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## 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*

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when it comes to the peace process, it is clear that a deal with the Palestinians is unobtainable in any case. So why not do the right thing in the meantime? It's better both for the president and for the US to use the bird in their hand now rather than chasing after the elusive one in the bush.

In order to make history, all President Trump has to do is...nothing. He should simply not sign the waiver, thereby enabling the legislation to come into force. In this context, the other option, that of actively signing the waiver that will once again prevent Jerusalem from receiving the status it deserves, is inconceivable. (Times of Israel May 10)

*The writer is diplomatic correspondent for the Hebrew language Makor Rishon and the NRG website.*

## Commentary...

### Mr. Trump, on Jerusalem Just Do Nothing By Ariel Kahana

We are one step away from what might be a historic moment without us realizing it. Near the end of this month, President Donald Trump will visit Israel for the first time. Also at the end of this month, Israel will celebrate its 50th anniversary of the liberation and reunification of Jerusalem. At the same time, President Trump will have to decide whether or not to execute the "Jerusalem Embassy Act".

This 1995 legislation that was approved by the vast majority of Congress says the following:

- (1) Jerusalem should remain an undivided city in which the rights of every ethnic and religious group are protected
- (2) Jerusalem should be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel
- (3) The United States Embassy in Israel should be established in Jerusalem

Although the wording clearly mandates the embassy should be relocated from its current position in Tel Aviv, Presidents Obama, Bush and Clinton broke their campaign promises and signed waivers to suspend this act every six months during their terms, for a total of 36 waivers so far. The Washington establishment had told them that recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital would harm the peace process. None of the three former presidents executed the "Jerusalem Embassy Act", nor did they bring peace.

Many US presidents have launched Middle East peace initiatives during their terms, including Obama, G.W. Bush, Clinton, H.W. Bush, Reagan and Ford. All of the initiatives collapsed. Peace was only made when the two sides sat down together without using brokers, namely the peace deals with Jordan and Egypt. Not only did those respected US presidents not make history in the Middle East, they also failed to do right by Israel.

But doing right is exactly the tremendous opportunity President Trump now has. It is up to President Trump whether or not he wants to secure his place in history. He can continue the unsuccessful legacies of his predecessors. Alternatively, he can try doing something different, an option that will put him in the same position as President Truman, who recognized the State of Israel eight minutes after it was established.

Just as everybody remembers the president who recognized Israel, they will remember the president who recognized Jerusalem. If President Trump upgrades the status of Jerusalem, he will be remembered as a great leader for many years to come.

As Jews, we remember certain foreign leaders favorably for the good they did on behalf of the Jewish people throughout history. Cyrus the Great allowed us to build the Second Temple. Although he conquered the world, Alexander the Great treated all nations equally and respected the Jews for their religion. Napoleon wanted our people to come back to their homeland. Lord Balfour established the diplomatic basis for creating the State of Israel.

In all those cases, advisors and experts urged them not to do what we know today surely had to be done. In fact, all those historical figures went against the stream. And that is why President Trump is the right person at the right time for the job of moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, thereby recognizing Jerusalem as a united city under Israeli sovereignty.

And it's not only the Jews who want this to happen. Hundreds of millions of people around the globe are desperate to see Jerusalem in the hands of its rightful owners. Such a move will send a clear message to the entire world that this president stands for what is right; that he stands by his word; that he is unafraid to do what he believes should be done (such as ordering the missile strike in Syria) even if it means going against the Washington establishment or swimming against the stream.

This action will also clarify to the Islamic extremists that the United States backs countries that grant true religious freedom to all people and respect all religions (unlike the Palestinian Authority which pushes Christians out of its territory). Such a move will put President Trump on the right side of history.

It's well known that Arab countries might not like the decision. Then again, they didn't like the establishment of the State of Israel, either. And

### Israel Is Still at War

By Efraim Inbar

After several military defeats, the largest and strongest Arab state, Egypt, signed a historic peace treaty with Israel in 1979. The defection of Egypt from the anti-Israel Arab alliance largely neutralized the option of a large-scale conventional attack on Israel, improving Israel's overall strategic position.

Yet Cairo refrained from developing normal relations with the Jewish state. A "cold peace" evolved, underscoring the countries' common strategic interests but also the reluctance of Egypt to participate in reconciling the two peoples.

Jordan followed suit in 1994, largely emulating the Egyptian precedent. Jordan's peace treaty with Israel also reflected common strategic interests – but was commonly referred to by Jordanians as the "King's peace," indicating a disinclination for people-to-people interactions with the Jews west of the Jordan River.

The inhibitions in the Arab world against accepting Israel should not be a surprise. Muslims seem to have good theological reasons for rejecting the existence of a Jewish state. Moreover, the education system in the Arab countries has inculcated anti-Semitic messages and hatred toward Israel for decades. Unfortunately, the dissemination of negative images of Jews and Israel has hardly changed in Arab schools and media.

This is also why the euphoria of the 1990s elicited by the "peace process" with the Palestinians, and propagated by the "peace camp," was unwarranted. Indeed, the peace negotiations failed miserably. The process did, however, allow the Palestinian national movement a foothold in the West Bank and Gaza. As a large part of the Arab world is in deep socio-political crisis and another fears the Iranian threat, it is the Palestinian national movement and the Islamists that carry on the struggle against the Zionists.

The Palestinians are at the forefront of the war on Israel, despite their lack of tanks and airplanes. They use terror, and pay the terrorists captured by Israel as well as their families. The use of force against Jews is applauded, and slain perpetrators are awarded the status of martyrs. They use missiles against Israel's civilian population. The limits on their firepower are the result of Israeli efforts to cut off their supply of armaments.

The Palestinian national movement denies the historic links of the Jews to the Land of Israel, and particularly Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority (PA) recently demanded of the UK that it apologize for the 1917 Balfour declaration, which recognized Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel. There are endless examples in Palestinian schools and media to sustain the conclusion that the Palestinians are not ready to make peace.

Moreover, the PA cannot conclude a "cold peace" like Egypt or Jordan. Those two countries take seriously their commitment to prevent terrorism from their territory. In the West Bank, the PA – established by Yitzhak Rabin on the premise that it will fight terror in exchange for the transfer of territory – refuses to honor its part of the bargain. It encourages terror by subsidies to jailed terrorists and by innumerable steps to eulogize the "martyrs" and honor their "heritage." The ruling Palestinian elite in Gaza, Hamas, formally refuses to give up armed struggle against Israel.

The "Oslo process" was an attempt by Israel to push the Palestinian national movement into a statist posture and to eventually adopt a statist rationale along the lines of that of Egypt and Jordan, which led them to a "cold peace" with Israel. But the religious and ethnic dimensions of the conflict with Israel have overcome any underdeveloped statist Palestinian instincts. The ethno-religious impulses of the Palestinians nurture their

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continuation of violent conflict.

So far, no Palestinian leader who has adopted a statist agenda, prioritizing state-building over other Palestinian aspirations, has garnered popular support. Salam Fayyad, who was admired in the West for his attempts to reform the PA's bloated bureaucracy, seemed to tend in this direction. But his level of support among the Palestinian public never rose above 10%.

Palestinian society is becoming more religious and radical, similarly to other Arab societies. This trend benefits Hamas, which is becoming more popular. The ascendance of Hamas further feeds hostility towards Israel. A drive to satisfy the quest for revenge, and, ultimately, to destroy Israel — which would be an historic justice in the eyes of the Palestinians — overrides any other consideration.

A renewal of negotiations leading to Israeli withdrawals is extremely unlikely to result in a durable and satisfactory agreement any time soon. Israel will need to maintain a strong army for many more decades to deal with the Palestinian challenge. Moreover, changes within neighboring states can be rapid. Unexpected scenarios, such as a return of the Muslim Brotherhood to the helm in Egypt or the fall of the Hashemite dynasty, might take place, and a large-scale conventional threat might reemerge. Finally, the Iranian nuclear specter is still hovering over the Middle East.

Israel must remain vigilant and continue to prepare for a variety of warlike scenarios. The understandable desire for peace should not blur the discomfiting likelihood that Israel will live by its sword for many years to come. (Middle East Forum May 4)

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### **The People vs. Haaretz** By Shmuel Rosner

Haaretz is an Israeli newspaper. Admired by many foreigners and few Israelis, loathed by many, mostly Israelis. Read by few, denounced by many, it is a highly ideological, high-quality paper. It has a history of excellence. It has a history of independence. It has a history of counting Israel's mistakes and misbehavior. It has a history of getting on Israel's nerves.

Still, it is just a newspaper. The story of the people vs. Haaretz — that is, of a great number of Israelis' growing dislike for the paper — is worth telling only because it tells us something about Israel itself: that the country's far left is evolving from a political position into a mental state and that the right-wing majority has not yet evolved into being a mature, self-confident public.

Consider an incident from mid-April. Haaretz published an op-ed by one of its columnists. It made a less-than-convincing argument that religious Zionists are more dangerous to Israel than Hezbollah terrorists. And yet, the response was overwhelming. The prime minister, defense minister, education minister and justice minister all denounced the article and the newspaper. The president condemned the article, too. The leader of the centrist party Yesh Atid called the op-ed "anti-Semitic." Leaders of the left-of-center Labor Party called it hateful. The country was almost unified in condemnation.

Of course, not completely unified. On the far left, a few voices supported the article and the newspaper. Some argued that the article was substantively valid. Others argued that whether the article was substantive or not, the onslaught on Haaretz is a cynical ploy to shake another pillar of the left — maybe its most visible remaining pillar.

If there is such ploy, it doesn't seem to be working. Last week, on the eve of Israel's Memorial Day, a day of somber reflection, Haaretz was at it again. One article by a leading columnist explained that he could no longer fly the Israeli flag. Another seemed to be calling for a civil war. These are not exceptions; they are the rule for a newspaper that in recent years has come to rely on provocation.

Its provocations aim to serve its ideology. Haaretz and its core readership are fiercely opposed to Israel's occupation of the West Bank, to the government's support for settlers there, to the government's recalibration of the High Court, to Israel's state-religion status quo and to other conservative trends.

Four factors have converged to make Haaretz more annoying to Israelis today than ever before. First, the country is less receptive to a left-wing agenda as most of its citizens tilt rightward. Second, the country feels it is under an unjustified and hypocritical international siege and so is less forgiving when Israelis are perceived to be providing Israel's critics with ammunition. Just recently, Jewish Israelis ranked "left wingers" as one of the groups contributing least to Israel's success. Third, Israel's left is very small, and also feeling under siege. Fourth, the left's frustration with Israel makes it bitter and antagonistic. It makes it more prone to test the patience of other Israelis by upping the rhetorical ante in its criticism of country, leaders and groups.

The result of this increasingly provocative discourse is often pathetic, at times comical and occasionally worrying. Haaretz irks the majority of Israelis by giving voice to preposterous descriptions of what Israel is or does ("fascism," "apartheid"), and the majority and its leaders never fail to take the bait and fly into a rage. It is a childish game and, in the long run,

Israel loses. Its quality newspaper of coherent dissent, necessary in a pluralistic society, has become a platform for juvenile contrarianism. Its left-wing opposition, to which Haaretz gives voice, has become synonymous with needless antagonism; public debate has been made blunter and less constructive; the public is angrier and less tolerant of dissent.

Tempting as it is, the story of the people vs. Haaretz is not a story of a country whose public is no longer willing to tolerate debate. It is a story about a group within Israel that is losing its ability to communicate with the rest of society and have any chance of influencing its future. It is a story about a group within Israel that finds its relief in provoking the rest of us until we snap.

I worked at Haaretz for more than a decade, as features editor, head of the news division and, for three years, chief United States correspondent. My stint in Washington ended in 2008 when my employment was terminated. But I always valued Haaretz's independence from dogma and its professional excellence, even though I wasn't always comfortable with its ideological bent. The fact that I no longer consider it a must-read paper is probably for the same reason most Israelis are uncomfortable with it: Haaretz still employs good journalists, and on some of the issues these writers make strong cases, supported by evidence. But all in all, reading Haaretz in the last couple of decades is increasingly an exercise in anticipating a nearing demise.

The paper gets many specific stories right, but it gets the larger arc of Israel's story wrong. It tends to paint a bleak picture of Israel's actions, and it goes overboard in predicting grave consequences for Israel that rarely materialize. It tends not to notice that Israel today is a country more powerful militarily, economically and culturally than it was when the newspaper and its circle of loyal readers began explaining how almost every choice that the country is making is wrong.

And maybe that's the source of Haaretz's frustration: It is not that Israel does not listen. It is that Israel does not listen and still succeeds. (New York Times May 11)

*The writer is the political editor at The Jewish Journal, a senior fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute and a contributing opinion writer for the New York Times.*

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### **Target the Money** By Ariel Bolstein

The campaign to slander Israel led by a host of international organizations and bodies leaves this country with no choice but to develop new coping mechanisms.

The battle is not confined to any defined battlefield. Those who wish to destroy Israel will use any means necessary: They spread lies about Israel in the media, attack it in legal forums, and try to harm it economically. In all these areas, Israel must fight fire with fire.

We recently saw an excellent example of the importance of using new tools to combat Israel hatred when the Dallas-based bank Comerica decided to close an account belonging to a leftist organization named the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. The name may sound unassuming, but the group was actually activated by the Soviet Union during the Cold War to serve as an "agent of influence" in Western countries.

Since the end of the Cold War, it appears that most of the group's efforts have been focused on bashing Israel. Among other things, the IADL supports the boycott, sanctions and divestment movement, accuses Israel of "war crimes" and seeks to bring Israelis to trial abroad. The organization's activists, for whom verbal delegitimization and libelous claims are not enough, aim to cause the only democracy in the Middle East actual harm, economic and otherwise. Their aspiration is to establish a designated court to try the detested Zionists for their "crimes against humanity." Now, however, IADL activists are on the defensive as they scramble to re-establish their cash flow.

How did an American bank wake up one day and realize it was assisting a contemptible anti-Semitic organization? It would not be a stretch to assume that only dogged pressure, applied by pro-Israel activists, led the bank to close the IADL account.

Stiff legislation banning boycotts on the Jewish state, coupled with letters warning the bank of potential culpability in illegally assisting an anti-Israel group, did the trick. Expect the fight against the BDS movement to be long and arduous. The IADL is just one body among many in the network of global anti-Semitism. With that, the small victory claimed by shutting down the IADL's bank account in the U.S. is a step in the right direction.

The BDS movement's incitement machine requires two types of fuel: hatred and funding. It is virtually impossible to eradicate anti-Semitic hatred, which has been around since the Jewish nation first came into existence.

But it is necessary to construct effective dams to stem the flow of money to the wide variety of anti-Israel agents. Blocking funds has proved itself in the war on terror. Without financial support provided primarily by

Arab states and some European governments, the terrorism of delegitimization of Israel will also cease to exist. (Israel Hayom May 8)

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### **An Oasis of Normalcy** By Reuven Berko

Recently a journalist, known as a slanderer who nips at the heels of the Zionist convoy, made use of the following invective (quoted here in part): "It's a fact that we're an abnormal country. A normal country has borders and doesn't have 2 million people it wants to get rid of."

In contrast to this loathsomeness, Joint Arab List Chairman Ayman Odeh has made it clear that the Israeli "abnormality" stems mainly from our failure to understand that he and many of the people who voted for his party want to get rid of us.

Like in past years, Israeli Arabs marked Independence Day last week as the anniversary of the Nakba (the Arabic term, meaning "catastrophe," for the displacement of Palestinian refugees during Israel's War of Independence). Odeh and his family participated in a demonstration replete with Palestinian flags held near Kibbutz Kabri. His daughter waved a Palestinian flag that bore the word "return" in Arabic (so we wouldn't understand?). Others held up their fingers in a V for Victory, to mark the failure of their attempt to wipe us out in 1948 and their vision of doing so in the future.

Odeh and Hamas are cut from the same cloth. After a tense waiting period after the leaks about a revision to the Hamas charter, we were informed that the clause of the charter that called to exterminate Jews (under the model of the Battle of Khaybar in the days of the Prophet Muhammad) had been stricken and replaced with a call to limit the extermination to the Zionist "occupiers of Palestine."

The optimists among us gleefully pointed to Hamas' willingness to be satisfied with a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders. You could almost hear the footsteps of the Messiah. It was a kind of relief to discover that only we "Zionists" are destined to die, and that Hamas has no plans -- at this stage -- to conduct a global Islamic genocide against our Jewish brethren in the Diaspora in the spirit of the Muslim Brotherhood organization, from which Hamas has supposedly split. Reading the words of the "revised" charter, sighs of relief were cut off and reality is once again knocking at the door of the Left's delusions. Unfortunately, the "revised" charter calls for jihad, the "return" of Palestinian refugees, and the liberation of all "Palestine" and the establishment of a Palestinian state whose capital is Jerusalem on the wreckage of Israel -- all this, along with the existing incitement, tunnels, and rockets.

Only days after the "revised" Hamas charter was made public, the Zionists celebrated Independence Day. The emotional roller coaster a Zionist in his "borderless" homeland rides at this time of the year is complicated, and give the signs of what that same Israeli journalist called an "abnormal state" a strange meaning: Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel and Victims of Terrorism, and most painful to the Palestinians, the Independence Day of our country, whose borders are delineated by a line that checks its enemies' abilities to attack it and "return."

There is not a single Palestinian who doesn't know that the vision of "return" that is common to both the schemes of Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal and the wishes of Odeh of the Joint Arab List will not come true until the last Zionist is killed. However, Israel has a sane Zionist majority that will never allow millions of murderers to "return" and kill their loved ones.

Israel is actually an oasis of normalcy surrounded by millions who are busy slaughtering each other (for now) with weapons they amassed to use against us, but who still dream of "return." Critics, take note: Israel is an island of normalcy on which Jewish life is flourishing while millions around it and inside it aspire to get rid of us. The dogs bark, but the convoy rolls on. (Israel May 7)

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### **Why Can't Jews Pray Freely in the Jewish State?** By Michael Freund

A series of troubling incidents in recent weeks has left little room for doubt that one of the central pillars upholding Israeli democracy is increasingly coming under assault.

Indeed, even as the Jewish state likes to boast abroad that every citizen enjoys freedom of worship and free access to the holy places, Israeli security forces have repeatedly curtailed the exercise of that right specifically when it comes to Jews.

This disconcerting development not only flies in the face of Jewish self-respect and common sense, but also runs counter to Israel's *raison d'être*, and it cannot be allowed to continue.

Take, for example, the detention early Tuesday morning of four Jews who went to pray at the tomb of Joshua bin Nun, who led the conquest of the Land of Israel when the Israelites reached the Promised Land after the Exodus from Egypt.

This ancient Jewish holy site is located on the outskirts of the village of Kifl Hares, adjacent to Ariel, in an area under full Israeli security control.

The worshipers were arrested after an IDF officer had apparently issued a recent military order which bars Jews from visiting the site.

There are two troubling aspects to this situation.

First, back in January, the Petah Tikva Magistrate's Court unconditionally released 10 Jews who had been detained at Joshua's Tomb after a representative of the police admitted that there was no legal impediment to Jews traveling to the site or praying there.

Second, the fact that a military official has the power to curb the basic civil rights of citizens without due process is something that should terrify us all. There is no reason, other than exigent circumstances, that anyone other than the courts should be invested with such authority. Trampling on fundamental freedoms of Israeli citizens is not a power than any general or colonel should have.

Unfortunately, it is not just the military that engages in such shenanigans, but the Israel Police too.

According to media reports, the police acceded to requests from the Greek Orthodox Church to ban Jews from lighting traditional bonfires for Lag Ba'omer next week in a park zoned for public use on Mount Zion, just outside the Old City of Jerusalem.

Although the land in question is registered as being under the church's ownership, it is nonetheless defined as a public area, which entitles people to utilize and enjoy it.

The church has every legal right to ask the police to prevent vandalism and littering on the site. But what gives law-enforcement authorities the right to respond so cavalierly to the request and bar an age-old Jewish custom from being followed? Another outrageous example of police overreach occurred last month in Jerusalem, when six young women went to pray at the Gate of the Tribes at the northeastern entrance to the Temple Mount. The group did not enter the Mount, where police do not allow Jews to pray or even carry a Bible, but merely stood outside it and sought to commune with the Creator.

Border policemen quickly arrived, dispersed the group and detained a 13-year-old.

It is bad enough that the police prohibit Jews from praying on the Temple Mount, but what gives them the authority to extend that dubious ban to include praying near it? While such incidents have become routine, and barely earn a headline in the daily media, that in no way means they are any less worrisome or unreasonable.

It is yet another example of how unchecked power inevitably leads to an erosion of basic rights. And it is a sad commentary on the current state of affairs that we have reached a point where one can, in all seriousness, pose the following question: Why can't Jews pray freely in the Jewish state? As John Adams wrote two centuries ago to his friend and compatriot in the founding of America, Dr. Benjamin Rush, "Nothing is more dreaded than the national government meddling with religion."

So here is a quick civics lesson for the army, the government and the police: Your job is to ensure that citizens can exercise their rights freely, not to restrict or curtail them.

If the fear is that allowing Jews to do so will upset Arab extremists, then the task before security officials should be clear. Safeguard the rights of the former rather than bow to the threats of the latter.

After all, that is how democracy is supposed to work. (Jerusalem Post May 11)

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### **The PLO's Most Powerful Lobbyists** By Caroline B. Glick

In private conversations over the past week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has complained bitterly about American Jewish billionaire Ronald Lauder. According to media reports, Lauder played a key role in convincing US President Donald Trump that he can reach "the ultimate deal" with the PLO and Israel.

Netanyahu is surely right that Lauder shouldn't have been lobbying Trump on behalf of the PLO.

But he is wrong about Lauder's responsibility for the president's sudden decision to start singing from Barack Obama's hymnal on everything related to Israel and the PLO.

Lauder is far from the only member of the PLO's booster club.

First of all, there is the American foreign policy establishment.

After 23 years of successive administrations upholding the fantasy that all the Middle East's problems will be resolved the minute Israel hands over Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria to the PLO, it's hard to find any establishment types who aren't completely committed to the delusion that the PLO is the answer to America's prayers.

Then there is the Israeli establishment. To understand its power, we need to consider the status of the Taylor Force Act.

The Taylor Force Act is a popular pro-Israel bill now being deliberated in Congress. If it passes, the US will be barred from transferring funds to the PLO -controlled Palestinian Authority so long as the PA pays salaries to convicted terrorists sitting in Israeli prisons and pays pensions to the families of terrorists killed while committing terrorist acts.

The bill, named for Taylor Force, a former US military officer murdered by a Palestinian terrorists in Tel Aviv in 2015, enjoys majority support in both houses. Nonetheless, it has hit an iceberg.

On Wednesday The Jerusalem Post reported that neither AIPAC nor the Israeli government support it.

AIPAC reportedly won't lobby for the bill because it lacks support from Democratic lawmakers. This claim is ridiculous on its face.

If AIPAC can't get Democrats to support a bill ending US funding of terrorism, then AIPAC might as well close its doors right now.

As for the government, it is far from clear how the government could be more supportive. Netanyahu has spoken publicly in favor of the bill.

So if Netanyahu supports it, which Israeli government opposes it? The report didn't say but the answer is obvious to anyone who has spent time on Capitol Hill over the past 17 years.

Since the PLO initiated its terrorist war against Israel in 2000, US lawmakers have made repeated attempts to end US financial support for the PA. But every time they came close to defunding it, some member of the IDF General Staff appeared in their chambers and asked them to keep the dollars flowing.

The claim is always the same. If Congress cuts off the funds to the PA, the PA security services will stop cooperating with the IDF. That cooperation, the generals tell them, is critical to Israel's counterterrorism efforts. So cutting off US funds to the terrorism-supporting PA is tantamount to supporting terrorism.

This claim has become so routine that no one ever bothers to think it through. But it needs to be scrutinized.

Let's begin with the following question: If the PA weren't funding terrorism, (to say nothing of inciting terrorism and glorifying terrorists), would the level of Palestinian terrorism rise or fall? The answer, of course, is obvious. The level of terrorism would fall if the PA weren't funding, glorifying and inciting terrorism.

And if the levels of Palestinian terrorism drop then IDF's need for security cooperation with the PA's security services would also diminish.

The fact that the IDF's General Staff has failed to draw the obvious conclusion that less money for terrorism means less terrorism indicates that something is preventing our generals from drawing rational conclusions from their institutional experience.

Two recent stories explain the source of this cognitive blockage.

The first story involves Lt. (res.) Dean Issacharoff.

Issacharoff completed his IDF service in 2015 and went to work for Breaking the Silence where he serves as the anti-IDF group's spokesman.

Breaking the Silence is a foreign government-funded organization that works to blacken the IDF's reputation by publishing generally anonymous war crimes allegations against Israeli soldiers.

At a Breaking the Silence conference in Kiryat Ono on April 4, Issacharoff was filmed telling his audience that he himself is a war criminal.

Issacharoff said that during his military service as a combat officer in Hebron, he violently assaulted a Palestinian who posed no threat to himself or his soldiers.

Issacharoff said that he committed this crime in front of his soldiers and his company commander.

On April 25, Ad Kan, a volunteer organization that counters radical political NGOs, sent a letter to Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit asking him to open a criminal probe against Issacharoff. Ad Kan attached a video of Issacharoff's remarks to its letter.

Given the severity of the crimes Issacharoff claims to have committed, Mandelblit could have been expected to immediately order the State Prosecution's Criminal Division to launch a probe. But as it happened, for two weeks, Mandelblit sat on his hands.

Then, on May 7, Issacharoff's claims came to the public's attention when another volunteer organization, Reservists on Duty, which defends IDF soldiers from slander, exposed it in an online film. Issacharoff's company commander and his soldiers stood before the camera and one after another they rejected his claims saying, "Dean Issacharoff, you're a liar."

Two days later Mandelblit forwarded Ad Kan's letter to his criminal division.

The reason that Ad Kan and Reservists on Duty were compelled to act is that the IDF's legal authorities have been amazingly passive about Issacharoff's claims. The Military Advocate-General's Office rejected Reservists on Duty's request to open a criminal probe into Issacharoff's claims.

The MAG claimed that since Issacharoff's alleged crimes were committed more than a year ago, the State Prosecution rather than the IDF is responsible for investigating and prosecuting him.

But in truth, if the IDF wanted jurisdiction over its reserve officer who is publicly slandering its soldiers and officers, all it needed to do was call him to duty and send him to the Military Police for investigation.

The fact that the IDF has refused to take action, and that Mandelblit only transferred Ad Kan's letter to his criminal division after the story hit the news, indicates that Israel's military and legal establishment would have

let Issacharoff get away with either committing a war crime or slandering his fellow soldiers and officers if Ad Kan and Reservists on Duty hadn't alerted the public.

This then brings us to the second story. It revolves around Breaking the Silence's comrades in B'Tselem.

Over the past decade, B'Tselem has spent millions of shekels on a campaign to slander the IDF and its soldiers.

The foreign-government financed group's Camera Project uses video production to blacken the IDF's good name and impede its operations. Participants in B'Tselem's Camera Project enter closed military zones in Judea and Samaria with video cameras. The selectively edited videos they produce uniformly portray IDF soldiers and officers as cruel and callous.

Over the years, B'Tselem's snuff film project has damaged the IDF's international reputation, its operational capacity and the morale of its soldiers. But despite the fact that it has numerous legal means to fight B'Tselem, the General Staff has taken no action against the group.

This week, emboldened by the IDF's passivity, B'Tselem escalated its campaign against the IDF.

On Sunday B'Tselem posted a menacing message on its Facebook page addressed to the parents of a young active duty IDF officer.

It read, "To the parents of the officer with a beauty mark over his upper lip, that in February of this year served by the Yitzhar settlement: If you want to bask in the glory of your son the hero in the course of his operational activities, go to the Cinematheque in Tel Aviv. Your son will be starring in a film there – cocking his weapon against civilians... barking orders in broken Arabic..."

A photo of the officer and two of his soldiers was posted below the message.

B'Tselem's action was prominently covered in the media. Its video of the officer and his soldiers was played and replayed.

This was no mere snuff film.

B'Tselem's post, publicly shaming a serving officer, was a steep escalation of its political war against the IDF and its soldiers and officers. Now all IDF soldiers and officers are on notice. The next B'Tselem post may be a defamatory post against them addressed to their parents.

Given the demoralizing effect B'Tselem's assault on the officer and his family had on their soldiers, the generals might have been expected to open criminal proceedings against B'Tselem.

But that didn't happen.

Instead, the IDF Spokesman, Maj.-Gen. Moti Almoz, wrote a post on his Facebook page.

"Greetings to all of our slanderers," he began.

Rather than pledge to take necessary legal action to defend IDF soldiers and officers from abuse and harassment at the hands of B'Tselem, Almoz treated B'Tselem's hostile act as an adolescent prank.

Almoz concluded his post, which never even mentioned B'Tselem by name, "You will continue to make movies as if in the name of freedom of expression, despite the fact that your expression is unconnected to reality. And we will continue to protect the people of the State of Israel and ensure the security of its citizens, without inserting the IDF into political disputes."

Almoz's conclusion is particularly problematic because the fact is that his statement that the IDF's position is apolitical is misleading.

It is true that there is nothing political about soldiers lawfully carrying out their missions. But, the General Staff's decision not to defend its soldiers and officers from the likes of B'Tselem and Breaking the Silence is a political decision.

In choosing to treat anti-Israel groups like Breaking the Silence and B'Tselem with kid gloves, the General Staff is inserting itself directly into Israeli politics.

Likewise, when IDF generals lobby Congress to maintain US funding of the PA, and when "military sources" express their opposition to Trump's plan to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, they are behaving as political activists.

This returns us to Netanyahu and his frustration at Trump's sudden embrace of the PLO, which places the most pro-Israel president in history on a collision course with Israel.

Netanyahu is right to be angry. But his rage at Lauder is misdirected. The real culprit is the General Staff.

Since no prime minister can dispute the holy grail of "security concerns," Lauder got blamed.

This situation is insufferable. Our generals cannot continue to receive a pass for their political activism.

When they lobby for the PLO and against moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem they cross the line into gross insubordination. When they protect Breaking the Silence and B'Tselem rather than their soldiers, they commit a grave dereliction of duty. (Jerusalem Post May 12)