



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*

thwart the terror.

And despite yet another round of shuttle diplomacy between Jerusalem and Ramallah by US Secretary of State John Kerry, who has already been to Israel four times since assuming his position in February, (if only he would spend this much time

focusing on the Syrian civil war, which has claimed over 80,000 lives) it would seem that despite his seemingly good intentions, all he is really doing here is clogging traffic.

An incident which proves the true sentiments our "peace partner" neighbors occurred last week in the PA Area B village of Beit Omar, just south of the Gush Etzion Junction. There, fluttering in the wind, hung from an electrical pole for all Route 60 commuters to see, someone decided to fly a red Nazi flag, complete with white-and-black Swastika embroidery.

The image, which was captured and disseminated by the Tazpit News Agency, was shocking for many, but based on the daily incitement against Jews coming out of the PA official media outlets and institutions, I would say that the flag is par for the course.

So call the situation what you want, "escalation," "third intifada," or perhaps most appropriately "war of terror" – regardless of what term is used, community email lists and social media pages in Judea and Samaria are being flooded with comments and questions from concerned residents trying to decide whether or not it's time to once again rock-proof, or maybe even bullet-proof, their vehicles.

The bottom line is that the situation is unacceptable. It's one which our leaders must prioritize and deal with, before even one more citizen of our country gets hurt. (Jerusalem Post May 28)

Commentary...

Call It What You Want, The Terror Must Stop By Josh Hasten

With an upswing in violent terror attacks targeting Israeli civilians and soldiers throughout Judea and Samaria over the past several months, one of the most oft-asked questions posed by commentators has been, "are we witnessing the beginning of a so-called 'third intifada'?" On one hand, while OC Central Command Maj.-Gen. Nitzan Alon admitted to Channel 2 this past March that the IDF has identified trends of escalation, he did stop short of referring to the violence as a "third intifada." However, at the same time, just last week a senior IDF officer told Army Radio his sources indicate that the Palestinian Authority will likely choose to launch another "intifada" should US-brokered efforts aiming to jump-start negotiations between Israel and the PA flounder.

Therefore, the officer added that soldiers are training to deal with a variety of potential scenarios involving drawn-out rounds of violence.

Regardless of the classification of the current situation, the fact of the matter is, the daily attempts to scare, harm, and yes, to kill Jewish commuters, whether the weapons of choice are rocks, firebombs, knives, or guns, by Arabs throughout the PA must be dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Despite the general blackout regarding these incidents in the mainstream media both locally and internationally, the fact is that the threat is real, and the government must act now to squelch the violence. The first step that needs to be taken is for the political echelon to untie the hands of the IDF soldiers who are risking their lives day in and day out confronting these thugs.

Speaking to several soldiers in full riot gear while they were catching their breath near the northern entrance to Efrat, where daily rock throwing and firebomb incidents have become the norm, the soldiers expressed frustration that they don't have a green light from their commanders to effectively deal with the situation. These highly motivated troops have no lust for blood, but rather a simple desire to prevent their fellow Israelis from getting hurt.

According to the soldiers the possible scenarios in which they have permission to use live fire against the attacking Arabs is so restricted it has become a daily game of cat and mouse, where the IDF's main response is only to fire tear gas all day long in attempts to disperse the mobs.

However, the situation might hopefully soon change with an increase in pressure by the soldiers and the residents of the communities themselves, insisting that enough is enough.

According to IsraelNationalNews.com a special Knesset session was held last week after complaints were received from exasperated reserve duty soldiers claiming that the current doctrine calling for restrained responses to the violence was only exacerbating the problem. At the session MKs representing a variety of parties agreed with the reservists, urging the government to crack down on the terror.

In addition, while it was reported in this newspaper that Economy and Trade Minister Naftali Bennett intends to submit a plan to the Defense Ministry calling for new regulations governing when the IDF and residents of Judea and Samaria are able to open fire to defend themselves, no changes have been implemented to date.

Also, while Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon, during a solidarity visit to Beit El last week, said that the army had his full backing to do whatever was necessary to stop the attacks, security on the ground hasn't improved.

Without tangible changes, residents of Judea and Samaria are becoming frustrated.

Demonstrations were held this past Friday outside PA Arab villages that are sources of the attacks, near Beit El, Kedumim, and in Gush Etzion, calling on the government to allow the IDF to use the necessary force

Instead of Focusing on the Haredim, we Should be Rewarding Those Who Serve By Dror Eydar

This isn't how you should treat a wound. This isn't how "the responsible, stable part" of the government should behave. An attempt to behave evenhandedly is not "winking at the haredim."

Actually, intimidation through penal sanctions -- as if it is even possible to jump into command cars and speed through ultra-Orthodox towns, incarcerating thousands -- is an irresponsible gesture to those fanning the flames within our nation, to those who seek "peace now" disguised as "haredi-recruitment now." And, as with the pursuit of peace contracts, these people are going to suffer a defeat that will end up damaging us all. Actually, it is already damaging us all. There have been serious and appropriate steps on the road to universal conscription but, on Monday, the whole thing dissolved into chaos.

In the last decade, progress has been achieved on the issue of ultra-Orthodox recruitment. Thousands enlisted. The haredi street began to accept that enlisting was legitimate. Quietly, without impassioned declarations, the process got underway. The gradual induction of haredim into the army was happening parallel to other deep sociological, cultural, geographical and political developments, which were steering haredi society toward greater integration with the whole society.

The Peri committee -- named after Science and Technology Minister Yaakov Peri (Yesh Atid) and tasked with drawing up haredi-recruitment reforms -- is pulling us backward. The proposed penal sanctions seem extraneous. In the end, they'll just become a dead letter in the legal books. These so-called "easy profits" are like a bull in a china shop, thinking that one can force the haredim to do something they inherently see as a threat to their existence.

And this is what the aggressive and ruthless recruitment campaign of late has suggested: From the haredi community's perspective -- their moderates don't have a say anymore, thanks to the extremists within our society -- for the first time in Israel's history, the military issue is being positioned to everyone's detriment against Torah study. Do you want to resolve the issue or do you want to mouth off to the public with populist slogans about dismantling the government?

Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid said that whoever thought his party was going to buckle (don't founder; be flexible, be sagacious) was not

familiar with the party. Well, whoever thought that aggressive sanctions would cause the haredi public to fold, really -- and I mean really -- didn't know the community at all. It seems that we don't understand the ultra-conservative way the community behaves in times of hardship.

Further, we are carelessly pitting the state head-to-head against the haredi public. Instead of integrating the two sides, we are postponing and hindering any sort of reparation. This isn't Zionism, it's belligerence. Likud and Habayit Hayehudi need to muster the historic responsibility to reject magic solutions and support long-term goals. In the meanwhile, instead of focusing on the haredim, we should be rewarding those who serve. (Israel Hayom May 28)

Shimon's Balderdash By Michael Freund

Israeli President Shimon Peres created a stir on Monday when he delivered a speech at the World Economic Forum in Jordan that strayed far beyond his circumscribed presidential mandate.

In a short and somewhat rambling address, and in remarks to reporters afterwards, the 89-year-old head of state made a number of brash and blatantly political statements that could just as easily have been penned by a pro-Palestinian speechwriter.

"President [Mahmoud] Abbas, you are our partner and we are yours," he said, as though oblivious to the fact that the Palestinian leader has steadfastly refused Israeli pleas to return to the negotiating table. Then, in a sentence as contorted as the logic behind it, Peres opined that, "What holds back the renewal of the peace negotiations are some gaps in the bridge between the beginning and the conclusion."

Sorry, Shimon, but that is just balderdash. The Palestinians have repeatedly insisted on various preconditions before talks can resume and they would like the outcome of the negotiations essentially predetermined. It is that -- and not "some gaps in the bridge" -- whatever that means -- which has prevented a resumption of diplomatic dialogue.

But the truly troubling aspect of Peres' remarks is that he performed a great service to the Palestinian cause by obfuscating reality and portraying both sides as equally responsible for the current impasse.

This is moral relativism at its worst, and it merely reduces the pressure on the Palestinians to act in good faith. As the president of Israel, Peres should have defended the Jewish state's position rather than try to ingratiate himself to his audience at Israel's expense.

Indeed, not once did Peres use the word "terror" in his speech, nor did he refer to rocket attacks from Gaza or the Hamas regime which holds sway there. Instead, he offered an astonishingly naive and simplistic view of just how easy it should be to resolve a century of conflict.

"It's time for peace. It shouldn't be so complicated..."

"I do believe it is a real possibility," he said, belying the fact that the 20 years since the signing of the Oslo Accords have only pushed peace further away than ever.

Some like to view Peres as an irrepressible optimist, but when optimism becomes completely detached from reality, it is more akin to delusion than to hope. And this is hardly the first time that our timeworn president has demonstrated an unwillingness to come to grips with the world as it exists, rather than how he would like to imagine it.

In interviews last month with The Jerusalem Post and with the Walla news site, Peres insisted that he did not regret the Oslo Accords, even though they sparked the worst wave of terrorism in Israel's history. "There were terror victims before the Oslo Accords," he told Walla, as though that somehow diminishes the stain of responsibility from his record.

Just to put the facts in context: in the five years after Oslo, more Israelis were killed by Palestinian terrorists than in the 15 years prior to the signing of the agreement. A total of 279 men, women and children were murdered in the half-decade following the accords, while 254 were killed in the previous 15 years.

And in the two decades since Peres and Yitzhak Rabin cooked up Oslo and forged a deal with Yasser Arafat in September 1993, over 1,400 Israelis have lost their lives to Palestinian terror.

Rather than acknowledge this devastating failure, Peres could not find it within himself to utter even a word of remorse or guilt. And that is what is truly remarkable about his observations in Jordan: not that Peres delivered them, but that so many people still take him seriously.

Peres brought disaster upon the country, handed parts of our ancient homeland over to our enemies, gave them weapons and thereby begat the most lethal period of anti-Israel terror in our history, and yet he still does not shy away from offering sage advice about how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

That is like the captain of the Hindenburg offering flying lessons, Lindsey Lohan preaching about responsible drinking or Barack Obama

expounding about fiscal discipline.

Yes, Peres had a long and storied career, and he made important contributions to the country and its development in a wide variety of fields. But he was also directly responsible for one of the greatest strategic errors in Israel's history, for which we are still paying a heavy price.

And that is precisely why his propagandizing is so infuriating. As president, he has no right to interfere in the policy decisions of the elected government. And as a failed leader, Peres would do best to keep his opinions to himself.

As he himself noted at the outset of his talk in Jordan on Monday, "History is made of biographies of men and women who failed to forecast the future."

Clearly, Shimon Peres is one of them. (Jerusalem Post May 27)

What Does Israel's Arab Minority Really Think?

By Alexander Jakobson

The Israel Democracy Institute's 'Israeli Democracy Index 2012' -- an annual comprehensive survey of the mood of Israeli society, widely considered one of the most authoritative in the field -- provides some fascinating data about attitudes among Arab-Israelis regarding Israeli democracy and the state itself. The findings (not significantly different to previous years) certainly reflect a critical attitude towards the Israeli reality and government policies. But they also reflect something else: a huge gap between the responses of Arab-Israelis and the typical discourse of the Arab elite in the country; between opinion at the base and rhetoric amongst the political leadership of this community.

Before setting out the findings, we must ask how reliable they are. It is sometimes suggested that the relatively positive results of these kinds of surveys reflect the reluctance of Arab participants to express their views with full candor and their desire to appease the establishment or the Jewish majority. But one of the survey's most interesting findings is the negative answer given by the great majority of Arab respondents to the question, 'Do you think that the Knesset Members from Arab parties are more radical than the general Arab public?' Only 24.4 per cent think so; almost half of the rest say the Arab MK's are actually more moderate than the Arab public at large. This is obviously a very disappointing answer from the viewpoint of the Jewish majority. Those who gave it were clearly not afraid of anybody and not trying to please anybody. Precisely for this reason, it can be regarded as strengthening the credibility of the other answers in the survey: after having expressed support for their political leadership, the Arab citizens proceeded to give, on many important points, answers that are hugely different from what the leadership is saying.

There is a huge difference between the responses of ordinary Israeli Arabs and the typical discourse of the Arab elite.

The picture is thus complicated, and the fundamental attitude of the Arab minority towards the State appears to be deeply ambivalent. But given the prolonged national conflict, with no end in sight at this point, this ambivalence should be regarded as good news. The Arab parties express the negative aspect of this ambivalence well enough; but anyone reading the survey will notice that the other aspect exists as well, and it is not at all negligible.

Proud to be Israeli. Some 44.5 per cent of Arab citizens (compared with 89 per cent of Jewish Israelis) answered affirmatively when asked whether they are 'proud to be Israeli' (14.1 per cent 'very proud', 30.4 per cent 'quite proud', 20.4 per cent 'not so proud' and 29.3 per cent 'not at all proud'). This reflects a decline from last year, when 52.8 per cent of Arabs responded positively, but it is still within the normal fluctuations over the last decade (between more than 40 and more than 50 per cent). Some argue that a state that defines itself as Jewish cannot, by definition, inspire feelings of patriotism among its Arab citizens -- these findings tell a different story. It should be noted that the expression the survey uses is not 'Israeli citizen' but 'Israeli'. In theory this should be the same thing, but in fact, everyone living in Israel knows that both Jews and Arabs often use the term 'Israeli' as a synonym for an 'Israeli Jew'.

To my knowledge, none of the leaders of the Arab public would adopt the label 'Israeli', and many reject this term explicitly. The Arab leadership also rejects the term 'Israeli Arab' because it sounds too Israeli. The acceptable alternative is not 'Palestinian Israeli' or 'Israeli Palestinian' but 'Arab Palestinian citizen of Israel,' or '(Arab) Palestinian in Israel'. Under these conditions, the willingness of slightly less and sometimes slightly more than a half of the Arab public to adopt the label 'Israeli' and express pride in it is of great significance. A few years ago I spoke with a group of British journalists who questioned me about the situation of Arab citizens of Israel. After dealing with various specific points, I asked them: do you suppose that 45 per cent of Catholics in

Northern Ireland would be prepared to say 'I am proud to be British'? One of them replied, 'I don't believe there are 45 Catholics in Northern Ireland who are willing to say I am proud to be British, never mind 45 per cent.' Of course, he may have been exaggerating.

Israeli democracy. In relation to Israeli democracy, 44 per cent of Arab respondents say Israel's democracy is at the 'appropriate level', 7.8 per cent say Israel is 'too democratic', 37.2 per cent said it is 'not democratic enough' and only 11 per cent that it is 'not democratic enough by far'. The last answer corresponds to what is routinely said by virtually the entire Arab leadership. In fact, the 'vision documents' of the Arab leadership claim that Israel is not a democracy at all. That is not the opinion of the Arab public.

With regard to political institutions, 51.3 per cent of the Arab population have confidence in the Knesset and 51.8 per cent in the president, while only 39.3 per cent have confidence in the government (the cabinet). This signifies, presumably, not political support for the present government, but rather confidence in the government as an institution.

Nearly 82 per cent of the Arab respondents 'definitely agree' that under no circumstances should violence be used to achieve political goals. The percentage of Jews that answered that way to the question is 75.5 per cent.

Equality. Asked whether Arab citizens are discriminated against ('disadvantaged', as the survey puts it) compared with the Jewish population, a large majority of respondents answered 'yes'. One should not make light of this finding. But here also there are marked differences between the message from the public and the message of the leadership. Some 46.6 per cent 'strongly agree' with this claim, while 28.3 per cent 'somewhat agree' and 22.5 per cent 'disagree' or 'do not agree so much.'

National security and state institutions. 16.8 per cent of Israeli Arabs say they would increase Israel's defence budget, while 40.8 per cent would leave it unchanged. In 2011, when the question was asked in a different way, 45 per cent responded that it was 'important' or 'very important' to enhance Israel's military capability. Some 42.4 per cent of Arabs say they have confidence in the IDF and a further 18.8 per cent have confidence 'to a small extent'. Only 32.5 per cent have 'no confidence at all'. It seems that even among those who do not have great confidence in the IDF, more than a few are of the opinion that there are other forces in the Middle East that inspire even less confidence.

Some 62.3 per cent of Arab respondents say they have confidence in the police (25.1 per cent 'a lot of confidence' and 37.2 per cent 'some confidence') – a significant increase from the previous survey and slightly more, remarkably, than the percentage of Jews who say so. The editors of the survey comment that this may be due to increased recent police efforts to fight crime in the Arab sector. If indeed one year of relatively good work is enough to garner the police of the Zionist state an expression of confidence by a large majority of the Arab public, this indicates that the real relationship between the state and its Arab citizens is very different, and much more complex, than is commonly thought.

If so, there is an important lesson here for other parts of the Israeli establishment: a concrete action – even if not particularly dramatic – by official institutions, for the benefit of the Arab public, as part of the country's citizenry, can certainly lead to increased confidence by the Arab citizens in these institutions.

Some 78 per cent of Arabs say they have confidence in the Supreme Court (compared with 72 per cent of Jews). Certainly, the Supreme Court is the most liberal branch of the Jewish state, which has done a lot to protect the civil rights of the Arab minority. But it is still unmistakably a branch of the Jewish state. Not many radical critics of the Jewish state, within the country or abroad, are willing to give credit to its Supreme Court.

Israel's future. When asked about their assessment of Israel's outlook for the next fifteen years, a large majority of the Arab respondents estimated that the country will be able to defend itself militarily (62.8 per cent), and that it will not lose its Jewish character (68.1). Some 49.7 per cent think Israel will become much more religious, and 55.5 per cent believe its international isolation will grow. But the assessment that enjoys the highest majority is that Israel will retain its status as a high-tech leader (75.9 per cent). Some 60.2 per cent of Arabs (compared to 75.6 per cent of the Jewish population) say they are 'optimistic about the future of Israel'. Just over half of those are 'very optimistic', the rest 'quite optimistic'.

Of course, one may question the methodology and significance of any poll, but consistent findings in a series of authoritative polls are not something that can be easily dismissed. Anyone who studies the data closely, and factors in the difficult prevailing circumstances, must be impressed by the extent of optimism among Israel's Arab minority. The findings should, I think, inspire some cautious optimism in the reader as well. After all, the data was collected after a period in which the Yisrael Beitenu party and parts of the Likud questioned the loyalty of the Arab

minority in Israel in a highly inflammatory manner. The shameful public call by a group of municipal rabbis not to sell or rent apartments to Arab citizens, met only fairly mild disapproval from government leaders, and no official measures were taken against these rabbis, despite the fact that they are public servants paid by the state. Back in 2006, some Arab Knesset members publicly praised the Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah whilst his missiles fell on Haifa and (the Arab-Israeli town of) Nazareth; this did not help the relations between Jewish and Arab citizens either. Indeed, anyone listening to the nationalist rhetoric on both sides could easily imagine that the relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel were about to explode.

However, these and similar findings indicate that Jewish-Arab relations in Israel are actually much better – or less bad, if one prefers to put it this way – than the nationalist rhetoric would suggest. Clearly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict casts a large shadow over these relations. But even absent a solution to this conflict (which would of course be highly desirable in many respects), there is much that can and should be done to improve the civic status of Arabs in Israel and the relations between the majority and the minority. The claim that the Arab citizens of Israel are essentially and fundamentally alienated from the state is plain wrong.

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Can the People Trust the Government? By Martin Sherman

As soon as we abandon our own reason, and are content to rely upon authority, there is no end to our troubles. – Bertrand Russell, 1950

This week, almost a decade and a half after the Muhammad al-Dura incident at the Netzarim junction in the Gaza Strip, the government of Israel has taken a stand, rebutting responsibility for the death of the then-12 year old Palestinian child.

While hardly a "silver bullet," definitively disproving the vicious blood libel against the IDF the incident triggered, the investigatory initiative, as a stand-alone endeavor, may arguably have some merit to it. As The Jerusalem Post's Herb Keiron points out in his astute analysis (May 21): "The [government] panel, as convincing as it might be, did not incontrovertibly demonstrate the truth. Rather, it put out – 13 years after the event – a strongly argued Israeli version of those events."

However, when viewed in broader context, the handling of the al-Dura affair highlights the dismal performance of almost four decades of successive Israeli governments, frittering away the fruits – both physical assets and international stature – of Israel's stunning military victory of June 1967.

Significantly, whatever one might feel regarding the wisdom of reopening the controversy after so much time, it is extremely doubtful whether the government would have instituted the recent inquiry and attempted to shake off blame attributed to it, without the tenacity of private citizens such as Philip Karsenty and Dr. Yehuda David, who fought unstintingly to expose the truth – largely at their own expense, with precious little official support, and not infrequently, despite official disapproval.

Indeed, the hesitant, lethargic and erratic response that characterized the way Israel dealt with the al-Dura episode reflects much of what has characterized the conduct of our national strategy over the better part of the last four decades, in the realms of both security and diplomacy.

Prima facie, it is easy to dismiss sweeping accusations of strategic incompetence against the Israeli leadership over recent decades as excessive alarmism, at best, and unsubstantiated hysteria, at worst.

After all, since its inception Israel has undergone astounding development. For anyone living under the rugged austerity that prevailed during the first decade of the state, the realities of today would surely have seemed an unattainable dream. Then, basic foodstuffs were rationed by government decree; waves of immigrants were housed in tents and tin shacks without running water or electricity; gnawing doubts existed as to whether the nascent, poorly equipped, largely untested IDF could meet the daunting challenges it faced.

In those forbidding circumstances of chronic scarcity and acute insecurity, no one could have pictured that within a few decades, Israel would be traversed by multilane highways, that household kitchens would be equipped with the latest modern conveniences, that foreign travel would be a commonplace experience, that consumerism would rival levels in many developed countries.

Visible signs of burgeoning power and prosperity abound everywhere: Surging GDP per capita, amazing advances in science and technology, massive gas finds and the prospect of soon-to-be-attained energy

independence.

On the security front, things appear well in hand, with little to induce a sense of immediate existential danger to national survival. The once-horrific Palestinian terror has faded into a faint memory, with most of the country enjoying long periods of calm, punctuated by brief low-intensity conflagrations, with little impact on major urban metropolises. Israel's regional adversaries are in debilitating "post-Spring" disarray.

Even with regard to Iran, surreptitious computer worms and mysterious explosions appear to have disrupted – at least to some degree – Tehran's nuclear program, causing the projected schedule for doomsday scenarios to be repeatedly pushed back.

Surely all this makes pronouncements of pessimism seem positively perverse? Surely all this awesome achievement points to the foresight and competence of Israeli governments rather than any alleged ineptitude? However, despite the undeniable successes, at least some of which must be credited to good governance, any congratulatory complacency would be perilously misplaced.

A dispassionate analysis, entailing a measure of historical perspective, of Israel's major geostrategic decisions since the mid- 1970s reveals a depressing sequence of massive miscalculation, coupled with obdurate refusal not only to concede error and engage in timely corrective measures, but to stubbornly adhere to the self-same disproven political paradigm for future policy formulation.

Regrettably, a compelling case could be presented for likening the behavior of successive governments to that of the management of a public transportation company that focuses on upgrading the upholstery of its buses, enhancing their air-conditioning, improving the stereo-systems and installing wi-fi, but neglects the maintenance of the brakes and skips oil-changes.

Thus for the passengers – the Israeli people – the journey seems increasingly comfortable, but as the inevitable curves in the road approach, increasingly dangerous.

In fact, it may be worse. Without wishing to push the analogy too far, imagine that the management was aware of the calamitous consequences of its policy, but persisted with it anyway. After all, both in the present government and in several of its predecessors, numerous ministers warned of the perils of policy they later embraced – and were even elected to public office on the basis of their opposition to it.

Ever since the much-heralded 1978 Camp David Accords, as a result of a series of misguided and myopic government decisions, Israel has found itself in an ever-tightening and menacing geostrategic stranglehold.

These decisions have created a set of geopolitical circumstances that – despite the modern comforts of day-to-day life – are gradually but inexorably coalescing into a situation that makes the viability of Israel increasingly untenable.

The decision to evacuate Sinai – universally applauded except for by a small band of then-reviled, but ultimately vindicated, skeptics – has led to what in effect is a largely uncontrolled – and uncontrollable – jihadi emirate, in which acts of unspeakable savagery are the order of the day. Courtesy of the Begin-government, the peninsula is slowly evolving into a security nightmare, pressing ever-more ominously on Israel's long southern border, threatening to obliterate the tourist industry in Eilat, with no good option even remotely conceivable.

Given the situation in Egypt it is difficult to know which would be worse:

(a) To let the Islamist regime remilitarize the peninsula – and thereby not only forfeit the major tangible benefit for Israel in the peace agreement, but risk the weapons introduced to the area, ostensibly to impose law and order, falling into the hands of the Islamist warlords they were intended to pacify.

(b) To insist on maintaining the demilitarization – and allow the entire peninsula to descend into unregulated chaos with all the attendant security hazards, nourished by inputs across the largely unrestricted border with the Islamist-dominated entity in Gaza.

(c) To retake Sinai – or significant tracts of it – and risk a full-scale war with Egypt and any other allies (state or non-state) that might be eager stand by its side.

True, the withdrawal treaty with Egypt did provide 30 years of uneasy "cold peace" – or rather prickly non-belligerence. But in the long run that is likely to appear a rather forlorn return, for which future generations may well be called on to pay – with daunting compound interest.

Barely a decade after the Sinai pullout, the Rabin government decided to throw caution to the wind and dispense with all the hitherto sober caution regarding the terrorist PLO headed by Yasser Arafat.

Disdainfully disregarding pleas of "Don't give them guns" by opponents of the fateful 1993 Oslo Accords, who were dismissed as "right-wing religious radicals," the Labor-led coalition acceded to the deployment

of armed Arab militias within mortar range of the national parliament and almost instantaneously unleashed a wave of unprecedented bloodshed among the civilian population that took over a decade to rein in.

Several years later, with Ehud Barak as prime minister, Israel undertook a hasty and unbecoming unilateral evacuation of the security zone in south Lebanon. Apparently more intimidated by Israeli activist organizations such as "The Four Mothers" than by the specter of Islamist terror on our northern border, the government sanctioned the 2000 IDF withdrawal from the area, facilitating its takeover by the implacably inimical Hezbollah and the buildup of its arsenal of rockets and missiles, which culminated in the 2006 Second Lebanon War.

This military encounter, grossly mismanaged by the Kadima-led government of Olmert-Linvi, which, shackled by its commitment to the ridiculous notion of unilateral withdrawal, could not permit military rationale to determine IDF operations, ended with the ludicrous UN Resolution 1701. Predictably, the result has been an immensely empowered Hezbollah with its weapons stockpile quadrupled and its political stature immeasurably enhanced.

It would be a grave error to believe that the subsequent years of calm on our northern border reflect successful deterrence of Hezbollah. Its will to fight remains undiminished.

It merely indicates that it has been forced to regroup, rearm and redeploy – and to wait, with greatly improved capabilities, for the next opportune moment.

Emboldened by the perceived flight of the IDF from south Lebanon and by the far-reaching concessions offered by Barak, the Palestinians in 2000 launched the bloody second intifada that, once again, brought carnage to the streets of Israel.

The wave of bloody violence was only contained after the 2002 Defensive Shield Operation, the construction of the muchmaligned security barrier and a series of targeted assassinations of leading terrorists.

Astoundingly, despite accumulated experience and many of his own clearly stated positions, Ariel Sharon, Barak's successor, embarked on a policy that flew in the face of every vestige of common sense: Unilateral evacuation of the Gaza Strip and the eradication of all remnants of Jewish presence in the area.

The result has – predictably – been the rise of an Islamist enclave, with increasing military capabilities and political stature that can hold the entire south of the country hostage at its whim, while comprising a plentiful source supply for the radicals in Sinai.

In light of the escalating security problems on the fronts with Sinai, Lebanon and Gaza, one can only shudder to think of the situation we might well be facing now on the border with Syria, had previous governments "succeeded" in concluding a deal with Damascus, and the Golan Heights had been transferred to the control of an Assad regime. Against the backdrop of brutality and bloodshed that has engulfed Syria, how risible the assurances of so many "well-informed authorities" that Assad could be relied upon seem today? Imagine the dread that would be felt in the country if al-Qaida affiliates were now in control of the Golan, commanding the approaches to the Galilee and overlooking Tiberias. How chilling it is to realize that it is but for the grace of God (or good fortune – depending on one's religious proclivities), not the prudence and foresight of the Israeli government, that the country might well be facing such a calamitous situation.

But worse might still be in store....

There are indeed ominous signs on the horizon of things to come. The hectic comings and goings of Secretary of State Kerry, the rumors in the public domain, the de facto building freeze, the well-funded drive for a unilateral withdrawal to the security barrier and delineation of the provisional borders, all augur ill for the future.

Given the mounting dangers to national security that the injudicious adoption of a policy based on political appeasement -cum- territorial concessions has precipitated in the South and North, it seems almost inconceivable that it is again being contemplated in the East – where its inevitable failure would have far graver ramifications than elsewhere. Could it be that a government headed by a premier, and composed of a bevy of ministers, senior officials and advisers, who built their political careers on warning of the perils of relinquishing the highlands of Judea and Samaria and control of the Jordan Valley, be the government that does precisely that? The people of Israel are confronting a crisis of credibility. Can they trust the people elected to lead them to "press on the brakes" and stop the country hurtling – plush upholstery, wi-fi connections and all – into the dangerous curves.

If not, who killed Muhammad al-Dura – if he was killed at all – will seem like small potatoes. (Jerusalem Post May 25)