



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

would mean their being called traitors and pushed out by their Islamist rival, Hamas.

Hamdullah is sort of the perfect compromise. He is a nobody, a technocrat, lacking all political experience so he won't try to

challenge the party bosses and cannot do so. Hamdullah will do what he is told.

But also Hamdullah, dean at al-Najah University, is a Fatah party member (plus 1), is British-educated (plus 2), and an English professor (plus 3). In other words, he knows how to deal with the West and will hopefully keep the money rolling in but cannot do anything and won't try.

Hamdullah cannot negotiate even if he wanted to do so. He will ignore Western encouragements to return to the bargaining table but will keep accepting the checks and provide the PA with a moderate face that will gain public relations' points with his British-accented English.

Meanwhile, we will all wait for a year or two or three to see who Abbas's successor will be. Abbas has long passed the end of his elected term without anyone in the West pointing out that his government is no longer legitimate. His desire to become partners again with terrorist Hamas gets a pass as does the fact that the PA has now rejected the Oslo Accords of 1993 with Israel on which its own existence is based.

Yet corrupt, incompetent, and hardline as it is the PA serves a purpose. It preserves the fiction that the "peace process" is still alive and keeps Hamas out of power.

Of course, on the positive side, it also keeps Hamas from overthrowing the PA—which means the West Bank, since Hamas already controls the Gaza Strip—out of the hands of the revolutionary Islamists who would use it to launch an immediate war on Israel backed by the other Muslim Brotherhood regimes.

That in itself is worthwhile given the fact that there is zero alternative of a moderate Palestinian leadership that would make peace with Israel. Of course, the PA has no interest in doing what is necessary to actually obtain a Palestinian state. (RubinReports.com Jun 3)

Commentary...

Palestinian Authority Finds Perfect Prime Minister By Barry Rubin

The Palestinian Authority (PA) leader Mahmoud Abbas has appointed a new prime minister. He is Ram Hamdullah.

Who?

It is useful to remember that the post of PA prime minister was originally forced on PLO, PA, and Fatah leader Yasir Arafat ten years ago in the hope of getting the PA to be more moderate and more competent as an economic and administrative entity. It has not worked too well.

But once you think about it, Hamdullah is the perfect PA prime minister. His predecessor was Salam Fayyad. Fayyad, named six years ago, was a serious economist who actually tried to curb the ruling Fatah party's corruption. The Western donors liked Fayyad and kept him in office for years against the will of the Fatah bosses, who periodically tried to get rid of him. They feared that if they forced out Fayyad, the money would be cut off. At any rate, they blocked all of Fayyad's reform measures and he never played any significant role in negotiations with Israel.

The Fatah bosses run the PA's broad policy. Of the 18 members elected in 2009 they are mainly hardliners, either radicals or old Arafat loyalists. After the election, a moderate, Ahmad Qurei (better known as Abu Ala), who missed out on election by two votes said, albeit with exaggeration, that the Fatah elections were more dishonest than the recent ones in Iran.

But even he, perhaps the most moderate individual in the higher ranks of the organization, showed the culture of Fatah by accusing Israel of fixing the election and those who won as being Israeli agents! So the arguably most moderate leading figure claimed that Israel conspired to control the election by picking hardliners. This tells you part of the problem

The victory of people like Jibril Rajoub, Muhammad Dahlan, and Tawik Tirawi—all security force commanders—showed, he claimed that "someone wants to see rubber stamps" in Fatah's leadership. He implied that these people were too soft on Israel and were actually willing to make concessions as part of a comprehensive peace agreement. Of course, such a comprehensive agreement has not appeared in the last four years and is nowhere in sight.

No need to wonder why this conflict continues when you look at thinking and behavior like this.

At the same time, Gaza Strip leaders of Fatah have resigned. Even aside from vote-fixing they do have a case. After all, since Hamas prevented many from attending the meeting they couldn't vote for candidates from Gaza.

And there is still more. Who beat Abu Ala for the position on the Fatah Central Committee? Tayyib Abd al-Rahman. He was for many years the head of Arafat's personal public relations' operation. I remember him well from the 1980s running Arafat's press conferences. So much for new leadership.

Now, however, it is a sign of the contempt that the Fatah bosses feel toward President Barack Obama, as someone too powerless or unwilling to pressure them. In fact, it is a sign of their low respect that the replacement of Fayyad comes only a few days after Secretary of State John Kerry offered them a fund of \$4 billion of the PA went back to negotiations with Israel. The PA refused.

According to the theory that the PA really wants a two-state diplomatic solution with Israel, this makes no sense. Doesn't it want to compromise to end "oppression" and "occupation" as soon as possible? No, unfortunately they would rather wait decades in hopes of wiping Israel off the map, or leaving the issue open for the next generation, or fear that compromise

The Jewish People's Resurrection By Dr. Haim Shine

Forty-six years ago, in six days of divine grace, Jewish history changed its course. Thanks to the determination of our fighters and the dedication displayed by the honorable fallen soldiers, we returned home, to the homeland where the character of the Jewish people was shaped for generations.

The War of Independence in 1948 ended in a big victory. Outnumbered, trapped under siege and stranglehold, the people of Israel burst forth into freedom and into the light. After the 1967 Six-Day War, suddenly we were able to see the words of the Bible come back to life in the Land of Israel. We were enthralled with the vision of Biblical prophecies coming true before our eyes. We shed tears of joy at the Western Wall -- the only remnant of our Temple. In six days, 2,000 years of crying and lamentation turned into an endless source of comfort.

During the Six-Day War, we did not conquer foreign land or anything that did not already belong to us. No one can label a people as conquerors in their own homeland. The Jews never stopped praying in the direction of Jerusalem, mourning the destruction of the land or trying to return to Israel despite countless obstacles and tribulations. The land waited patiently for its saviors to re-cultivate its vineyards and plow its earth.

Like many times in the past, various dream peddlers managed to turn a big day into a small moment. On many stages across Israel and around the world, many visionless, angry and pessimistic cultural figures tried to convince the people both inside Israel and outside it that the Israel Defense Forces are an occupying army, that the Six-Day War was the source of all our problems and crises and that the Jewish settlers, who put themselves in the front lines, pose an obstacle to peace. Never in the history of humanity

has there been a peace that claimed so many lives.

The "occupation" theory collapsed in the face of the vision of a united Israel. In my youth, I heard this vision voiced in the campaign speeches of Likud leader Menachem Begin. Begin's strong belief in the unity of the Land of Israel was a wonderful mix of thousands of years of Jewish heritage, an affinity to the Jewish homeland and political realism anchored in a disillusioned analysis of the situation.

For years, however, I could not understand Begin's consent to recognize, as prime minister, the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, as stated in the peace agreement with Egypt. I once asked Yehiel Kadishai, Begin's close confidant, about it. His answer was that Begin believed that when the time would come to exercise those rights, the number of Jews living in the homeland, including Judea and Samaria, would nullify any possibility of giving territorial rights to the Palestinians within the Land of Israel -- rights that they never actually possessed.

These days, it is beginning to become clear that Begin was right on that issue as well. The spokespeople of the Israeli Left, who, for many years have been trying to convince the Israeli public that a return to 1967 borders will result in peace, have now accepted that a new, irreversible reality has emerged in Judea and Samaria.

Hundreds of thousands of Jews have built their homes in the historic Israeli homeland and every intelligent person understands that at this point they cannot be evacuated. Every life-loving Israeli living in Tel Aviv, Raanana or Netanya knows -- after the traumatic evacuation of the Gush Katif settlement bloc in Gaza -- that the settlers of Judea and Samaria are our guarantee that hostile enemies will not invade central Israel. The most leftist of the Israeli Left already knows that there is no point in signing peace agreements with collapsing, divided, unstable countries.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with his two-state vision, is trying to navigate the Jewish people through a hostile world. The world's sages are having trouble understanding why the Jews insist on surviving. How do you explain to the world that the Jews have been dreaming about this tiny piece of land for 2,000 years and are willing to fight for it for another 2,000 years? People of truth know that the two-state solution is not feasible. The minimum that the Palestinians demand is much more than the maximum that the State of Israel is willing to give, without putting its very existence in jeopardy.

That is why, if Israel wants to survive, it must continue building in Judea and Samaria and around Jerusalem. Millions of Jews living in those regions will ensure our grasp on our homeland for all eternity. It is no dream -- many Jews in the world are already beginning to realize that the time has come for them, too, to return home. (Israel Hayom Jun 6)

Happy Israel By Daniel Pipes

In a typically maladroit statement, U.S. Secretary of State John F. Kerry recently complained that Israelis are too contented to end their conflict with the Palestinians: "People in Israel aren't waking up every day and wondering if tomorrow there will be peace because there is a sense of security and a sense of accomplishment and of prosperity."

While Kerry misunderstands Israelis (Palestinian rejectionism, not prosperity, caused them to give up on diplomacy), he is right that Israelis have a "sense of security and ... of prosperity." They are generally a happy lot. A recent poll found 93 percent of Jewish Israelis proud of be Israeli. Yes, Iranian nuclear weapons loom and confrontation with Moscow is possible, but things have never been so good. With thanks to Efraim Inbar of Bar-Ilan University for some of the following information, let us count the ways.

-- Women need to give birth to 2.1 children to sustain a country's population; Israel has a birthrate of 2.65, making it the only advanced country to exceed replacement (The next highest is France at 2.08; the lowest is Singapore at 0.79.). While haredim and Arabs account for some of this robust rate, secular Jews are the key.

-- Israel enjoyed a 14.5% growth of gross domestic product during the 2008-12 recession, giving it the highest economic growth rate of any OECD country. (In contrast, the advanced economies as a whole had a 2.3% growth rate, with the United States weighing in at 2.9% and the Euro zone at minus 0.4%.) Israel invests 4.5% of its GDP in research and development, the highest percentage of any country.

-- Due to major gas and oil finds, Walter Russell Mead observes, "the Promised Land, from a natural resource point of view, could be ... inch for

inch the most valuable and energy-rich country anywhere in the world." These resources enhance Israel's position in the world.

-- With Syria and Egypt consumed by internal problems, the existential threat they once posed to Israel has, for the moment, nearly disappeared. Thanks to innovative tactics, terror attacks have been nearly eliminated. The IDF has outstanding human resources and stands at the forefront of military technologies; and Israeli society has proven its readiness to fight a protracted conflict. Inbar, a strategist, concludes that "the power differential between Israel and its Arab neighbors is continuously growing."

-- The Palestinian diplomatic focus that dominated the country's politics for decades after 1967 has receded, with only 10% of Jewish Israelis considering negotiations the top priority. Kerry may obsess over this issue but, in the acerbic words of one politico, "Debating the peace process to most Israelis is the equivalent of debating the color of the shirt you will wear when landing on Mars."

-- Even the Iranian nuclear issue may be less dire than it appears. Between the vastly greater destructive power of Israel's nuclear arsenal and its growing missile defense system, military analyst Anthony Cordesman predicts that an exchange of nuclear weapons would leave Israel damaged badly but Iranian civilization destroyed. "Iranian recovery is not possible in the normal sense of the term." Maniacal as the Iranian leadership is, will it really risk all?

-- Successes of the "boycott, divestment, and sanctions" movement are pretty meager (Stephen Hawking snubbed the president's invitation! A United Nations body passed another absurd condemnation). Israel has diplomatic relations with 156 out of the United Nations' 193 members. Looking at multiple indices, Inbar finds that, globally, "Israel is rather well integrated."

-- In public opinion surveys in the United States, the world's most important country and Israel's main ally, Israel regularly beats the Palestinians by a 4-to-1 ratio. And while universities are indeed hostile, I ask handwringers this question: Where would you rather be strong, the U.S. Congress or the campuses? To ask that question is to answer it.

-- Ashkenazi-Sephardi tensions have diminished over time due to a combination of intermarriage and cultural cross-pollination. The issue of haredi nonparticipation is finally being addressed.

-- Israelis have made impressive cultural contributions, especially to classical music, leading one critic, David Goldman, to call Israel a "pocket superpower in the arts."

Listen up, anti-Zionists and anti-Semites, Palestinians and Islamists, extreme right- and left-wingers: You are fighting a losing battle; the Jewish state is prevailing. As Inbar rightly concludes, "Time seems to be on Israel's side." Give up and find some other country to torment.

(Israel Hayom Jun 6)

Peacemaking or Perfidy? An Open Letter to Peres By Martin Sherman

History is made of biographies of men and women who failed to forecast the future. -- Shimon Peres, Amman, May 26, 2013

My good friends, for the second time in our history, a British prime minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honor. I believe it is peace for our time. -- Neville Chamberlain, September 30, 1938

The Arab Peace Initiative is a meaningful change and a strategic opportunity. It replaces the strategies of war with the wisdom of peace....History will judge us not by the process of negotiations, but by its outcome. -- Shimon Peres -- Amman, May 26, 2013

To: Shimon Peres, President of Israel

Dear Sir,

I confess I was appalled by your speech at the World Economic Forum in Amman earlier this week. There were many elements in it I found disconcerting, but what I found particularly disturbing was your approving embrace of the so-called "Arab Peace Initiative" (API).

There are of course, numerous reasons why Israel should firmly reject the API as a devious, deceptive and disastrous blueprint for its demise. But this in itself is not why I find your endorsement of it so galling.

Rather it is because no one other than yourself has, in the past, better elucidated why this is so.

Indeed, you can hardly be unaware of the fact that the adoption of the API entails Israel undertaking measures that are the diametric opposite of those you once prescribed.

After all, no one other than yourself has set out a more compelling rationale why implementing the measures it calls for would provide the Arabs an opportunity to emaciate Israel, compress it back into indefensible borders and make its survival dependent solely on their discretion – creating, in your own words, “compulsive temptation to attack Israel from all directions.”

I trust, therefore, that you will fully understand why it is so perturbing to encounter the staggering dichotomy between the views you once expounded and those you propound today, particularly as the experience of recent decades appears to corroborate the sober realism of your former positions rather than the flighty optimism of your current ones.

In broad brushstrokes, the API comprises Israeli agreement to: full withdrawal from all “occupied Arab territories,” i.e. from all of Judea-Samaria and the Golan Heights, and a return to the pre-1967 frontiers, aptly designated by the late Labor Party dove Abba Eban as “Auschwitz borders”; recognition of an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital; the “right of return” for millions of so-called “refugees” to Israel (sometimes euphemistically phrased as a “just solution” to the Palestinian refugees problem.

I am sure that you will agree that in the not-too-distant past, acceptance of these would have been considered tantamount to treason by all elements of the mainstream Zionist political establishment – yourself included.

Indeed, on the basis of his last address to the Knesset (October 5, 1995), seeking ratification of the Oslo II Accords, we must assume your colleague and co-recipient of the Nobel Peace prize, Yitzhak Rabin, would have rebuffed them contemptuously.

After all, in that address, he rejected every one of the above elements of the API in the permanent resolution of the conflict he envisioned – from the recognition of full Palestinian statehood, through the division of Jerusalem, to the withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines.

Recently, the API sponsors, currently headed by Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad Al Thani, have “magnanimously” agreed to the “possibility” of infinitesimal modifications to the pre-1967 lines by means of “mutually agreed, minor comparable land exchanges.”

One could devote an entire essay to explaining why such “mutually agreed, minor comparable land exchanges” are nothing but ill-advised illusion, whose pursuit would be futile and foolhardy. However, suffice it to say, that if such exchanges were “minor” they would have no significant strategic value, and if they were to have such value, they would not be “mutually agreed,” nor would there be any realistic chance of them being “comparable” – whatever that might mean.

So in exchange for consenting (read “capitulating”) to this manifestly suicidal (a term I feel you too would have endorsed until recently) list of concessions, the Arab League will deign to “establish normal relations with Israel.”

Gee, what a bargain! All those concessions for a promise of “normal relations” with a list of nations that includes Somalia, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and perhaps Syria.

And then of course there is Islamist Egypt, publicly mulling revoking the peace accord, Hezbollah dominated-Lebanon; imploding Yemen; unstable Libya; Tunisia, slipping ever-closer to a Shari’a-compliant society; Algeria increasingly menaced by al-Qaida affiliates in the south...

What possible significance – or durability – could “normal relations” have with a group of such inherently inimical nations?

But I do not want to get bogged down in a discussion of the demonstrably deadly defects of the API. What I would like to focus on is how to comprehend your public support for it in light of your clearly stated repudiation of its core elements in the past – and the emerging realities that appear only to reinforce the validity of that repudiation.

At the outset, I must point out that none of the following citations can be dismissed as a mere slip of the tongue, misrepresenting the views that you once held. For they all come from books written by you and in which you clearly invested considerable thought in formulating.

The one is a volume, available only in Hebrew, titled *Tomorrow is Now* (K’Et Machar) written in 1978, long before “the extremist settler movement” had acquired much prominence in Israeli society. The book is based on an interview with a preeminent journalist of the time, the late Haggai Eshed, and sets out your vision for the future of the nation and the programmatic prescriptions by which this was to be attained.

The other is the much-publicized *The New Middle East*, which was published in 1993, the very year the Oslo Accords were concluded, and in

which you once again lay out your vision – this time for the region.

In them, you articulate your positions on a range of topics very relevant for the API, and your reasons for these positions – which I should now like to present to you.

In *Tomorrow is Now* you warned sternly – and as it turns out, accurately – of the realities liable to emerge should Israel accept the idea of a Palestinian state: “The establishment of such state means the inflow of combat-ready Palestinian forces (more than 25,000 men under arms) into Judea and Samaria; this force, together with the local youth, will double itself in a short time.

“It will not be short of weapons... and in a short space of time, an infrastructure for waging war will be set up in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Israel will have problems in preserving day-to-day security, which may drive the country into war, or undermine the morale of its citizens. In time of war, the frontiers of the Palestinian state will constitute an excellent staging point for mobile forces to mount attacks on infrastructure installations vital for Israel’s existence, impede the freedom of action of the Israeli air force, and cause bloodshed among the population... adjacent to the frontier line.” p. 232

You cautioned: “If a Palestinian state is established, it will be armed to the teeth. Within it there will be bases of the most extreme terrorist forces, equipped with antitank and anti-aircraft shoulder-launched rockets, endangering not only random passersby, but also every airplane and helicopter taking off in the skies of Israel and every vehicle traveling along the major traffic routes in the Coastal Plain”. p.255

Given the precedents of previous withdrawals, can you honestly say that in today’s realities, if the IDF were to evacuate Judea-Samaria and abandon the Golan – as the API dictates – these dangers would be in any way been significantly reduced?

You astutely refuted the two-state-compliant myth that modern weaponry has reduced the strategic importance of territory, arguing that in fact enhanced firepower, mobility and range increase this importance: “In 1948, it may have been possible to defend the ‘thin waist’ of Israel’s most densely populated area, when the most formidable weapon used by both sides was the cannon of limited mobility and limited firepower... [However], with the development of the rapid mobility of armies, the defensive importance of territorial expanse has increased... Without a border which affords security, a country is doomed to destruction...” p. 235, 254

You cautioned soberly: “It is of course doubtful whether territorial expanse can provide absolute deterrence. However, the lack of minimal territorial expanse places a country in a position of an absolute lack of deterrence. This in itself constitutes almost compulsive temptation to attack Israel from all directions...” p. 255

You somewhat denigratingly dismissed placing any store on agreements with the Arabs or on demilitarization arrangements with them, remarking: “The major issue is not [attaining] an agreement, but ensuring the actual implementation of the agreement in practice. The number of agreements which the Arabs have violated is no less than number which they have kept.” p. 255

The same skepticism as to the value of any accords on demilitarization is reflected, a decade and a half later, in your “*The New Middle East*” where you warn: “Even if the Palestinians agree that their state have no army or weapons, who can guarantee that a Palestinian army would not be mustered later to encamp at the gates of Jerusalem and the approaches to the lowlands? And if the Palestinian state would be unarmed, how would it block terrorist acts perpetrated by extremists, fundamentalists or irredentists?” p. 169

How indeed?

But perhaps the most astounding of all is your stance on the issue of “settlements” and the imperative you saw for their development.

You urged Israel “to create a continuous stretch of new settlements; to bolster Jerusalem and the surrounding hills, from the north, from the east, and from the south and from the west, by means of the establishment of townships, suburbs and villages – Ma’aleh Adumin, Ofra, Giló, Beit El, Givon... – to ensure that the capital and its flanks are secured, and underpinned by urban and rural settlements. These settlements will be connected to the Coastal Plain and Jordan Valley by new lateral axis roads; the settlements along the Jordan River are intended to establish the Jordan River as the de facto security border; however it is the settlements on the western slopes of the hills of Samaria and Judea which will deliver

us from the curse of Israel's 'narrow waist'... the purpose of the settlements in the Golan is to ensure that this territorial platform will no longer constitute a danger, but a barrier against a surprise attack..." p. 48

These are not the exhortations of a wild-eyed, bearded radical rabbi, or scruffy hilltop youth. They are yours. Now, what are those who heeded your call to "deliver us from the curse of Israel's 'narrow waist'" to think?

Of course, the breathtaking gap between your previous and present positions cannot be explained by the meaningless, mendacious mantra of "change."

For while it is certainly true that there have been far-reaching changes in the region over the past three-and-half decades, these changes – especially the more recent ones – serve only to underscore the validity of your former views, and to undermine that of your current ones.

It is precisely because of the changes that have raged across the region that your Amman speech came across as so absurdly Kafkaesque, so detached from reality, so shamelessly cynical.

Surely it is time for Israeli taxpayers (and voters) to demand an end to such capricious conduct of our foreign affairs – or at least, a convincing explanation for it. Other than "change," of course.

Kindly consider this an urgent request to do so. (Jerusalem Post May 30)

President's National Fund By Michael Teplitsky

An old Hasidic tale tells of a man who came to a tzaddik with a complaint. "All my life," he said, "I have tried to follow the advice of the rabbis that one who runs away from fame will find that fame pursues him, and yet while I run away from fame, fame never seems to pursue me."

The tzaddik replied: "The trouble is that while you do run away from fame, you are always looking over your shoulder to see if fame is chasing after you."

Half a million dollars for a 45-minute speech, or about \$11,000 per minute; the sum paid a year in advance to the fund of former US president, Bill Clinton, for a speech he is supposed to deliver at an event in honor of President Shimon Peres' 90th birthday, to be held in two weeks at the Peres Academic Center.

An op-ed by former politician Yossi Sarid, in Haaretz, sparked a lively public debate after it claimed the event was organized and funded by the Jewish National Fund. After several conflicting statements by both organizations, it now seems the event was funded mutually by the JNF and the Peres Academic Center, even though it is not clear who was the main sponsor.

The JNF was established as an organization aimed to acquire lands for the Jewish people. Its founder Theodor Herzl has stated that "the fund shall be the property of the Jewish people as a whole." Lately, the fund focuses more on environment and sustainability. It is not clear what President Peres' birthday has to do with JNF's objectives.

The fund responded that their linkage to the event was the fact that during the same week the organization will be hosting its global conference. Moreover, it claimed the event was organized by the PAC.

However, they did not deny co-sponsoring the event, and stated that the JNF does not receive funds from the Israeli government.

Maybe so, but it still raises money on behalf of the Israeli people. Not to mention the fact that the JNF has a constant deficit, which according to the most recent forecasts is expected to reach NIS 1.7 billion in a few years.

It is important to note that Clinton did previously raise \$2m. for a JNF project, but would that justify paying Clinton a "wage" equal to even a quarter of the raised amount? Another claim might be that the money goes to his foundation, not into his pocket. Of course, this is true, but does it mean that these two organizations may transfer money to charities around the world (as important as they may be) without any report or approval? At this point, we must raise the question of why the JNF should pay for what seems as the "panem et circenses" of the president? And are the JNF's explanations sufficient? Two weeks from now, the cult of personality around the president will reach its peak at the event organized on his behalf. Mr. Peres is indeed a renowned personality whose contribution to Israel cannot be exaggerated.

However one cannot help but wondering why is he the only president in the western world to have an academic institution named after him while he's still alive? The Clinton-JNF-Peres issue should raise a number of questions regarding the conduct of public organizations (such as the JNF)

and what they do with public funds, allegedly on behalf of the public. The Israeli public and JNF's donors deserve answers to those questions.

More importantly, the public has the right to know how public funds are being spent on behalf of Israel's first citizen. Peres' birthday is estimated to cost millions of dollars, most of which will come out of the taxpayers' pocket (directly and indirectly). The issue of expenditures of public funds for private purposes by government officials, recently in the headlines in Israel, has not involved Peres so far. Hopefully, this time, the media and the organizations promoting good governance will not be able to turn a blind eye to those facts. (Jerusalem Post Jun 3)

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Labeling Settler Goods Misses the Mark By David Benjamin

We were informed this week of Germany's decision to back EU labeling of products from Israeli settlements in the West Bank so as to distinguish them from Israeli goods produced within the pre-1967 armistice lines. The labeling has been touted by European officials as a "service" to the consumer. Apparently, the idea is to enable consumers to boycott produce from the said areas if their conscience so dictates. This assumes that products originating in the territories are somehow legally or morally tainted. Is this assumption true? Does one have to be a supporter of the settlements to view such boycotts as wrong-minded?

Advocates of the boycott put forward three main arguments for refusing to buy goods from the settlements: The first is that settlements are illegal under international law, namely Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying power from transferring its own population into occupied territory. The second is that settlement industries unfairly or unlawfully exploit the human or natural resources of the "occupied territory." The third is that Jewish settlements in the territories are an obstacle to the implementation of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Regardless of the merits of the above propositions, none are relevant to the question of whether it is acceptable to buy goods produced in the territories.

As far as international law is concerned, while settling in occupied territory may be problematic (this is itself hotly disputed, as is the question of whether Judea and Samaria are even "occupied" in the first place), there are no prohibitions whatsoever on economic activities such as investing in occupied territories or running a business there. Certainly there are no restrictions on providing gainful employment to the local residents. Far from being prejudicial to the people living under occupation, such activities contribute positively to the economy of the area.

What about the argument that these businesses should be boycotted because they benefit the settlers? The problem here is that the people running these enterprises or profiting from them are not necessarily settlers. The reality is that many of these businesses are owned or run by people who live inside the Green Line. This is not surprising, since most settlements are within a ten or twenty minute drive from major population centers in Israel proper. Moreover, these businesses frequently employ Palestinian residents of the territories who will lose their source of livelihood if their employers are forced to relocate.

As for the complaints about unfair or illegal exploitation: This is neither an inherent nor necessary feature of such enterprises. That certain businesses may be accused of such exploitation does not justify a blanket penalty aimed at everyone.

About the claim that settlements are an obstacle to peace, this too has nothing to do with the factories, farms and other businesses located in the territories. If anything, these enterprises are conducive to peace, since in addition to providing employment opportunities for Palestinians and contributing to the local economy, they provide islands of normal interaction and goodwill between Israelis and Palestinians. They also have the potential to be building blocks of a future independent Palestinian economy.

For those who want a speedy and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian impasse, boycotting products from the few locations that actually give hope for future coexistence hardly seems the way to go.

The writer is an Israel-based attorney specializing in international law, the law of armed conflict and counterterrorism. (Israel Hayom Jun 5)