







I N S I D E

-  Will Hamastan Emerge in Gaza?
-  Does Bashar Assad Know What He is Doing?
-  How Dangerous is Iran?
-  Did the IDF Perform Well in the War Against Palestinian Terror?

An Unexpected Political Coalition:

Where else would polar opposites such as Rabbi Menachem Fruman of the Tekoa settlement in Judea and Israeli author A.B. Yehoshua meet? At the BESA Center, which frequently serves as a meeting place for ideological foes. In this case, Fruman, Yehoshua and others came together in July to demand that the Gush Katif settlements in Gaza not be destroyed, but rather allowed to remain under Palestinian sovereignty. See full story inside.

General Amos Gilboa: "Israel Can Contain Even a 'Hamastan' in Gaza"



The leading lights in academia from Ankara, London, New York, New Delhi and Washington headlined the BESA Center's annual international conference for 2005 on "Israel's Strategic Agenda". The assessment emerging from two days of discussions was that new paradigms in global strategic thinking worked in Israel's favor, while developments in the Middle East brought about an overall worsening of Israel's strategic situation.



Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilboa, head of the Political-Military Bureau in the Israel Ministry of Defense

"America is moving into a new paradigm in foreign policy," said noted political scientist Prof. Steven David of Johns Hopkins U., who opened the conference. "This neo-conservative paradigm emphasizes the type or nature of regimes – is a society democratic and free or not? This is happening because U.S. interests, especially in the Middle East, require internal regime change in other countries."

"Take oil, for example, which is a high priority American strategic interest. It's no longer enough for Saudi Arabia to be allied with us. We have to worry about Saudi instability too, and without democratic reforms we're not sure that the regime in Riyadh will survive. Or consider terrorism: the lack of democratic, good regimes in the Mideast spawns terrorism. The same for the spread of weapons of mass destruction. We can't afford to have such weaponry fall into the hands of undemocratic regimes," said David.

"Yes, Egypt can suppress Islamic radicals for the short term, and obviously the West has no desire to see radicals overcome the Mubarak regime. But in the long term, it is in America's interests that liberal democracy extend to the Mideast. The entire premise of the Iraq invasion was that an unstable, but emerging, Iraqi democracy would be better than a stable, but vicious, Iraqi dictatorship," David said.

Dr. Rory Miller of King's College London offered a fascinating look into European perspectives on the Middle East. EU Mideast policy, he said, is driven by competition with the US; by traditional pro-Arabism; and increasingly, by the "Islamicization" of Europe, out of deference to Europe's sizable and rapidly-growing Moslem populations. "Consider European policy towards Iran or the Hamas. What is important to the EU in both contexts is not human rights or fighting terrorism, but the setting of a policy independent of the US!" He expressed particular pessimism about EU-Israel relations into the future.

China is a growing power on the international scene, and in the Mideast too. Haifa U. Prof. Yitzhak Shichor believes that China is interested in regional and global stability, to fuel its unparalleled economic development (which has been running at an astounding 9-10 percent a year for more than a decade!). Only four percent of Chinese trade is with the Mideast, he said, but its import of Mideast oil is significant and growing. Chinese military sales to the region remain significant, but China remains sensitive, he said, to US predominance in the region. Unfortunately, Shichor said, Washington can count on little help from Beijing in dealing with Iran's push for nuclear weapons.

Prof. Stephanie Neuman of Columbia U. informed conference participants that Washington was looking to control the global arms trade as much as possible, and that this would mean decreased maneuverability for Israel's arms industries. "You, Israel, simply cannot any longer sell sophisticated weapons to the Chinese, for example," she said.

"We need to protect our interests, and will do so ever more aggressively."

In a comprehensive presentation on the political economy of energy, BESA Center associate Dr. Max Singer reviewed the "myths" that sustain, in his view, Saudi Arabia's "overrated" oil weapon. He noted that, contrary to popular opinion, most oil reserves are not in the Middle East; that Persian Gulf countries need the oil revenue as least as much as the West needs their oil; and that Saudi Arabia is an inherently weak, and increasingly brittle, country. "One policy implication of this is that there is no reason for Washington to shy away from confronting the Saudis over their support for terrorism," he said.

Moving closer to home, Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilboa, head of the Political-Military Bureau in the Israel Ministry of Defense, spoke about the Israel-Egypt agreement on the Philadelphi corridor in Gaza – which he had just finished negotiating on behalf of Israel. "I don't discount the possibility that Gaza could be taken over by Hamas after the Israeli disengagement," he said. "But I believe that Israel can contain even a 'Hamastan' in Gaza, if this emerges. And in some ways it will be easier for Israel to deal harshly with a Hamastan than it is for us to respond to attacks coming from territory under the jurisdiction of a still-somewhat functioning, Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority."

Maj. Gen. (res.) Prof. Yitzhak Ben Yisrael of TAU led a discussion on technological aspects of the war on terror. He pointed out that Israel's ability to target and eliminate terrorist leaders, through a sophisticated combination of human intelligence and hi-tech weaponry, had proven itself to be extraordinarily effective in decimating the Palestinian terrorist leadership. "Eliminating just 25 percent of Hamas or Jihad leadership is enough to bring about a collapse of all their terrorist operations against Israel."

Prof. Stuart Cohen and Dr. Avi Kober of the BESA Center led a telling discussion of civil-military relations and the social implications of Israel's war of attrition with the Palestinians.



Imri Tov of TAU, Prof. Stephanie Neuman of Columbia U., and Dr. Max Singer of the BESA Center.



Prof. Yehezkel Dror of The Hebrew University, speaking from the floor.



Prof. Steven David of Johns Hopkins U.

"Despite the long war, and the predominance of this war in Israeli politics, I find no emerging militarization of Israeli society," said Cohen. "Just the opposite is true. Israeli society is putting ever-increasing constraints on the military! In fact, I am worried that we are going too far, to the extent that I have to question the IDF's ability to act decisively."

"Israeli society has evinced a much greater ability to withstand Palestinian terror than any of us dared imagine," Dr. Kober said. "Our stamina to persevere through a protracted conflict is a key ingredient in Israel's national strength."

The conference concluded with keynote addresses by Hebrew U. professor and Israel Prize laureate Yehezkel Dror and former Mossad Director Efraim Halevy. Dror, a well-known strategist, expressed strong reservations about the trends in American foreign policy described by Steven David. Halevy offered a brilliant "tour de horizon" of Israel's many strategic challenges, and argued that prioritization was crucial. "Biting off more than you can chew is a fatal mistake of decision-makers," he said. Interestingly, Halevy expressed greatest concern about Israel's internal societal issues, including the strains between religious and secular Jews. "These are of concern to me no less than the nuclearization of Iran," said Halevy.

Another topic dealt with in-depth at the conference was Israel's challenges in the arena of public diplomacy, with presentations by BESA Center associates Prof. Gerald Steinberg (the power of NGOs in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), Prof. Eytan Gilboa (the 'hasbara' war), and Hebrew U. Prof. Michla Pomerance (the international law debate over Israel's use of force).

Other participants in the conference were Rear Admiral (res.) Shaul Chorev, Prof. Eyal Zisser (TAU), Dr. Uzi Arad (IDC), Imri Tov (TAU), Prof. Arye Heilman (BIU), Prof. Huseyin Bagci (METU, Ankara), Maj. Gen. (ret.) Giora Romm, Col. Dr. Meir Finkel of the IDF, Air Commodore (ret.) Jasjit Singh (Centre for Strategic Studies, New Delhi), Prof. Sam Lehman-Wilzig (BIU), and BESA Center associates Dr. Zeev Bonen, Dr. Hillel Frisch, Dr. Jonathan Rynhold and Prof. Shmuel Sandler.

Conference on Urban Warfare in the Territories IDF International Law Chief:

"Israel Can Shell Terrorists Shooting From Urban Areas"



From left: Col. Pnina Sharvit-Baruch, head of the IDF's International Law Division, Brig. Gen. Yossi Heiman, IDF Chief Infantry and Paratroopers Officer, and Amir Rappaport, head of the military desk at the Israeli daily newspaper Maariv.

In May, the BESA Center convened a conference to consider the legal, military, moral, halachic and sociological limitations of close-quarters combat (also known as urban warfare). A stellar lineup of speakers addressed the topic, with widely-varying perspectives.

Col. Pnina Sharvit-Baruch, head of the IDF's Law Division, reviewed the international law pertaining to urban warfare. She argued, provocatively, that from a strictly legal point of view Israel was entitled to use artillery against targets in Palestinian urban areas. "If they are launching rockets against us from built-up areas, or building bombs in the basements of apartment buildings, we are within our rights to shell these areas in response," she said.

Rabbi Dr. Nerya Guttel, Head of Orot College and an expert in halacha (Jewish law), similarly argued that "it is sometimes immoral to be moral. At some point, we have to say that an Israeli response that is too restrained only encourages more terrorism thus exposing Israeli civilians to even greater danger – and that is immoral," he said.

The keynote presentation of the conference was given by Brig. Gen. Yossi Heiman, Chief Infantry and Paratroopers Officer of the IDF. The IDF faces many hardships in urban warfare, he said, beginning with the difficulty of distinguishing between combatants and civilians, and the difficulty of maneuvering heavy armor freely.

"In urban areas, we have trouble collecting accurate intelligence, trouble targeting civilian facilities where the terrorists purposefully seek cover, and trouble maximizing our firepower," he said.

Nevertheless, the IDF must prepare for more urban warfare in the future, Heiman said, because population density and urbanization are on the rise in Arab territories and countries bordering Israel.

An effective presentation was given by Mr. Jonathan Boimfeld, a representative of the "Breaking the Silence" Association. From a soldier's perspective, he said, the price of combat in urban areas is a loss of one's own moral compass and the risk of dehumanizing the enemy.

Other participants in the conference were Prof. Yuval Wolf, Dean of Social Sciences at Bar-Ilan U., and Amir Rappaport, head of the military desk at the Israeli daily newspaper Maariv. The conference was co-sponsored by the IDF Military History Department.



BESA Associates Ginat and Kedar Publish New Books on Syria Does Bashar Assad Know What He is Doing?

Growing international pressure on Syria to reform its foreign policies culminated in a unanimous October 31 United Nations Security Council resolution demanding Syria's full cooperation with a UN investigation into the assassination of Lebanon's former prime minister; a murder which Syria is strongly suspected to have ordered. Washington, in particular, has stepped up its pressure on Syria to end its support for rebels in Iraq and for terror groups fighting Israel. In new books, two BESA Center researchers warn that Syrian President Bashar Assad is leading Syria into ruin.

Sensing already in the early summer that global opinion was turning against the relatively new Syrian leader, Bashar Assad, the BESA Center convened a special seminar in June to ask: Does Assad know what he is doing, or is he recklessly leading Syrian into international isolation? The seminar also marked the publication of new books on modern Syria by two BESA Center associates, Dr. Mordechai Kedar and Dr. Rami Ginat.

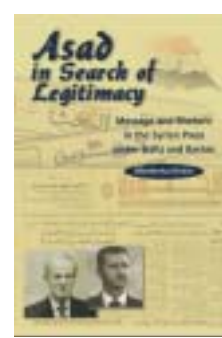
"Syria's diplomatic situation never has been worse," said Syria expert Prof. Eyal Zisser of the Dayan Center. "Bashar has destroyed all that his father had managed to build in terms of Syria's regional and global standing. He is simply not up to the task, either out of weakness or internal political constraints. I see little changing in Syria for the better, unless forces within the Syrian government decide that Bashar is a threat to the regime and act to replace him."

Dr. Rami Ginat, whose book *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism: From Independence to Dependence* (Sussex Academic Press, 2005), was just published, agreed with Zisser's assessment. "In the wake of the demise of the Iraqi Ba'ath regime led by Saddam Hussein who refused to comply with the new rules of an international arena dominated by a single global power - Bashar al-Assad's regime is left with little maneuvering room: either respond favorably to American requests and serve US interests in the Middle East or bear the unpleasant consequences," he said. "American pressure has forced Syria to back out of Lebanon, and Washington will continue to squeeze Syria to stop supporting regional terrorism. I wouldn't want to be in Bashar's shoes today."

Adding to the gloomy assessment, BESA Center associate Dr. Gil Feiler said that the Syrian economy was "in shambles" and in a "catastrophic situation".

BESA Center associate Dr. Mordechai Kedar, whose book *Asad in Search of Legitimacy: Message and Rhetoric in the Syrian Press under Hafiz and Bashar* (Sussex Academic Press, 2005), was published earlier this year, spoke about the opposition forces in Syria. None of them, he said, have any real power, nor have they been able to coalesce into a significant challenge to the regime.

Prof. Eli Podeh of the Hebrew University spoke about Syria's diminished standing in the Arab world, and BESA Center Director Prof. Efraim Inbar reviewed Israel-Syria relations. "Syria has little to offer Israel, so the cost of peace with Syria - giving away the Golan Heights - is not worth the price," Inbar argued. "Moreover, this sad fact is true of entire Arab world too. They have little to offer Israel. Therefore, as a long-term strategy, Israel should not be looking to join the Middle East region, but to deepen and expand its relations with Europe and North America," Inbar said.



Asad in Search of Legitimacy by Dr. Kedar



Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism by Dr. Ginat



Maj. Gen. (res.) Avraham Rotem of the BESA Center, Prof. Eli Podeh of Hebrew U., and book author Dr. Rami Ginat of the BESA Center.



Dr. Gil Feiler of the BESA Center, book author Dr. Mordechai Kedar of the BESA Center, and Prof. Eyal Zisser of TAU.

BESA Center Experts Discuss: How Dangerous is Iran?



How dangerous is Iran, and what can be done to minimize the dangers? The BESA Bulletin turned to four BESA Center research associates for their views.

The new Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, drew a storm of international condemnations when he declared in late October that Israel must be "wiped off the map."

This was not the first time, of course, that Islamic Iran had called for Israel's annihilation. Ayatollah Khomeini regularly called the U.S. and Israel "the Great Satan" and "Little Satan" and prayed publicly for Israel's end. However, when the relatively moderate Muhammad Khatami was elected president in 1997, he toned down the anti-American and anti-Israeli rhetoric, and even suggested that a dialogue between civilizations be launched including Jewish (but not Israeli) religious leaders.

Today, however, Iran is rapidly moving towards the acquisition of nuclear weaponry with the declared goal of eliminating Israel. Simultaneously, it is giving sanctuary and support to al-Qaeda terrorists who are planning and directing jihad across the globe, and to Hizballah, the Islamic Jihad and other terrorist groups operating against Israel.



Prof. Efraim Karsh

Prof. Efraim Karsh of King's College in London wonders what the fuss is all about. "Arab and Muslim leaders have expressed the desire to obliterate the Jewish state with impressive regularity,

with little response from the West. Against this backdrop of international acquiescence in the face of constant calls for Israel's destruction, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has legitimate reasons to feel that he has been singled out a bit unfairly these last few days," remarks Karsh with a touch of sarcasm.

"I hope that the West will now take a stand against all those who call for the destruction of Israel," Karsh continues. "Otherwise, there will be only one lesson from this tawdry affair: that countries should feel free to advocate genocide against the Jewish people -- as long as they aren't developing weapons that can be turned on London, Paris, or Moscow once they've finished the job in Tel Aviv."



Prof. Efraim Inbar

BESA Center director Prof. Efraim Inbar states plainly that "Iran is an existential threat to Israel. The combination of an extremely hostile ideological regime and Iran's known long-range missile capability is scary. If the missiles were to be tipped with nuclear bombs indeed they could perpetrate huge damage in the densely-populated coastal area of Israel."

"Moreover, I don't think that Israel can 'live' with a nuclear Iran, in some sort of nuclear 'balance' -- as some strategists have suggested. It is very difficult to emulate the model of nuclear standoff that existed between US and the USSR during the Cold War. I am not questioning the rationality of the Iranians, but I have serious doubts as to their sensitivity to costs. Even Rafsanjani said that he is willing to sacrifice millions of Moslems in order to destroy the Jewish state -- and I believe him."

"The additional danger posed by the Iranian nuclear program is the threat of nuclear proliferation in the region. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey will not be able to stand idly by as Teheran obtains the nuclear bomb, and they will seek to arm themselves with similar weapons. A multi-polar nuclear Middle East is a nightmare from a strategic point of view. Moreover, regional states that lack retaliatory capabilities will be susceptible to Iranian pressure and political blackmail."



Dr. Ze'ev Maghen

BESA Center associate and Iran expert Dr. Ze'ev Maghen says that he was not surprised by Ahmadinejad's fiery rhetoric. "He is a true believer; a product of the Iranian revolution who is on a mission to raise the status of Islam in the world. Getting rid of the great Islamic 'heartache' -- Israel -- is a part of that. Ahmadinejad is consciously attempting to position himself in Ayatollah Khomeini's mold -- that of a scolding, frowning Iranian firebrand, and to distance himself from the smiling, amiable posture of Khatami," explains Maghen.

"The very fact that Ahmadinejad can hold a conference entitled 'A World Without Zionism' and basically get away with it -- nobody in the West took any real action against Iran -- concerns me greatly.

Israel has such increasing pariah status in much of the Middle Eastern and Asian worlds that it becomes legitimate to talk about nuking Israel."

Maghen specializes in the study of Modern Iran, Shiite Islam and Persian Gulf politics. He continues: "I don't think that Teheran intends on getting the nuclear bomb and then pressing the button labeled 'Tel Aviv' on the next day. The bomb is meant to strengthen their regional and international position and to allow them freedom of action. But in a deteriorating situation -- such as escalating violence in the territories or a war where Palestinian casualties grow too high -- Iran could be drawn into a 'Saladdin scenario', where it is tempted to finish-off the 'Crusader Zionist' presence in the Mideast with one smashing nuclear blow."

"Unfortunately, I see only very minimal efforts in the West to dissuade Iran from continuing on this path. The lackadaisical Western European approach to Iran, along the Chinese and Russian support for Iran, means that there is no 'stick' with which to threaten Iran."


What can be done about Iran's nuclear threat? Maghen does not discount an Israeli military strike on Iran in the future. "We do know where they are developing their nuclear weaponry. Even if some of the sites are decoys, Israel still could do significant damage to the Iranian nuclear effort. While the official Israeli line is that Teheran's nuclear ambitions are not mainly an Israeli problem, and that Israel can't tackle them alone -- at the end of the day, Israel is first on the Iranian firing line. For our children's sake, Israel may be forced to act."



Prof. Gerald Steinberg

Prof. Gerald Steinberg, a BESA Center expert on disarmament and nuclear strategy, agrees, but holds out some remaining hope for a firm international policy that will force Iran to halt its drive to obtain a nuclear weapons

capability. "Even before Ahmadinejad's threats to annihilate Israel, the US and Europe made some headway in bringing Iran's illicit program to the UN Security Council, with the direct support of India, and the tacit agreement of Russia and China," he says.

"The rhetoric of genocide and role of extreme rejectionism in Iranian decision-making has further highlighted the myth that a nuclear Iran would act responsibly, and showed the degree to which the existing threats of instability and conflict would be enhanced if Iran is not stopped from going further." 

American Hegemony in the Mideast

José María Aznar of Spain: "America is leading a Pax Democratica Revolution"

José María Aznar, the former Prime Minister of Spain, was the keynote speaker at a BESA Center symposium on "Pax Americana", or American hegemony, in the Middle East.

The June symposium was held in conjunction with Bar-Ilan University's fiftieth annual Global Board of Trustees meetings. Chaired by the symposium was Dr. Thomas O. Hecht, founder of the BESA Center and chairman of its International Advisory Board.

Aznar condemned the anti-Americanism sweeping Europe. "We must acknowledge that America has been an open-minded and generous power, and that it has paid dearly to sustain the democratic order that we now enjoy. This is not only a question of historical justice, but a necessary point of departure for any reflection on the role of the United States in today's world."

"I would argue that the United States is an indispensable power in today's world. The US not only projects power, but above all values: liberal, free-market, democratic values. So, I propose to use the term Pax Democratica instead of Pax Americana."

Echoing Natan Sharansky (see next page), Aznar said: "I believe freedom is the most powerful tool at our disposal to change the world for the better. I believe extending freedom throughout the world is the only way we have to win over our enemies... There is a close link between the nature of a political system and its inclination towards violence and the use of force."

"Democracies are not inclined to fight amongst themselves. Democratic systems are less belligerent than dictatorial and autocratic regimes. That is the reason why I believe expanding democracy, transforming dictatorships into free societies, is so important nowadays."

"Attempting to 'fix' the Middle East through 'democratic revolution' is quite an ambitious undertaking," warned BESA Center Director Prof. Efraim Inbar. "In any case, Iraq was the best place to start this experiment for two reasons. Firstly, Saddam had to go. Secondly, Iraq is potentially a wealthy country, and democracy requires prosperity in order to flourish. Iraq is a key country in the region, such that if the experiment succeeds, it will have a ripple effect across the Middle East. But if the U.S. fails in Iraq – and the prospects of success just now don't look too rosy – we all will pay the price..." Inbar warned.

BESA Center associate and Iran expert Dr. Zeev Maghen said that the Moslem Middle East has two basic problems with the U.S. in the role of democratic reformer: what America is, and what America is not. He suggested, paradoxically, that the Bush Administration's Christological or faith-based approach to exporting freedom may ultimately help America win friends and influence people in Islamic countries.

"Whether this was the conscious intent or not, Bush essentially is preaching the effective co-existence of democratic institutions with traditional and religious values. For the first time in decades, what America is selling need not be identified with full-blown secularism and atheistic hedonism. The U.S. under Bush is, in a sense, exporting its own revolution: the revolution that envisions vox populi working with, rather than against, vox dei. This is a message well suited to the Middle Eastern Muslim ear," said Maghen. "But first the bombs will have to be silenced so the people can listen."

Dr. Hecht summarized the symposium by expressing deep concern about the growing differences between Europe and the U.S. over global diplomacy. "Europe is reluctant to face the challenge and threat posed to Western civilization by Islamic Jihadism or rogue states with nuclear ambitions. Europeans are also very envious of America's global leadership and doubtful about the legitimacy of the use of American power. They enjoy accusing the United States of tearing the fabric of international law, but fail to admit that an international order does not exist."

"How are we to establish a common dialogue in a world threatened by Jihad, with a reorientation of the fulcrum of power from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with massive demographic changes while AIDS devours parts of Africa, with the mass migration of peoples and economic globalization – when Europe acts repeatedly to undermine the U.S. and Western unity? Let Europe stop wasting its energy fighting the wrong enemy," said Dr. Hecht, "before Islam devours Europe itself."



At the symposium: Former Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar (speaking at the podium) with BESA Center Founder Dr. Thomas O. Hecht (center) and BIU President Prof. Moshe Kaveh.



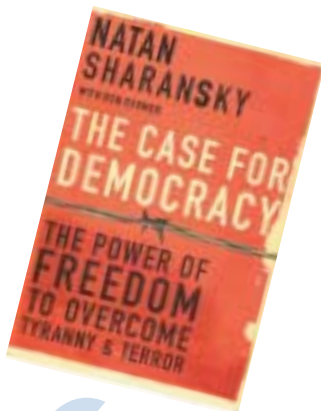
Left: Former Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu being interviewed by the media at the conference

Middle: Minister of Housing and Construction Yitzhak Herzog (left) with Natan Sharansky

Right: U.S. Senator Jon Kyl (on-screen) speaking by satellite to the conference, as Benjamin Netanyahu, Ari Shavit, Natan Sharansky and Efraim Inbar listen.

Conference Marks Publication of Natan Sharansky's *The Case for Democracy* **Can the Middle East Become Democratic?**

Are democracy and stability compatible in the Middle East? That is the question at the core of Natan Sharansky's runaway bestseller new book *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005). Sharansky's answer: "Free" societies are inherently more peaceful than "fear" societies, and it is incumbent on the West to encourage the nascent moves towards democracy in the Arab Middle East. A BESA Center conference debated Sharansky's argument.



"The United States will never be safe until the Arab Middle East moves in the direction of democratic norms," said Senator Kyl. "Israel cannot be expected to rely upon Arab dictators to sustain any Middle East peace," added Under Secretary Feith.

Mr. Issam Abu Issa, Chairman and Founder of the Palestine International Bank who now lives in London, riveted the audience with his description of the financial malfeasance that characterizes the Palestinian Authority. "Yasser Arafat personally stole my bank and purposefully destroyed the Palestinian middle class," Abu Issa said. "Unless and until the PA democratizes, no serious global businessman will invest in the PA."

Then-Minister of Finance Benjamin Netanyahu spoke of the nexus between terrorism and dictatorship. Minister of Housing and Construction Yitzhak Herzog praised Sharansky's book, but added that it was incumbent on Israel to assist in the development of a democratic PA.

Haaretz journalist Ari Shavit, who chaired part of the discussion, argued that President Bush's fascination with Sharansky's arguments stemmed from his need to adopt a theoretical prism for the post-9/11 world. "Natan divides the world into black and white, good and evil, free and despotic. This has enabled George Bush to break down the traditional realpolitik constructs of American foreign policy and more clearly identify America's 'enemies'," he explained.


It was left to Haifa U. Prof. Amatzia Baram, BIU Prof. Baruch Susser, and BESA Center associate Dr. Hillel Frisch to pour cold water on the optimism and enthusiasm for Natan Sharansky's political vision.

Baram held out slim prospects for the establishment of true democracy in liberated Iraq. Susser termed politics a 'Greek tragedy' where the morality of freedom and virtue of human rights seldom won the day.

Frisch reviewed the history of democratic processes around the world, noting that economic stability and growth were necessary conditions for the emergence of democratic movements.

In his response, then-Minister of Diaspora and Jerusalem Affairs Natan Sharansky blasted Israeli academia and media circles for their "close-mindedness" on the issue. "When we dissidents took on the Soviet Union arguing for human rights, we were also told that our thinking was over-optimistic and naïve," said Sharansky. "Picking up on that successful struggle, many in the West today understand the liberating power of ideas to transform the non-democratic Middle East. But alas not here in Israel."

"Most Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Ariel Sharon still prefer to deal with 'the Arab dictator they know'. This was the central mistake of Oslo: expecting that a dictator like Arafat could be relied upon. I remain convinced that only a leader who is democratically reliant on public opinion can be relied upon to seek stability and peace. It is unfortunate that this is better understood in Washington than in Jerusalem," Sharansky said.

Sharansky concluded: "By withholding our support for the American policy of democratization in our region and by adhering to a shortsighted policy aimed at propping up strong and friendly dictatorships, or weak and antagonistic ones, Israel is committing a grave strategic error." 

Natan Sharansky's new book is an important political document. President George W. Bush has publicly and repeatedly recommended the book to world leaders. "The thinking in this book is part of my presidential DNA," Bush has said.

Strangely, Sharansky's book has garnered more attention in Washington than in Jerusalem; perhaps because Israelis are skeptical of the possibility that Arab dictatorships are likely to democratize any time soon.

Convinced that Sharansky's book nevertheless demands attention, the BESA Center took upon itself in March to gather Israeli and American leaders for the first public discussion in Israel of Sharansky's book.

U.S. Senator Jon Kyl (R-Arizona) and U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Doug Feith (who joined the discussion by satellite broadcast, courtesy of the USIA) heaped praise on Sharansky's moral vision.

Did the IDF Perform Well Against Palestinian Terror?

The sharp debate below between BESA Center associates Cohen and Steinberg -- about the performance of the Israel Defense Forces in the war against Palestinian terrorism -- was first published on the Internet in the spring (through the *BESA Perspectives* series).

No. The IDF Gets Low Marks

by Prof. Stuart Cohen



The IDF's record in the war against Palestinian terrorism is no better than mixed. True, the IDF can take pride in several tactical achievements. It was particularly successful in learning how to pre-empt and/or defuse terrorist activities

by pooling its intelligence and surveillance resources with those of the General Security Services and the Police Force. Largely thanks to such measures the numbers of Israeli victims of Palestinian violence declined from monthly averages of almost 38 in 2002, 18 in 2003, to 11 in 2004, and even lower in 2005.

That achievement should not be belittled. After all, the IDF was not fighting a conventional battle, but rather a "sub-war". As US forces are now discovering in Iraq, this category of conflict presents conventional armies with especially complex operational problems. In the Israeli case these were compounded by the fact that the IDF was also dealt an unusually tricky domestic hand. Throughout the past four years, its freedom of operational maneuver has been restrained by the seemingly chronic hesitancy of successive Israeli governments to provide the military arm with consistent policy guidelines.

The IDF's measure of success is gauged by the degree to which it fulfilled its three basic professional obligations during the past four years: to maintain the integrity of the State and the safety of its inhabitants against all foreign foes; to serve as an instrument of strategy in the wider sense, by providing the government with additional room for diplomatic and political maneuver; and to constitute a "school for the nation" by imparting to soldiers the values underlying Israel's claim to be a Jewish and democratic state.

1. Defense of the Integrity of the State and the Safety of its Citizens

Since September 2000, Israeli society has been made to pay an unusually high price in blood. Over 1,000 citizens have been killed, and over 5,500 injured, frequently as a result of outrages perpetrated in public facilities by suicide bombers, mostly within the "green line".

IDF reprisals, often against the same locations, by no means entirely have undermined Palestinian motivation to mount similar attacks in the future. Neither have they put an end to the Kassam missile strikes against Israeli targets in the Negev, which in fact persisted after Sharm-el-Sheik, too.

2. Support to the Political Arm

Military operations are not ends in themselves. Rather, their main purpose is to widen the scope of maneuver available for other political activity, non-violent as well as violent. It follows, then, that the effectiveness of a specific military campaign can never be measured by simply adding up the number of enemy personnel killed and assets destroyed. What matters is whether the benefits of all that activity outweigh its political costs.

Judged by that gauge, too, IDF operations must be considered only a qualified success. For one thing, the list of missed opportunities is far too long. There is no evidence that the IDF's mission agenda in the recent conflict ever included local military initiatives, of the sort that might have won "the hearts and minds" of the Palestinians and thereby weaned at least some of them away from their allegiance to Arafat and the other gangsters who bear prime responsibility for the insurgency and its destructiveness.

Neither are there any signs that the IDF really understands the importance of managing operations in a way that will reduce Palestinian opportunities to score diplomatic points by projecting themselves as the "righteous victims" of Israeli aggression. Instead of carefully synchronizing military actions with the country's overall political aims, the IDF has all too often given the impression of naively assuming that a simple resort to force, crudely applied, could serve its own ends and that its inherent justifiability would be self-evident.

Worst of all, the IDF has still not mastered the rudiments of psychological operations, whose importance for the successful management of a "sub war" has long been axiomatic in all analyses of modern strategy.

3. "School of the Nation"

Like every other army, the IDF constitutes a social institution, which exercises a strong influence over the men and women whom it encompasses, and determines much of their behavior both in and out of uniform. In the Israeli case, the societal scope of that influence is especially pervasive, since military service is (nominally) mandatory for all citizens.

Troop behavior is an especially critical issue in counter-insurgency operations. Principally this is because of the complex ethical issues to which "sub-wars" give rise. It is not at all easy for armies to observe the humanistic norms of military conduct if their enemies altogether invalidate conventional rules of engagement, for instance by intentionally blurring accepted distinctions between combatants and non-combatants and committing morally outrageous crimes.

To its everlasting credit, the IDF avoided succumbing to the temptations of becoming as brutal as its enemy. Instead, it sought to grapple with the moral dimensions of combat far more fundamentally, for example, through the dissemination of its Code of Ethics, which was first published in 1995, and revised in 2000. Expressly designed to ensure that soldiers do not "dehumanize" their enemies, this document emphasizes the importance of the preservation of "human dignity" and the "purity of arms".

Certainly, the wilder charges of mass rape, murder and pillage spread abroad both by Palestinians and by some of their irresponsible sympathizers inside and outside Israel, are patently false. But it is less easy to dismiss the evidence indicating the occasional resort to random acts of vindictiveness by some troops.

At times, these acts have resulted in the deaths of non-combatants (including women and children); more often, they took the form of patently callous behavior at check-posts. Even more disturbing is the tolerant attitude towards such behavior adopted by both the military judicial system and many senior commanders.

To indicate the IDF's various faults during the recent campaign is not, of course, to imply that the military performance has been an entire failure. What does need to be pointed out, however, is that its record certainly falls far short of the standards set by the IDF itself, and which Israeli society has become accustomed to expect. 

Yes. The IDF Was Very Successful

by Prof. Gerald M. Steinberg



Prof. Stuart Cohen's assessment is not backed up by much evidence. A closer examination of the facts leads to the very different conclusion: that the security forces performed extremely well, by any reasonable measure, in winning

Arafat's War. Indeed, the successful Israeli response to Palestinian strategic use of terror and asymmetric warfare already is being studied by the armed forces of the world's other democracies.

In the four years of this war, over 550 suicide-bombings were attempted, in addition to drive-by shootings and attempted mega-terrorism. At its height in March 2002, the terror campaign killed over 140 Israelis in one month, and severely wounded hundreds more. Palestinian leaders (as well as some Israelis) mistakenly assumed that this carnage would escalate, and Israel would be forced to retreat and eventually surrender. Instead, by 2004, terror casualties were reduced to about 100 deaths for the entire year, and over 80 percent of attacks were aborted en route, essentially marking Arafat's defeat.

This accomplishment can be credited to five key dimensions, acting together in a very complex, dynamic environment: highly advanced intelligence capabilities; precision-guided weapons for preventive targeted attacks against terrorists; isolation of the political leaders (Arafat); extensive perimeter defense; a motivated and resilient civilian population, which continues to identify closely with the IDF.

While all five elements are essential in fighting a terrorist war, the development and advanced use of intelligence and surveillance resources is central, and in a manner which deserves far more credit than the cursory acknowledgement in Cohen's essay.

In April 2002, when "Operation Defensive Shield" was launched, this intelligence provided the basis for locating and destroying the core of the Palestinian terror network. The number of terror operations that were intercepted and blocked grew steadily over the next two years.

This also marked the beginning of the end of Arafat as an effective leader, and the defeat of his strategy. In parallel, the policy of isolating Arafat in a "closed military zone" without ready media access was a highly successful example of psychological and political warfare.

As a result, Palestinians no longer heard his support for "martyrs," but saw his impotence daily, particularly when first the U.S. government, and then, with reluctance, even Arafat's European backers, agreed that he had become "irrelevant."

Cohen also focuses criticism on the IDF's failures, particularly in the "broader political and societal dimensions." Regarding the core mission to defend "the integrity of the State and the safety of its citizens," he faults the military for allowing that "1,000 citizens have been killed, and over 5,500 injured."

Yet this war, and the fact that most of the casualties occurred during the first year of intense attacks (from May 2001) cannot be laid at the doorstep of the military. It was, in fact, the Israeli political leadership that chose the direction of the Oslo process and the transfer of power to a Palestinian Authority led by a corrupt and rejectionist leadership. The IDF, as a military force in a democratic polity, voiced its concerns but correctly did not intervene in this modern "march of folly."

To their credit, the security forces, at all levels, were prepared for the counterattack, including training for urban warfare necessary to destroy the terror cells located in the densely-packed quarters of Jenin, Nablus and elsewhere. Had these preparations not been made, Israeli casualties would have been ten times higher, as Arafat had expected. And had the IDF not responded powerfully to the Kassam rocket barrages from Gaza, they would indeed have continued. Instead, the military response created the necessary conditions for a return, at least for now, to a political relationship and a deterrence-based cease-fire.

Cohen also faults the IDF for a "scale of destruction and death on the Palestinian side" not justified by military realities, and for failing to win over Palestinian "hearts and minds," thereby weaning them "away from their allegiance to Arafat and the other gangsters who bear prime responsibility for the insurgency and its destructiveness."

There is no evidence for the claim from Cohen and other well-intentioned Israelis that such opportunities existed and that Israeli military behavior, rather than internal Palestinian societal factors, prevented implementation. After generations of Palestinian incitement, violence, and rejection of any "Zionist" historical rights, the hope that restrained Israeli responses to war and terror would lead to political compromise and mutual acceptance remains a messianic dream.

By the same token, there is no basis for blaming the IDF in the context of the political war that has been waged to delegitimize and demonize Israeli responses to terror. No examples are provided by Cohen for sweeping claims of improper links between Israel's democratic political leadership and the IDF, or the assertion of ill-conceived strategies based on "a simple resort to force." A small number of targeted attacks against terrorists may have, in retrospect, applied "excessive force" that resulted in accidental civilian deaths, but the vast majority were morally and militarily justified, and saved countless Israeli lives.

In reality, the IDF was confronted by a politically and ideologically motivated coalition that automatically condemned any Israeli actions in self-defense, regardless of the details. After decades of Israeli political incompetence in the realm of public diplomacy and "soft power," there is little that the IDF could have done to prevent the Arab regimes and Europe's anti-Israel ideologues on the UN Human Rights Commission, in the NGO networks, in the media and on university campuses, from portraying the Palestinians as "righteous victims" of Israeli aggression.

Improvements are always necessary, even though the evidence indicates that, despite the particular brutality of this terror war, IDF ethical standards and their implementation fare well in comparison with the US and British forces in Iraq.

Arafat and his colleagues had good reason to believe that Israeli society was too weak to defend its independence and core interests. Terror appeared to be the most effective means of gaining Israeli concessions through international intervention, and without the need for Palestinian acceptance of the rights of the Jewish people to sovereign equality and independence.

Four years later, the terror groups, including the PLO and its off-shoots, are in disarray, Palestinian economic gains achieved under the Oslo framework are gone, and the political achievements that Arafat rejected in 2000 are no longer within reach. And despite the pain from the brutality of Arafat's war, Israeli society, including the economy, has recovered.

On the basis of these achievements on the battlefield, the IDF has again given the Israeli political leadership the conditions necessary to take the required measures to improve Israel's long-term security. When the details are considered, there is a strong case for concluding that this victory was the IDF's greatest and most difficult achievement since 1948. 🐦

Did the Gush Katif Settlements Have to be Destroyed?

The Gaza disengagement is now a fact of history, along with the attendant removal of the Gush Katif settlement bloc. But did the settlers have to be forcibly removed from their homes, and their flourishing towns and farms destroyed? Not all Israelis thought so, including a few well-known leaders of the Israeli left-wing.



From left: Rabbi Menachem Fruman of Tekoa, Israeli author A.B. Yehoshua, Prof. Efraim Inbar and Dr. Khalil Shikaki.



Israeli author Aharon Meged and Avi Farchan of Elei Sinai, a town that was located in northern Gaza

In July, prior to the disengagement, the BESA Center convened a conference to consider the possibility that the settlements might be able to remain in place, under Palestinian sovereignty. The initiative for this discussion came jointly from Rabbi Menachem Fruman of the Judean town of Tekoa in the West Bank and noted Israeli author and peace activist A.B. Yehoshua.

Rabbi Fruman passionately argued that both Israelis and Palestinians needed to change their way of thinking about self-identity. Nationalism and statehood were old, outdated paradigms, he said; a personal, physical attachment to the land was paramount. "Individuals in both communities should respect the deep roots in the holy land experienced by all. Thus Palestinians should have no problem with Jews living and tilling the land as a minority within the boundaries of the Palestinian Authority," pleaded Rabbi Fruman, "just as we respect the ties to the land of Arab Israelis living in Israel as a minority."

A.B. Yehoshua also argued that the Jewish settlers of Gush Katif should be allowed to stay under Palestinian sovereignty and international guarantees, but for a totally utilitarian reason. "The trauma of tearing Jews away from their homes and then gutting houses, synagogues and schools will be too terrible for Israeli society to bear, and I fear that this will prove a bar to future peacemaking," explained Yehoshua.

"Future peace deals inevitably will require further Israeli handovers of territory to Palestinian control, and it will prove impossible to destroy the many Jewish towns in the West Bank. Therefore, for the sake of peace, we must find a way to allow settlements to remain in place, under Palestinian control."

Settlement activist Avi Farchan and Rabbi Yishai Bar-Chen, both of the Elei Sinai settlement in northern Gaza, advanced this line of thinking. "We will be the bridge to peace!," exclaimed Farchan. "If [PLO advisor] Ahmed Tibi can serve as a member of Knesset and hold Israeli citizenship rights, why can't we settlers hold guaranteed minority rights in a Palestinian state? Why do our towns have to be razed to the ground?"

Israeli author Aharon Meged termed the planned destruction of Gush Katif "a Zionist disaster". "This is a rollback of everything Zionism has stood for," he said, "Where Jews settle – that becomes the national homeland of the Jewish People! This has been the Zionist principle from the earliest days of Herzl."

The experts disagreed. Dr. Ofra Bengio of TAU, an expert on minorities in Arab lands, and leading Palestinian pollster Dr. Khalil Shikaki, explained that a plan to leave Gaza settlements in place had no chance of working.

"The history of majority-minority relations in the Arab world does not suggest that the type of coexistence arrangement under discussion today has much of chance of success," said Bengio, "and that is an understatement. The historical record indicates that Jewish settlers would be barely tolerated at best, persecuted or slaughtered at worst. And given the Palestinian hatred for Jewish settlements in the current context, they would stand no chance of surviving."

Shikaki explained that Palestinians would never accept the presence of the settlements on 'their' land. "We want this land for our own development. Moreover, removal of the settlements is a matter of principle for us. They should not have been built in the first place."

RECENT LECTURES

Ambassador Jiri Schneider delivered the BESA Center's Annual Madame Madeleine Feher European Scholar-in-Residence Lecture in May, with a talk entitled "Israel: The Test of the West?" Schneider is coordinator of the Program on Atlantic Security Studies in Prague, a former ambassador to Israel, and former head of the Czech Foreign Ministry Policy Planning department. He argued for the greater inclusion of Israel in Western life, since it shares basic values and cultural affinities with the West. Schneider's lecture is available on the BESA website.



Dr. Joel Rosenthal, President of the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, and Prof. Stuart Cohen of the BESA Center lectured in June on "Military Ethics in a New Strategic Environment." "As the American military out-sources more of its responsibilities to other actors, from private security companies to foreign governments, what becomes of American standards of morality – such as the prohibition on torture?" asked Rosenthal. The seminar was cosponsored by the Public Affairs Office of the US Embassy.



Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, a former commander in the Indian Air Force and Director of the New Delhi Center for Strategic and International Studies, lectured in June at the BESA Center on "The Global Power Shift to the East."



French Ambassador Gérard Araud lectured at the BESA Center in September on French Middle East policy. He belittled efforts to have Hezbollah placed on the EU's list of terrorist organizations. "Such efforts are nothing but feel-good diplomacy that won't make the slightest difference," he said. "Labeling the party a terror group would only give it an excuse to rally the Arab world with the claim that 'all the world is against us; it's an American-Zionist plot.' France doesn't want to give them that pleasure. We prefer to give Hezbollah a share in the democratic process and [to understand] that in this democratic process there's no place for weapons and for terrorism." Araud also said that France and Israel share a common interest in preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear military power, and that unless Iran's policy changed within a few months France would try to take the matter to the UN Security Council.



The BESA Center hosted more than 30 ambassadors for its annual diplomatic briefing in May. Pictured at the briefing: The Ambassador of Canada, Donald Sinclair (center), with colleagues, along with professors Shmuel Sandler (second from left) and Stuart Cohen (at right).



The BESA Center

The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University seeks to contribute to the advancement of Middle East peace and security by conducting policy-relevant research on strategic subjects, particularly as they relate to the national security and foreign policy of Israel. Founded by Thomas O. Hecht, a Canadian Jewish community leader, the Center is a non-partisan and independent institute dedicated to the memory of the late Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and the late Egyptian president Anwar Sadat.

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