



## Commentary...

### A Broom and a Flag By Michael Freund

I'm no psychiatrist, but as Israel turns 60, we seem to have developed an acute case of schizophrenia. You can almost sense the contradictory impulses at work, as many Israelis wonder whether to celebrate the country's numerous accomplishments, bemoan its agonizing disappointments or some combination of the two.

Whether it is the various corruption scandals involving political figures, the latest child-abuse cases that rocked the nation a few weeks ago, or the ongoing assault on traditional Jewish and Zionist values, there would seem to be plenty of reasons to scratch our heads and speculate about where this country is headed.

Add to that the continuing Palestinian rocket attacks against Sderot, the growing threat of a nuclear Iran, and the Hizbullah arms buildup north of the border, and it is no wonder that some of our fellow citizens would prefer to hide under the nearest bed until the storm passes.

Quite frankly, it seems hard to blame them.

But then there is the other side of the coin. Look at Israel's various triumphs in fields ranging from computer science to agriculture, note the optimists. Our ability to survive in a hostile neighborhood is an achievement in and of itself, they say.

They, too, have a point. So which is it, then, on Israel's 60th Independence Day? Doom or delight, glee or gloom? Or perhaps some mixture of the two? The very question, I think, is remarkable, if only because it betrays an utter lack of appreciation for historical context and perspective.

After all, in the life of an individual, a span of sixty years may represent the bulk of his productive days on this earth. But for a nation, it is an infinitesimal period, a mere episode or interlude in the great sweep of history.

Nonetheless, look at what we the Jewish people have managed to achieve here since 1948.

We've brought millions of immigrants from around the world, made the desert bloom, and built a free country amid a sea of tyranny, all in less time than it took to construct the Leaning Tower of Pisa (177 years), the Great Wall of China (centuries), or even Washington's National Cathedral (83 years). Not bad, don't you think?

Consider, for example, where today's great superpower, the United States, was in the 60th year of its existence.

Back in 1836, large swathes of the North American continent remained untamed, as Arkansas became just the 25th state to join the Union.

Americans living on the periphery faced frequent Indian attacks and great uncertainty. In May of that year, Comanche Indians slaughtered five members of a family in Texas and then proceeded to abduct their 9-year old daughter, who was later forced to marry the tribal chief. Twenty-five years would pass before she was rescued from her captors.

And then, of course, there was the Battle of the Alamo, where Mexican troops massacred hundreds of valiant American defenders in Texas, including folk hero Davey Crockett.

Incidents such as these must surely have sent a chill down the spine of every citizen.

Even America's democracy was struggling at the time, as the dispute over slavery continued to fester. In 1836, the House of Representatives went so far as to pass the infamous "gag rule" as a means of suppressing debate on this contentious issue.

Nonetheless, despite the great challenges which America faced at the time, that did not dampen their sense of optimism or detract from their appreciation for what had been accomplished in the period since the nation's founding. Indeed, in his annual address to Congress in December of that year, President Andrew Jackson started off by saying, "it is a source of the most heartfelt

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satisfaction to be able to congratulate you on the high state of prosperity which our beloved country has attained."

"With no causes at home or abroad to lessen the confidence with which we look to the future," he continued, "the general condition of our affairs may well excite our national pride."

This, too, must be our approach as we mark Israel's 60th annual Independence Day, and as we face the

future. Sure, there are still plenty of swamps left to be drained in this country. Swamps of Jewish ignorance, swamps of poverty and unemployment, swamps of callousness and despair. But that should never detract from our appreciation of the fact that we finally have a Jewish state, even with all of its faults.

A moving story about the great Hassidic Rebbe of Sadigora, Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Friedman of blessed memory, bears this out. When the Nazis took over Vienna, where the rebbe lived, they sought to humiliate the Jews by forcing the great sage to sweep the streets of the city to the taunts and laughter of Austrian onlookers.

The German soldiers handed the rebbe a broom, but while he swept, he recited a silent prayer: "Master of the Universe, may I yet merit to sweep the streets of the Land of Israel."

The Nazis then gave him a large flag and forced him to hoist it over a tall building. This time the rebbe intoned, "Master of the Universe, may I yet merit to raise the flag of Israel over a high place in the Land of Israel."

After surviving the war, the rebbe was determined to fulfill his vision. And so, each year, on Independence Day, he would rise early, take a broom in hand, and proceed to sweep the streets of Tel Aviv in honor of God's answer to his prayer. And then the elderly rabbi would ascend to the top of Tel Aviv's Great Synagogue, and raise a large Israeli flag proudly for all to see.

So the next time you find yourself down in the dumps, wondering about this country and its leadership - think back to the Rebbe of Sadigora, with a broom in one hand, a flag in the other, and a heart full of gratitude to God for the miracle that is the modern State of Israel. (Jerusalem Post May 6)

### Anti-Zionism at 60 By Caroline Glick

Israel's 60th Independence Day is an excuse for the international media to weigh in on the state of the Jewish state. Given the anti-Israel bias of most of the international media, not surprisingly, most of the reports reveal less about Israel's status at 60 than they reveal about how anti-Zionists perceive Israel at 60.

Two critiques - both cover stories of major magazines - stand out in this regard. In Canada, Maclean's magazine's May 5 cover pictures three Israeli soldiers struggling to raise the national flag. The headline reads, "Why Israel Can't Survive."

In the US, the cover of The Atlantic Magazine's May edition sports a Star of David painted in Palestinian colors of red, black and green ensconced in a PLO flag. The headline asks, rhetorically, "Is Israel finished?"

The authors of the two articles - Michael Petrou in Maclean's and Jeffery Goldberg in The Atlantic come to their subject from different angles. Petrou writes as an emotionally disengaged observer. Goldberg, who made aliya in the 1980s, writes as a disillusioned Zionist who abandoned Israel and moved back to America. Petrou writes of Israel's certain demise with amoral detachment. Goldberg's dispatch is a deeply emotional attempt to justify his decision to abandon Israel.

Petrou's article begins optimistically enough. He asserts that at 60, Israel can handle all the security threats that come its way, including Iran's nuclear weapons program and Hizbullah's missiles in Lebanon. Yet despite its military strength, Petrou says that Israeli is nonetheless doomed for it has no way of contending with what he proclaims is the greatest threat: the Palestinian demographic time bomb.

By Petrou's estimation, "Within one or two decades, the number of Muslim and Christian Arabs will surpass the number of Israeli Jews

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(including Gaza, the West Bank and Israel itself). When that happens, if there is still no Palestinian state (and in the absence of large-scale ethnic cleansing), Israelis will be forced to choose between two futures. Their country will either be Jewish, but not democratic - in other words, a Jewish minority will control a land mostly inhabited by Palestinians - or Israel will be democratic, but not Jewish, because Arabs will form the majority in what will become a binational state."

While well written, Petrou's piece is a journalistic embarrassment. For his central contention is a fabrication.

The Arab demographic time bomb is a fiction. It was created out of whole cloth in 1997. That year, the Palestinian Authority's Bureau of Statistics published data from a falsified census which claimed that there were 3.8 million Palestinians living in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. The PA projected population growth of some 4.7 percent per year - far higher than any other place on earth. At that growth rate, the PA claimed that by 2015, the Palestinian population in Judea, Samaria and Gaza would be some 5.8 million and that together with Arab Israelis, who number some 1.2 million, they would comprise the majority of the population between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

In January 2005 a group of Israeli and American researchers published an in-depth analysis of the PA data. They compared the census with birth and death records published by the PA's Health Ministry, and education records of children entering first grade published by the PA's Education Ministry. They compared immigration rates published by the PA with immigration records compiled by Israeli authorities at the international borders. They compared population statistics with voter rolls in the 1996 PA elections. Their findings were remarkable.

They discovered that the PA had counted as residents hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who lived abroad. It double counted Arab Jerusalemites. It assumed high immigration rates when in fact except for 1994, the PA has experienced net emigration every year. The PA inflated birthrates and deflated death rates. It ignored the tens of thousands of Palestinians who had immigrated to Israel.

All in all the American-Israeli Demographic Research Group discovered that the PA's census data was exaggerated by some 50 percent. Its researchers discovered that there were only 2.5 million Palestinians living in Gaza, Judea and Samaria in 2004. They found that Israeli Jewish fertility rates are higher than Palestinian fertility rates in Judea and Samaria and the Jewish fertility rates are converging with Israeli Arab fertility rates. Fertility rates in Gaza are similarly declining steadily. So too, Israel's net Jewish immigration rates are positive and rising. Most striking, the researchers found that Israel's Jewish majority west of the Jordan River has remained remarkably steady since 1967. Today Jews make up a 3:2 majority over Arabs in Israel, Gaza and Judea and Samaria. Jews comprise 67 percent of the population of Israel and Judea and Samaria and nearly 80 percent of the population within sovereign Israel.

The AIDRG's initial and subsequent reports have received significant attention in Israel. Had he wished, Petrou could easily have accessed its work on the Internet. But that would have upset his conclusions.

Petrou's story reveals a consistent message of many anti-Zionists. That message is that no matter what Israel does, it remains essentially powerless, just as Jews were powerless for 18 centuries in exile. It is meant to demoralize Israel's supporters by telling them there is no point in trying to prevent the inevitable. And it is meant to console Israel's detractors. They needn't worry. Israel is on its way out.

While Goldberg too, makes use of the PA's phony demographic data, his argument for Israel's demise is not about demography. It is an indictment of Jewish power. If Petrou's Jewish state is doomed because it is powerless just as Jews have always been, Goldberg's Jewish state is doomed because it has sinfully deviated from Jewish history by being powerful.

Goldberg set up his article as an indirect dialogue between far-leftist novelist David Grossman, whose son Uri was killed in the Second Lebanon War and Olmert - who Grossman blames for his son's death. Goldberg served as the moderator. Goldberg's decision to focus his analysis on Grossman was a revealing one. While Grossman enjoys a pride of place among the radical leftist elite, he is a marginal figure in Israeli society. Yet by Goldberg's telling, Grossman is a giant. As he tells it, Grossman's son's death in war, "became a national tragedy." Yet this is untrue.

Goldberg likes Grossman, because like Goldberg, Grossman doesn't feel comfortable with Jewish power. Goldberg notes approvingly that during the course of the Second Lebanon war, Grossman held a press conference with fellow radical leftist novelists A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz demanding that Israel not launch a ground offensive in Lebanon. Goldberg ignores the fact that their call was widely ignored by the general public and to the extent that their press conference evoked a response, it was a negative one.

Goldberg recalled that after that press conference, Grossman told him, "Force [against Hizbullah] will fan the flames of hatred for Israel in the region

and the entire world, and may even... create the situation that will bring upon us the next war and push the Middle East to an all-out regional war."

What is bizarre about Grossman's statement is that it was made while Israel was in the midst of a regional war. The war was fought by Hizbullah forces but it was directed by Iran, and Hizbullah was armed and equipped by Syria with Russian assistance. Today Grossman, who advocates negotiations with Iran's Palestinian proxy Hamas, is none the wiser and no less isolated from mainstream Israeli opinion. Yet Goldberg misleads his readers by claiming that Grossman's views are mainstream and influential.

Goldberg's assessment of Israel as destined to fail is predicated on two ideological opinions which imbue both his narrative and his analysis. First, he claims that Israel's decision to build communities beyond the 1949 armistice lines is the reason that the Arabs refuse to make peace with it. That is, it is Israel's fault that there is no peace. Arabs are not actors, they merely react to Israel. Second, and more fundamentally, Goldberg argues because Israel is powerful, it is necessarily immoral.

Far from a moral argument, Goldberg's second assertion renders his analysis a moral perversion. For him, there is no distinction between actors only between their relative military power. It is military strength, or the absence of military strength, that determines if a nation should be supported or delegitimized. In his mind, there is little difference between a powerful Israel and a powerful Germany. Both are destined to use power to advance evil. By the same token, since America is militarily powerful, its campaign in Iraq is evil and since al-Qaida in Iraq is militarily weak, it is a victim, and good, just like the Palestinians.

Goldberg's view is just as familiar as Petrou's. As Prof. Ruth Wisse from Harvard University wrote in her recently published book *Jews and Power*, throughout the years of Jewish powerlessness in 18 centuries of exile, many Jews confused their tragic and lamentable existential condition for a moral virtue. They reviled Zionism with its message of Jewish empowerment because they refused to recognize that power can be used to advance both good and evil, depending on the identity of those who wield it. For Goldberg, then, it is the very success of Zionism in empowering Jews that makes it unacceptable.

In the end, the unifying factor in Petrou's and Goldberg's anti-Zionism is that both ignore Zionists. For Petrou, Zionists are irrelevant because they are doomed to fail whoever they are. For Goldberg, Zionists are no more than symbols. They cannot be moral because they are powerful.

Israel's success is a testament to the enduring ingenuity and strength of the Jewish people as moral actors. The longevity of anti-Zionism is a testament to the fact that no matter what Israel's accomplishments, there will always be those who fail to see them. (Jerusalem Post May 5)

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**Moshe Rabbeinu and Yom HaAtzmaut** By Moshe Kempinski  
*He wanted to share our joys and troubles.*

We are entering the days of celebration for the establishment of the State of Israel, followed three weeks later by the day celebrating the reunification of Jerusalem. Around us, the world gathers their weapons and brandishes their swords at us. Those in the world who claim to be our friends attempt to batter this nuisance called Israel into a more manageable pest. Those that claim to be our leaders seem to constantly find ways to redefine the word corruption.

There are those that look around them and wonder: Is there anything to really celebrate? There are others that smile smugly and declare: "We told you people all along that you were wrong to support and sanctify this secular state." There are yet others who are still recovering from the blows, the injustices and the shame heaped upon them by this same state that they had so rejoiced in.

Yet there are many of us who will rejoice on these days and will declare with unhesitant faith the Shehecheyanu blessing: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us in life, sustained us and brought us to this moment."

Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses) is the man who walked between Heaven and Earth. He is the man who spoke to G-d as men speak to each other, *panim el panim*, that is to say, "face to face." This is the man who walked into the fiery mountain and felt the Glory of G-d pass over him. This man at the end of his life had but one request, one final plea (Deuteronomy 3: 24-25):

And I beseeched HaShem at that time, saying: "O HaShem G-d, Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness, and Thy strong hand; for what god is there in Heaven or on Earth that can do according to Thy works, and according to Thy mighty acts? Let me go over, I pray Thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill-country, and Lebanon."

In order to emphasize his passionate plea, our sages declare that he prayed this plea 515 times, a number equivalent to the gematria (numerical equivalent) of the word *Va'etchanan* ("and I beseeched").

What would Moshe have given in order to stand in one of those never-ending lines in the government offices? What would he have sacrificed to be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the young people settling the hilltops of Judea and Samaria? What joy would he have had to taste the sweet fruit of the land he so yearned for? That yearning was so great that he was ready to postpone his entry into the bliss of the World to Come. All in order that he could "see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill-country, and Lebanon."

Moshe knew his people and sensed clearly what the future held for them. He knew the arrogance and difficulties that would overcome them. Yet, he wanted to share that future with them.

What of us - those who have merited to be born in such a generation as this? We who have seen how from the ashes of Auschwitz and the slaughterhouse of Europe rose the "dry bones" as foretold in Ezekiel 37. Painstakingly these dry bones began to wear flesh, sinews and skin (37: 4-6).

It was this generation that witnessed how, with the culmination of the Six Day War in June 1967 and the miraculous victory of the Jews over their Muslim enemies, the holy city of Jerusalem was reunited: "Jerusalem that is built like a city, in which all is united together." (Psalms 122:3)

It is those of us who live in Israel today that watched the Divine plan continue to unfold; and the streets and squares of Jerusalem were once again filled with children playing, exactly as Zachariah prophesied: "Thus says the L-rd of hosts: old men and old women shall yet again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem.... And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets." (Zechariah 8:4-5)

It is those of us who live in this great land that can wonder if in fact some of the children that Zechariah saw could have been our very own.

A barren corner of the Middle East began to bloom and flower. A land seemingly cursed as uninhabitable and forsaken began to blossom, reaching out to welcome its children back home, just as we read in the prophecies of Ezekiel: "But you O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they will soon be coming." (Ezekiel 36:8)

As we today eat the sweet fruits of this land and marvel at how good they taste, we must remember that we are not eating mere fruits, but are actually eating a prophecy that has been fulfilled.

As history moved into the last decade of the twentieth century, the Iron Curtain that surrounded the Communist countries of Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia collapsed. And suddenly the hidden Jews from the former Soviet Union began returning home to the Land of Promise:

Therefore behold, days are coming when it will no longer be said. "As the L-rd lives, Who took out the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt," but rather, "As the L-rd lives, Who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the North, and from all the lands to which He had driven them;" and I shall return them to their land, which I gave to their forefathers. (Jeremiah 16:14-15)

We who have seen all this, can we dare not rejoice? How can we explain not lifting our voices in song and praise? There is yet much more to do and much more to fix and repair. It is a fact that this Heavenly gift is still unformed and is still covered with unsightly husks and coverings. Yet underneath lies a glorious gift, a gift from G-d. We cannot stand back and watch and wait for the gift to be ready and pleasing. We must begin to unwrap it with singing and Hallel. We need to do that for those who are not here with us, because they never ceased their yearning over two thousand years of history.

We need to do it for Moshe Rabbeinu because, more than any other human, he foresaw this wondrous gift called the reborn State of Israel. (IsraelNationalNews.com May 6)

*The writer, author of "The Teacher and the Preacher", is the editor of the Jerusalem Insights weekly email journal and co-owner of Shorashim, a Biblical shop and learning center in the Old City of Jerusalem.*

### **Failing the Test of History** By Martin Sherman

*Palestinians have attained 'failed state' status even before it was established Merit is no qualification for freedom.... Freedom is enjoyed when you are so well armed, or so turbulent, or inhabit a country so thorny that the expense of your neighbour's occupying you is greater than the profit.*

- T. E. Lawrence to the Editor of *The Times* July 22, 1920

This quote from a letter written by "Lawrence of Arabia" almost a century ago, setting out a case for the political independence for the Arabs in the Middle East, has current relevance in assessing the flurry of statements over the last few years - particularly from senior US politicians - that "the Palestinians deserve a state of their own."

Indeed, such views have been explicitly expounded by US Administrations for over half a decade from Colin Powell through Condoleezza Rice to George Bush who has incorporated the idea into his "vision" for the Middle East.

Several pro-Israeli pundits have tried to dispute the widely accepted contention that "the Palestinians do indeed deserve a state" Some like Naomi Ragen have warned of the unsavory nature that such a state would take - devoid of any semblance of law and order and due process, tolerance of religious diversity, political dissidence, freedom of expression, or regard for the status of women. Others, like Natan Sharansky, have attempted to condition the establishment of Palestinian statehood on the development of Palestinian democratization.

However, it would appear - regrettably - that neither of these objections, in spite of their factual accuracy and moral validity, can serve as a binding political criterion for national independence. For if tolerant pluralistic polities, in which the rule of law and civil equality flourished, were the touchstone for recognition of national sovereignty, such recognition would have to be denied numerous states across the globe - from Myanmar through Belarus to Zimbabwe.

Similarly, if democratically elected regimes were the litmus test, many of the states in the international system, and the Middle East, would not qualify - including several that Israel recognizes as having a major role to play in the region such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan where the sovereigns are not elected at all, and Egypt where the elections are hardly free and fair.

To adopt these positions would demand from the Palestinians criteria for national independence that are demanded from no other people. Moreover, are figures like Sharansky really proposing that Israel could accept Palestinian sovereignty if its government were democratic but revoke that acceptance as a result of regime change?

However, the Palestinians have undermined - indeed invalidated - their claim to statehood by even the more lenient and clearly measurable empirical criterion set out by Lawrence above. For the Palestinians' ongoing failure to achieve statehood reflects the converse - but necessary - corollary of the practical yardstick he stipulates.

If success in achieving statehood is the sole criterion by which to judge whether such statehood is indeed deserved, then surely it follows that the reverse is true: Failure to achieve statehood is the ultimate indicator in determining that it is not.

And the Palestinian failure has been undeniably staggering. In fact a strong case can be made for the claim that, in the history of modern national independence movements, none have enjoyed conditions more conducive to success, and yet achieved such miserable results, than that of the Palestinians. Indeed, the proponents of Palestinian statehood must be compelled to respond to a simple but trenchant question: Why hasn't it happened up to now? For it should not be forgotten what the Palestinians had in their favor:

- Decades of unmitigated support and patronage of the USSR, one of the world's two post-WW II superpowers
- Almost universal international endorsement of their claims
- Highly supportive coverage in nearly all major international media
- Massive financial backing making the Palestinians the highest per capita recipients of international aid on the face of the globe
- Almost two decades of highly accommodative Israeli administrations which not only acknowledged but often even identified with their claims of statehood

Yet in spite of these highly benign circumstances the Palestinians have not managed to produce any semblance of a sustainable society. The Palestinian leadership has done nothing but bring about a repressive and regressive interim regime that provided little but the pillage of the Palestinian people and the squander of the vast amount of resources provided by donor nations.

Nearly a decade and a half after the Oslo Agreements, the Palestinians have shown the world that they simply cannot "cut it." All they have been able to establish was both tenuous and dysfunctional, from a corrupt kleptocracy to a tyrannical theocracy - both now sliding into abysmal anarchy and chronic chaos accompanied by fratricidal fury. Indeed the Palestinian state has perhaps the unique, if dubious, distinction of attaining "failed state" status before it was in fact established.

So today, decades after other movements for national liberation across Africa and Asia, with far less financial and political support, managed to throw off mighty empires, the Palestinians with all the might of the Muslim world, and its vast petro-riches, behind them, have been unable to wrest independence from a tiny micro-state like Israel - not only when it opposed such independence, but even when it did not!

Clearly then, the time has come for the international community to recognize that rather than a coherent, cohesive national entity, the Palestinians comprise an amorphous amalgam of clans, gangs and bands whose overriding aspiration to not to establish a state for their own people but to dismantle a state of another people.

Clearly the time has come to remove the issue of Palestinian statehood from the international agenda - for the Palestinians themselves have shown

that they are patently incapable of maintaining such statehood. Indeed, while "(moral) merit" may not, as Lawrence points out, be a "qualification" for self-determination, continual and chronic failure to attain it, even under the most benevolent conditions, must surely be clear grounds for disqualification.

Accordingly, the time has come challenge the validity of the conventional wisdom which holds unquestioningly that "the Palestinians deserve a state of their own." Not because of any objections raised by the opponents of such a state, but because the Palestinians themselves have manifestly failed the test of history. (Ynet Apr 30)

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### Israel's Case of the Chickenpox By Hillel Halkin

When I was five years old, two days before my sixth birthday, I came down with the chickenpox, ruining the party that was planned. Something similar has happened this week to Israel. A fine 60th birthday present the prime minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, and his police investigators have given it! Just when the country was dutifully trying to forget its troubles and gearing up to celebrate six decades of Jewish independence next Thursday, it was notified in rapid succession that:

- Its prime minister had been questioned summarily by police investigators on yet another corruption charge (that was last Friday).
- The suspicions against Mr. Olmert, this time, were "extremely grave" and could lead to a rapid indictment and his forced resignation (over the weekend).
- The police had obtained a court order forbidding any public disclosure of the nature of these charges (over the weekend again).
- A "dramatic development" would take place on Tuesday, throwing light on the whole mysterious affair.

Writing these lines on Monday night in Israel, therefore, Tuesday's columnist can't help feeling foolish. Sometime tomorrow, you, my readers, will probably know things that I can't even imagine at the moment.

Mysterious isn't the word. Israel has been preparing for its 60th independence celebration for a long time. Festive events have been planned, guests have been invited, the president of America is due to drop by later this month.

Surely the police knew that they would be casting a pall over the entire celebration, just as they knew that, by blacking out all news reports of it, they would be subjecting the nation to unbearable suspense.

What could they have discovered of such urgency that pursuing it couldn't have been postponed another week?

And if the latest case against the prime minister was really such that any delay in following up on it might have jeopardized it, what need was there to announce that Mr. Olmert was being questioned? Why couldn't, at the very least, the news of this have been put off until after Independence Day? The prime minister himself, it seems safe to assume, would have been only too happy to spare himself the embarrassment of spoiling the festivities.

And even if the news of Mr. Olmert's questioning couldn't have been put off, why was a blackout imposed on it? To prevent the prime minister and others under suspicion from destroying evidence or coordinating alibis? But it's unimaginable that those under suspicion, whatever they were suspected of, would need the press to tell them what evidence to destroy or what alibis to concoct.

It doesn't make any sense. I wish I could put off writing this column until tomorrow. Of course, I could simply have ignored the whole thing. I had been planning to sit down tonight and write about Israel's first 60 years. Perhaps I should have gone ahead and written it as if nothing had happened. After all, whatever it is that has happened, I am, like everyone else in Israel, being kept in the dark about it.

What would I have written? Something, I suppose, about taking the long view. About the need, when thinking about Israel, to put the obfuscating details aside and concentrate on the larger picture. About how one day in the future, when the history books have to summarize Israel's first 60 years, they will skip over all the disappointments and failures and stress the glorious chapter in human history that the return of the Jewish people to its land after long centuries of exile constitutes. About ...

But who can concentrate on the larger picture? All I can think about is what Mr. Olmert has done that I'm not being told about. Siphon off the national budget into his bank account? Speculate on the shekel with inside information? Secretly sell the Western Wall to the Saudis?

But suppose he has? What difference would that make in the perspective of history, of the three-millenia drama of the world's oldest people?

The mind wanders. Could it be a simple case of bribery? Of nepotism? Could Mr. Olmert, perhaps back in the days when he was minister of industry and commerce, have awarded sinecures, sold jobs to the highest bidder, appointed his office manager's nephew to be deputy director of a government corporation? Do the police finally have the goods on him?

And if they do, what happens now? He'll have to resign, of course. Who

will take over the reins? Foreign Minister Livni? Mr. Olmert's Kadima party will probably rally around her. But does she have what it takes to hold it together? To keep both Labor and Shas in her coalition? To avoid having to call for new elections?

New elections! The story isn't that. It's 60 years of remarkable development, of economic growth, of millions Jews gathered from the four corners of the earth, of a small democratic state fighting off its enemies.

And if there are elections, who will be the winner in them? Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud? And what happens then? Do we invade Gaza? Bomb Iran? How is Mr. Netanyahu going to get along with a new Democratic administration in Washington that will not be sympathetically disposed to him?

On the day I was six, I lay in bed and itched and wished I could scratch and felt sorry for myself that my birthday had been spoiled. If a whole country could come down with the chickenpox, that's what Israel has gone and done now. (NY Sun May 6)

*The writer is a contributing editor of The New York Sun.*

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### Peace at Any Price By Moshe Arens

The Israeli government is engaged in a frantic search for peace. Peace with Mahmoud Abbas, even a shelf agreement, and peace with Syria. That seems like the most natural thing in the world. After all, as the saying goes, "Peace is better than war." And if these are the alternatives, that choice seems the correct one. But if we have learned anything from history, it is that even that is not always true. Some past peace agreements have served as invitations to war.

But Israel at this time, even while engaged in a war with the Palestinians in the South, is not facing an imminent danger of war with any of the neighboring Arab states. So war with its neighbors, and in particular Syria, is not the alternative to a peace agreement. Rather, the current choice is between continuing the 60 years of belligerency with Syria or striking a peace agreement. This also seems to be a rather easy choice at first sight, until we come to the price Israel would have to pay for the agreement.

Should we go for peace at any price? Some people might well believe that no price is too high for peace. Will it not guarantee against future wars? Is that not worth any price? So if Bashar Assad wants the Golan in exchange for peace, why not give it to him? And if he wants a few hundred meters beyond what used to be the international border before the Syrian army invaded Israel in May 1948, why not give it to him? Is that narrow strip of territory worth forgoing peace with Assad? And what if he were to insist on obtaining a small strip of the Galilee as well?

Is that where peace at any price stops? Should it rather be peace at any reasonable price? And at what point does the price cease to be reasonable? There is no quantitative answer.

When faced with such an insoluble equation, it is sometimes convenient to try to find a solution by addressing the problem from another angle. That is what happened when Ariel Sharon proposed the disengagement from Gush Katif, which involved uprooting 8,000 Israeli citizens from their homes and turning the area over to the Palestinians. We want a Jewish democratic state. That is why we are here, and this objective is worth any price. As it turned out, this move did not achieve - or even advance - peace, and Israel is no more Jewish and democratic now than it was before these Israeli citizens were forced out of their homes. It was no more than a delusion, dispelled in short order, that was cleverly sold to the Israeli public.

Some of the advocates of peace with Syria at any price may regret that the argument of "a Jewish democratic state" does not apply to turning the Golan Heights over to Syria. There is no "demographic problem" there. Instead, this has been called a "just" solution to the problem. After all, the Golan Heights was sovereign Syrian territory before Syria attacked Israel in the Six-Day War. Does that not mean that it is only proper to return to the Syrians this territory they lost during the war, even if it means uprooting 30,000 Israelis who now live there?

But that is not the accepted rule of nations that come to peace agreements. The aggressor nation is not entitled to all territory lost in a war. That would mean that there is no price for attacking a neighbor: Even if the aggression fails, nothing is lost. Just try applying this ludicrous principle to the territories Germany lost in World War II. Syria attacked Israel three times - in 1948, in 1967 and in 1973. The last two times, Syria was soundly defeated. Is it at all reasonable that Syria's lost territory should now be restored? That this cruel dictatorial regime, which is attempting to attain nuclear weapons, should be appeased by receiving the Golan Heights?

According to newspaper reports, Prime Minister Olmert already has informed Bashar Assad that Israel is prepared to cede the Golan Heights to Syria. That hasty move needs some further thought, unless all of Olmert's thoughts at this time are devoted to saving his coalition. (Haaretz May 6)