

A lone voice in the wilderness

By Gail Lichtman The Jerusalem Post

'Real' Islam, says Sunni scholar Sheikh Prof. Abdul Hadi Palazzi, supports a Jewish state by 'divine right.' But the path to peace and tolerance will not be smooth After a decade of having watched our conflict morph, he says, from a thorny Arab-Israeli problem to a seemingly unsolvable Muslim-Jewish one, Sheikh Prof. Abdul Hadi Palazzi, the director of the Italian Muslim Assembly and an outspoken critic of Islamic fanaticism and terrorism, has once again come here with a message of hope: Peace is possible between Islam and Judaism, between Israel and the Muslim world based on the Koran and the traditional Muslim sources.

The 49-year-old Sunni scholar was in Israel for three weeks, his first visit in four years, during which time he toured Jerusalem, was a guest of the Jewish community in Hebron, and lectured at Bar-Ilan University and the Israel Center in Jerusalem (sponsored by the Root and Branch, where he is co-chair of the Islam-Israel Fellowship).

The crux of what Palazzi has to say is that Israel exists by "divine right" not only according to the Bible but also according to the Koran. He notes that it is clearly stated in the Koran (Sura 5:21) that God gave the Land of Israel to the Children of Israel and ordered them to settle there. In addition, it is predicted that before the End of Days, God will bring the Children of Israel to retake possession of the Land, gathering them from the different countries and nations (Sura 17:104).

As a Muslim who accepts this premise of the Koran, Palazzi has no problem with Jewish sovereignty over the entire Land of Israel - including Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. During his visit here, he repeatedly urged Israel to assert its sovereignty by building in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and wresting political control of the Wakf (the Supreme Muslim Authority) and the Temple Mount from the Palestinian Authority.

While Palazzi's views are not what one generally hears, his scholarly credentials are impressive. He has a doctorate in Islamic sciences from the Institute for Islamic Studies and Research in Naples (by authorization of the former grand mufti of Saudi Arabia) and authorization to teach (ijazzah) both Koranic exegesis and Islamic law from the University of al-Azhar as-Sharif in Cairo.

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Palazzi sees the main problem facing the Islamic world, and also the West, as the dominance of Saudi Arabia and its Wahhabi heresy.

With respect to Israel, Palazzi believes that "for the first time in recent years, there is a situation in which time can work for Israel if the Israeli government has the courage to take some steps including measures once thought inconceivable."

For starters, Palazzi says that as a precondition for resuming negotiations Israel must insist that the Palestinian Authority accept Israel as a Jewish state. "What is the use of negotiating with someone who does not recognize who you are and what your role is?" he says.

And in the meantime, Israel should keep on building and expanding in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria. "It must be clear to the Palestinian Authority that time is not waiting for them. If they refuse to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, then Israel will just keep on building and growing. No country in the world can let foreign countries limit it."

According to Palazzi, there is nothing in Islamic law that prohibits non-Muslims from the Temple Mount; Israel must assert its rights there. "Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel, yet Israeli Jews are not allowed to walk freely on the Mount in their own city. Israeli sovereignty of the most important part of Jerusalem is in name only."

Moshe Dayan made the initial mistake in 1967 by leaving control of the Temple Mount in the hands of the Jordanian-appointed Wakf, but Oslo made the situation even worse when the Palestinian Authority seized control of the Wakf and appointed its own grand mufti of Jerusalem, says Palazzi.

Since then, the PA has been systematically denying that there ever was a Jewish temple on the Mount.

In the long term, Palazzi feels that the only possible solution to the Temple Mount is for Israel to promote and develop its own Israeli Muslim scholars, trained abroad in a friendly Muslim country, to become local imams and eventually the mufti. "The Israeli government should appoint the grand mufti of Jerusalem and not the PA. This is what is done everywhere else in the world, even in non-Muslim countries. In France, the Muslim Supreme Council is appointed by the French president."

Palazzi thinks the time is ripe for Israel to take these steps because of a number of new developments in the world.

The rise of Shi'ite Iran and its alliance with Hamas and Hizbullah have changed the dynamics for Saudi Arabia, a major funding source for Islamic terrorism. "Wahhabis are more against Shi'ites than against Jews and Christians," Palazzi explains. "The fact that Iran wants to acquire nuclear weapons and become the regional power is a problem not only for Israel but also for the Saudis. Some 90 percent of the oil in Saudi Arabia is concentrated in the area of the country inhabited by Shi'ites, a Saudi minority without rights. The Saudis see the problem with Shi'ites in Yemen and in Oman and feel surrounded. This is why they are not investing as much in anti-Israel terrorism as they did before. The anti-Israel verbal level is the same, but they have no real intention of supporting the start of a new intifada."

And while there is always the danger that Iran will try to do something, Palazzi believes that Israel is in a strong position not to come under physical attack right now.

However, the attitude of the Obama administration toward Israel has weakened the country politically. "It is telling that in Cairo, Obama made a very soft declaration about Iran but reserved his most violent comments for Israel, calling the position of the Israeli government concerning settlements really negative. Nevertheless, I don't think a US president can go much beyond this."

With Obama tied down in Afghanistan and with Iran, Palazzi believes that he will not really be able to press Israel much further.

In Europe, there is a rising demand that the PA account for the billions in funding it has received from the EU. Palazzi claims that in the face of the current economic situation, public opinion is turning against endless funding of the PA. "This is the reason why the decision to fund the PA is made by the EU and not the individual countries. That way, European politicians can say to their constituents, 'It was not our government that decided but the EU, and we can't oppose the majority of the union.'"

Palazzi was born in Rome to a non-observant Muslim family of Syrian origin that had been living in Italy for more than a century. During his studies in philosophy at the State University of Rome, he became interested in Islam. Upon graduation, he went to Cairo to study, where he was a pupil of Sheikh Muhammed al-Mutawali as-Sharawi, one of the most outstanding Islamic scholars of his time. Sharawi felt it was necessary for the Muslim world to develop positive relations with Israel. He was the man who convinced Egyptian president Anwar Sadat to initiate relations with Israel.

When Palazzi returned to Rome four years later, he found a changing Muslim community, with extremists beginning to take control. "This is when I

started to distinguish my position from theirs. I took a clear stand that there is no problem with the existence of Israel and in developing good relations with the Jewish community," he recalls.

Often accused of being a lone voice in the wilderness, Palazzi points out that apart from Iran, no Muslims are criticizing him. He has received invitations to attend conferences in Saudi Arabia and has discussed his views in Malaysia, Indonesia and Turkey. He has also been invited to conferences throughout Europe and had speaking engagements in North America. He maintains an Internet site and receives many inquiries from Muslims around the world.

"The path of peace and tolerance is hard. There is a Hadith [narration of Muhammad] that says that the time will come when learning will be as one wandering in the desert. If someone is teaching the original Sunni Islam, he has to be doing it by himself. The Wahhabis are affluent and have unlimited funds for propaganda and organization. On the practical level, the situation is very difficult. But there is hope for change," he says.

This change will not come quickly. If oil is replaced as the main source of energy, leading to the Saudis' losing a great part of their wealth or the regime collapses, the restoration of real Islam will only be a matter of time, according to Palazzi. The situation in Iran - if the regime collapses and a pro-Western government replaces it - would also be a game changer. Then a new generation of Muslims in the West, no longer under foreign influence, would be free to lead the way to a return to real Islam.

Even so Palazzi, working on a shoestring budget with volunteers, is encouraged. "I see some real changes in Italy," he relates. "When Iran called for the destruction of Israel, we were able to hold a large demonstration outside the Iranian Embassy. We even had other Muslim organizations - Moroccans and Iranian exiles - in Rome demonstrating with us in support of Israel's right to exist, along with Jewish groups. Not so long ago, I would never have believed this possible - to have such a demonstration and have Muslim organizations other than mine taking part. I also am beginning to see changes in the Italian media with respect to Israel. Little by little, I am seeing the fruits of what I am doing," he says.

"All these changes together are why I think this is the moment for Israel to move to make its position stronger. This would benefit both Israeli and Arab residents who want to live in peace. And when the day comes when no one will say that the rebuilding of a Jewish Temple is a threat, then there is nothing in Islam against it. The rebuilding of the Temple will be a time of redemption and a blessing for Israel and all the nations," Palazzi concludes.

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Obama Misjudges His Misjudgment

By Tom Gross The Wall Street Journal January 28, 2010

Too much Middle East peace processing. Last week, in an "exclusive" interview granted to Time magazine, U.S. President Barack Obama admitted he erred during his first year in office by raising unrealistically high expectations of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"I'll be honest with you, this is just really hard," Mr. Obama said when asked about the Middle East.

"This is as intractable a problem as you get," he went on, noting that while Israel had showed a willingness "after a lot of time" to make "some modifications" in policy, it "still found it very hard to move with any bold gestures."

"I think it is absolutely true that what we did this year didn't produce the kind of breakthrough that we wanted, and if we had anticipated some of these political problems on both sides earlier, we might not have raised expectations as high," Mr. Obama added.

Judging from these remarks, the American President appears almost as lost on this issue as he is on how to counter the Iranian nuclear threat. He has gone from one extreme to the other—from being ridiculously optimistic about the prospects for swiftly resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (did he think he could just wave a magic wand and solve a 100-year-old-dispute?), to becoming overly pessimistic now.

In fact, Mr. Obama's first year in office, from late January 2009 until the present, turned out to be one of the most encouraging for Israelis and Palestinians in over 15 years—not that Mr. Obama seems to grasp this, probably because it had little to do with him. Indeed his initial policies were unhelpful to both Israeli and Palestinian moderates, but luckily both groups generally ignored him.

There were several factors that made the first 12 months of Obama's presidency better for peace prospects (for those of us who want a two-state solution) than previous years.

Firstly, there was less violence, both between Israelis and Palestinians, and between Palestinians and Palestinians, than there had been for years. Among other landmarks, 2009 was the first year in a long time without any successful suicide bombings against Israel.

In addition, the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank have finally started to behave like a security force rather than like a terrorist group. For example, last week they rescued an Israeli settler who was trapped under her overturned car near Qalqilya in the northern West Bank. They used special equipment to extricate the seriously injured woman, and provided her with initial emergency treatment until Israeli medics could arrive. In previous years (and especially when Yasser Arafat lorded it over the

Palestinians), they would probably have shot her instead.

Then, there was the strong economic growth in both Israel and the Palestinian territories relative to most of the rest of the world, for which 2009 was a bleak year. (While Gaza is not undergoing the same kind of economic growth enjoyed by the West Bank, the standard of living there is nonetheless considerably better than you would suppose from the distorted picture provided by certain partisan journalists and NGO workers, and much better than in many other areas of the world.)

And most importantly, 2009 was the year that a Likud Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, not only recognized the principle of an independent Palestinian state, but also made the most sweeping freeze on Israeli settlement-building in the West Bank since 1967.

Yet barely any of this seems to have registered with Mr. Obama. Instead, in his remarks to Time, even when he acknowledged there had been mistakes, he implied that the responsibility for the mistakes always rested with others, not with him.

Try telling that to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Hardly a day goes by without Mr. Abbas privately pointing the finger of blame at Mr. Obama for his clumsy approach.

Occasionally, Mr. Abbas airs his exasperation in public. For example, in an interview published on Dec. 22 in the London-based Arabic daily Asharq al-Awsat, he explained that he could not afford a situation in which Mr. Obama appears more Palestinian than the Palestinians.

"[Mr.] Obama laid down the condition of halting the settlements completely," he noted, even in areas which Palestinian negotiators have already agreed in principle will form part of Israel. "What was I supposed to say to him? Should I say this is too much?"

Every informed observer knows that for a realistic two-state solution to be achieved, Israel cannot return to what Abba Eban famously referred to as Israel's "Auschwitz borders" (i.e., borders that were indefensible), and that there will be land swaps between Israelis and Palestinians so final borders will more closely reflect demographic and security considerations. Indeed as long ago as 1967, the international diplomats who carefully crafted U.N. Resolution 242 acknowledged that the 1967 borders would not and should not necessarily constitute Israel's final boundaries. They made clear in the wording of their text that they believed that not all of the land previously occupied by Jordan (land that has come to be known as the West Bank) should necessarily be relinquished by Israel.

And yet Mr. Obama stepped in and tried to insist on just that, much to the consternation not only of Israelis, but of Mr. Abbas.

What has been happening on the ground in the past year—brought about by both Israeli and Palestinian Authority leaders effectively ignoring Mr. Obama and the other so-called "peace processors"—is that the Palestinian government in Ramallah, with quiet assistance from Israel (assistance which I outlined in some detail in a piece on these pages last month), is finally doing some state-building instead of engaging in endless hollow "processing" involving

talks about talks with foreign leaders. For a Palestinian state to be viable it is not just a question of what Israel might give the Palestinians, but of the Palestinians getting their own house in order.

And even if Mr. Obama isn't quite aware of this accomplishment, those of us who want to see a viable, independent and peaceful Palestinian state can only welcome it.

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A Low and Dishonest Decade

By Caroline Glick TownHall.com January 4, 2010

Upon returning from Cairo on Tuesday, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu proclaimed, "It's time to move the peace process forward."

The most sympathetic interpretation of Netanyahu's proclamation is that he was engaging in political theater. It was a low and dishonest statement uttered at the end of what has been, in the immortal words of W.H. Auden, "a low and dishonest decade."

Everyone with eyes in their heads knows that there is no chance of making peace with the Palestinians. First of all, the most Israel is willing to give is less than what the Palestinians are willing to accept.

But beyond that, Gaza is controlled by Hamas, and Hamas is controlled by Iran.

For its part, Fatah is not in a position to make peace even if its leaders wished to. Mahmoud Abbas and his deputies know that just as Hamas won the 2006 elections in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, Hamas would win elections today. To maintain even a smudge of domestic legitimacy, Fatah's leaders have no choice but to adopt Hamas's rejection of peaceful coexistence with the Jewish state.

Clearly, now is not the time "to move the peace process forward."

No less than what it tells us about Netanyahu, his statement is notable for what it tells us about Israel. Our continued willingness to ensnare ourselves in the rhetoric of peace processes demonstrates how little we have progressed in the past decade.

In 1999, Netanyahu was ejected from office by an electorate convinced that he was squandering an historic opportunity for peace between Israel and its neighbors. A majority of Israelis believed that Netanyahu's signature policies of demanding that the Palestinians abide by their commitments to Israel, and maintaining the IDF's security zone in south Lebanon were dooming all hope for peace.

His successor, Ehud Barak, promised to remove IDF troops from Lebanon and forge a final peace with the Palestinians and with Syria within a year.

After winning the election, Barak famously promised a swooning crowd at Rabin Square that the "dawn of a new day has arrived."

Barak lost no time fulfilling his campaign promises. He withdrew the IDF from south Lebanon in May 2000.

He launched talks with Syria in December 1999. For four months he begged Syrian dictator Hafez Assad to accept the Golan Heights, stopping only after Assad harshly rebuffed him in March 2000.

And in July 2000 at Camp David, Barak offered Yasser Arafat Gaza, 90 percent of Judea and Samaria and half of Jerusalem in exchange for peace. After Arafat rejected his offer, Barak sweetened it at Taba in September 2000, adding another 5% of Judea and Samaria, the Temple Mount, and extra lands in the Negev, only to be rejected, again.

Barak made these offers as the wisdom of appeasement exploded before his eyes. Hizbullah seized the withdrawal from Lebanon as a strategic victory. Far from disappearing as Barak and his deputy Yossi Beilin had promised it would, Hizbullah took over south Lebanon and used the area as a springboard for its eventual takeover of the Lebanese government. So, too, with its forces perched on the border, Hizbullah built up its Iranian-commanded forces, preparing for the next round of war.

Similarly, Barak's desperate entreaties to Assad enhanced the dictator's standing in the Arab world, to the detriment of Egypt and Jordan.

To the extent he required encouragement, the ascendance of Hizbullah, Syria and Iran made it politically advantageous for Arafat to reject peace. Buoyed by their rise, Arafat diverted billions of dollars in Western aid from development projects to the swelling ranks of his terror armies. Instead of preparing his people for peace, he trained them for war.

Arafat responded to Barak's beggary at Camp David and Taba by launching the largest terror offensive Israel experienced since the 1950s. The Palestinians' orgiastic celebration of the mass murder

of Israelis was the final nail in Barak's premiership, and it seemed at the time, the death-knell of his policies of appeasement.

A year and a half after he took office, the public threw Barak from power. Likud leader Ariel Sharon - who just a decade earlier had been taken for dead - was swept into power with an electoral landslide. To the extent the public vote was for Sharon, rather than against Barak, the expectation was that Sharon would end Barak's appeasement policies and defeat Arafat and the terror state he had built in Gaza, Judea and Samaria.

But this was not to be.

Rather than abandon Barak's policies, Sharon embraced them. He formed a unity government with Labor and refused to fight. He didn't fight after 22 teenagers were massacred outside the Dolphinarium nightclub in June 2001. He did not fight after the September 11, 2001, attacks and the Palestinian celebrations of the slaughter in New York and Washington.

Sharon did not order the IDF to fight until the carnage of March 2002 that culminated in the Seder massacre at Netanya's Park Hotel forced his hand. Had he not ordered the IDF to dismantle the Palestinian terror infrastructures in Judea and Samaria at that time, he faced the sure prospect of being routed in the Likud leadership race scheduled for November of that year.

Operation Defensive Shield was a textbook example of what you get when you mix weak politicians with a strong society. On the one hand, during Defensive Shield, the IDF took control of all the major towns and cities in Judea and Samaria and so enabled Israel to dismantle Palestinian terror networks by remaining in place in the years that followed.

On the other hand, Sharon refused to allow the IDF to launch a parallel operation in Gaza, despite repeated entreaties by the army and residents of the South. Most important, Sharon barred the IDF from toppling the PA or even acknowledging that it was an enemy government. And he maintained that the Palestinian jihad began and ended with Arafat, thus absolving all of Arafat's deputies - who were then and today remain deeply involved in the terror machine - of all responsibility.

In acting as he did, Sharon's signaled that he was not abandoning appeasement. Indeed, he made clear that his aim was to re-embrace appeasement as his national strategy as soon as it was politically feasible.

Most Israelis explained away Sharon's behavior in his first term as the price he was forced to pay for his coalition government with Labor. So when in 2003 Sharon, Likud and the political Right won an overwhelming mandate from the public to lead the country without the Left, the expectation was that he would finally let loose. He would finally fight for victory.

Instead, Sharon spat on his party, his coalition partners and his voters and adopted as his own the policies of the Left that he had condemned in his campaign.

To implement those policies, Sharon dismantled his government and his party and formed a coalition with the same Left the nation had just overwhelmingly rejected.

The past decade's major policies: the withdrawal from Gaza, the construction of the security fence, the acceptance of the road map peace plan, the Annapolis Conference, Operation Defensive Shield, the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead all shared one central feature. They were all predicated on ignoring the lessons of the failure of appeasement in 2000.

Whereas Defensive Shield's strategic success was owed to Israel's decision to maintain control over the territory the IDF seized in the fighting, in launching the wars with Hizbullah and Hamas, Sharon's successor, Ehud Olmert, ignored that success and chose instead to emulate the operation's failures.

To further his government's appeasement policies, Olmert refused to order the IDF to seize south Lebanon or Gaza. By the same token, like Sharon in Defensive Shield, Olmert announced at the outset that he had no interest in defeating Israel's enemies. He limited the goals of the campaigns to "teaching them a lesson." And of course by not seeking victory for Israel, Olmert enabled both Hizbullah and Hamas to claim victory for themselves.

By opting not to defeat Hizbullah or Hamas, Olmert communicated the message that like Sharon before him, his ultimate strategic aim was to maintain the political viability of appeasement as a national strategy. He was fighting to protect appeasement, not Israel.

As we move into the second decade of this century, we need to understand how the last decade was so squandered. How is it possible that in 2010 Israel continues to embrace policies that have failed it - violently and continuously for so many years? Why, in 2010 are we still ignoring the lessons of 2000 and all that we have learned since then?

There are two main causes for this failure: The local media and Sharon. Throughout the 1990s, the Israeli media - print, radio and television - were the chief propagandists for appeasement. When appeasement failed in 2000, Israel's media elites circled the wagons. They refused to admit they had been wrong.

Misleading phrases like "cycle of violence" were introduced into our newspeak. The absence of a security fence - rather than the presence of an enemy society on the outskirts of Israel's population centers - was blamed for the terror that claimed the lives of over a thousand Israelis. Palestinian propagandists

and terrorists such as Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti were treated like legitimate politicians. Palestinian ties to Iran, Syria, Iraq and the nexus of global jihad went unmentioned or unmentioned upon.

At the same time, opponents of appeasement - those who had warned of the dangers of the Oslo process and had spoken out against the withdrawal from Lebanon and a potential withdrawal from the Golan Heights and Gaza - were not congratulated for their wisdom. They remained marginalized and demonized.

This situation prevails still today. The same media that brought us these catastrophes now derides Likud ministers and Knesset members who speak out against delusion-based policies, while suddenly embracing Netanyahu who - with Barak at his side - has belatedly embraced their pipe dreams of appeasement-based peace.

Then there is Sharon. The man who built the settlements, who removed the PLO from Lebanon, who opposed Oslo, Camp David and the withdrawal from Lebanon; the man who opposed the security fence and pledged to remain forever in Gush Katif. As Israel's leader for most of the past decade, more

than anyone else Sharon is responsible for Israel's continued adherence to the dishonest, discredited and dishonorable dictates of appeasement.

Whether due to his alleged corruption, his physical enfeeblement, his fear of the State Department, or his long-held and ardent desire to be accepted by the Left, Sharon betrayed his voters and his party and he undermined Israel's ability to move beyond failure.

Auden's "low and dishonest decade" was the 1930s. It was the West's obsession then with appeasement that set the world on course for the cataclysm of World War II.

As Israel enters the new decade, we must redouble our efforts to forestall a repeat of the cataclysm of the 1940s. Disturbingly, Netanyahu's call for a fraudulent peace process shows that we are off to an ignoble, untruthful start.

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These Palestinians aren't happy about Israel settlement freeze

By Ilene R. Prusher The Christian Science Monitor January 26, 2010

Many Palestinian construction workers were employed in building projects that Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu's 10-month settlement freeze has put on hold.

Theoretically, the 10-month freeze on building Israeli settlements in the West Bank was supposed to benefit the Palestinian cause.

But at the run-down cafes that make up a town square of sorts here in the Jalazon Refugee Camp, there's a different story.

It's just before noon, and the area is full of young men with nowhere to go.

Normally, about half of Jalazon's able-bodied men are employed in construction in nearby Jewish settlements. But since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under pressure from President Barack Obama, announced the settlement building freeze in October, much of the work has disappeared.

In the long-term, the freeze is meant to help the stagnant Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas said he wouldn't agree to a resumption in peace talks without a building moratorium. But in the short-term, thousands of Palestinians who work in construction across the West Bank are feeling the pinch. They're annoyed that no one seems to be paying attention to the impact on their lives of what they see as a pointless exercise.

"Work in the settlements has decreased dramatically in the last few months - it's nothing like it was before. But our lives haven't changed for the better and the leaders aren't any closer to peace, so what's the point?" says Walid Mustafa, a sort of self-appointed spokesman of the unemployed and father of seven who says he's lucky to find work one day a month. "The settlement freeze is temporary anyway. The Israeli government is made up of settlers, and they will build again soon enough."

Mr. Mustafa estimates that about 80 percent of camp residents who work in construction are now unemployed, while those still working are taking jobs for 50 shekels a day (\$13) rather than the 150 shekels (\$40) they used to make.

"The settlement freeze has only brought more poverty," complains Abdel Aziz Othman.

"There's no work anywhere," agrees Issa Muhammed Mahmoud, a young man who spends most days sitting here, chatting and drinking tea for lack of something else to do. "I used to be able to go into Israel to work on sites there, but now they don't give permits for that, and they're bringing laborers from China to do it."

Palestinian: I'm not judged for working in settlements

The fact that so many Palestinians work on building sites in the occupied West Bank is a sensitive matter, though most construction workers

here will talk freely about it. On the one hand, settlements are roundly considered by Palestinians to be an impediment to the establishment of a Palestinian state, and clearly stand in the way of Palestinian territorial contiguity in the West Bank. The 120 settlements that Israel has built in the West Bank since 1967 are considered illegal under international law, and Israel never annexed the territory.

But on the other hand, most Palestinians consider working in settlements to be a form of realpolitik applied to home economics. Palestinians who are skilled in masonry, construction, and other relevant trades have built the vast majority of homes in Israel's controversial settlements to meet their daily needs.

"While the politicians dawdle away the months, we have families to feed," says Fawzi Aqraba, a Palestinian from the Nablus area interviewed while finishing off a home in the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Netafim. "Everyone at home in my village knows what I do, and I don't think anyone judges it. We have to survive."

New 'Dignity Fund' for Palestinians

Mr. Abbas rejected Netanyahu's offer of a 10-month settlement freeze late last year, maintaining his position that the stop-work order should mean all building comes to a halt, and that it must include East Jerusalem. Netanyahu exempted approximately

3,000 buildings – projects already begun – from the freeze, and he has rejected calls to limit Israeli building anywhere in Jerusalem. George Mitchell, the US Middle East peace envoy, was here last week in the hopes of forging a breakthrough, but none was apparent.

Palestinian officials hold that the Israeli offer is too limited in scope. "Washington, along with the international community, is pressuring the Palestinians without obliging Israel to stop settlement construction," Nabil Shaath, a member of the Central Committee of Abbas's Fatah party, said Tuesday in a statement e-mailed to reporters.

Ziad Toame, director general at the Palestinian Ministry of National Economy, says the Palestinian Authority (PA) recognizes that many Palestinian workers depend on jobs in the settlements. Mr. Toame's ministry is in charge of enforcing a new PA campaign to get Palestinians to stop buying goods made in settlements. As part of the campaign, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad set up a \$2 million "Dignity Fund" to compensate Palestinian merchants for their losses.

"We hope that the Dignity Fund will be expanded, if we get more donors, and then we might be able to compensate construction workers as well," Toame says. "Or start training programs so they can do something else."

For Bigots, Israel Can Do No Right By Alan Dershowitz The Huffington Post

As most objective observers throughout the world marvel at Israel's efficiency and generosity in leading the medical aid efforts in Haiti, some bigots insist on using these efforts as an occasion to continue their attack on the Jewish state. Both the neo-Nazi hard right and the neo-Stalinist hard left cannot help but to demonize Israel, regardless of what Israel does.

The neo-Nazi website ReportersNotebook.com features a blog entitled "The Zionization of Disaster Relief." It accuses Israel of "exploiting the suffering of poor, defenseless Haitians on behalf of Israeli Triumphalism." It complains that Israel is rendering medical aid to Haiti only to deflect attention from its crimes against the Palestinians.

The hard left, even in Israel, complains that Israel should not be sending medical assistance to such a faraway place. Instead it should be sending it to nearby Gaza.

Even the *New York Times*, in an otherwise thoughtful analysis of the controversiality of the aid among some Israelis, failed to note the difference between Israel sending its limited resources to faraway Haiti and to nearby Gaza. Haiti is not at war with Israel. Haiti has not pledged itself to Israel's destruction. Haiti has not fired 8,000 rockets at Israeli civilians. Gaza, on the other hand, has a popularly elected government that has done and

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continues to do all of the above. Moreover, there is no comparison between the tens of thousands of Haitians who have died from a natural disaster, and the people of Gaza who suffer far less from what is, essentially, a self-inflicted wound.

Nor do the perennial enemies of Israel emphasize the comparison between tiny and resource-poor Israel, on the one hand, and the enormous and resource-rich Arab and Muslim nations, on the other hand. While Israel digs deeply into its treasury and manpower to send medical assistance a quarter of the way around the world, Arab and Muslim nations are generally missing in action when it comes to relief efforts. This is true not only in Haiti, which is a Catholic nation, but it was equally true when tsunamis and other natural disasters have devastated Muslim nations.

For those who argue that Israel is sending this aid to Haiti for its own selfish reasons, there are two answers. First the realpolitik answer: All nations have interests; and all act, at least in part, out of self interest. When the United States government is asked by Americans to justify its multibillion dollar foreign aid grants, it generally responds by arguing that these grants are serving the interests of the United States. When it comes to Israel, however, a double standard is always applied. Israel must act

only out of altruistic motives, while all other countries are entitled to leaven altruism with self interest. The second answer is that Israel is doing far more in Haiti than would be required to satisfy its self interests. It is sending more aid per capita than any country in the world. It is doing it with extraordinary efficiency and real impact. Isn't it at least possible that the millennia-long Jewish tradition of *tzadakah* -- that is, charity based on justice -- is at least part of the explanation for Israel's generosity?

The fact that so many Israelis are advocating medical and other assistance to Gaza certainly supports this latter theory. Has any other country in the history of the world ever provided medical and other assistance to a people with whom it is at war -- to people who continue to support rocket attacks and other forms of terrorism against its own civilians? Again, a double standard. The reality is that Israel will be extremely generous to the people of Gaza if and when they stop supporting attacks on

Israeli civilians, stop making martyrs of their suicide murderers, and stop encouraging their children to don suicide vests. Contrast Gaza with the West Bank, which today has an improving economy, better travel conditions and among the best health care available in any Arab or Muslim country in the area. The peace dividend the Palestinian people will reap from making peace with Israel is incalculable.

So continue to criticize Israel when it fails to live up to generally applicable international standards, but praise it when it exceeds those standards in rendering aid that has saved and will continue to save many lives. Israel will continue to send disaster relief regardless of how the world reacts to it because Israelis understand how it feels to be subject to disasters. But fairness requires that Israel not be condemned for its humanitarian efforts, and that its rendering of aid to Haiti not be used as yet another occasion for applying a double standard to its actions.

A nation of caregivers

By Frida Ghitis The Miami Herald January 22, 2010

For once, the main topic of discussion in Israel has no connection to war, politics or even the Middle East. From huge newspaper headlines to private conversations in small towns, Israelis can't get enough information about the tragedy crushing Haiti.

Israelis seem determined to do all they can to help the inhabitants of a frail nation thousands of miles away, people with no connection to Israel other than the fact that they both have a history of suffering. Watching the Israeli response -- one of the fastest, most effective of any country on Earth -- it is striking to see the enormous gap between the grotesque image of Israel woven by its enemies and the reality of the country's character.

Israelis are not saints. The country has made mistakes and its actions are legitimate subject for debate. In fact, nations that face armed conflict put their morality on the line every time they fight. But there is honest criticism that recognizes the country's difficult position, and there is vicious slander aimed at reaching malicious propaganda goals.

Israel's enemies have succeeded in drawing a monstrous image. They have painted a nation of blood-thirsty, amoral beings -- an ugly caricature seeking to delegitimize the country. Sadly, this image has taken hold in much of the world, with the ultimate result of pushing away the chances for peace and reconciliation. Supposedly unbiased reports that accuse Israel of deliberately trying to kill Palestinian children; television programs that show Israelis as baby snatchers and organ traders, all of these fit in with the libels that have plagued the Jewish people across the centuries.

A more subtle version of the same approach ignores the life-and-death risks Israel faces with each

step it takes towards the creation of a Palestinian state.

Again, this is not to say that Israel cannot be criticized. In fact, nobody challenges Israel more energetically than Israelis. The country engages in anguished introspection. Its armed forces enlist ethicists and philosophers. Its political, social and religious leaders constantly discuss the ethically appropriate response to enemies who operate inside a baffling framework of morality -- encouraging their supporters to blow themselves up among civilians and promoting an ideology that openly declares their intention to destroy the state of Israel.

As I write, another rocket launched from Gaza has fallen inside Israel; another failed effort to kill as many Israeli civilians as possible. Israel's critics will ignore this attack, as they usually do. They will ignore Israel's restraint, but if the escalation ultimately leads to a response, they will fulminate against Israel's efforts to stop its attackers and they will ignore it in discussing the tough question of the Gaza blockade. What would critics do if their own civilians were subjected to thousands of rocket attacks? What if their enemies hid their command posts in hospitals and schools? To some the answer would be easy. In Israel the question sometimes threatens to tear the country apart.

The dilemma is an old one. More than 40 years ago, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir predicted, "One day, we will forgive our enemies for killing our children, but it will be harder to forgive them for having forced us to kill theirs."

When facing a natural disaster, the dilemma is easily resolved: You do what you can to help. Within moments of the quake, Israelis were on their way to Haiti, as they have in countless other disasters

around the world. In eight hours they raised a state-of-the-art field hospital.

One week later, scores of Israeli doctors were still performing life-saving operations at the only fully-functioning medical facility in Haiti.

Israeli rescuers, experienced at recovering the remains of terrorism and war victims, risked their lives crawling into unstable buildings to dig out desperate survivors. Crowds in Haiti chanted their thanks to Israel. A grateful mother named her new baby "Israel."

Fences point to Jewish, Palestinian divisions

By Ben Hubbard The Washington Times December 30, 2009

The head of this Palestinian village can't scan the horizon without being reminded of everything his people have lost. From the roof of the village council building, Abdelnasser Bedawi can see six of the nine Israeli settlements and outposts that have sprung up on the surrounding hills in the past three decades, fencing in the village and keeping it from two-thirds of its land.

From a grassy hilltop in one of those settlements, Shiloh, Batya Medad sees a different story in the settlers' red-roofed houses: She calls it the return of the Jewish people to land God promised them in the Old Testament.

Mr. Bedawi and Mrs. Medad speak different languages and have never met, though their homes lie only about a mile apart. Between them lies the harsh conflict over Israel's West Bank settlements.

The settlements have emerged as the chief roadblock in Middle East peace efforts.

The Palestinians consider them a threat to the state they hope for in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. Their leaders have refused to resume talks until all settlement building stops.

After rebuffing U.S. and Palestinian calls for a freeze in building, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced in late November a 10-month halt to new construction in West Bank settlements like Shiloh as a step toward restarting talks.

Settlers have protested the move, saying it restricts life in their communities, while Palestinians have rejected it because it doesn't apply to East Jerusalem nor to about 3,000 homes already under construction elsewhere.

On Monday, Israel announced it is building nearly 700 new apartments for Jews in East Jerusalem, where Palestinians hope to set up the capital of a future state, drawing protests from the U.S., Palestinians and the European Union.

Settlements, now numbering about 120 in the West Bank, have been argued over by lawyers and negotiators ever since they started going up after Israel captured the territories in the 1967 war. Today, about a half-million Israelis live in the West Bank and in the Arab sector of Jerusalem that Israel annexed - a move the world has never recognized.

While the harshest critics of Israel's morality, the countries that have done their best to smear Israel, did not lift a finger to help Haiti. Israel, a land smaller than New Hampshire, sent hundreds of emergency workers, one of the largest contingents. When other countries started packing, Israeli said they will stay there at least another month.

Israel's demonizers will concoct sinister reasons for Israel's good deeds. You can count on that. Israel's response to Haiti's plight shows the country's true face -- a face its enemies don't want you to see.

Qariout, a rocky village of 2,600 people about 20 miles north of Jerusalem, illustrates why Palestinians are so desperate to halt the spread of settlements.

Beyond the political issue of their effect on borders for any future state, they constrict life in hundreds of West Bank villages by gobbling up farmland, restricting movement and exposing villagers to clashes with settlers, Palestinians say.

Shiloh was the first settlement in the Qariout area, founded in 1979. Since then, two other settlements have sprung up nearby, along with six smaller wildcat outposts, which are illegal under Israeli law but get electricity, water and protection from the government.

Together, they surround the village on three sides and deny it access to about two-thirds of its land, according to Yesh Din, an Israeli rights groups that tracks settlements.

Dror Etkes of Yesh Din said the Israeli government has officially allocated 28 percent of the village's original 2,100 acres to nearby settlements.

Another 35 percent to 40 percent of the village's land has been taken unofficially by settlers or the Israeli army, he said.

Sometimes, settlers fence off or cultivate plots, chasing off Palestinians who try to reach them, he said.

Other times, Israeli authorities seize plots to build army posts or roads between settlements. Once a road is built, villagers can rarely reach the land beyond it, Mr. Etkes said.

At the same time, Israel refuses to let the village pave the 1.2-mile-long road to the highway and regularly bulldozes it shut, calling it "illegal" and forcing villagers to make a 13-mile detour.

Mohammed Muqbil, a farmer born in Qariout in 1939, said he has lost two of his three plots to settlements. The army confiscated one in 1982 and settlers now grow grapes on it. Settlers chased him from another in 2003, then planted olive trees, he said.

His remaining plot, near the Shvut Rachel settlement, has been a battleground since 2000. Settlers have plowed up his wheat, harvested his olives, prevented him from working and even beat

him up, he said. In 2007, a settler uprooted his 300 trees with a bulldozer, he said.

His father farmed the plots before Mr. Muqbil was born, and Mr. Muqbil said he has documents from Israel and Jordan, ruler of the West Bank until 1967, proving his ownership.

He also keeps an inch-thick stack of Israeli police reports he filed after each incident - all to no avail, he said.

Yesh Din has documented 14 incidents near Qariout of criminal trespassing and attacks on Palestinians by settlers in the last two years.

But complaints rarely bear fruit.

An Israeli police statement said that out of 60 cases involving damaged trees in the West Bank over the past three years, only three brought indictments. That's because the vandalism is often carried out at night by "lone perpetrators" and Palestinians sometimes wait months or years to file complaints, the statement said.

Neta Patrick of Yesh Din's legal team said "such investigations are not the top priority of the Israeli police." Investigators rarely collect forensic evidence or check settlers' alibis when looking into alleged settler crimes, she said.

Mr. Muqbil says he now reaches his remaining field only a few times a year, in coordination with the army. He has planted 70 new olive trees, which won't produce for five years, he said. He worries they won't live that long.

"I'm scared they'll tear them out again," he said.

Shmaya Tiran, a spokesman for the Shvut Rachel settlement, said Mr. Muqbil's claims are "lies he tells the media."

"He invaded our land and planted crops, not the other way around. This land belongs to us, not to him. Nobody here attacked him," he said.

Some Israelis view the communities as a front line of defense against their enemies; others call them a religious imperative.

In Shiloh, a town of 2,200 people, billboards advertise new homes, and foundations have been

laid for about 10 new buildings that remain exempt from the 10-month construction freeze. The community has two schools, a seminary, three synagogues and a swimming pool, Mrs. Medad said.

The Bible gives Jews the right to live in Shiloh, she said.

"In most of the Western world, when you swear on the Bible, you are swearing that Shiloh is Jewish," she said.

Mrs. Medad and her husband immigrated from Great Neck, N.Y., to Israel in 1970. She said when they came to Shiloh the hills were covered with wildflowers because "nobody had ever walked here, nobody had cultivated it, nobody owned it."

She is 60 and vows no peace deal can make her leave.

"I don't need anybody's permission to live here. The Jewish people have a long, long history. We don't have to listen to upstarts," she said.

Behind Mrs. Medad stood about 30 trailers for new residents waiting for homes, followed by rows of greenhouses. Shiloh and its neighbors are surrounded by security roads lined with surveillance cameras, concertina wire and guard dogs every 100 feet to keep Palestinians away and prevent attacks.

Mrs. Medad denied her Arab neighbors had history in the area and said she rarely thinks about them.

"If they want to live in peace with us, they can stay," she said. "If they don't want peace, then they should go."

Back in Qariout, Mr. Bedawi says true peace would require settlers to leave.

"How can you make a state when there are settlements all over the West Bank?" he said.

He recalled his childhood when he'd swim in a local spring and play in a field where his family grew wheat and tomatoes.

Today, he doesn't let his 7-year-old son leave the village for fear he'll run into settlers, he said. He's not sure where the boy would go anyway: Both the field and the spring now lie inside Shiloh.

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