



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*

adults to the cemetery, while preventing the rest of those who were present despite the darkness of the night, from participating, even preventing the press from participating... They wanted a quiet wedding without music, thinking that way Jerusalem would forget its groom... But the wedding will not end this way... it will last three consecutive days in which [the town] al-Sawahra will welcome all of those who come to

congratulate the groom and will hang his portrait embracing the nation's flags." - Al Hayat-Al Jadida, March 14, 2008 (Palestinian Media Watch Mar 17)

From the PA Media...

PA Media Celebrates Murderer of Yeshiva Students

By Itamar Marcus and Barbara Crook

The official Palestinian Authority daily newspaper describes the murderer of eight yeshiva students in Jerusalem as a "groom" and his burial as his "wedding celebration." The story in Al Hayat Al Jadida goes on to evoke the neighborhood Jabal Mukaber's "week of anticipation... preparing themselves for the wedding procession." The term "wedding" is the expression commonly used in PA society, and in PA schoolbooks as well, to describe the death of Shahids - Martyrs for Allah. According to Islamic tradition, they will wed the 72 Dark-Eyed Maidens (Virgins) of Paradise.

The article then reports the "shocking news" for the "thousands who were waiting" that the Israeli Army had decided to force a pre-dawn burial to prevent community celebrations of the murders and the murderer. It bemoans the fact "that the groom was buried in the [early] morning without a celebration and without a wedding procession."

However, the PA daily vows that the wedding celebrations will continue: "The wedding will not end this way... it will last three consecutive days in which [the town] al-Sawahra will welcome all of those who come to congratulate the groom and will hang his portrait embracing the nation's flags."

Seeing the Martyr's death as a wedding can be found throughout Palestinian society. Some examples:

New Palestinian Schoolbook:

"... I will not cry during this wedding, as our Arabness does not want us to cry over the Shahids." [Arabic Language and the Science of Language, grade 12, p. 13 (2006)]

Mother of two killed terrorists, called "Shahids":

"We do not encourage our sons to die. We encourage them to Shahada [Martyrdom] for the homeland, for Allah. We don't say to the mothers of the Shahids: "We come to comfort you," rather we say: "We come to bless you on your son's wedding, on your son's Shahada. Congratulations to you on the Shahada." For us, the mourning is [a joyous] wedding. We give out drinks, we give out sweets. Praise to Allah, our mourning is a wedding." [PATV, Nov. 17, 2004]

The following is from the PA official daily, Al Hayat Al Jadida:

Headline: "Jerusalem groom, Abu-Dahim, [the murderer of 8 in the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva] leaves without his wedding procession"

"The residents of the town Jabal Mukbar, were surprised by the sounds of loudspeakers blasting from the [mosque] minarets announcing that the Jerusalem groom, the Shahid, [Islamic Martyr] Ala'a Abu-Dahim [murderer of the 8 Yeshiva students] has gone without their participation in his wedding procession.

"An entire week of anticipation, a house of mourning whose sanctity was violated, and soldiers deployed on every street, their military weapons infuriating everyone ... nonetheless [the town of Jabl] al-Mukbar did not tire of the wait and kept its promise to the groom.

"Every day, these past seven days, everyone was in a state of anticipation... preparing themselves for the wedding procession. At five o'clock in the morning the loudspeakers of the mosque minarets announced the shocking news to the thousands who were waiting, that the groom was buried in the morning without a celebration and without a wedding procession... frowning faces... expressing their sorrow for having been denied [the right] to participate in the groom's procession and to accompany him to the town's cemetery...

"The occupation soldiers sneaked in hours before dawn and lead several

Commentary...

Meet the World's Most Incompetent Ethnic Cleansers

By Evelyn Gordon

It is hard to decide which aspect of Mahmoud Abbas's recent "ethnic cleansing" accusation is more worrying: what it reveals about him, or what it reveals about the world's willingness to tolerate even the vilest and most obviously nonsensical slanders against Israel.

Addressing the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Dakar last Thursday, the Palestinian Authority chairman declared: "Our people in the city [of Jerusalem] are facing an ethnic cleansing campaign through a set of Israeli decisions such as imposing heavy taxes, banning construction and closing Palestinian institutions, in addition to separating the city from the West Bank by the racist separation wall."

If Jerusalem's Arabs are facing ethnic cleansing, then Israelis are surely the most incompetent ethnic cleansers in human history. After all, ethnic cleansing usually aims at removing an unwanted population and substituting your own nationals.

But according to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Jerusalem Institute of Israel Studies, Jerusalem's Arab population skyrocketed 266 percent between 1967, when Israel annexed east Jerusalem, and 2006 (the last year for which figures are available). That is almost double the Jewish population's growth during those years (143 percent); consequently, the city's ratio of Jews to Arabs shrank from 74:26 in 1967 to 66:34 in 2006.

Even during the intifada, which prompted the fence and the closed institutions that Abbas decries, the Arab population continued ballooning: It rose from 208,700 at the end of 2000 to 252,400 at the end of 2006, an increase of 21 percent in six years, or 3.5 percent a year. Jerusalem's Jewish population grew by only 4.7 percent during those years, or less than 1 percent a year. In absolute terms, the Arab increase (43,700 people) was double the Jewish increase (21,100).

Nor was the Arab growth solely due to natural increase: Ziad al-Hamouri, who heads the Jerusalem Center for Economic Rights, estimates that some 30,000 Arabs have moved to Jerusalem since construction of the fence began; others put the figure even higher.

IF ABBAS is truly unaware of these very well-publicized facts, this casts doubt on his viability as a negotiating partner. Since any deal must be rooted in reality, it is hard to negotiate with someone who remains determinedly ignorant even about "core issues" such as Jerusalem. But more importantly, how can you trust the good faith of someone who has no qualms about accusing you of one of the most heinous crimes in the modern lexicon without even bothering to check his facts? Almost certainly, however, Abbas does know the facts. After all, both Palestinians and Israelis frequently cite east Jerusalem's Arab majority to support Palestinian claims to part of the city.

But in that case, the question becomes even more troubling - because how can you trust the moderation, good faith and peaceful intentions of someone who has no qualms about publicly accusing you of such a heinous crime even knowing that it is false? Bluntly, this was nothing less than deliberate incitement against Israel, in a forum guaranteed to receive maximum coverage in the Arab world.

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Nor was this a one-time aberration. Just last month, for instance, Abbas told the Jordanian daily *Al Dustour*: "At this time, I object to the armed struggle, since we are unable to conduct it; however, in future stages things may change." Yet if his only reason for opposing armed struggle is that he currently believes he cannot wage it successfully, that is hardly reassuring, as this reason would disappear following a peace agreement: With the IDF gone from the West Bank and Jordan border, Palestinians could easily import quantities of sophisticated arms and plan attacks unhindered.

THEN THERE was the PA's rejection in December of a French proposal, backed by senior UN officials, for a UN resolution mandating educational activities to support the peace process. The proposal would have amended an existing resolution that requires teaching about alleged Israeli crimes against the Palestinians, thereby fostering hatred rather than reconciliation. Yet Abbas evidently prefers fostering hatred.

It is hard to imagine anything more innocuous, or more vital to the success of the process, than peace education. If Abbas cannot even agree to that, one has to wonder about his commitment to peace.

There are numerous similar examples, such as his June 2006 charge that Israel was seeking to "eliminate the Palestinian people." Never mind that, by the PA's own figures, the Palestinian population of the territories has quadrupled under Israeli rule - including a 34 percent increase in the past decade alone.

But perhaps even more worrying than Abbas's statements is the world's response. Not a single international leader bothered to condemn last week's ethnic cleansing accusation. Nor did anyone condemn his *Al-Dustour* remarks, his rejection of the peace education resolution, or any of his other less-than-moderate statements and actions.

Given the world's fixation with resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, its reluctance to acknowledge that Abbas may be miscast as a peacemaker is understandable. Yet by tolerating such blatant incitement, the international community further undermines the prospects for peace.

First, such remarks scarcely encourage Israelis to believe that Abbas is acting in good faith, which is an obvious prerequisite for Israeli consent to any agreement. For that reason alone, the world should be interested in condemning such remarks.

Far more important, however, is the message this sends to Palestinians. If Abbas can hurl such vicious and patently false accusations at Israel without even a pro forma protest from world leaders, that tells Palestinians that willingness to live in peace with Israel is not necessary to retain international support. If the world has no objection to even the most vicious Palestinian incitement - despite knowing that such incitement routinely leads to actual violence - then it clearly cares nothing about peace; what it cares about is satisfying Palestinian demands.

That, in turn, encourages Palestinians to believe that eventually, the world will force Israel to accede to these demands even without peace - thereby obviating any need to stop the violence or make the kind of concessions negotiated agreements always entail. And as long as they believe this, peace will remain a distant dream. (Jerusalem Post Mar 19)

What to Do about Gaza: the Realistic Scenario By Barry Rubin

Not only is there no good solution to the Gaza problem, there's no "solution" at all. But in the Middle East, solutions are rare; what's needed is the best imperfect option among alternatives.

The first option is to continue current policy. Israel absorbs damage and casualties in Sderot and some other places. Few are affected; almost all the country functions normally. International pressure and casualties are limited. Israel hits rocket launchers, terrorist bases, and leading terrorists periodically. Eventually, there will be an anti-rocket defense.

But aside from government's duty to its citizens, things will change. Hamas will produce larger and longer-range missiles against Ashkelon and eventually Ashdod.

Another problem with this strategy is that Western criticism defines even minimal self-defense methods as disproportionate. If you get slammed for taking punches, you might as well fight back. Moreover, the West basically protects Hamas's rule in Gaza, despite sanctions and diplomatic isolation, neither of which might last.

As Hamas grows more aggressive, Western policies might become more appeasing. Meanwhile, being "soft" on Hamas doesn't make peace talks work, but does make Hamas look more effective than the less violent PA and Fatah.

At the same time, Israeli public opinion will continue to press the government to change policy.

THERE ARE three proposals playing off a thirst for neat solutions. A cease-fire is an ideal dovish solution; overthrowing Hamas is a solution which appeals to hawks; and giving the mess over to an international force makes both philosophies happy.

Unfortunately none of these ideas would work. A cease-fire is riddled with problems, paradoxically bringing even more violence. Hamas wouldn't observe it, letting both its own members and others attack Israel while inciting murder through every institution. The cease-fire would not last long; Hamas would use it to strengthen its rule and army while demanding a reward for its "moderation": an end to sanctions and diplomatic isolation, even Western aid.

THE NEXT alternative - reoccupying Gaza and destroying Hamas - might sound good. But how?

Israel isn't being hit hard enough to make such a huge undertaking worthwhile. Once again, Israel would be involved in the daily rule of more than one million hostile people. Troops would face constant attack from all directions. Too many would be tied up to permit proper security in the West Bank and Lebanon border. Such a move would be high-cost in casualties, money and international friction.

And, in the end, Hamas would not be "destroyed." To defeat Hamas is not to eliminate it, but to keep it as weak as possible (through military strikes, isolation, etc.) and limit its ability to hit Israel.

Then there is the fallacy that Gaza can be turned over to a "moderate" Fatah and PA. Well, there is no chance of their accepting this gift. In fact, Fatah would rather make a deal with Hamas than fight it. And why believe they would do a better job than last time?

ANOTHER idea is essentially a gimmick: turning Gaza over to an international force. This is a fantasy. Countries are not going to send forces into a war there, to be attacked every day; nor will they brave criticism from Arab and Muslim states as well as terrorist attacks for no benefit.

Besides, what would the force do? Certainly not arrest thousands of Gazans, kill those trying to attack Israel, hold mass trials of terrorists and sentence them to long prison terms. It would definitely not disarm Hamas or stop arms smuggling from Egypt.

And when rockets keep falling, the international force would block Israeli military action in Gaza.

The option would also be a political disaster, with the sponsoring countries rushing to establish a Palestinian state and negotiate with Hamas. Finally, as noted above, the PA and Fatah wouldn't take Gaza from an international force.

WHAT IS needed, instead, is an option based on reality, not wishful thinking: to push Hamas back. Israel's interest is to minimize attacks on its soil and citizens while limiting the cost of the response needed to achieve that goal. This can best be done by combining a more active version of current policy and the creation of a security zone in the northern Gaza Strip to push Hamas and its allies out of range.

Such a zone could be made relatively secure because it would be on a narrow front, with flanks protected by the sea on the north and Israel proper on the south and east, with Israel controlling the airspace. This would be an interim policy until anti-rocket defenses could be implemented, in perhaps three years.

Of course, there is risk. Israeli forces would be attacked, yet they would be in a strong, fortified position and know they were protecting the civilians behind them. Some rockets would fall on Israel, but the numbers would be far reduced and the area affected limited. Israel would continue to operate within Hamas-held Gaza as needed.

Would the world, which already claims Israel is occupying Gaza, do much if Israel temporarily took back 10 percent?

THIS ISSUE will not be solved by negotiations, concessions, appeasement, force, or anything else. Defense Minister Ehud Barak is right: "It's not the end, the beginning of the end, or the end of the beginning."

The same logic applies to Gaza, the West Bank and the Lebanon border. The main goal is for the army to minimize danger and damage, so people can go about their normal lives and build up the country, protected by their soldiers. (Jerusalem Post Mar 16)

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A Skewed Process Editorial Jerusalem Post

Israel is reportedly bracing for a "skewed" report from Lt.-Gen. William Fraser on Israeli and Palestinian implementation of their road map obligations. What is likely "skewed," however, is not just one report, but the whole US approach to achieving Arab-Israeli peace.

Since the government recently announced it would expand a settlement inside the security barrier near Jerusalem, Israel expects to be criticized in the Fraser report.

Meanwhile, though the Palestinian leadership in Gaza has been openly orchestrating the bombardment of Israeli cities, Palestinian Authority

President Mahmoud Abbas is not being held responsible for this, so US criticism of the Palestinians is expected to be muted.

The micro problem with this approach is that there is no symmetry between settlements and terrorism, on either the moral or strategic levels. It is a moral travesty that building homes is compared to murdering innocents. But even if settlement expansion can be seen as problematic, it makes little sense to treat all settlements equally, as if there were no difference between expanding existing towns that are contiguous with Israel and inside the security barrier, and settlements situated amidst the Palestinian population.

While the US seems to pretend that there is no line between "good" and "bad" settlements, a clear distinction should be made between settlements that are entirely consistent with a two-state solution and those designed to block such an eventuality.

But all this is trivial compared to the macro problem, which is that the US makes no distinction between the respective distances Israel and the Palestinians are from making the two-state approach work, and instead looks for ways to criticize both sides no matter what, in an attempt to appear "evenhanded."

Since the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, the Israeli public and political system have moved dramatically from a consensus that a Palestinian state would be an anathema, to an equally broad consensus that regards it as acceptable, even a necessity. At the same time, the Palestinians have if anything become more radicalized since 1993, and have not begun to prepare themselves for a two-state approach, let alone embrace it.

The lack of movement on the Palestinian side is illustrated not just by the complete rejection of Israel by Hamas, but by the nonexistence of a Palestinian peace camp that accepts Israel's basic legitimacy. While Yasser Arafat, and now Mahmoud Abbas, claimed to have accepted Israel's "right to exist," both continued to champion the "right of return," an obvious back-door method to achieve Israel's destruction.

Almost no Palestinian will accept that the Jewish people have any national or historical rights to a state alongside Palestine; almost no Israeli will reject the right of Palestinians to build a peaceful and democratic state alongside Israel. This gargantuan gap is what prevents peace.

Pretending that Israelis and Palestinians are equally to blame for the lack of peace is not just misleading and unfair, it is actively harmful to the cause of peace, because it lets those who are obstructing peace off the hook. Nor is this "skewing" limited to the Israeli-Palestinian sphere.

Another major impediment to peace is the free ride given to the non-radical Arab states. These states are considered to be doing their part because they are not directly helping Hamas (though much of Hamas's funding comes from these countries, and Egypt refuses to stop the weapons flow to Gaza), and because they have a standing offer to make peace once Israel has settled with the Palestinians.

The Arab stance that they are patiently waiting for peace, however, should not wash. These states could, if they led the way rather than insisted on following, quickly tip the current Palestinian trend from radicalization to moderation.

The non-radical Arab states do not lift a finger to encourage and exemplify normalization with Israel partly because the international community - including Israel - does not demand it of them, and does not blame them for perpetuating the conflict. The other reason these states do not help is because they are afraid that Iran will succeed in becoming a nuclear power, and that in such a world it would be very dangerous to take a step that seems to support the US or Israel.

In short, while the US is busy counting outposts and settlements, and acting as if Israel is holding up the works, the real obstacles to peace lie elsewhere. So long as these real obstacles do not become the focus of Western policy, the "peace process" will continue to be a dismal failure. (Jerusalem Post Mar 13)

Germany's Pro-Israel Power Play By Caroline Glick

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's speech in German before the Knesset this afternoon will be the culmination of what the Israeli media has referred to as an "historic" three-day state visit to Israel. The day before Merkel launched her "historic" visit, Der Spiegel reported on the "historic" visit of another German to Afghanistan.

That visit ended on March 3 when the visitor in question, known as Cüneyt C. from Bavaria and also known as Saad Ebu Furkan blew himself up in front of a US guard post in Khost, an hour's drive from the border with Pakistan where the German-Turk underwent terror training. Two US soldiers were killed and dozens were wounded after being trapped beneath the rubble, making C. Germany's first successful suicide bomber.

Although the first German to kill US forces, C.'s associate, Sadullah K. a young German from the state of Hesse died trying. K. was killed in October in a US airstrike along the Pakistan-Afghan border after he also underwent

training in Pakistan. Both men belonged to the German-based Islamic Jihad Union. The IJU made headlines in September when German investigators rounded up the leaders of an IJU cell which was planning massive attacks against American targets in Germany. These leaders - also Germans - were in contact with both C. and K. who escaped the police dragnet and made it to Pakistan after travelling through Turkey and Iran.

And of course, Germany's reputation as a home for al-Qaida-like jihadists was burnished by Saudi and Egyptian nationals who studied in Hamburg several years ago. Led by Muhammad Atta, they enjoyed German hospitality while planning the attacks they carried out in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001.

MERKEL, WHO presents herself and her country as Israel's greatest friend and supporter in Europe, will no doubt ignore this story in her Knesset speech. She will doubtlessly also not mention that her country is Iran's largest importer. She might mention that last year Germany did cancel a half of its loan guarantees to German firms doing business with Iran. But she won't mention that the move has had almost no impact on trade volume. In a recent report on German firms in Iran, Reuters interviewed British businessman Robert Mills, who runs DHL's operation in Teheran. DHL, the express delivery firm is a unit of the mail and logistics group Deutsche Post.

Mills gushed about the booming business his firm is doing in Iran, in spite of the international sanctions. Mills said the tonnage handled by DHL jumped by 50 per cent in the last two years and the company has doubled its turnover in Iran since 2005 on the back of rising imports of everything from telecommunications equipment to car spare parts.

Like Mills, other businessmen representing German firms reported booming businesses and expanding opportunities in spite of UN sanctions. Business managers reported that their earnings have doubled and tripled in the past two years.

Iran's faith in its German business partners is apparently unlimited. Why else would it be considering listing \$92 billion in shares of its energy holding company on the Frankfurt stock exchange? As MEEED, the Middle East Business Intelligence Report reported Sunday, with over 1,700 German firms operating in Iran, the fact that Germany recently broke off banking ties with Iranian banks is not viewed as an obstacle to listing the firm on the Frankfurt exchange. A spokeswoman for Deutsche Borse, the company which manages the exchange told the journal that it would have no objection to listing the Iranian firm.

GERMANY'S actions toward Iran cannot be squared with Merkel's rhetoric of support for Israel and commitment to Israel's security. Both Germany's actions and its pro-Israel rhetoric can only be understood when seen through the lens of power politics - which is the lens that informs European policymakers in their decisions relating to Israel, Iran, the Middle East, and indeed the world as a whole.

Power politics are a function of two main components - the threat of war and violence, and economic leverage. From the Europeans' perspective, the Arab world and Iran wield both weapons of power politics against them. Through restive, increasingly radicalized Muslim minority populations in Europe - like C. and K. and their IJU colleagues in Germany and Pakistan - the Islamic world wields the threat of terror over the heads of European leaders. And through oil, they wield the ultimate commercial gun at Europe's head.

Neither the EU nor any single European state has managed to put together a coherent or rational domestic policy for contending with the threat posed by Europe's Muslim minorities. And so, the issue has been deflected to the realm of foreign policy. There, combined with the oil threat, the Europeans have contended with Arab and Islamic pressure by opting to appease them. This they do by attacking Israel, supporting the Palestinians, and preventing the disarmament or political defeat of Hizbullah in Lebanon.

The Europeans act as they do for a combination of reasons. First, they have no real military capacity to either defend themselves or attack the Arab and Muslim states which foment rebellion among their own Muslim minorities. Second, they have no wish to use their collective commercial power. If they were interested in the latter of course, they could paralyze the Iranian economy in weeks simply by cutting off their trade with Teheran. And third, the ultimate military free riders, they trust that the US or Israel, which are both more directly threatened by Iran's nuclear program than they, will take out Iran's nuclear installations for them.

THE EU'S appeasement policies have been made clear through their actions as the commanders of UNIFIL forces in Lebanon since the Second Lebanon War. It was Israel's hope that European forces, which make up the majority of the 15,000 UNIFIL forces in south Lebanon, would prevent Hizbullah from rearming after the war and, perhaps, help to strengthen the pro-Western Siniora government against Syrian, Iranian and Hizbullah attempts to overthrow it. Yet the opposite has occurred. Since the war, and under the blind eyes of the Europeans, Hizbullah has rebuilt its forces. Three

years after the March 14 demonstration which fomented the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, the Siniora government is paralyzed and the March 14 Movement is demoralized and in disarray.

The Germans provided the public with one of the most absurd displays of European hypocrisy and mendacity on February 29. That day, Germany transferred command over UNIFIL's naval contingent to Italy. After deploying a force of four ships and 2,400 men to the Lebanese coastline in 2006 with the expressed purpose of preventing Hizbullah's rearmament, Germany devoted most of its efforts to complaining about Israeli overflights of Lebanese airspace and provoking the IAF by launching German helicopters into Israeli airspace without prior coordination.

And yet, at the command handover last month, German Defense Minister Franz Josef Jung announced, "We can guarantee that no weapons were smuggled by sea." For its part, Hizbullah has clearly been unimpressed by Germany's naval power. It has registered no complaints against Germany's navy, something it would have done if any of the 13,000 boats the Germans claim to have inspected was actually carrying its weapons. Significantly, while Hizbullah was downright friendly to the German navy, it went into a near apopleptic fit of rage when, the same week that the Germans transferred command to the Italians, the USS Cole anchored off Lebanon's coast.

While Merkel will ignore her country's economic support for Iran and its military weakness and decision to embrace appeasement of the Arabs at Israel's expense as a national and continental strategy during her address to the Knesset, she will wax poetically about her nation's support for the so-called "peace process" and Palestinian statehood.

Merkel of course, knows full well that Israel's presumptive Palestinian "peace partner" the Fatah movement is a terrorist group. She also knows that the Olmert-Livni-Barak government's presumptive interlocutor for peace, Palestinian Authority Chairman and Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas is neither able nor interested in establishing a Palestinian state that will live at peace with Israel. She also knows that if the so-called peace process brings about a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem, that state will simply be a terror state that will stand at the side of the terror state that was established in Gaza in 2005.

And yet, rather than confront Merkel and her European colleagues with these known facts, the Olmert-Livni-Barak government prefers to play along with the farce. In their view, all of this is immaterial. The Israeli government's European policy is to appease the Europeans by helping them to appease the Arabs.

If the Olmert-Livni-Barak government were to pause to consider what they are doing they would recognize that they have missed the entire point. They have ignored the power politics that inform Europe's decision-makers' policy moves. Were they to recognize them, they would recognize their appeasement policy for the disaster it has become.

If Israel were to play the power politics game, it would understand that it must do three things. First, it must use its own considerable economic leverage to force individual European firms to decide if they are willing to forego Israeli technology in favor of Iranian export markets which make up only one percent of European foreign trade. Second, they would ensure that the Europeans understand that Israel will use its considerable military power to defeat its enemies. And finally, it would use its political weight to expose Europe's humanitarian and pro-peace rhetoric as a hypocritical sham. That is, Israel would work to change the Europeans' calculations of their own interests.

But of course, in the media frenzy of feel good German-Israeli friendship that has characterized Merkel's visit, none of this is likely to occur this week. And in the appeasement frenzied political climate that has gripped Israel since 1993, it is hard to imagine anyone stopping to realize that we are the only ones who take the Europeans at their word. (Jerusalem Post Mar 17)

Purim, and All That Jazz By Avraham Feder

I don't like Purim much. Not that I don't have a good time. Like most Israelis, I celebrate, make merry, put on a ridiculous costume, swing my gregger, the louder the better, even flirt with inebriation, ad lo yada - and all that jazz.

It's just that I have never found Megillat Esther to be funny. Oh, there's plenty of partying and pomp there, even sexual politics. There's life-and-death intrigue, too, but after melodramatic suspense, the "good guys" - that is, the Jews - win!

It's still not funny, because I can't get out of my head two frightening elements in the story: (1) that genocide of our people was being planned; and (2) that the perpetrators who had the power to get away with it were a pair of buffoons.

What, then, is the Megilla, if not a brilliant revelatory satire on the Jewish condition in exile? The fickleness with which the fate of an entire people could be decided is enough to ignite within us who are living after the Shoah

bloodcurdling reminders that the 20th-century Jewish predicament in Europe had no Mordechai and Esther to come riding in just in time, flip the hamentash on its head, so to speak, and all that jazz.

Well, then, haven't we in Israel blunted the satirical sting of the Megilla? Here in our own state we are not subject to the whims of foreign potentates and murderous anti-Semites (ha ha, and all that jazz!) Yet the satirical underpinnings of Purim and the way the Jewish people have been observing Purim through the ages - with drunken levity, ubiquitous masks, and pandemonium inside and outside the Megilla reading - all suggest a cutting relevancy precisely for us here in our ostensibly "galut-free" State of Israel.

Take getting drunk, for example. Our sages taught that one should drink on Purim until he cannot distinguish between "blessed be Mordechai" and "cursed be Haman." The sages couldn't have been prescribing Dionysian snorting, certainly not orgiastic revelry. An implied message, however, might be for us to realize that only in an extreme state of intoxication could a Jew confuse the blessing of a fellow Jew and the cursing of a genocidal Persian (Iranian) anti-Semite.

Yet could the sages have ever imagined that, someday, fully sober Jewish leaders of an independent Jewish state would be sitting down with latter-day Hamans like Yasser Arafat and signing peace agreement after peace agreement, only to see them violated shamelessly and murderously?

One doesn't need to imbibe vodka to become intoxicated. One can become drunk over an idea, so that no matter how much contrary evidence is brought to disprove the validity of that idea, one hangs on, begging for "one more for the road."

How else can we explain our addiction to a "peace process" with those who are unrepentant in their lust to lie to us, to terrorize us, to destroy us?... and all that jazz.

Or how about the noise we make during the Megilla reading? Please note that not only children with their toy rattles, but mature adults with heavy wooden noise-makers all join in a cacophony of hooting, whooping, stomping on the floor, wiping out metaphorically all the generations of Amalek.

For some of us, however, the satirical sting fixes our attention on another cacophony, the interminable gibble-gabble of political leadership, promising solutions based on surrendering land of the Land of Israel. And to whom? To those whose negotiating strategy is consistently and unreservedly to say no to any national Jewish existence in the Middle East.

Through the cacophonous bedlam of "expert" analyses of what the independent State of Israel is to do with Gaza, and with Judea and Samaria (and we may as well add the Galilee and eastern Jerusalem), might we not ask the following question of our leadership: Is there a short-term, middle-term, long-term plan alternative to the by-now stillborn two-state solution? Is there a clear, resonant clarion call of a governmental strategy piercing through the roar of Hamas "greggers"? Or is the real symptom of our national perplexity our Purim masks? When do we take these masks off?

THE USUAL assumption about masks is that we wear them to hide our identity from others... and all that jazz. But the nagging truth is that psychological anxiety - not to mention spiritual and ethical despair - set in when the masks we wear hide our identity from ourselves.

Are we or are we not an independent nation living in its own homeland fighting for our legitimate existence and security? Or are we still living in exile, banking on the largesse of others who may at times be paragons of virtue, but who just as easily can be fools and scoundrels?

This is not to say that sovereign states are completely independent in all aspects of their social, political, economic, and cultural being. But within the maelstrom of international give-and-take, a nation that has pride in itself learns how to maneuver to its maximum benefit, without surrendering strategic assets - certainly not to ruthless enemies.

Let's be honest. Who forced us into the asinine Oslo process, and who dictated the unilateral disengagements from Southern Lebanon and Gaza, if not our confused selves? Talk about all that jazz!

IT'S A pity that we don't have a holiday celebrating another historical event that took place at about the same time as the events of Purim. A group of Jews left the exile of Babylonia to return to Eretz Yisrael. The biblical record of this "Shivat Zion" - unlike Megillat Esther - is not satirical. It is a serious account, sober but optimistic in its hope for a rebirth of the Jewish nation in its homeland. It served throughout the last two millennia as a precedent for our blessed contemporary "Shivat Zion."

But then again, we always had an unsatirical, unambiguous, glorious precedent for the rebuilding of our national pride - Pessah.

Thank God, to modify a Wordsworth verse: If Purim comes, can Pessah be far behind?... and all that jazz.... (Jerusalem Post Mar 19)

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