



## 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*

Israel. Although the report advocated removing all US combat brigades from Iraq by the beginning of 2008, it wasn't wedded to the notion. It allowed the possibility of a temporary surge of US forces to secure Baghdad and so enable the Iraqi government to assert control over the country and build its military.

But while ambivalent on Iraq, the Baker-Hamilton report was unyielding in its insistence that the US distance

itself from Israel. The report argued that to gain regional - and indeed international - support for the project of stabilizing Iraq, it was necessary for the US to appease the Syrians, the Iranians, the Saudis, the Egyptians and the Jordanians. And the best way to do that, they claimed, was to disembowel Israel. The report recommended that Israel be forced to give Syria the Golan Heights and coerced into accepting a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria, Gaza and Jerusalem which would be run by a Hamas-Fatah "national unity government."

Like Baker and Hamilton, Gates was also not wed to the idea of a speedy withdrawal of combat forces from Iraq. Instead he supported the surge and for that he has gained great acclaim in Washington. But also like Baker and Hamilton, Gates has been unyielding in his push to distance the US from Israel. Indeed, in his National Defense Strategy, Israel is not listed as a US ally.

Gates's push to abandon the US's alliance with Israel in favor of embracing Iraq's Iranian and Arab neighbors is nowhere more apparent than in his actions regarding Iran's nuclear weapons program. And those actions are simply a continuation of his efforts before entering office. In 2004, Gates co-authored a study for the Council on Foreign Relations with Israel foe Zbigniew Brzezinski calling for the US to draw closer to Iran at Israel's expense.

Over the past nine months, largely due to Gates's advocacy, this has been the essential thrust of US policy toward Iran and Israel. The policy involves downplaying the urgency of the threat of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, understating the progress Iran has made toward nuclear capabilities and openly working to appease Iran through US support and involvement with EU negotiations with Teheran.

The first US assault on what had until then been a more or less united public front with Israel on the issue of Iran's nuclear program came with the publication of the US's National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear weapons program last November. In the face of Iran's open calls to destroy Israel and the US, its rapid progress in its uranium enrichment activities, its command of the insurgency in Iraq, of Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian Authority, and its ballistic missile buildup, the NIE claimed that Iran had ended its nuclear weapons program in 2003.

The publication of the NIE was a body blow not only to Israel's efforts to isolate Iran and forge an international consensus about the need to confront Teheran. It was also a precision strike against the US's own stated objective of building a consensus for sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council. Gates was responsible for the report's public dissemination.

IN RECENT months, as Iran has ratcheted up its genocidal rhetoric, taken over the Lebanese government, strengthened its alliance with Syria, built up its offensive forces, doubled the scale of its uranium enrichment, and strengthened its attachment to Russia, Gates has moved out of the shadows and into the spotlight. Assisted by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael Mullen and Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell, Gates has made defending Iran's nuclear installations against the prospect of any Israeli or US attack his primary concern.

Gates has been a constant proponent of "engaging" Iran. In May for instance, he told a group of retired US diplomats, "We need to figure out a way to develop some leverage... and then sit down and talk with them. If there is going to be a discussion, then they need something, too. We can't go to a discussion and be completely the demander, with them not feeling that they need anything from us."

Following Gates's clear lead, the US not only stopped being "the demander," it has become Iran's supplicant. And it has been repaid with

## Events...

### Sunday September 7

The BAYT Israel Action/Bet El Twinning Committee and Canadian Friends of Bar Ilan University sponsor a lecture by **Professor Gerald Steinberg** on "Paying for the Propaganda War Against Israel: Europe, Canada and Jewish Organisations" at BAYT.

## Commentary...

### Iran's American Protector By Caroline Glick

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates is the darling of Bush administration foes. Gushing about Gates in a recent column, Washington Post writer David Ignatius crooned, "Gates is an anomaly in this lame-duck administration. He is still firing on all cylinders, working to repair the damage done at the Pentagon by his arrogant and aloof predecessor, Donald Rumsfeld." Ignatius called on the next administration to give Gates a major role leading its foreign and defense policy.

It can only be hoped that Ignatius's advice will be ignored.

Today the US strategic posture lies in tatters in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of US ally Georgia. The fact that aside from issuing strong reprimands the administration has no policy for contending with Russia's aggression shows clearly that the move caught Washington completely by surprise.

That Russia was apparently able to invade Georgia without US foreknowledge is a stinging indictment of all US intelligence agencies. As was the case before the September 11, 2001 attacks, again US intelligence agencies have failed their country.

But America's intelligence agencies' failure to comprehend the significance of Russia's intentions was not theirs alone. It was shared as well by Gates and by his State Department counterpart Condoleezza Rice. Both senior cabinet secretaries simply failed to notice what Russia was doing, or how its actions would influence US interests.

GATES'S DENIAL of Moscow's strategic hostility to the US was made clear as late as last month. As Russia built up its forces along Georgia's borders, Gates released his new National Defense Strategy which he presented as "a blueprint for success" for the next administration.

Gates's strategy paper, which foresees asymmetric campaigns against non-state actors comprising the bulk of US military operations in the coming decades, raised the hackles of US military commanders when he turned his attention to Russia and China. In Gates's view, the best way to confront these authoritarian rising powers is to deny that they constitute a threat to US interests. Rather than building US forces to confront them, Gates advocates building "collaborative and cooperative relationships" with them.

Gates's penchant for collaborating and cooperating with US rivals and enemies is no doubt the reason that the Left supports him so enthusiastically. Since he assumed office after the November 2006 elections, betraying allies as part of a strategy of appeasing US enemies and rivals has been the focus of his efforts.

Ahead of his appointment to the Pentagon, Gates was a member of the Iraq Study Group led by James Baker and Lee Hamilton. The thrust of the ISG report, issued on December 6, 2006 - the day he was sworn into office - was that for the US to maintain its credibility in the Middle East and generally, it was necessary to appease its enemies by betraying its allies.

While the ISG report was ostensibly focused on Iraq, its real focus was

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increased Iranian extremism. Iran met the US's decision to openly join the Europeans in offering it everything from nuclear reactors to World Trade Organization membership last month with intensified military action directed most recently against the US's allies in the Persian Gulf. Iran has threatened international oil shipments through the Straits of Hormuz, has launched a satellite and tested still more missiles and again and again called for Israel's destruction.

But this hasn't thwarted Gates. Since Iran itself demonstrated the falsity of the National Intelligence Estimate, Gates moved from subtle to open opposition to US military strikes against its nuclear installations. Together with Mullen, in recent months he has stated repeatedly that attacking Iran would be a disaster for the US. And he has not stopped there. Gates has used his authority as defense secretary to also block any possibility that Israel will attack Iran.

In June the Pentagon leaked information about the IAF's massive exercise in the Mediterranean which it claimed was a rehearsal of an attack against Iran. The same month, McConnell and Mullen visited Israel and rejected requests for military equipment and other support that would improve its ability to attack Iran's nuclear facilities.

Asserting that as far as the obviously infallible US intelligence estimates are concerned, Iran's nuclear program is not nearing completion, Mullen and McConnell also told their interlocutors that the US opposes an Israeli strike against Iran. As a consequence the US will deny the IDF the right to fly over Iraqi airspace.

Alarmed by the administration's swift slide toward Iran in recent months, senior IDF commanders and cabinet ministers have streamed into Washington. Last month Chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi spent a week in Washington trying to convince the US to change course. After Ashkenazi failed to deliver the goods, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz all converged on Washington. They too failed.

To hide the US's now openly pro-Iranian position from the public, Mullen gave Ashkenazi an unrequested Legion of Merit decoration. Gates agreed to supply Israel with advanced anti-missile defense systems that could be deployed as early as 2011 if funding is steady. If deployed successfully, these anti-missile systems should be able to intercept up to 90 percent of incoming Iranian nuclear warheads.

SPEAKING OF Russia's invasion of Georgia over the weekend, Gates claimed that Russia's actions would harm its relations with the US and the West "for years to come." But at the same time, he demurred from mentioning even one concrete step that the administration is considering adopting against Russia, arguing that "there is no need to rush into everything."

The administration has been accused by its critics of ignoring the strategic alliance among Russia, Iran and Syria. That alliance has been made most apparent by Russia's assistance to Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and its provision of sophisticated air-defense systems to both countries. Yet it is more likely that the administration is acutely aware of that alliance. Bush has simply decided to follow Gates's recommendation of appeasing all three.

Gates's position presents a daunting challenge to Israel and indeed to the US. If Iran is to be prevented from carrying out genocide, and if Bush hopes to leave office with even a shred of international credibility, Gates must be shunted firmly to the side. (Jerusalem Post Aug 18)

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### **Missile Defense for the Gaza Periphery** By Jeff Daube

I am an inveterate Middle East news junkie. As such, I have spent at least four to five hours a day on the Internet and e-mail trying to make sense of the overabundance of often confusing news that this troubled region generates daily.

In particular, one human interest item caught my eye last December. A mother in Kibbutz Nir Am, which lies between Gaza and Sderot, could not locate two of her young children when the Tzeva Adom (Color Red) alert went off, signaling the launching of a Kassam rocket by Palestinian terrorists. A few seconds later she heard a thump, and when she raced to her backyard, she found her two boys there, meters from an unexploded Kassam. It only failed to detonate because it had landed in very muddy ground thanks to earlier downpours.

Since this near-tragedy occurred on the second day of Hanukka, she called this her family's personal miracle of Hanukka.

I was so intrigued by the story that I decided to contact the mother to find out why we do not hear more about some of the communities in the Gaza periphery that get hit with rockets and mortars on a regular basis. She told me that the communities "only" have a few thousand residents in total and therefore do not seem to warrant coverage. But her community of Nir Am, alone, has absorbed more than 750 Kassam hits!

A FEW days later I made aliya and decided to take a number of trips to Sderot and its environs in my new position as director of the Zionist Organization of America's Israel office. I quickly learned that often the open area in which a Kassam is reported to have fallen is actually a community; replete with homes, kindergartens and, yes, people - people who suffer all the symptoms of post trauma stress disorder, injuries and deaths that you would expect them to suffer, under the circumstances.

I opened a part-time ZOA office in the Gaza Periphery community of Netiv Ha'asara in the hopes of drawing more media and government attention to the plight of the Gaza periphery communities. Soon after I was invited to attend a meeting at Nir Am where two highly placed security officials, Yossi Arazi and Oded Amichai, gave a compelling presentation about the Nautilus/SkyGuard laser system.

Without getting too technical (due to space considerations, I have omitted a host of Nautilus/SkyGuard advantages), Nautilus employs a high energy laser that focuses on the incoming projectile - whether it be a mortar, artillery shell, Kassam or Katyusha - and destroys it long before it reaches its target.

Nautilus has been successfully tested at White Sands, New Mexico and was found to have a 100 percent kill rate when 46 projectiles were fired. Under actual battle conditions, it is expected to achieve a similar success rate.

The unfounded concerns regarding Nautilus - such as reload capacity and chemical toxicity - have been debunked beyond question. At a subsequent meeting in Tel Aviv, Yossi, Oded and an additional expert, Ofer Lavie, patiently explained to me why the new Northrop Grumman SkyGuard, an upgrade of the original Nautilus prototype, is the system of choice hands down. The most obvious reason is that it is fully developed (having cost 400 million US taxpayer dollars) and is ready to be deployed; it can be operational shortly after authorities give the green light.

YET THE prototype is sitting in plastic in New Mexico even as I write this. Last time I checked, Pancho Villa's progeny were not about to threaten the residents of New Mexico with rocket attacks. The Nautilus could be sitting in the Gaza periphery, just as well, protecting innocent citizens who are under threat.

Other systems currently under consideration are beset by schedule, cost and range problems. For example, the Iron Dome system, which uses missiles to shoot down rockets, won't be ready until 2011 at the earliest and costs approximately \$100,000 per threat destruction, as opposed to the \$1,000-\$2,000 of SkyGuard/Nautilus. This does not even take into account that Iron Dome's threat destruction probability is less than SkyGuard's, so it could take multiple shots to destroy one \$500 Kassam. Add to that R&D, operational costs, current need for fortification and damages, and we end up with a system that is prohibitively expensive and does not even offer the same level of protection - not from Kassams fired in the typical four km. to six km. range; nor from mortars, which have already taken three lives; nor from artillery shells.

Similarly, the solid state laser system called LADS, as well as the Phalanx rapid fire systems, are short-range solutions that simply do not provide the coverage needed.

I AM no expert in anti-missile technology, but I do know that the first priority of any government is the safety and security of its citizens. We are not sure how long the current period of relative calm will last - perhaps as long as it takes Hamas to rearm and ready itself for the next round. Based on the latest intelligence reports, Hamas continues to smuggle and arm itself at a steady pace. Most Israeli residents in the area are resigned to the fact that it is not a question of "if" but "when" this calm will end.

From my comfortable Jerusalem apartment 20/20 hindsight is easy, but I cannot help but wonder how radically different the home front picture might have looked in the North during the Second Lebanon War had the Skyguard/Nautilus systems been in place. This time Hizbullah is said to be armed with 40,000 - compared to 12,000 - rockets. I shudder to think what Iran's proxies might be called upon to do should their Iranian patrons want to divert attention in order to relieve pressure on their nuclear weapons programs.

Not a single one of the experts I have spoken to can understand why the Defense Ministry is ignoring Northrop-Grumman's formal January 2007 proposal to deploy Skyguard/Nautilus systems in the Gaza periphery.

I am calling upon the government to explain why we cannot, at the very least, take the one Nautilus system sitting in the New Mexico desert and place it in the Sderot/Gaza periphery region. After all its wonderful people have been through the past seven years, don't they deserve a little piece of mind?

It only makes sense. (Jerusalem Post Aug 20)

*The writer, previously a pro-Israel advocate on Capitol Hill, is now the director of the Zionist Organization of America's Israel Office.*

## **Scotch & Cookies** By Onnie Schiffmiller

Well, it's 2:00 AM. Martha has piped one thousand rosettes and Oprah has saved the world. Still, I'm awake. I'm told it's normal.

When Jonah and Rina were babies, I expected to pace the floor at 2:00 AM. How else could I earn the motherhood badge? It was a right of passage, and I willingly signed on for 2 tours of duty that included midnight feedings and 4:00 AM wake-up calls. But, I thought the deal was, once they were big enough to look down on, instead of up at, me, I could safely return to my love affair with sleep. I had it all worked out.

It seemed like a good plan and it was working pretty well until two weeks ago when Jonah entered the tank corps of the IDF (Israel Defense Forces). The last month has been an emotional roller coaster, and I share it for several reasons. On a selfish level, it feels good to get it all out. The emotions have been bottled up for awhile and it the release feels good. Also, I think it's important for people to understand what this aspect of Israeli living is like. Finally, as a salute to the families and friends of members of the U.S. armed forces who say good bye to their loved ones knowing that they won't see them for months at a time. We will see Jonah, on average, once every three weeks and the separations are painful. I'm sure that families of U.S. servicemen stationed in Iraq, would be thrilled to see their sons or daughters that often. While I sympathized with their plight, I never really appreciated their sacrifice until now.

Over the last few weeks, friends and family in the States have asked me how I feel about this newest phase of our lives, and more than anything, I feel proud. That surprises me. I thought I would feel sad. I thought I would feel uncontrollable anxiety. I thought I would revisit our decision to settle here. I thought I would feel despair. Did those emotions surface? Of course they did; often, with great intensity. But so did a growing sense of pride. Pride in my children, proud in my community (more on that in a moment) and pride in this country.

The weeks that preceded the draft were similar to those that preceded sleep away camp. Shopping lists seemed to grow bigger each day. Every time we crossed one item off, five more were added in its place.

Of course, summer camp never included a visit to Shmulik's. Shmulik is a short, pot-bellied bald man in his 60s who owns the local army supply store on a small alley unknown to everybody except for local Raanana residents. He's a no-nonsense kind of guy who's been outfitting kids for the army for over thirty years. No body piercings. No tattoos. Just a grandfather who's steady, even voice is so reassuring that you leave thinking that as long as you're outfitted by Shmulik, nothing bad can happen.

You walk into his store and tell him that your draft date is quickly approaching. He pulls out a hi-tech index card filled with all the items required by your unit and methodically tells you every item you will need. Shmulik is efficient. Ten minutes and 1,000 shekels later, we could have been done. But, I'm a mom and when I spotted the extra thick army socks, resting on a top shelf, I grabbed them. Jonah thought I was ridiculous. Why spend 80 shekels (\$26) on socks? Was lamb's wool really going to protect him? Jonah was the voice of rationality, but Shmulik just looked at him and said, 'Tishma l'Ima' (Listen to your mother). Shmulik clothes the soldiers but he comforts the mothers.

Andy and I are new at this army-parenting stuff. We thought that his draft should be marked in some official way, but we just weren't sure what to do. Ultimately, we decided to make a kiddush in our shul (synagogue) after services on Shabbat morning. We've been part of a wonderful community for five years and we thought that marking this occasion in a communal way was the least we could do to thank people who have been so much a part of our lives over the past few years.

We were amazed not just at the number of people who came, but the incredible thoughtfulness of everyone who walked past the front door. Some who came were parents of Jonah's friends. While we knew their sons well, we only had a passing relationship with their mothers and fathers. Yet they came and filled with hugs and kisses and assurances that if we felt overwhelmed, we could call them day or night to share our fears. You knew these were real offers. And there was that sense of pride welling up. One mother stopped by with a special cream to help remove grease from hands that have been cleaning equipment all day. Another came with a thermal scarf that had protected her three sons during the unforgiving cold of 3:00 AM guard duty in January. One lawyer volunteered to help us get Jonah to the army bus on Sunday mornings. All of this help and we never had to ask for any of it.

As for Jonah, he spoke beautifully; calm and confident. As guests said good bye, I noticed that doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs didn't just say, 'goodbye Jonah', a few said 'hitraot chamudi' (goodbye me dear friend) and that instant, I knew that Jonah was now a man.

Sunday, was one of my most difficult days. Coming on the heels of my mother's fourth yahrtzeit (anniversary of her death) I kept thinking how much I wish she had been there to see her grandson wear the Tzahal (IDF) uniform. There isn't a grandmother on the face of the planet who would have been prouder. As we drove to the induction center after a long sleepless night, I was so grateful to have Rina, and her sidekick Arielle with us. Rina and Ari turn any situation into a giggle fest, and they did not fail us. I don't even remember what they said but they kept us laughing despite the tension we all felt.

The time at the induction center is relatively short for parents and siblings. You wait outside for your child's name to appear on the large LED board. Less than 45 minutes of hanging it out with nothing to do and then it is time to say goodbye. I hugged Jonah so long, hoping my arms you could stop the inevitable but, of course, two minutes later he was on the bus and he was officially a soldier.

Jonah came home his first Shabbat, proud and exhausted. He did his swagger lap around the neighborhood so that people could see him in uniform and then collapsed; exhausted physically and emotionally. Basic training is grueling, especially when you do it in the desert where the mercury breaks 100 degrees daily. Again, I think of the troops in Iraq.

Army mornings can start as early as 4:00 AM, and the days often don't end until 11:00 PM. It's enough to break any spirit, and we, as his parents have to be there to tell him that yes, he will be able to survive this. It's hard to say this having never had to do push-ups at 3:00 AM or run 3 kilometers with a helmet, bullet proof vest and 3 belts of ammunition weighing down our bodies. But more than anything, Jonah, and anyone who has gone through basic training, needs to know that those around them believe that they can do it.

And, as hard as it is to watch him go through it, there are still those moments when I know it's OK. He called us one day laughing. OK, he's laughing, that must be good. He and his buddies had to stand at attention, perfectly still. It seems easy until you need to do it. Try it, you'll probably find yourself swaying. He told us that the commanding officer berated his charges yelling, 'Stand still! You are not lulavim! (The palm fronds waved during Sukkot) He had me in stitches when he offered his theory that the entire military industry was designed to support the shoe polish companies. You know what, if he spends his days polishing his boots, that's just fine with me!

The other day, Jonah had to switch bases. When he reached the new one, he went to unpack his stuff. His commanding officer stopped him and said, 'No, first let your parents know you got here'. So, it's the army and most of the time it's miserable but though you can see it often, it still has a heart.

I'm obsessing about what I should have waiting for when Jonah comes home. But, in the end I know it will be the single malt for the man and some chocolate chip cookies for the boy that still lingers.

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## **Gestures** By David Wilder

This afternoon a group of people gathered at the ancient Jewish cemetery in Hebron to participate in a memorial service on the anniversary of the killing of Hebron resident Elazar Leibovitch six years ago. Murdered at the same time were three members of the Dickstein family- the mother, father and young son.

Elazar Leibovitch was murdered, by the Hebrew calendar, on the 17th day of the month of Av. On the same date, at almost the identical hour, Shmuel HaLevy Rosenhaltz, nicknamed "the Matmid" or perpetual student, was the first victim of the 1929 riots and massacre in Hebron. The next day, another 66 men, women and children were killed. Tomorrow a group of people will gather at the same cemetery, only a few meters from Elazar's grave, and mark the 79th anniversary of that horrific event.

This week the Israeli government decided to commemorate these two events in a unique way. They decided to release 200 terrorists, as a 'good-will' gesture to Holocaust denier, Abu Mazen, presently head of the palestinian authority. In order to express support for one Jew-hater over another Jew-hater (Hamas), the Israeli government is freeing 200 terrorists from prison. Not only isn't Israel getting anything in return; they didn't even bother asking for anything in return. What could Israel dare request? Perhaps little things, like Abu-Mazen's full cooperation in successfully achieving the release of Israeli POW Gilad Shalit. But no, that would be too much to ask for. This time Israeli has to give something for nothing, thereby showing Abu-Mazen's supporters and not so much supporters just how good he is, just how strong he is, just how much he can twist the long arm of the Zionist enemy and get murderers released from jail. Without paying any price.

Of course, in their opinion, this isn't enough. All prisoners must be released, unconditionally. But, this is a good beginning, a step in the right direction.

This is how the Olmert administration is marking the 79th anniversary of the 1929 riots, instigated and initiated by Amin el-Husseini, who later met with Hitler in Berlin, formed the Muslim Brigades, and had plans to annihilate all the Jews living in Eretz Yisrael when they expected Rommel to invade during World War Two. Amin el Husseini's direct successor was Abu-Mazen's predecessor, Arafat. Abu-Mazen is trying hard to follow in his footsteps.

However, the government's decision was not enough to mark the current occasion. They had to go just one step further, stick the knife in just a little deeper.

The common rule of prisoner releases over the years has been to refrain from freeing terrorists with 'blood on their hands.' In other words, those that just helped, or attempted to kill but didn't succeed, and the like, they're ok to set free. But those who actually pulled the trigger, they're another story.

That's the way it was, until today. For the first time, the Israeli government decided to release a couple of 'real terrorists,' those who went all the way, and did the dirty act to its fullest degree.

So, who's being released, in celebration of the anniversary of the killings in Hebron? One of the two is Ibrahim Mahmoud Mahmud, who twenty years ago murdered Yehoshua Saloma, a young Yeshiva student studying in the Kiryat Arba Yeshiva. Saloma, a new immigrant from Sweden, who came to Israel alone, had walked into Hebron from Kiryat Arba to buy some dried fruits for the upcoming Tu B'Shvat holiday. While making his purchase in the Hebron Kasba, he was brutally murdered from behind by Ibrahim Mahmoud Mahmud. Saloma is still dead. Mahmud is still alive. And if Olmert et al have their way, he will soon be free. This is the message to the world that Israel is making on the days when Hebron is marking the murders of 68 other Jews by Arabs: 67 in 1929, and Elazar Lebovitch, 6 years ago.

It's interesting to note: Yehoshua Saloma was the first Jew to be killed in Hebron since the 1929 riots. His murderer is about to be freed by the Israeli government. Can you imagine Israel releasing a few of the barbarians who butchered Jews during those few hours on a summer Saturday in 1929? What's the difference between the barbarians of 79 years ago, the barbarians of 20 years ago, the barbarians of 6 years ago, or the barbarians of today?

Ah, what's the difference you ask? Very simple. In 1929 we could (rightfully) blame the British. Today who do we have to blame? We need only look in the mirror and point a finger at the image we see.

But, then again, it's only a gesture. (Jewish Community of Hebron Aug 18)

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### **WJC Embraces an Anti-Semite** By Isi Leibler

World Jewish Congress officials allowed themselves to get carried away when they hailed a recent meeting with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as having been "successful" and proclaimed that he had joined the global struggle against anti-Semitism. The Venezuelan demagogue did announce that his ambassador to Israel, who had been recalled during the Second Lebanon War, would resume his duties. But beyond that he has yet to display any meaningful initiative to reverse his long-standing hostility to the Jewish people and the Jewish state and his fervent alliance with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

It must have been music for the ears of Chavez to hear WJC secretary-general Michael Schneider proclaim to the media that "when it comes to anti-Semites, we [Chavez and World Jewry] are on the same page." Schneider's explicit assertion that "Chavez was certainly not an anti-Semite" was based on an assurance to that effect by Chavez and a vacuous offer to join others and "condemn all forms of anti-Semitism, discrimination against minorities and anti-Muslim sentiment." To his credit, WJC president Ronald Lauder was more circumspect and apparently declined to comment.

The paeans of praise directed towards Chavez by Schneider and his colleagues ignore the fact that this wretched hooligan has achieved the notoriety of being the most loathsome contemporary anti-Semitic head of state outside the Muslim world. This is the man who in a Christmas speech alleged that "the descendants of those who crucified Christ control the world's wealth."

Chavez has also achieved international notoriety as one of Ahmadinejad's closest allies. Both tyrants extol one another's virtues and radiate hatred against the US and Israel. Chavez describes Ahmadinejad as "a fighter for just causes," a "brother" and a "revolutionary." Last year the Iranian president awarded Chavez Iran's highest honor, the Islamic Republic Medal.

Chavez boasts of his close ties with President Bashar Assad of Syria. At a joint press conference with Assad, Chavez said "We know how Israel was born. It is an annex of the North American empire in the Middle East. Israel

is the cause of the conflict in the region. This territory 6,000 years ago belonged to the Canaanites and the Philistines. These lands belong to the Palestinians."

The Venezuelan president has also enthusiastically identified himself with Hizbullah and was widely displayed together with its leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, in posters throughout Lebanon stating that "Israel needs to be judged for its crimes." He also provides a haven in Venezuela for Hizbullah terrorists.

During the Second Lebanon War, Chavez recalled the Venezuelan ambassador to Israel in response to what he described as a "new Holocaust" comparable to Hitler's actions against the Jews being perpetrated with "gringo" planes provided by the US.

Chavez also intimidated the 12,000 members of the Venezuelan Jewish community, 25 percent of whom have emigrated since he assumed power. His government sanctioned vicious anti-Semitic media campaigns and a proliferation of anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic propaganda and graffiti at all levels. As recently as six months ago, Chavez authorized a police raid on the Caracas Club Hebraica on the spurious grounds that illegal weapons were being stored there. The synagogue has also been subject to repeated vandalism. In June this year, Alexis Navarro, the Venezuelan ambassador to Russia, alleged that a failed coup against Chavez had been orchestrated by Mossad intelligence snipers who were "Venezuelan citizens but Jews."

It is therefore mind-boggling that Schneider could blithely inform the media that "there may have been some differences on some issues such as Iran and also the Middle East," but after Chavez had assured him "that he was certainly not an anti-Semite," the meeting was a "success." In effect, certain World Jewish Congress leaders are legitimizing the man who maintains warm relationships with Holocaust deniers and demonizers of Israel, enshrining him with a mantle of respectability in the struggle against anti-Semitism, when he merely paid lip service to the cause by saying that he "opposed anti-Semitism."

Clearly oblivious to the growing international concern about the expanding Iranian presence in his region, Latin American Jewish Congress president Jack Terpins casually informed the media that the question of Iranian influence in Venezuela "is an internal problem between Venezuela and Iran." He stressed that "the meeting could not have been better and that a new era has begun," adding that "the world Jewish community is now calmer about President Chavez. He has demonstrated that he is a great friend of this community."

To top off this Alice in Wonderland diplomacy, Chavez is also reported to have agreed to assist the WJC in its interfaith dialogue activities with Christians and Muslims. Last month, WJC representatives at King Abdullah's interfaith conference in Madrid displayed their impotence by failing to raise the issue of Saudi anti-Semitism. But if their intention is to now coopt this loathsome tyrant to promote interfaith relations, they would be forfeiting any semblance of Jewish dignity and their groveling would have descended to an all-time low.

IDEALLY WE would prefer to treat foul mouthed anti-Semites like Chavez as lepers. But the harsh realities of political life sometimes oblige Jewish leaders to converse with tyrants and leave no stone unturned in efforts to ameliorate onerous situations. A carefully planned meeting between international Jewish leaders and Chavez was therefore entirely appropriate, even were it only to provide support for the embattled local Jewish community. But the rules of diplomacy in such an encounter do not require the Jewish party to absolve an anti-Semite of his past sins merely because he agrees to a meeting.

In this context, the WJC leaders blundered in failing to make explicit representations concerning the global anti-Semitic and anti-Israel policies conducted by the Venezuelan regime. They were also premature in dispensing a clean bill of health to one of the key personalities leading the international anti Jewish campaign. Worse, their failure to even relate to these issues in subsequent media interviews may transform this encounter into an utterly counterproductive exercise.

In recent years, our greatest challenge has been to demonstrate that demonization and delegitimization of Israel is simply a new version of anti-Semitism - substituting hatred of the Jew as an individual with hatred of the Jewish state. Now we have the WJC secretary-general and some of his colleagues lauding Chavez and bestowing upon him the dubious distinction of being the first leader openly embracing Iranian Holocaust deniers and shamelessly indulging in demonization of Israel to be treated with deference and regarded as an ally by a body purporting to represent world Jewry. If any reputable non-Jewish organization or government behaved in such a manner, we Jews would be the first to protest. (Jerusalem Post Aug 18)