, it is forbidden from deploying its army in large numbers to the Sinai. In previous years, it used this restriction as an alibi in its lackluster efforts to prevent the arms flow from Sinai to Gaza. Now that flow threatens to go in the opposite direction, endangering not just Israel but also Egyptian tourist resorts such as Taba and Sharm el-Sheikh. "The situation in Sinai now poses the greatest threat to Egypt's national security," writes one perceptive Egyptian blogger. "Any Palestinian crossing the border could take with him weapons and explosives and supply them to Al Qaeda affiliated groups in Sinai."

The Egyptian-Israeli treaty may ultimately have to be revised to take account of the changing facts on the ground. Israel, too, will have to rethink some basic strategic assumptions. Supporters of Ariel Sharon's "disengagement" plan -- present company included -- can take a measure of satisfaction in noting that Gaza is increasingly becoming an Arab problem rather than an Israeli one. But in addition to the physical challenge of having to defend against incessant (if so far rarely deadly) rocket attacks from Gaza, and reinforce its long desert border with Egypt, Israel must also now consider the possibility that the current regime in Egypt may not long survive the death of its soon-to-be octogenarian president.

Who and what comes next is anyone's guess, though it would be foolish to gamble on Gamal Mubarak, the president's West-leaning son. Egypt is a military regime, and the younger Mubarak, who never served in uniform, is not well-loved among the generals who will have the final say in matters of succession.

A more serious question is whether the military might take a more indulgent view of the Brotherhood, either because it has been infiltrated by Islamist officers, or because it seeks a condominium with the Brotherhood in order to shore up its own legitimacy. (In this connection, U.S. efforts to "engage" the Brotherhood in a political dialogue would have a disastrous effect, as it would signal to the military that it could cut its own deal with the Islamists without having to pay a price in U.S. support.)

In the meantime, the border with Gaza is again being sealed, bringing the crisis to a temporary end. It won't remain quiet for long, and neither will Egypt -- the next great foreign policy crisis on the American horizon. (Wall Street Journal Jan 29)

Awaiting Winograd By Michael Oren

I had fought in war before but had never seen such intensive fire - tracer bullets, rockets, artillery shells - nor been assigned a more horrific detail. My unit was escorting the bodies of Israeli soldiers killed on the last night of the Second Lebanon War, a few hours before the UN cease-fire agreement took effect. None of us understood the purpose of this last-minute offensive or, indeed, many of the government's disastrous decisions during the war. We agreed that the burden of these failures would be borne by our leaders, military and civilian alike. Now, a year and a half later, veterans of the war are demanding that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert accept responsibility for its conduct - or risk unraveling the consensus on which Israel's survival depends.

The war began on July 12, 2006, when Hizbollah gunmen ambushed an Israeli border patrol, killing eight and kidnapping two. Olmert's response, a large-scale campaign intended to crush Hizbollah and secure the soldiers' release, was supported by most Israelis until serious mismanagement of the war surfaced. While receiving inadequate or faulty equipment -- my rifle literally fell apart in my hands - Israeli forces were denied permission to

invade Southern Lebanon and neutralize the katyusha rockets that were pummeling Israeli cities. Instead, Israeli jets bombed the Lebanese routes through which Syria re-supplied Hizbollah and destroyed the organization's Beirut headquarters. These attacks obliterated much of Hizbollah's infrastructure and killed a fourth of its fighters, but they also laid waste to a large part of Lebanon and squandered Israel's initial international backing. Hundreds of rockets, meanwhile, continued to smash into northern Israel, displacing a half million civilians. Only on August 13, after a month of fighting and with a UN cease-fire already approved, did the government authorize a ground offensive into Lebanon. The operation achieved nothing, either militarily or diplomatically, and cost the lives of thirty-three Israeli troops.

In another country, perhaps, such blunders might result in the resignation of senior officers but not necessarily elected officials. In Israel, though, no one is above blame. Accountability for decision-making is a tenet of the Zionist ethos on which the Jewish state is based and, unlike most nations, Israel has a citizens' army in which the great majority - politicians included - serve. Most uniquely, Israel confronts daily security dangers and long-term threats to its existence. Israelis can neither condone nor afford a prime minister who passes the buck to their army or shirks the onus of defense. The person who sends us into battle cannot escape responsibility for our fate.

No sooner had the war ended than Israelis began demanding an official inquiry into its handling. Why did the government set unrealistic goals for the operation? Why were no orders given for an invasion, and why were no measures taken to protect the home-front from missile attack? Above all, Israelis insisted on knowing why Olmert authorized a final offensive with no apparent objective other than enhancing his image.

Olmert resisted these demands, but public pressure forced him to appoint an investigative panel headed by Supreme Court Justice Eliyahu Winograd. While not empowered to recommend resignations, the commission issued a preliminary report that compelled Defense Minister Amir Peretz and Chief-of-Staff Dan Halutz to step down. The second Winograd report, scheduled for publication tomorrow, will focus on the prime minister's performance during the war, but Olmert has sworn not to cede power irrespective of its findings. At stake, however, is not merely the government's future but rather the fabric of Israeli society.

Israel lacks a constitution but is bound by an unwritten social contract. Israelis defend their country with their lives and their leaders' pledge not to send them to war heedlessly. Prime Ministers Golda Meir and Menachem Begin resigned in the aftermath of disappointing wars, though both were exonerated of incompetence. By ignoring these precedents, Olmert, whose culpability began before the war when he appointed a defense minister devoid of military experience, threatens to break the contract. Israelis will think twice before following his orders - and perhaps those of future prime ministers - into battle. The cohesiveness that enabled Israel to survive sixty years of conflict will unwind.

Thousands of Israelis are calling for Olmert's resignation. Rightists convinced that the prime minister cannot safeguard the country's security have joined with Leftists who understand that leaders who fail at war will never succeed at peacemaking. All are united by a willingness to shoulder the burden of Israel's defense. This was the commitment that united us that last night in Lebanon, as we took up the stretchers bearing the remains of somebody's son, somebody's husband, and brought them home for burial.

(Wall Street Journal Jan 30)

Sderot in Sound Bites By Evelyn Gordon

Sound bites are usually poor reflections of complex policy issues. But several statements over the past two weeks accurately encapsulate the main flaws in Israel's policy toward Sderot.

On January 16, responding to a High Court petition demanding that it reinforce private homes in Sderot against rocket attacks, the government argued that reinforcement would set a dangerous precedent, since "other parts of Israel are, or are likely to be in the near future, threatened by high-trajectory missiles." Therefore, the focus should be on strengthening residents' "endurance" - for instance, by bolstering Sderot's economy.

There, in two sentences, are two crucial errors. One is that Israel is powerless to stop the rocket fire, which will therefore inevitably spread to other towns. That is patently false: While thousands of rockets have been launched at Israel from Gaza, not one has been launched from the West Bank, and the methods that work there would also work in Gaza.

This is hardly a state secret: Earlier this month, following a 16-month study of the Second Lebanon War, a bipartisan Knesset panel unanimously concluded that only large-scale ground operations - precisely the tactic Israel has employed in the West Bank since 2002 - can halt rocket fire, and a majority backed applying this lesson to Gaza. Yet the government prefers to plead helplessness, thereby abdicating its most basic responsibility: protecting

its citizens.

The second error is that the economy can be disconnected from security and bolstered regardless of the rockets. Israel's own experience amply disproves this theory: At the intifada's height (2001-2002), as tourists disappeared and local residents' fear of attacks depressed domestic consumption, Israel suffered a recession. Since then, the economy has grown impressively, and experts of every political and economic stripe attribute the turnaround in large part to the dramatic decline in terror that began in 2003. Iraq, incidentally, demonstrates the same lesson: As terror spiraled, the economy tanked, but the recent drop in terror has produced modest economic improvement.

SDEROT IS no exception to the laws of nature; there, too, economic recovery depends on improved security - a point driven home two days later when mattress factory Hollandia International announced that it could no longer take the rocket attacks and was relocating to central Israel. "I hope it will be a warning light for the government," company president Avi Barssessat declared.

Next, at a January 20 cabinet meeting, Defense Minister Ehud Barak enunciated another crucial error: After fellow minister Avi Dichter noted the obvious - that current IDF tactics are not working - Barak insisted that the army's modus operandi in Gaza should remain unchanged. That fits the classic definition of insanity: doing the same thing but expecting different results. After all, the army has been using these tactics ever since the August 2005 disengagement, yet the number of missile strikes on southern Israel soared from 270 in 2005 to over 1,000 in both 2006 and 2007.

This infatuation with failed tactics not only ensures the problem's continuation, but encourages escalation. Two weeks ago, after Hamas dramatically upped the volume of fire, launching some 90 rockets and mortars in 48 hours, Palestinian commentators noted that the organization felt free to do so precisely because, having heard Israeli leaders repeatedly declare that under no circumstances will they launch a major ground operation in Gaza, it concluded that it need not fear provoking one by intensifying the barrages.

Finally, on January 21, came Defense Ministry spokesman Shlomo Dror's response to international condemnation of Israel's short-lived blockade of Gaza: "It's very interesting that we didn't hear these condemnations when the rockets were falling [on Israel]. Is that not collective punishment?"

Dror is, of course, correct. But coming from a government spokesman, the complaint is highly disingenuous. One cannot expect the world to care more about Israel's security than Israel's government does - and the government, far from treating the daily rocket fire as a priority, has done its best to pretend that the problem does not exist. Government officials devote scant attention to this issue in either public speeches or private meetings with diplomats and journalists; Israel has not even lodged regular complaints with the UN.

Indeed, Ehud Olmert talks more about suffering Palestinians than suffering Sderot. At Annapolis, for instance, he spoke movingly about Palestinian "pain and deprivation," but said not a word about Sderot residents' pain and deprivation. He devoted exactly one sentence to Sderot - and even that was not a demand that the rocket fire stop. He merely declared that it "serves as a warning" against "moving forward too hastily."

By contrast, Palestinian officials complain loudly and continuously about Gaza's hardships. And the world not unnaturally concludes that since Palestinians are complaining while Israel is not, Palestinians must be the victims, and Israel the villain.

One can understand Olmert's desire to avoid discussing Sderot. He would rather not remind Israelis that his party's flagship policy, the disengagement, quadrupled rocket attacks on southern Israel. Moreover, talking about it might force him to take action, and he desperately wants to avoid a major operation in Gaza. But unless and until the government makes Sderot's plight a priority and brings it to international center stage, the world will continue ignoring the rocket fire while condemning every Israeli response.

Together, the four errors described above add up to a failed policy that has turned Sderot into a living hell. And to improve the situation, all four must be addressed. The government must understand that security is the bedrock on which all else is built, and unless the rockets stop, no amount of economic aid will help the south. It must acknowledge that current tactics for suppressing the rockets have failed and need to be changed. It must realize that a viable alternative exists - namely, the methods that succeeded in the West Bank. And it must bring Sderot's plight to world attention consistently and forcefully, to lay the groundwork for applying these tactics to Gaza as well.

If it is unwilling to do these four things, it must go, immediately. A government that abandons its citizens to enemy fire has no right to exist. (Jerusalem Post Jan 30)
