



Commentary...

Just Say No By Annika Hernroth-Rothstein

The only thing as reliable as the regular bursts of war in the Middle East are the envoys sent there by world leaders looking either to build a legacy or to divert attention from a lack of domestic achievements.

I'm not sure these leaders ever really expect their efforts to succeed, or if they just go through the motions to say they tried. Whatever their intentions, the process is time-consuming. And judging by the news, it seems we are on the verge of yet another such round.

This week, the White House announced that a delegation of envoys would be arriving in the Middle East in coming days, with the goal of relaunching peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. The team, appointed by U.S. President Donald Trump and containing Jared Kushner, Jason Greenblatt and Dina Powell, is hoping that what Trump views as a "relative calm" between the two parties will help create a new opportunity for a mutually agreed peace.

This seems to be another enormous waste of time. That aside, I am deeply uncomfortable with the idea that Israel should stand at attention every time a world leader has a political flight of fancy. When Israel is always first to say yes to these talks, it essentially assumes responsibility for the conflict and its potential resolution. Furthermore, every time these negotiations fail, as they inevitably do, Israel comes out looking like the bad guy in the eyes of the international community. When it comes to peace negotiations, Israel is like a bullied child, aching for acceptance, accepting any and all invitations, regardless of the sender or the cause.

But negotiations and mediations are a clear sign of desperation in today's political climate, not a call to be heeded or respected. This principle is clearly displayed by Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom, who offered to mediate a resolution to the crisis between North Korea and the United States. She made this offer after being denied the opportunity to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where her only diplomatic achievement was getting the Arab League and Israel to agree that she is a fool. Once North Korea chooses other diplomatic partners, Wallstrom will undoubtedly try to insert herself into some other war-torn place, as this is the most effective way to hide all her other failures, foreign and domestic. Trump's plans for the Middle East are likely to be no more viable than the Swedish efforts, given the history of previous attempts.

Israel should say thanks but no thanks to this latest bid, and take this opportunity to take a stand. Maybe it's time to try a different approach.

It is commendable to seek peace and make efforts toward that goal, but only when there is a reliable and trustworthy partner on the other side. But knowing what we know about the Palestinians and their intentions, there is no peace to be sought and no reason to sit at the negotiating table. Any diplomatic effort will leave us looking like losers while the other side gets credit for having tried. Israel should not allow itself to be used as a pawn. It must not be made to look bad just to build someone else's legacy or hide their political failures. For that reason, we should not engage in this travesty, but should just say no. (Israel Hayom Aug 17)

The Libel that Kills By Nadav Shragai

Raed Salah, the leader of the Islamic Movement's outlawed Northern Branch, refers to himself as the Al-Aqsa sheikh, sailed on the Gaza blockade-busting Turkish ship Mavi Marmara, and for years has spoken of his vision for a global caliphate with Jerusalem as its capital. He is also the same man who for years has disseminated the false warning that "Al-Aqsa is in danger."

His latest arrest, one of dozens, presents a legal question: Has this false suggestion that Israel is somehow planning to destroy Al-Aqsa mosque shifted from being an abstract claim to being an actual weapon, considering that it has motivated vehicular rammers, stabbers, shooters and murderers in recent years?

In practice, the answer is clear: This libel does indeed kill. Quite literally. Hundreds of attacks in recent years were motivated by this

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falsehood.

It is enough to consider the indictments issued against the attackers, as well as their own statements and Facebook pages, to understand that this libel -- rooted in the days of Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husseini -- has gone beyond the point of just venomous

propaganda. It has been turned into an actual weapon, the equivalent of a suicide bomber, a Qassam rocket or a gun. Those who repeat this libel over and over are akin to an attacker who pulls the pin of a grenade or starts a timer on a bomb.

The most serious aspect of this problem is that this claim, directed at the Israeli government, is entirely unfounded. In fact, even those who endlessly repeat it don't always believe the things they themselves are saying.

The only instance when a state commission of inquiry investigated Salah and his libel in depth was after the events of October 2000 (when unrest on the Temple Mount spiraled into the Second Intifada), in which 12 Israeli Arabs were killed. The Or Commission, a state-appointed panel, investigated the events.

We should remember the findings of the committee members, then-Supreme Court Justice Theodore Or, Hashem Khatib and Professor Shimon Shamir:

"It is implausible that Salah in fact believed that the government planned to destroy the mosques and build a temple in their place, as he claimed. There is no escaping the conclusion that his statements on the matter were aimed at gaining political capital, to recruit supporters and hone the struggle.

"His calls to liberate Al-Aqsa through blood, especially as expressed in the mass festivals of rage he organized, served to escalate the tense atmosphere in the Arab sector on the eve of the October events." Since then, Salah has continued to make inflammatory remarks. He has paid for some of these remarks with time in prison, but it is very unlikely that he has changed his ways.

The attempt to keep him behind bars is a legitimate attempt to protect the public from what amounts to a ticking time bomb.

This is not an infringement on his freedom of religion nor is it a violation of the tenets of democracy or freedom of speech. This is mainly the defense of democracy against the freedom to incite that is liable to lead to bloodshed and the loss of human life in the future. (Israel Hayom Aug 16)

A Reminder from Tehran and Beirut By Eyal Zisser

This week marked the 11th anniversary of the Second Lebanon War. Even as the battles raged, some said it was not just another war in the Lebanese arena -- this time between the IDF and Hezbollah -- but the first round in the conflict between Israel and Iran. Indeed, Hezbollah was and still is Iran's advance military force, created, funded and armed by Tehran, which still dictates the terrorist group's decisions.

The Second Lebanon War resulted in a prolonged period of quiet along the northern border, but it did not eradicate Hezbollah or its strength. Even more importantly, it did not prevent Iran from deepening its foothold in the Middle East. After the war in Lebanon came the war in Gaza, and now it is Syria's turn.

This week, we received a reminder of this complex reality from both Jerusalem and Beirut. First, from Mossad chief Yossi Cohen, who warned that Iran is quickly filling the vacuum in the region following the defeat of Islamic State, with the goal of establishing a regional hegemony spanning from Iran to Yemen to the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

We also heard Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah deliver a speech on the anniversary of the war's end.

Nasrallah has been stuck in his bunker since the summer of 2006, and the only thing he can do is offer his followers fairy tales of the organization's successful battles against the IDF. However, he has decided to revert to threatening Israel with his missile capabilities. His threat of hitting the ammonia plant in Haifa, which is being emptied and relocated, has now expanded to include the nuclear reactor in Dimona.

Nasrallah is a deterred leader, scarred by the blow he suffered during the war in Lebanon 11 years ago. He is afraid of another war with Israel. From this perspective, he has become a strategic Israeli asset, because there is no one better for the job of exhibiting restraint and maintaining the

quiet along the border.

This quiet, though, is restricted to the border area. Deeper inside Lebanon and Syria, Hezbollah continues to gather strength, not only with hands-on help from Iran, but also under the umbrella of its blatant presence on the ground. In Lebanon, this translates to Iran building missile factories to avoid having to ship its missiles from Iran through Syria to Hezbollah. In Syria, meanwhile, the Iranians are tightening their grip on large swathes of the country from where Islamic State has retreated. All this is taking place with Russia's blessing and under the open but blinkered eyes of Washington. Just this week, Amman wailed over the revelation that Shiite militias, controlled by Iran, had taken up positions along Jordan's border with Syria.

During the Second Lebanon War, President George W. Bush's administration pushed Israel to pummel Hezbollah in an effort to curb Iran. Success in that regard, as we know, was partial and limited. Later came the Obama administration's nuclear deal with Iran, which granted the regime legitimacy and emboldened it to push ahead with its plans.

Now the Americans and Russians have reached an understanding in Syria that could give the Iranians legitimacy to maintain a long-term presence there. Moreover, it gives Iran a land corridor linking Tehran to Beirut, via Baghdad and Damascus. Hamas' leadership, after reading the new regional map, is now prioritizing its relationship with Iran and has already dispatched a delegation to Tehran. All these factors render Israel, and incidentally Jordan too, alone to face the menacing Shiite crescent rising beyond the northern border. (Israel Hayom Aug 15)

Commemoration Gone Wrong By Reuven Berko

This week, Mayor of Rome Virginia Raggi reversed the municipality's decision to memorialize late Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat by naming one of the city's public parks after him. The original plan sought to honor the Nobel Prize laureate who, in the municipality's view, worked to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians. For balance, it was decided to name a street in the Italian capital after the late chief rabbi of Rome, Rabbi Elio Toaff.

In a letter to the municipality, the head of the Jewish community in Rome, Ruth Dureghello, condemned the decision for even drawing a comparison between the two figures. Explaining that the plan would debase the late rabbi, she demanded it be called off. Noting Arafat's direct involvement in the terrorist attacks that killed a young Jewish man in Rome in 1982, Dureghello wrote, "The municipality must decide whether it wants to memorialize the terrorists or their victims."

The municipality responded with that well-known anti-Semitic refrain: "Some of my best friends are Jewish." The supposed "balance" in this trick of transfiguration through the use of an exalted rabbi far removed from politics is reminiscent of the actions of the fascist leader Benito Mussolini, who, when he rose to power Italy in 1923, met with Rome's then-Chief Rabbi Angelo Sacerdoti to ease the minds of Italy's Jews. But when the Grand Council of Fascism embraced the race laws, it adopted the anti-Semitic policies of Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler and sent the Jews to their deaths. Around 7,900 of Italy's Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, and lest we forget, it was Italy that bombed Tel Aviv, killing 130 people, in September 1940.

There is something shocking about the municipality's initial decision to turn the man who made terrorism a Palestinian start-up, who pledged to send "millions of martyrs to Jerusalem" to kill Israel's Jews and in fact did as much right up until his death despite signing the Oslo Accords, into a figure worthy of being memorialized as a peace activist.

Perhaps the municipality forgot about the Palestinian terrorist attacks on Rome or the fact that Arafat expressly stated that the peace agreement was from his standpoint a tool in the style of the fraudulent treaty signed between the Prophet Muhammad and Mecca's infidels in Hudaybiyyah in the seventh century and later violated by Muhammad's sword. Or perhaps the Italians are wooing the Islamists who threaten them at home, and maybe even winking at a number of anti-Semitic priests at the nearby Vatican, at the expense of Israel, world Jewry and the memory of Rabbi Toaff?

It is interesting that the Romans, who destroyed the Second Temple and exiled the Jews, now seek to memorialize Arafat, the man who sought to deploy a million martyrs to destroy the Jews who returned to their historic homeland. Maybe the Italians will memorialize Arafat at the Arch of Titus with a checkered keffiyeh concealing its silent testimony? But they must make haste, lest the Palestinians, like the other Islamists, blow up the arch that inadvertently documents the right of the Jews to Jerusalem. (Israel Hayom Aug 14)

A Friendship Worth Fostering By Ariel Bolstein

Although I have often heard praise and appreciation for Israel from foreign politicians, an unusually honest conversation with P. a few years back has been ingrained in my memory. It is not every day that one witnesses an outburst of friendship from a senior official in Iraq's

autonomous Kurdistan Region. "We will not forget Israel's support for the Kurds," he told me. "It is a great honor to learn from you, and it will be an even greater honor when an independent Kurdistan is established. A Star of David flag will fly proudly, and we will be allies."

P. was responsible for youth activities in the Kurds' largest political party, and will in all likelihood be included in the senior leadership of an independent Kurdistan. The opinion he expressed was shared by others. When word was received that the Kurds in northern Iraq had been given final authorization to hold a referendum on independence on September 25, 2017, the issue of relations between the Jewish state and the future Kurdish state took on even greater importance. The denial of Kurdish sovereignty is one of the greatest injustices of the century. These people have suffered under the oppression of numerous regimes that divided the Kurds' territory among themselves and used any means necessary to stifle their desire to preserve Kurdish national and cultural identity. How fortunate that the attempts at oppression were unsuccessful. And how fortunate that Israel extended its hand to the Kurds decades ago and continues to call for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state.

There is no greater abyss than the one that separates the aspirations of the Kurds and the conduct of those who are referred to in recent decades as "Palestinians." The hypocrisy of the international community, which completely ignored the just ambitions of the Kurdish people -- a real nation with a history, language and consciousness -- while at the same time dedicating countless efforts and resources to please an invented people whose false narrative is built upon a dream of destroying the Jewish state and taking its place. The Kurdish national movement does not threaten any of its neighbors and does not aim to wipe them off the map. It shares the basic values of our culture, and therefore the mutual sympathy between it and the Jewish national movement is self-evident.

Even without investing in public diplomacy, Israel enjoys tremendous sympathy among the Kurdish leadership. We cannot, however, assume that this will remain the case. As Kurdistan's independence begins to take shape, other forces -- some of them hostile to Israel -- will want to stir the Kurdish pot. Iran is already in the process of doing just that. Kurdistan is set to become a significant player in the Middle East arena. This is a positive development for us and for the entire free world. We must foster ties with the Kurdish state that is forming before our very eyes to ensure that this wonderful friendship does not slip through our fingers. (Israel Hayom Aug 15)

Accelerating Chaos Within the American Jewish Community

By Isi Leibler

The chaos enveloping American Jewry since the election of President Donald Trump—which many predicted would be merely a passing phenomenon—has in fact increased exponentially over the past few months. It is concurrent with the turmoil prevailing at all levels inside the new administration.

However, it is precisely at such a turbulent time, when the leadership of American Jewry should assume a stabilizing role, that it seems to be losing control.

Many Jewish leaders concentrate more on vilifying Trump than securing and promoting their communal interests. They unashamedly abuse their Jewish institutional roles to promote far-left and liberal agendas, even labeling their opponents as anti-Semites to achieve their goals.

That is not to deny that there has always been a segment of American society which was fiercely racist and anti-Semitic. The shocking displays of hatred and the violence emanating from the recent national gathering of white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia testify to this. And while there was violence from the "Antifa" far left elements, it is indisputable that the violence emanated from vile racists carrying Nazi flags.

Vice President Mike Pence denounced the white supremacists and racists but, to his discredit, Trump's initial response was only to condemn "in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of bigotry, hatred and violence on many sides." Without explicitly condemning the white supremacists, he was perceived as applying moral equivalence to both sides, which most Americans and Jews of all political persuasions would consider outrageous. It was only two days later that Trump belatedly explicitly denounced the racist hate groups such as White Supremacists, Neo-Nazis and KKK as criminals and thugs "repugnant to everything we hold dear."

The threats from the radical Right must not be tolerated. Yet despite the massive exposure they received, these fascist and racist groups represent a minute segment of society and their influence is marginal when compared to the leftist anti-Semites. The latter, who are vastly understated, promote the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement and have transformed campuses into anti-Israel and anti-Semitic platforms.

Moreover, there are Jewish community leaders who have allied themselves with far-left campaigns headed by vicious anti-Israel elements, arguing that anti-Israel agitators should not be excluded as partners in

broader campaigns for social justice. There are also calls for BDS proponents and anti-Israel Jewish groups to be included in the “big tent.”

The worst organizational offender in this area is the Anti-Defamation League, which lost its credibility after Jonathan Greenblatt, a former aide to President Barack Obama, became CEO and used the organization to promote his liberal agenda. He is supported by leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements who uninhibitedly pursue partisan positions, as though their followers were all anti-Trump zealots. Their toleration of leftist anti-Israel agitators is frequently accompanied by public criticism of Israeli policies.

Although the racist demonstration in Charlottesville is evidence that there are threats from the Right, the ADL concentrates almost exclusively on right-wing extremists, conveying the impression that anti-Semitism primarily emanates from these quarters. The ADL even refused to break with the Black Lives Matter movement, despite the rabidly anti-Israel clauses in its objectives, alleging that the offending clauses were inserted by a small minority.

The ADL also blamed Trump’s immigration policies and indifference to racists for the surge of bomb threats against Jewish institutions. Yet when it transpired that the threats originated from an American leftist and a mentally unstable Israeli, the ADL did not rescind its accusations. It continuously understates and fails to protest the growing numbers of anti-Israel elements who now thrive within the left-wing ranks of the Democratic Party and are dominant on many campuses.

An extreme example of anti-Semitism clearly not emanating from the white-supremacist Right was the case of American imam, Ammar Shahin, who, in a sermon delivered at the Islamic Center of Davis in California on July 21, called for the annihilation of the Jewish people and “the liberation of Al-Aqsa mosque” from “the filth of the Jews.” He described Jews as “wicked” and said, “O Allah, destroy them and do not spare their young or elderly. ... O Allah, turn Jerusalem and Palestine into a graveyard for Jews.” He made similar outrageous remarks on other occasions.

After the media quoted him, there were cries of outrage and calls for his dismissal. Under pressure, the imam conceded, “I said things that were hurtful to Jews. This was unacceptable. ... I am deeply sorry for the pain inflicted. The last thing that I would do is intentionally hurt anyone, Muslim, Jewish or otherwise. It is not in my heart.” The imam, however, did not retract his obscene remarks.

The ADL, which has been smearing conservatives as anti-Semites, failed to call for the ouster of the imam or call on the authorities to prosecute him for inciting violence. Instead, an ADL spokesman “welcomed” the “apology,” expressing “the hope that the imam will continue to learn from others about why his words were so dangerous.” Such a response from an organization whose *raison d’être* is to lead the struggle against anti-Semitism was utterly pathetic and even contemptible.

There are many similar examples of acceptance of “progressive” anti-Zionists and anti-Semites, such as the praise that many liberal Jews have heaped on Linda Sarsour, the Palestinian-American head of the anti-Trump Women’s March and who publicly embraced convicted terrorist Rasmia Odeh, and the petition by over 200 progressive rabbis who had the *chutza* to condemn Israel for denying entry to open supporters of BDS.

Sectors of the Jewish media also contribute to this atmosphere. The most extreme example was a recent article published in the left-leaning *Forward* by editorial columnist Steven Davidson. Davidson listed 19 people who he thought Jews should worry more about than Sarsour. Aside from Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas who are listed toward the end of the article, all the others except one are Nazis or racists or right-wingers whom Davidson dislikes, such as Trump’s strategist Steve Bannon. Leftist anti-Semites are given a pass. But what makes this article scandalous is that the sixth person listed is Morton Klein, head of the Zionist Organization of America. Unbelievably, Klein is included with Islamist terrorists, Louis Farrakhan, David Duke and other anti-Semites.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Klein, he is a dedicated Zionist whose parents were Holocaust survivors. He was only included in this list because he is a strong opponent of far-left and liberal causes. His organization was a charter member of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and he is highly respected in Israel. To bracket this man with Nazis is obscene and should never have been published in a Jewish media outlet that purports to be mainstream. But other than Alan Dershowitz, who rightly described the article as the “most despicable ever in Jewish media,” there was a curtain of silence from most Jewish leaders.

The editor, who, to the best of my knowledge, has yet to issue an apology for publishing this outrageous article, should either resign or be dismissed.

The tension between Israel and large segments of American Jewry was compounded when, to retain his government, Netanyahu capitulated to haredi extremist extortion and rescinded the deal with the non-Orthodox regarding their right to allow mixed services at a designated area at the Western Wall.

While this is grounds for outrage by the non-Orthodox, prayer at the Western Wall has until now only attracted marginal numbers of progressives and this issue has been blown totally out of proportion. The threats to boycott and divert funds from Israel is symptomatic of the erosion of support for the Jewish state.

It is surely not surprising that, in this environment, access to the U.S. administration by Jewish leaders is lower than it has been in over 50 years.

The Jewish community must take stock or it will lose all influence on government. The Trump administration appears divided over Israel, with the State Department resurrecting the Obama approach of appeasing the Arabs and applying moral equivalence to Israelis defending themselves and Palestinians engaging in incitement and terror. The Jewish leadership could have a positive influence in this area if it displayed political neutrality.

Currently Israel enjoys more support from Christian evangelicals than from Jews.

American Jewish leaders should wake up now before it is too late and their once influential community becomes marginalized. (Jerusalem Post Aug 17)

Maybe There Is No ‘Solution’ By Aryeh Green

It is extraordinary how little things change in this region. A little over 25 years ago I penned an op-ed in *The Washington Jewish Week* about US president George H. W. Bush and secretary of state James Baker’s intention to “solve” the 100-year-long Arab rejection of Jews’ claim to our homeland. This was just at the start of the round of Palestinian violence that became known as the “first intifada.”

With minor edits, this 25-year-old article, frighteningly, still holds true today. Senior adviser to President Donald Trump Jared Kushner may be on to something, though he might learn a thing or two from history, rather than ignoring it.

Once again attention is focused on our small strip of land on the Mediterranean.

Talk of various “peace initiatives” is in the air. Despite the declaration by president Bush that “the time has come to find a solution to the Arab-Israel conflict,” two realities of our Middle East predicament must be understood to prevent expectations from being overly optimistic.

The history of violence in the region, and its role in political culture, may mean the dispute is not open to “peaceful” resolution – however much it pains us to admit. The intractable nature of the issues leaves little hope for an all-encompassing “solution” in the foreseeable future.

The violent “intifada” (since December 1988) is not a frustrated escalation of nonviolent earlier protests, it is a cultural phenomenon reflecting a prevailing attitude in the Arab world that problems can be solved primarily by force. To say “violence is the only language Arabs understand” would be racist; it is merely accurate to note the frequency of violence in Arab communal and political life.

This obsession with violence explains the continued unwillingness of the Arabs to enter into negotiations with Israelis, whether in the famous “Three Nos” at Khartoum, in the PLO and other terrorist organizations’ insistence on what they call “armed struggle” or in the current uprising and recurring bloodshed across the region.

Otherwise, one would expect this “uprising” to give way to some articulation of grievances aside from the general demand for a Palestinian state, and a willingness to compromise and work toward real peace. Israel is still awaiting such an approach. In the meantime, people are being stabbed and shot.

Given the events of the past few months, the Western world might now recognize the Middle East is a hostile and violent region, instead of continuing to view matters according to Western rules and values. Political discourse here owes more to the Beduin sword than to Jefferson’s (or Martin Luther King’s, or Gandhi’s) nonviolence and democratic moderation – whether Muslim vs. Christian, Sunni vs. Shi’ite, Arab vs. Arab or Arab vs. Jew.

But understanding that here, war is not merely a means but an end in itself is only one side of the coin. It reflects the continued hostile rejection of the Jews’ connection to our ancestral homeland, and thus the legitimacy of Israel’s very existence. The intractable nature of this ideological/religious approach virtually guarantees a continued stalemate, in what has become a civilizational conflict.

Three aspects of this historic struggle stand out. First, the Palestinians aspire to a state in “all of Palestine” (excluding Jordan). Israelis across the political spectrum – even those who support Palestinian statehood – demand the Arabs renounce the goal of destroying Israel, and agree that the establishment of such a state, wherever located and however structured, will fulfill their national aspirations.

Yet even “moderate” Arabs are unwilling to give up their dream of returning to Jaffa, Haifa and Lod. In 1947, the Jews/ Israelis agreed to partition because, even though it was not what we wanted, we were willing to take what we could get.

This willingness to compromise is lacking in the Palestinian community and has always been the main weakness of the Arab attitude toward Israel.

Second, Israel cannot accommodate a fully armed entity, whether autonomous or federated with Jordan; the Palestinians decry this as a limitation of their sovereignty. They insist that Jews/Israelis residing in the disputed territories of Judea and Samaria/the “West Bank” must be evicted; Israelis insist some must remain. And most realistic scenarios give Israel a right to maintain military installations in the territories, while this has already been denounced as unacceptable by Palestinian leaders.

And third, the status of Jerusalem continues to be disputed. Arabs and Jews, Jordanians, Palestinians and Israelis all lay claim to the city. No one has legal title to the eastern section of the city, including the “Holy Basin,” under international law. Left undetermined by the UN, Jordan’s illegal occupation was never recognized over any of the territory west of the river, and most nations have not recognized Israel’s historic, legal or political claim to date. Yet across the political spectrum in Israel, and in most Western governments, it is agreed that Israel will never surrender Jerusalem or the Old City, while Jordan, the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world continually maintain that a “return” to Palestine without “al Quds” is unthinkable.

These three issues may perhaps be resolvable through negotiations. Yet few people publicly acknowledge these and other difficult aspects of the conflict for fear of upsetting whatever “peace process” may be in progress.

We should not delude ourselves. Due to the passions and inflexibility involved, these disputes are likely to remain unsettled for some time.

This need not be depressing. France and Germany were at war for centuries. Our conflict is far too serious to be “solved” in a few weeks of shuttle diplomacy or a few years of one US administration or even a few decades of one generation. Once the hatred cools over the course of generations, perhaps a power-sharing arrangement and cross-national residency can be arranged. But that first step is the most crucial – a change in the decades of anti-Israel, anti-Jewish (anti-Christian and anti-Western) culture of hatred in Palestinian society and the broader Arab and Muslim world.

Just as a European Community would have seemed ludicrous to an 18th century Frenchman, so such a change in Palestinian society seems impossible, but until it occurs, discussing “solutions” is unrealistic and counter-productive. (Jerusalem Post Aug 16)

Netanyahu’s Great Challenge By Caroline B. Glick

Over the weekend, it was reported that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu supports legislation that would change the procedure for declaring war. The bill, supported by the government as well as by Netanyahu’s opponent and former finance minister Yair Lapid, involves implementing lessons learned from past experiences.

Under the suggested law, the government will provide the security cabinet with blanket authority to authorize military operations at the beginning of its tenure. By limiting the number of people involved in decision making regarding actual operations, leaks can be minimized and the element of surprise can be protected.

Given the wide support the bill enjoys, and its substance, the media could have been expected to cover the move in a sober-minded way. But alas, there was no chance of that happening amid the media circus surrounding the criminal probes of Netanyahu. The desultory probes were recently fortified by the deal Netanyahu’s former chief of staff Ari Harow cut with the prosecution to incriminate his former boss in exchange for leniency in the ongoing corruption probe of Harow’s alleged influence peddling.

Now, with Netanyahu’s sworn enemies in the media and the political Left braying for his immediate resignation, the war powers bill, like everything else he is likely to initiate in the coming months and years, is being reported as nothing more than an attempt to change the subject.

None of the probes are expected to conclude any time soon. Legal experts assess they will stretch well into 2019. This means Netanyahu will be under a cloud of suspicion at least until the end of his current term of office. And that is not good for the country.

So what can Netanyahu do to mitigate the impact of the probes on his ability to do his job? The answer is complicated. On the one hand, it is fairly clear that he won’t be able to do anything to end the probes and not because he is accused of doing terrible things. To the contrary, he is accused of doing ridiculously stupid and harmless things.

The police are conducting two investigations of the prime minister. In the first, they are investigating whether he received too many gifts from his friends. Specifically, they want to know if he received too many cigars from his friend Arnon Milchen and whether he received other presents from other friends. The second probe relates to a deal he discussed but never made with his arch-nemesis Yediot Aharonot publisher Arnon Mozes under which Mozes would give less hostile coverage of Netanyahu and in exchange, Netanyahu would get Yediot’s pro-Netanyahu competitor Israel Hayom to cut back its circulation. In the event, the talks went nowhere. In

2014 Netanyahu broke up his government and went to early elections in 2015 to prevent a bill – supported by 24 lawmakers in a preliminary vote – which would have bankrupted Israel Hayom from moving forward.

The 24 lawmakers that supported the bill received terrific coverage in Yediot. But none of them – including former justice minister Tzipi Livni – are under investigation. The police’s lack of interest in Livni is particularly notable. She advanced the bill despite the fact that then attorney general Yehuda Weinstein determined it was unconstitutional. She based her decision on a legal opinion produced for her by Yediot’s attorney.

Finally, the third investigation doesn’t involve Netanyahu at all. Instead his attorney, confidante and cousin David Shimron is under investigation. And according to investigative reporter Yoav Yitzhak, the probe unraveled this week when the state’s witness was shown to have lied either to police investigators or to his own attorneys about Shimron’s role in brokering a deal for Israel to buy new submarines from Germany.

Netanyahu supported the purchase, indeed, he touted it. His media foes allege that he only supported the purchase, which was opposed by the Defense Ministry, because Shimron was involved.

This allegation itself makes clear the absurdity of the probe.

If the investigation goes forward despite the collapse of the investigation, and Netanyahu is implicated, there is simply no way to prove that he supported the deal for corrupt reasons when he insists that he supported it because he believes Israel needs a modernized submarine fleet.

In other words, the third investigation is incapable of implicating Netanyahu regardless of its relative merits.

It is important to understand the inherent weakness of the probes because it shows us two important things. First, the investigators and the prosecutors do not care what the public thinks of their investigations. In a damning interview with the online Hebrew-language journal Mida last week, former police investigator chief superintendent Boaz Gutman confirmed the long alleged claim that police and prosecutors are motivated to investigate right-wing politicians rather than left-wing politicians because they want the Left restored to power.

As far as police investigators and prosecutors are concerned, it is they, rather than the public, that should decide who gets to lead Israel.

And this brings us to the second aspect we need to understand about the weakness of the probes. To date, politicized investigators and prosecutors have felt comfortable probing and indicting politicians for political reasons because since 1993, the mere act of indicting a politician has been the professional equivalent of a felony conviction.

In 1993, the activist Supreme Court ruled that then interior minister Arye Deri had to resign due to his recent indictment on corruption charges. The ruling, which had no basis in law, has since enjoyed the status of law. Politicians, who are later exonerated of all criminal charges, have repeatedly been forced from office, their reputations in tatters.

The power to remove politicians from office simply by indicting them gives the prosecution absolute power over the political system. The fear of indictment, perhaps more than anything else, has been sufficient to stop every significant attempt to pass laws to reform the unchecked legal system.

In recent weeks, coalition chairman MK David Bitan has told the media that Netanyahu has pledged not to resign if indicted in light of the trivial nature of the probes. Netanyahu’s ability to remain in his position, in opposition to the non-binding norm dictated by the Supreme Court in 1993, will be a function of the public’s view of him and of the investigations against him. And if Netanyahu is strong enough to stay, then his intention not to fold will have a salutary impact on the fairness of the investigations against him.

If the prosecutors realize they will have to win a case against a sitting prime minister rather than one they have already forced from office in disgrace, their decision about whether or not to indict Netanyahu will be based far more on the investigations’ findings and far less on their political views than in the past.

Although prosecutors do not care what the public thinks of them, they do care what their colleagues think of them. And if they indict a sitting prime minister and then fail to convict him while he is still in office and popular, their colleagues will not think well of them.

So it all boils down to governing. But how should Netanyahu govern? If Netanyahu follows the lead set by prime minister Ariel Sharon when he and his sons were under investigation, and abandons his political base to appease the Left, he will harm his chances of remaining in power. Netanyahu will become as unpopular as Ehud Olmert was when he was indicted. He will not avoid indictment. And he will not be reelected.

If on the other hand Netanyahu is loyal to his voters and implements the Right’s policy on Judea and Samaria – namely, applying Israeli law to Area C of Judea and Samaria in anticipation of the era that will begin when 82-year-old PLO chief Mahmoud Abbas dies – then he will not only be able to stay in office if indicted, he will win the next elections even if he is still enmeshed in criminal probes. (Jerusalem Post Aug 15)