

The Other Israel

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Content:

Adam Keller on: Paradoxes in the media; Nuri el-Okbi Saga; Tombs and heritage; The turtle and the hare, p.1-7 // Action reports, p 8-11: Against the wall by: Sebastian Rodriguez - Roy Wagner - Shy Halatzi; Sheikh Jarrah mass demo, by Gush Shalom // Gershon Baskin on witch hunt p.11-13 // Arik Diamant and David Zonsheine on Talking to Hamas p.13-14 // Eyal Megged on Blind Love p.15// Uri Avnery, p.16-19, on Bad Timing (and worse matters) // Sol Salbe. p. 19, on whether Netanyahu-Obama crisis is maybe serious // Aluf Benn, p.20-22 Netanyahu must choose

Crazy Country the blog of Adam Keller

Heroism and education

March 13

Shlomo Ben Yosef, a member of the Irgun underground, was executed by the British Mandatory authorities in 1938 after being caught while on his way to attack a civilian bus and killing indiscriminately its Arab passengers. This week the Minister of Education distributed prizes to students who filed dozens of papers about Shlomo Ben Yosef and his fellow militants who were also executed.

Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar said at the ceremony that integrating the tale of Those Who Ascended the Gallows into the educational curriculum is a good way of instilling values which youths should seek to emulate, strengthening their affinity to their country and their national heritage: "We have chosen to mark the story of Those Who Ascended the Gallows through an educational process imparting both knowledge and an educational experience." The dozens of students who received the award from the Minister of Education in person were chosen from among 750 who prepared papers on the subject in schools throughout Israel, with the encouragement and assistance of their teachers and special resources made available by the educational system. .

Also this week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to establish a special team to monitor incitement in the Palestinian Authority. Its results will be published periodically in a special "Incitement Index", with the data published throughout the world by the government of Israel. One of the major issues which the team is to focus on will be

the ongoing incitement in Palestinian schoolbooks, in particular... the depiction of Palestinian terrorists who harmed Israelis as heroes.

An Independent Statutory authority

March 10

"You see, dear Mr. Vice President, the District Planning Committee is a statutory authority, which takes its decisions completely independently. I myself, as the Prime Minister, don't even know what is on their agenda. It just happened that exactly today they took the decision to build 1600 new housing units. There was no intention of affronting you. The same is also true for my right hand. It, too, is a statutory authority, which takes its own independent decisions. Just now it took the decision to slap your face, right in the middle of the festive ceremony..."

An Exact Quotation

"There is no such thing as a good timing for building in East Jerusalem," said Minister Benny Begin. "It does not really matter at what time we announce plans for a new construction. Whenever we do announce it, there will be an immediate outcry all over the world and Israel will be blamed for destroying peace."

So far, quite right.

The Nuri el-Okbi saga

The obsessive trespasser

March 7

Nuri el-Okbi was nine years old in 1951, when he was expelled from the home where he was born at el-Arakib, north-east of Be'er Sheva.

The state representatives promised Nuri's father, Sheikh Salman el-Okbi, that the tribespeople have to leave their homes only for half a year, because "the land is needed for military maneuvers" and that afterwards they could come back. The promise was not kept. Sheikh Salman el-Okbi tried in 1956 to go back to his land and was immediately arrested and expelled again. While the el-Okbi tribespeople were living in poverty at Al-Hora, to which they were brought on trucks, the authorities initiated the judicial procedures to confiscate their land and register it as State Lands. According to the "real-estate-purchase law" passed by the Knesset in 1953, the State of Israel purchased all the lands of the el-Okbi tribe at a bargain price of zero Israeli Pounds and zero Agurot. Nobody bothered to inform the tribespeople of this nice deal. They found out about it only by accident, and only many years later.

Nuri el-Okbi spent his life in the struggle for his tribes people and for the Bedouins in general. He founded the "Association for the Defence of Bedouin Rights in Israel" in the 1960s, at a time that hardly anybody knew of such a problem, and Bedouins were usually thought of as exotic and friendly ornaments of the desert.

Ten years ago, there came up the possibility that the government of Israel will allow the el-Okbis to get back to at least part of their land. It came up - and immediately went down again.

In 2004, then Minister of Housing Effi Etam took care to create on the land - in a semi-military fact-creation operation in the middle of the night - a community for Jews only, known as "Giv'ot Bar" (Wild Hills).

In April 2006, Nuri el-Okbi arrived at the lands of el-Arakib - facing the perimeter fences of Giv'ot Bar, not far from the ruins of the house where he grew up - and erected there a tent. From then until last week he lived alone in this tent - day and night, winter and summer, ceaselessly demanding that he and his tribe be allowed to go back to the land.

Sometimes friends came from all over the country and also visitors from abroad, to encourage and support him. At other times there came less friendly visitors on behalf of the authorities - police and the Jewish National Fund and the so-called Green Patrol. Many times they destroyed the tent - and Nuri lived under the open sky until he acquired a new tent. Many times he was detained - but when released he went back to the land. Several times he was beaten and needed medical treatment - and also that did not intimidate him.

Last week Nuri el-Okbi was detained again - but this time he was left behind bars and there was presented against him a charge sheet. A very, very long and extremely detailed charge sheet, 22 pages with no less than 40 charges, divided into dozens of sub-charges. Again and again the charge sheet notes that "the accused did trespass by entering real estate which is state land, and stayed in it and held on to it without the slightest shred of a right.

This crime was committed by Nuri el-Okbi in the year 2006, and also in the year 2007, and again in 2008, and in 2009, and in 2010, in every month of everyone of these years, on dozens of dates which are carefully and meticulously noted down in the charge sheet. The prosecution has the names of eye-witnesses, no less than fifty of them, who are able to truly testify that indeed Nuri el-Okbi persisted day by day in his trespassing and also confronted the bulldozers which the Jewish National Fund sent to flatten the land of his father, preventing them from continuing to work and thus disturbing public workers in fulfilling their job, and he also annoyed the public workers and threatened them and in one case even attacked them (one man with not more than his bare hands, aged nearly 70, in face of five young and strong public employees...).

In every article of the charge sheet the state takes care to note and remark again that Nuri el-Okbi has "not a shred of a right over the land". Literally, the term used in rather poetical Hebrew reads "not a mote of dust of a right". Indeed, it was all crushed to dust and blown by the wind.

Winston Churchill and the Be'er Sheba District Court

Nuri el-Okbi continued -March 10

Last week, Nuri el-Okbi was held in the detention cell in the basement of Be'er Sheba's Hall of Justice, and the police demanded that he be remanded in custody until the end of judicial proceedings which might last for months or years – on charges of "trespassing". This week he sat, free, in the hall of Justice Sarah Dovrat, on the sixth floor of the same building – in the civil proceedings where he demands of the state to recognize that in the lands of Al-Arakib he is not "a trespasser" but the owner.

Adv. Rawash (for the state): In 1921, at the beginning of the Mandate, the British Government enacted the "Dead Lands Ordinance" and gave Bedouins two months to come up and register at the Land Registration Office their ownership of lands which they claimed. Hardly any Bedouin did that. They can't come up with ownership claims now.

Yiftahel: This is the common judicial argument under which the Bedouin claims of land ownership are rejected. But it ignores salient facts.

On March 29, 1921 – before the expiration of that two-month period – a delegation of Beduin Sheiks went to Jerusalem, to confer with Winston Churchill, at the time the British Secretary of State for the Colonies. In the official concluding statement, which I located at the Public Records Office in London, the Sheiks declared their loyalty to His Majesty's Government, while Churchill confirmed an earlier promise by High Commissioner Herbert Samuel, that "The special rights and customs of the Bedouin Tribes of Be'er Sheba will not be interfered with".

Subsequently, the British Mandatory Government excluded the Be'er Sheba District from the application of the new land law, absolving Bedouin inhabitants from the duty of registering their land. Instead, a Tribal Court was set up in Be'er Sheba, which remained active throughout the Mandate period. Cases of land dispute were usually settled by a bench of three Sheiks, in accordance with Bedouin Tribal Law.

The British recognized the Bedouins' ownership over the land. Whoever did want to register their land at the Land Registration Office was free to do so throughout the time of British rule, and 64,000 dunams of Bedouin lands were indeed registered. However, those who registered their land were usually those who wanted to sell it to non-Bedouins (including Jews). In order to continue holding the land, or to let sons inherit it, or to sell to other Bedouin, there was no need to have recourse to the governmental Land Registry Office. For such purposes, the traditional Bedouin tribal law was quite adequate. The assertion that Bedouin families or tribes which had not registered their land ownership in 1921 have "missed the train" and lost title to the land was never heard before 1948. This is not a British law, but an original Israeli judicial argument giving the British law a new interpretation which the British themselves never advanced.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is well-known for his admiration of Winston Churchill and for aspiring to emulate that British statesman. But Netanyahu might not be

quite familiar with Churchill's acts on March 1921...

Tombs and heritage

February 27

"We have to appeal to the Christians throughout the world. They know the Bible, they know that our Fathers and Mothers are really buried at the Cave of the Machpela in Hebron" was how Minister Gilad Arden of the Likud Party put it in a radio interview yesterday.

Indeed, the story in the Book of Genesis is well-known to anybody who reads the Bible. The death of Sarah, the wife of the Patriarch Abraham, and how he bought a piece of land in which to bury – all the while treating the inhabitants of Hebron in his time with great respect and courtesy (in marked contrast to the behavior of present-day Israeli settlers in Hebron, who daily invoke Abraham's name).

Is this story a historical fact? And even if it is, does the grave which Abraham dug for his wife truly lie under the structure in the Palestinian city of Hebron, called "The Cave of the Machpela" by Jews "The Ibrahimi Mosque" by Muslims? And is Abraham's son Isaac the one who is buried there at his side – the ancestor of the Jews according to Jewish tradition? Or is it Abraham's son Ismael, ancestor of the Arabs and the Muslims according to Arab and Muslim tradition? Or were completely different people buried there, hundreds or thousands of years later?

Perhaps, once upon a time historians and archaeologists would be able to provide a reliable and authoritative answer. In fact, it does not really matter. Traditions and myths, religious or nationalist, have their own power, only very loosely connected with objective facts.

There is no doubt that for centuries the Cave of the Machpela in Hebron (as well as Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem) constituted part of a genuine Jewish heritage, which was passed on from generation to generation. There was no need of a cabinet determining a "List of National Heritage Sites" nor of an army of occupation to conquer the Heritage Sites and control them and fortify them. That was a long time ago.

During forty two years of occupation, the Cave of the Machpela has become the "heritage" of rampaging settlers, the very symbol and emblem of wild nationalism and national insanity. On February 25, 1996 – exactly sixteen years ago – settler Baruch Goldstein turned the Cave of the Machpela into a field of carnage. Many of the Hebron settlers regard Goldstein as a hero whose act deserves respect and admiration – and also emulation.

During forty two years of occupation, the Cave of the Machpela has become a place which only the settlers and their friends have any wish of visiting. Ordinary Israelis would much rather board a plane and reach within a few hours the tourist sites in Thailand and South America.

Tombs and heritage (2)

The story of Jakob and Rachel is one of the oldest love stories known to human culture. The story of how they had to wait fourteen years before being able to consummate their love, and of how Rachel died in childbirth and was buried at the roadside, is touching and poignant – regardless of whether or not it really happened and if Rachel is truly buried under the structure in the city of Bethlehem which bears the name "Rachel's Tomb".

When the picture of Rachel's Tomb appeared on stamps published by the British Mandate, nobody opposed it and nobody protested. On the contrary, the British chose this picture especially in order to have a site acceptable to all of His Majesty's subjects in this country, Jews and Arabs alike. Rachel's Tomb had been, for hundreds of years, one of this country's symbols, part of the heritage of all its inhabitants. Some people still remember the days when Jewish and Arab women alike went on pilgrimage to Rachel's Tomb and prayed there, side by side.

Rachel's Tomb, that beautiful and modest structure which appeared on stamps and also in various naïve and romantic paintings, no longer exists. Under the rule of the State of Israel it was replaced by an enormous concrete fortification, guarded day and night by a large military force – a threatening enclave penetrating into Palestinian Bethlehem.

It is this location, as well as the Cave of the Machpela, that the government of Israel proclaimed to be "National Heritage Sites", which are to be "rebuilt" and "reconstructed" at considerable expense for the state treasury. PM Netanyahu utterly fails to understand why this decision precipitated such a big storm of protests: "We just wanted to connect the young Israeli generation to their historical roots in the soil of this country" he said. "The campaign conducted by the Palestinians in response to the cabinet decision is a hypocritical lie. The State of Israel is committed to freedom of religious worship for members of all religious denominations in all holy sites".

The Prime Minister has apparently not heard that soldiers guarding Rachel's Tomb were instructed not to admit any Palestinian into the compound, none whatsoever. Even an attempt to approach the entrance, surrounded by high walls and barbed wire, would involve a very real life danger for an inhabitant of Bethlehem.

Tombs and heritage (3)

"In the Galilee, in Tel Hai/Trumpeldor had fallen
For our country, for our people/Yosef
the Hero had fallen"

"Everywhere, at any moment/ Shall you remember me
For I did fight and I did fall/ For
the sake of my country"

In fact, the original intention of Netanyahu and his ministers was to focus on a myth from the nearer past – just ninety years, to be exact. In this case, there is no doubt, at least about the basic historical facts. The Battle of Tel Hai, between a Zionist pioneer militia headed by Yosef Trumpeldor and the inhabitants of the surrounding Arab villages, did

take place. A rather small affair, in comparison with the battles and wars which followed, but it was the first battle in the conflict, and it left behind an impressive myth, highly influential for generations afterwards.

During the 1960's, at my elementary school in Tel Aviv, I learned by heart the heroic Tel Hai songs, and I heard a lot of Yosef Trumpeldor and his famous last words "No matter, it is good to die for our country". Years later, the iconoclasts would assert that in fact his last words were a very pungent expression in Russian, his mother tongue (in fact, since Trumpeldor lay dying for several hours, he had time enough for both).

New generations arose, young people who thought that, rather than dying (and killing) for your country it might be preferable to live for its sake, achieve peace for its sake and that of its neighbors too. The Trumpeldor Myth was increasingly forgotten. Netanyahu now seems determined to take the myth out of its glass case in the museum, brush off the dust and present it with all its glory to the young generation of Israelis.

Can this work, even with the considerable government budgets earmarked for the purpose? Myths of this kind of myth are especially strong and effective among oppressed peoples, who still have no independent state of their own, who dream of liberty and struggle for it. Not so much for those who have a state for sixty years already, and spent most of it being occupiers.

The turtle and the hare

February 9

Once upon a time there were two friends, a hare and turtle, and they both joined the Jerusalem Police.

The swift hare was kept very busy in the police, all the time running here, there and everywhere. He was in Sheikh Jarrah, helping to expel Palestinian families and let settlers take over their homes and beating up any demonstrator who dared protest. And he went running to Shuafat, raiding and arresting in the late hours of the night and during the day confronting youths on the streets and spraying them with tear gas. A very very busy life he had, the swift police hare.

His friend the police turtle was given an important task: to approach the settlers in that illegal seven-floor house erected in the middle of Silwan, of telling them that they must at last obey the Supreme Court's ruling and get out of there. The turtle was given the eviction order, and he duly set out for Silwan – at a snail's pace, naturally. And get there he will. Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps next year, who can tell? You can't hurry up a turtle!

[end blog]

Action reports

Ma'asara

Sebastian Rodriguez <sebistr@hotmail.com>

- At Friday the 5th of February, the weekly demonstration in Ma'asara was held. Approximately 25 Palestinian, Israelis and international activists gathered at the village to protest against the Israeli occupation. In front of us a unit of reserve combined with a regular squad and 7 military jeeps. We were welcomed with a touch of cynicism and finger lifting from the troops, while we were singing and having speeches in Arabic and Hebrew. After 30 minutes we continued to Jeikh Jarrah with relative serenity which could have been much better if the army wasn't there.

Bil'in

Roy Wagner <rwagner@mta.ac.il>

[] Feb.5 - Just under 20 Israelis and 10 internationals joined a select bunch of Palestinians for the local weekly demonstration against the land annexation wall in Bil'in. The rain ceded, the clouds let a few rays of sun through, the almond trees were at full bloom, but that's as optimistic as it got. The demonstrators reached the fence gate, the army shot tear gas, the shabab tried to disperse the army with stones, and soon enough the demonstration was declared over. It was only after the last of the Shabab was already far along on the road leading back to the village that the army decided to invade, just to show they can. They did their show off excursion into the village, throwing gas and sound bombs directly at demonstrators' feet, and made a point of calling the demonstrators "Nazis". It did seem, however, that even some of the soldiers realized how stupid their commander's order were. Or maybe it's just my wishful thinking.

[] Despite attempts to follow activists from Tel Aviv and detain them at various checkpoints, 25 Israelis made it into Bil'in and joined some 10 international, several dozens of Palestinians and a bunch of 3D blue avatar characters for the weekly demonstration against the evil Israeli occupation. The demonstrators marched to the wall, where they were met with a shower of gas and shock grenades, which did not discriminate between blue, white and brown people. After the usual attempt to fight the occupation by delivering educational messages to soldiers, covering protesters' heads with scarves and plastic bags, and returning the army's unexploded gas canisters, the demonstration was dispersed by the organizers. For the first time in over a month the army did not send soldiers into the village during the demonstration. However, as in the previous week, the army did aim gas canisters directly at protesters after the demonstrations had been declared over and people were on their way back to the village. It seems that the army is determined to turn more demonstrators into martyrs, so please be careful next week.

[] Feb 19 - A complex logistic operation of the A.A. Wall travel agency brought over 300

people from Israel to Bil'in's 5th anniversary demonstration. Despite several attempts, the army managed to prevent only a small number of cars from entering the village. The demonstrators joined radical clowns, a Palestinian prime minister, the Ka/Ya-Samba percussionists, representatives of various Palestinian parties, The Palestinian Struggle Youth Union marching band, one mayor from Geneva, dozens of journalists and supporters from all over Palestine and other parts of the world to express solidarity with the local wo/men of Bil'in in their struggle against the evils of the Israeli Occupation. After a string of speeches in various languages and a jam session of the Palestinian marching band and the percussionists residing between the wall and the Mediterranean, over 1,000 people marched to the wall. The soldiers stood behind their usual post, and so the demonstrators broke forward, crossed the gate, bent the fence, crossed it, and marched over the soldiers' front post. After a few minutes of ecstasy, while dignitaries were still making their way forward, the army's foul water cannon made a surprise guest appearance, and managed to push the demonstrators back behind the fence. In a typical expression of oppression, after the demonstrators backed away from the smelly water, the army used a cannon to fire dozens of gas canisters - not into the few demonstrators at the front, but rather into the hundreds retreating or standing peacefully behind. The wind coming down the path combined with the panic of inexperienced demonstrators led to many injuries from gas inhalation, impact and falling. After the initial dispersal some demonstrators remained to absorb exceptionally large amounts of gas for the struggle. As has become customary lately, when the last demonstrators were on their way to the village, a few soldiers invaded the village, but due to the massive presence of supporters, they settled for one more round of gas, returning to bask in their own stench.

Beit Jalla

Report from Shy Halatzi shy.halatzi@gmail.com

[] March 3 - Already when driving on route 60, we saw the intimidating bulldozers riding on the side of the road on their way to another day of "putting facts on the ground" as chiefs of the Israeli government call it. As we arrived in Beit Jalla, a heart-breaking scene came into view - a huge pile of sawed trees and olive and lemon branches spread all across the yard of the house next to the wall's path. A yard it cannot really be called anymore - the grass is turned over, two children's swings were uprooted and put aside, and the only thing left standing is a brick oven, with mounds of dirt and mud all around it. 10 olive trees were cut down here already yesterday. A red X on the front floor of the house marks the path of the wall to pass here, which will seize the whole yard area and cut the only access driveway to it. It's hard to imagine how life would look like in this place in a week or two.

We were 45 protesters - 25 Palestinians, 15 international activists and 4 Israelis. We descended to the works path trying to stop the bulldozers. A group of twenty soldiers prevented us from doing so, and began pushing us up the hill without showing a closed military area order as they are required. While the bulldozer's claws were uprooting trees one after the other, we explained to the officers that their actions violate numerous international laws, as well as the fact that they may not tell us to move without the order.

We were pushed up the hill a few more meters to where we sat on the ground demanding to see a printed order before we move any further. At 08:53 they brought the papers and the officers declared the area will become a "closed military zone" within 7 minutes. One of them held two stun grenades with a nasty grin on his face. We reminded them again that constructing the wall on West Bank lands is a crime according to international law, as well as the settlers-only road which it "protects" and that they still may put down their guns and join us. A bearded IDF captain told us that the only law he follows is the biblical law. Rabbai Arik Ascherman referred him to to read the chapter in the book of Deuteronomy which refers to uprooting of fruit trees.

At 09:00 precisely they started pushing and dragging us up the hill again. 2 Israelis and one international activist were detained for a few minutes and were released shortly thereafter. Two Arab TV network reporters stationed on the upper road to report the events. Two young women from Beit Jalla were prominent among the protesters. As one of the officers told on of them them "Min fadlak, ruch min hon" (Please go away from here), she replied wisely "Min fadlak, ruch leIsrael" (Please, go back to Israel), with her finger pointing north-west.

When we left, the bulldozers were still working with all their might.

Tomorrow another group will go there.

“Thou Shalt Not Steal! Thou Shalt not Kill! Get Out Of Sheikh Jarrah!”

Gush Shalom website, report March 6 mass demo

This slogan coined by former Knesset Chairman Abraham Burg, a man with deep religious roots, well expresses the spirit of the demonstration that took place Saturday night (March 6) in East Jerusalem.

The protesters shouted in unison: “One-two, One-two / Jerusalem capital of Two States” and “Sheikh Jarrah, don’t despair / We shall overcome the Occupation!”

It was the largest peace demonstration in Jerusalem for a long time. More than 5000 protesters, Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians, filled the neighboring soccer field, where the demonstration took place according to the court order.

The Jerusalem police, tainted with racism, unwittingly contributed to the success of the protest. Its efforts to ban the protest altogether, or at least to exile it to a far-away spot, and the application submitted by the protesters to the Supreme Court, attracted wide attention and convinced many that they cannot stay away.

According to the court's proposal, the demonstration took place at the soccer field, but 300 protesters were allowed to march to the houses from which the Arab families were evicted so as to make room for the settlers.

The police called in large forces, which included elite units and mounted police officers, asserting that there was a danger of a clash between the protesters and the settlers. However, there was no violence.

The 300 marchers were headed by present and former Members of the Knesset. In the first row, present members Haim Oron and Dov Hinin marched with former members Uri Avnery, Mossi Raz and Naomi Hazan, the chairperson of the New Israel fund, which is now under a vicious attack by the extreme Right.

Accompanied by drumbeats, the marchers approached the "stolen" houses but were stopped a few yards from there by a line of policemen.

The Sheikh Jarrah protests, which started a few months ago with less than a hundred Jerusalemites, are getting larger and larger with every passing week. Together with the weekly demonstrations in Bil'in and Nia'lin, they are becoming the focus point of a new Left, headed by a new generation of young activists, side by side with the veterans.

A dark day for democracy

Gershon Baskin
Jerusalem Post, 09/02/2010

The witch hunt against Naomi Chazan, NIF is reminiscent of McCarthyism.

I have been a proud Jerusalem Post columnist since February 2005. I commended the paper for offering me a column knowing full well that I would not be particularly popular among its readership. Even when, after a year, the editor of the Post contacted me to explain that the financial crisis in the newspaper meant that it could no longer pay for my column, I requested to continue writing without any financial compensation. The paper never paid a significant amount anyway and I highly valued the opportunity to speak with a population that I have little access to and which has even less access to my worldview and political opinion.

The decision of the editors of The Jerusalem Post to have me as one of its columnists was

a merit of honor for the value of democracy and a sign that the newspaper was an exemplary example of free speech and open dialogue. The essence of democracy is the celebration of diversity and the commitment to defend the rights of those with whom you disagree to express themselves freely.

THE DECISION to cancel the column of Prof. Naomi Chazan, a worldwide respected academic, a former member of Knesset from the Zionist Meretz Party and currently the president of the New Israel Fund is a badge of shame on The Jerusalem Post. The posting of the Im Tirtzu advertisement with its explicit anti-Semitic motif of a caricature of Chazan with horns was dangerously anti-democratic. The witch-hunt against Chazan and the New Israel Fund is reminiscent of the darkest days of McCarthyism in the United States and similar to the atmosphere of states with secret police forces and dark dungeons. The Jerusalem Post should not have agreed to publish the advert of Im Tirtzu both because of its content and because of its format.

The media should be a watchdog for civil society protecting it from the arbitrary abuses of power of the state and its institutions. The media must be the defender of human rights, especially the right of free speech. When the media themselves cross the lines and become the limiter of free speech, they have committed a crime against their own values.

There has been a systematic attack against Israeli civil society organizations that defend human rights, that are in opposition to policies of the government, that support Palestinian rights and are opposed to the occupation of the Palestinian people and territories. These organizations are the clearest symbol of Israel's democracy. When Israel's human rights record is questioned in the West, clearly one of the greatest evidence of its democracy is the plurality of human rights organizations that work freely and have great access to the media.

NGO Monitor headed by Prof. Gerald Steinberg receives extremely wide exposure in this newspaper. I have tried to ascertain who provides its funding – who supports it and what is the agenda of the donors. The Im Tirtzu advertisements were funded, I have been told, by Evangelical Christians whose position on Jews, Judaism and the future of the Jewish people, according to their own tenets of faith scare the hell out of me.

Steinberg and NGO Monitor have called for full transparency and exposure of funding sources of civil society organizations that receive funds from foreign governments. I support this call. Now they are going after organizations that receive funding from the New Israel Fund – Jewish money from abroad mostly – which has a different agenda from the current right-wing religious government. NIF supports the rights of women, children, the poor, the disabled, the minorities, equality in education and services. NIF provides support for making Israel a healthier and a stronger society and country. I am in favor of full disclosure for all organizations that receive funds from NIF. By the way, my organization does not.

I am also in favor of full disclosure of the sources of funding of all civil society

organizations, including Im Tirtzu, NGO Monitor, El Ad, Ateret Kohanim and all of the other civil society organizations working on the right side of the political map. One standard for all – full disclosure and transparency of funding is what should be legislated by the Knesset.

As for The Jerusalem Post, it is not too late to rescind the decision to cancel Prof. Chazan`s column.

[The writer is the co-CEO of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (www.ipcri.org) and an elected member of the leadership of the Green Movement political party.]

Talk to Hamas

*Arik Diamant and David Zonsheine
The Guardian, Monday 15 February*

The Israeli media marked the one-year anniversary of Operation Cast Lead, the war on Gaza, almost as a celebration. The operation is recognised almost unanimously in Israel as a military triumph, a combat victory over one of Israel`s deadliest enemies: Hamas.

As combat soldiers of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), we have serious doubts about this conclusion, primarily because hardly any combat against Hamas took place during the operation. As soon as the operation started, Hamas went underground.

Most casualties were inflicted on Palestinians by air strikes, artillery fire, and snipers from afar. Combat victory? Shooting fish in a barrel is more like it. Operation Cast Lead consisted essentially of bombing one of the most crowded places on earth, striking civilian targets such as homes, schools and mosques, and ultimately leaving a trail of more than 1,300 casualties, mostly civilians, over 300 of whom were children. As soldiers of the IDF reserves, we bow our heads in shame against this hideous attack on a civilian population.

As for the goals of the operation, these too are questionable. Allegedly, operation Cast Lead was intended to stop the firing of missiles by Hamas. But the Qassam missile problem had been solved before the operation started. The ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel in place from 19 June 2008 had resulted in a drastic reduction of missiles fired from Gaza from a few hundreds per month to about a dozen for a period of five months. It was Israel that never lived up to its end of the bargain to end the siege of Gaza, breached the ceasefire in November 2008 by attacking targets in the Strip, essentially ignored Hamas`s proposal to renew the ceasefire, and eventually began operation Cast Lead a few weeks later.

The true goal of this operation was different from the one announced by Israeli officials. The real objective was not to stop the Qassams but to overthrow the Hamas government. As such, the operation failed. Hamas in Gaza is stronger than ever.

A year after this brutal war, a change of strategy is needed. Israel should commence immediate talks with Hamas, negotiating not only a ceasefire but also the `core issues` to be part of an end-of-conflict agreement. An open dialogue with Hamas is clearly in Israel's interest.

First, because Hamas was democratically elected in Gaza and has won the trust and respect of a significant part of the Palestinian people, anyone hoping to resolve this conflict will eventually need to bargain with the group.

Second, Hamas has proven capable of delivering peace and quiet to the citizens of southern Israel. As demonstrated before, Hamas has a strong hold on all organisations acting in Gaza and can enforce a truce.

Third, a prisoner exchange deal is our only chance to bring back the abducted IDF soldier, Gilad Shalit. In return, Israel will release hundreds of Hamas prisoners, out of the 8,000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Such a deal can have a pacifying influence on public opinion both in Israel and in Palestine and can be an important step towards reconciliation between the two peoples.

Hamas is currently Israel's enemy, but peace is made with enemies, not with friends. Hamas is also a powerful, pragmatic and well organised movement, possibly a future partner with whom Israel can `cut a deal`. A reluctance to recognise Hamas as the party in charge in Gaza is a strategy that failed and needs to be replaced. A nation that is truly looking for peace cannot afford to ignore its partners.

- Arik Diamant and David Zonsheine are the founders of Courage to Refuse, a movement of Israeli reserve soldiers who refuse to serve in the occupied territories. In November 2009 they launched an initiative calling Israel to open a dialogue with Hamas

Our love is blind

Eyal Megged, Y(ediot) Net News: 03.08.10

Anyone who talks about Jerusalem knows that just talking about it may prompt some kind of outburst. Hence, one needs to be cautious not only when moving a stone in Jerusalem, but even when writing about it.

We must not forget that we took over Jerusalem out of love. Yet love is blind – and since June 1967 we have been blind. Blind to the fact that half of Jerusalem is an Arab city.

Personally, I would not continue living in Jerusalem unless half of it was Arab. I deeply love the Arab city. The Arab Jerusalem is the city I love most in the world. Before the Six-Day War, the Arab Jerusalem was as far away as the moon. We never imagined we would ever set foot in it. Yet the miracle happened and we were overjoyed.

To this day, when I arrive in east Jerusalem, at least twice a week – whether to the Old City or to the city outside the ancient walls – it looks unbelievable. This city is the Levant, Arabia, the big world outside, and it's a walking distance from my home; a sort of Damascus, or Amman, or Baghdad. I love wandering through it, eating there, and getting lost in the crowd. It is a hospitable Arab town that usually welcomes guests. When there are no riots, it's a city taken out of A Thousand and One Nights.

Divide city equally

Yet we must keep in mind that this city is not part of the Jewish people's eternal capital, but rather, an Arab city. It's home to an Arab population and looks and is managed in line with their character and lifestyle. Our attempts to change this reality by words or declarations are pathetic, hollow, delusional and ridiculous, not to mention disastrous.

The forced park in Silwan, the aggressive settlement in Sheikh Jarrah, and the yeshivas set up in the Muslim quarter for spite will not Judaize the city, but rather, the other way around – they will boost the Arab determination to resist us and maintain the city's Arab character.

Archeological parks in both parts of the capital, yeshivas in the Old City, and Jewish life in Arab neighborhoods will only be made possible after we agree to divide Jerusalem equally. Recognizing the Arab religious and political aspirations in Jerusalem will not weaken us, but rather, strengthen us. It will prove that we are strong and realistic and that we seek true peace. Jerusalem's mayor doesn't understand it, and what's worse, the prime minister doesn't get it yet.

As noted above, we are in love, and those who are in love are not only blind – they also refuse to share their loved one. But what can you do when this loved one's heart also belongs to someone else?

A Matter of Timing

Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom website, 13/03/10

SOME WEEKS the news is dominated by a single word. This week's word was "timing".

It's all a matter of timing. The Government of Israel has insulted the Vice President of the United States, Joe Biden, one of the greatest "friends" of Israel (meaning: somebody totally subservient to AIPAC) and spat in the face of President Barack Obama. So what? It's all a matter of timing.

If the government had announced the building of 1600 new housing units in East Jerusalem a day earlier, it would have been OK. If it had announced it three days later, it would have been wonderful. But doing it exactly when Joe Biden was about to have dinner with Bibi and Sarah'le – that was really bad timing.

The matter itself is not important. Another thousand housing units in East Jerusalem, or 10 thousand, or 100 thousand – what different does it make? The only thing that matters is the timing.

As the Frenchman said: It's worse than criminal, it's stupid.

THE WORD "stupid" also figured prominently this week, second only to "timing".

Stupidity is an accepted phenomenon in politics. I would almost say: to succeed in politics, one needs a measure of stupidity. Voters don't like politicians who are too intelligent. They make them feel inferior. A foolish politician, on the other hand, appears to be "one of the folks".

History is full of acts of folly by politicians. Many books have been written about this. To my mind, the epitome of foolishness was achieved by the events that led to World War I, with its millions of victims, which broke out because of the accumulated stupidity of (in ascending order) Austrian, Russian, German, French and British politicians.

But even stupidity in politics has its limits. I have pondered this question for decades, and who knows, one day, when I grow up, I might write a doctoral thesis about it.

My thesis goes like this: In politics (as in other fields) foolish things happen regularly. But some of them are stopped in time, before they can lead to disaster, while others are not. It is accidental, or is there a rule?

My answer is: there certainly is a rule. It works like this: when somebody sets in motion an act of folly that runs counter to the spirit of the regime, it is stopped in its tracks. While it moves from one bureaucrat to another, somebody starts to wonder. Just a moment, this cannot be right! It is referred to higher authority, and soon enough somebody decides that it is a mistake.

On the other hand, when the act of folly is in line with the spirit of the regime, there are no brakes. When it moves from one bureaucrat to the next, it looks quite natural to both. No red light. No alarm bell. And so the folly rolls on to the bitter end.

I remember how this rule came to my mind the first time. In 1965, Habib Bourguiba, the president of Tunisia, took a bold step: he made a speech in the biggest refugee camp in Jericho, then under Jordanian rule, and called upon the Arabs to recognize Israel. This caused a huge scandal all over the Arab world.

Some time later, the correspondent of an Israeli paper reported that in a press conference at the UN headquarters, Bourguiba had called for the destruction of Israel. This sounded strange to me. I made inquiries, checked the protocol and found out that the opposite was true: the reporter had mistakenly turned a no into a yes.

How did this happen? If the journalist had erred in the opposite direction and reported, for example, that Gamal Abd-el-Nasser had called for the acceptance of Israel into the Arab League, the news would have been stopped at once. Every red light would have lit up. Someone would have called out: Hey, something strange here! Check again! But in the Bourguiba case nobody noticed the mistake, for what is more natural than an Arab leader calling for the destruction of Israel? No verification needed.

That's what happened this week in Jerusalem. Every government official knows that the nationalist Prime Minister is pushing for the Judaization of East Jerusalem, that the extreme nationalist Minister of the Interior is even more eager, and that the super-nationalist Mayor of Jerusalem practically salivates when he imagines a Jewish quarter on the Temple Mount. So why should a bureaucrat postpone the confirmation of a new Jewish neighborhood in East Jerusalem? Just because of the visit of some American windbag?

Therefore, the timing is not important. It's the matter itself that's important.

DURING HIS last days in office, President Bill Clinton published a peace plan, in which he tried to make up for eight years of failure in this region and kowtowing to successive Israeli governments. The plan was comparatively reasonable, but included a ticking bomb.

About East Jerusalem, Clinton proposed that what is Jewish should be joined to the State of Israel and what is Arab should be joined to the state of Palestine. He assumed (rightly, I believe) that Yasser Arafat was ready for such a compromise, which would have joined some new Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem to Israel. But Clinton was not wise enough to foresee the consequences of his proposal.

In practice, it was an open invitation to the Israeli government to speed up the establishment of new settlements in East Jerusalem, expecting them to become part of Israel. And indeed, since then successive Israeli governments have invested all available resources in this endeavor. Since money has no smell, every Jewish casino-owner in America and every Jewish brothel-keeper in Europe was invited to join the effort. The Biblical injunction – “Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the Lord thy God, for any vow; for even both these are abomination unto the

Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 23:18) – was suspended for this holy cause.

Now the pace is speeded up even more. Because there is no more effective means of obstructing peace than building new settlements in East Jerusalem.

THAT IS clear to anyone who has dealings with this region. No peace without an independent Palestinian state, no Palestinian state without East Jerusalem. About this there is total unanimity among all Palestinians, from Fatah to Hamas, and between all Arabs, from Morocco to Iraq, and between all Muslims, from Nigeria to Iran.

There will be no peace without the Palestinian flag waving above the Haram al-Sharif, the holy shrines of Islam which we call the Temple Mount. That is an iron-clad rule. Arabs can compromise about the refugee problem, painful as it may be, and about the borders, also with much pain, and about security matters. But they cannot compromise about East Jerusalem becoming the capital of Palestine. All national and religious passions converge here.

Anyone who wants to wreck any chance for peace – it is here that he has to act. The settlers and their supporters, who know that any peace agreement would include the elimination of (at least) most settlements, have planned in the past (and probably are planning now) to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount, hoping that this would cause a worldwide conflagration which would reduce to ashes the chances of peace once and for all. Less extreme people dream about the creeping ethnic cleansing of East Jerusalem by administrative chicanery, demolition of houses, denying means of livelihood and just making life in general miserable for Arabs. Moderate rightists just want to cover every empty square inch in East Jerusalem with Jewish neighborhoods. The aim is always the same.

THIS REALITY is, of course, well known to Obama and his advisors. In the beginning they believed, in their innocence, that they could sweet talk Netanyahu and Co. into stopping the building activity to facilitate the start of negotiations for the two-state solution. Very soon they learned that this was impossible without exerting massive pressure – and they were not prepared to do that.

After putting up a short and pitiful struggle, Obama gave in. He agreed to the deception of a “settlement freeze” in the West Bank. Now building is going on there with great enthusiasm, and the settlers are satisfied. They have completely stopped their demonstrations.

In Jerusalem there was not even a farcical attempt – Netanyahu just told Obama that he would go on building there (“as in Tel Aviv”), and Obama bowed his head. When Israeli officials announced a grandiose plan for building in “Ramat Shlomo” this week, they did not violate any undertaking. Only the matter of “timing” remained.

FOR JOE BIDEN, it was a matter of honor. For Mahmoud Abbas, it is a matter of survival.

Under intense pressure from the Americans and their agents, the rulers of the Arab countries, Abbas was obliged to agree to negotiations with the Netanyahu government –

though only “proximity talks”, a euphemism for “distance talks”.

Clearly, nothing will come out of these talks except more humiliation for the Palestinians. Quite simply: anyone building in East Jerusalem and the West Bank is announcing in advance that there is no chance for an agreement. After all, no sane Israeli would invest billions in a territory he intends to turn over to the Palestinian state. A person who is eating a pizza is not negotiating about it in good faith.

Even at this late stage, Abbas and his people still hope that something good will come out of all this: the US will acknowledge that they are right and exert, at long last, real pressure on Israel to implement the two-state solution.

But Biden and Obama did not give much cause for hope. They wiped the spit off their faces and smiled politely.

As the saying goes: when you spit in the face of a weakling, he pretends that it is raining. Does this apply to the president of the most powerful country in the world?

[What was published after this appeared gives some hope that the answer to Avnery's last question is No]

`Crisis` in US-Israel relations: is it different this time?

By: Sol Salbe

Middle East News Service (Melbourne, Australia)

14 March 2010

This sounds like a story that we have read before (and on more than one occasion): A crisis between Israel and United States. The US is finally putting its foot down and reminding Israel just who is the superpower with the economic and political power. And we have also got used to the next part: Israel using the power of its friends in the Congress to overrule the US administration which quickly folds up. But like in the story of the boy who cried wolf there finally comes a time when the real wolf does appear, and the story changes direction. The indications are that this time it is a real crisis. Let me make it clear that I do not believe that it has much to do with Barack Obama's personality, skin colour, or political views. It is simply that the sum total of the Global Financial Crisis, Bush's disastrous policies in Iraq and Afghanistan mean that the US needs to offer something to the Iran and Arab regimes. The Obama administration needs a success on the Palestinian front and Eli Yishai's timing with the 1600-housing-units announcement has given them an opening. It has at least 20 years since the US sounded

so tough. Of course one should not count the chickens till they are hatched but a story does need a watching brief. In the meantime I strongly urge you to get a feel for the changes by reading Aluf Benn's article, 'Netanyahu must choose between ideology and US support'

Netanyahu must choose between ideology and U.S. support

By Aluf Benn

Ha'aretz. March 14

A widely predicted crisis between Israel and the United States upon Benjamin Netanyahu taking office as prime minister finally erupted this weekend.

U.S. President Barack Obama did not hold back in condemning the humiliation caused to Joe Biden with the Israeli announcement of 1,600 new housing units in East Jerusalem during what was supposed to be the vice president's friendly visit to Israel.

Instead of accepting Netanyahu's partial apology and letting bygones be bygones, Obama issued a stern warning to the Israeli prime minister and is now demanding that he take "specific actions" to show he is "committed" to the U.S.-Israel relationship and to the peace process itself.

Washington did not reveal the contents of the ultimatum or the list of demands reportedly presented to Netanyahu. Those conditions, however, could undermine the prime minister's coalition ties to hard-line right-wing parties like Yisrael Beiteinu and Shas, as well as provoke strong criticism from within his own Likud faction. In case Netanyahu still fails to understand the situation, a U.S. official told Reuters yesterday that the Israeli leader's rightist coalition leaves him in a "perilous" situation.

The prime minister has reached the moment of truth, where he must choose between his ideological beliefs and political cooperation with the right on one hand, and his need for American support on the other.

It is a difficult dilemma. If he comes into conflict with the U.S. administration - hoping his friends in Congress and the Jewish-American community support him in the name of Washington's obligation to the "eternal capital of the Jewish people" - he could jeopardize Israel's security cooperation with the Americans against Iran. Netanyahu knows that the fuel and spare parts for Israel's air force, as well as the warning signals for missiles headed this way, all come from the United States. He also knows that Israel has no other allies with which to face the threat posed by the Islamic Republic.

The Obama administration has until now refrained from exerting firm pressure on Netanyahu, fearing it might lead to his coalition's collapse and a political crisis within Israel. High-ranking officials in Washington believe that tightening the terms for a settlement construction freeze in the West Bank and the dismantling of outposts could lead to a deep rift within Israeli society, or even a mutiny within its military.

In November, Netanyahu's government agreed to a temporary freeze on settlement building, but only on condition of the continued development of East Jerusalem. This time around, the prime minister thought he could once again survive the crisis, having apologized to Biden for the "unfortunate timing" of the Interior Ministry's announcement of the construction plan.

Netanyahu did not, however, promise that the housing units in Ramat Shlomo would not be built, or that his government's policy on developing East Jerusalem would change. The construction plan is still pending, he said, and would not be implemented anytime in the next few years.

His adversaries in the Obama administration spotted a perfect opportunity to strike, to teach him a lesson in national honor - taking a leaf out of the diplomatic playbook of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and his deputy, Danny Ayalon. Biden was humiliated in Jerusalem, and America is now returning the favor.

Washington delivered its rebuke to Netanyahu through a number of channels. There was the extended censure by telephone from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, a phone call from Biden, the summoning of Israel's ambassador to Washington to the office of Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg, the condemnation from the Quartet and, perhaps most important, a media briefing Clinton delivered during a CNN interview which escalated private rebukes into a full-blown public reprimand.

The reproofs were reminiscent of the "low chair diplomacy" the Turkish ambassador to Jerusalem was subjected to by the Israeli Foreign Ministry at the beginning of the year. The media was informed that the conversation between Clinton and Netanyahu lasted 43 minutes, "rather than 10 minutes as usual," and that the prime minister barely uttered a word.

Obama himself reportedly worded the message to be delivered to Netanyahu during his weekly Thursday meeting with Clinton, lest the argument be made that it was merely the secretary of state scolding the Israeli leader, and not the U.S. president himself.

A State Department spokesman described the conversation using phrases which bring to mind a teacher castigating a student, not a working discussion with the leader of a friendly country and ally.

The substance was no less damning than the form - Clinton spoke of an "insult" to the United States and of "harming bilateral ties." She could not understand, she said, how such a thing could have been done in light of America's strong obligation to Israel's security. U.S. media interpreted these remarks as suggesting that Washington's military support for Israel is hardly unconditional.

Clinton dismissed Netanyahu's explanation that the decision to approve the housing plan was made without his knowledge, reminding him that as prime minister he is responsible for his government's actions.

The statements from the United States were publicized Friday evening - Shabbat - while Israel was officially unable to respond, therefore affording the White House a media exclusive. The instinctive reaction from Netanyahu and his associates was to accuse Washington of a diplomatic ambush, to simply rely on the support of his backers in the United States. Indeed, Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, was the first to charge the White House with "humiliating" the Israeli prime minister.

This week presents Netanyahu with a difficult decision. He may choose to visit Washington as planned to speak at the AIPAC conference, which would embarrass the preeminent pro-Israel lobby and put it on a collision course with the Obama administration. Senior U.S. officials will likely decline meetings with him, unless he agrees to at least some of Washington's conditions. Canceling his flight, however, will be interpreted as acknowledgment of the crisis in U.S.-Israel ties.