

Editorial/comment

Israel will survive new threat from Hamas

Hamas' overwhelming victory in last week's election of the Palestinian Legislative Council adds another threat to a historically-besieged Jewish state.

It's ironic that Hamas, an abbreviation for the Arab title, Islamic Resistance Movement, now poses the main danger to Israel from the Gaza Strip and P.A.-controlled parts of the West Bank.

Founded in 1987, it was initially supported by the Israeli government as a relatively peaceful alternative to the then-more-radical PLO.

Hamas built up support through extensive charitable work. It runs a network of social service facilities, ranging from medical clinics to schools to programs supporting families of Palestinians killed in attacks on Israelis.

Hamas has carried out dozens of suicide bombings and other attacks on Israelis over the past 10 years.

But unlike Islamic Jihad, it has, for the most part, abided by a "truce" Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas negotiated last year with Palestinian terrorist groups.

In contrast to the Palestine Liberation Organization, however, Hamas does not recog-

nize Israel's right to exist.

It considers "Palestine" - present-day Israel and the occupied territories - a religious gift from Allah, which can never be surrendered to non-Muslims.

It was heartening to see Canadian Prime Minister-designate Stephen Harper last week joining U.S. President George Bush and the European Union in refusing to deal with Hamas, as long as it calls for Israel's destruction.

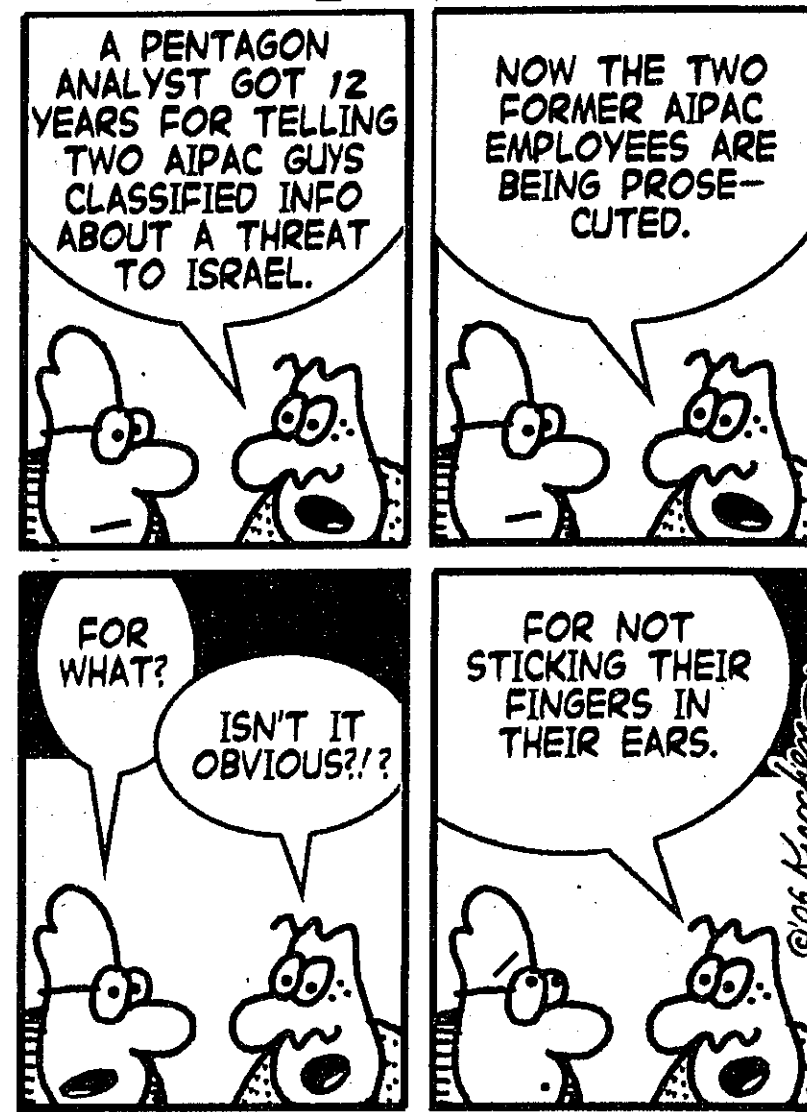
However reassuring such Western statements sound, however, Hamas will still have allies in the Muslim world, should Western governments withdraw financial support.

The main danger is that fanatically anti-Israel Iran may start funnelling massive amounts of money and weapons into P.A.-controlled territories, the way that it has supported Hezbollah, Israel's main enemy on its northern border.

It will take months, at least, and the upcoming Israeli election to determine how the Jewish state will deal with a Hamas government.

Ultimately, however, Israel will survive this latest challenge, as it has the myriad of others it's faced over the past 58 years, because it has no other choice.

Dry Bones



www.drybonesblog.blogspot.com

Hamas, Palestinian democracy, and Israeli options

Israel likely to take hardline position in short term

Hamas's shattering triumph in the recent Palestinian legislative elections took everyone by surprise, including Hamas. With 74 seats to Fatah's 45, Hamas will either be the next Palestinian government, or be a senior coalition partner within it.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES



BRENT E. SASLEY

There are two pieces of good news that came out of the elections. One, democracy worked, and since this is what Israel and all other countries had been calling for, they can in a kind of twisted



Palestinians hang election posters in the West Bank village of Dahiyat Al-Bareed north of Jerusalem last week for the January 25 Palestinian legislature elections. Credit: Brian Henderl/JTA.

irony be pleased. Two, Hamas does not have enough seats in the 132-seat Palestinian Legislative Council to change the Basic Law that governs the structure of polity and society; so no fundamentalist Islamic state for now.

Hamas itself will now be under tremendous pressure to moderate its position in regard to Israel, and especially to deliver on its campaign promises of bettering the lives of Palestinians.

Much of the international community has already pledged not to work with Hamas unless it changes its charter and renounces terrorism. At the same time, Hamas will have to find some way of working with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas.

All of this will make it harder for Hamas to represent itself as both an Islamist alternative to the secular Fatah, and as the face of violent resistance to Israel.

For its part, Israel now faces a series of difficult choices. First, Israel must decide whether or not to recognize any Hamas-led government. It has already indicated that it will not, until Hamas removes the clauses from its charter calling for Israel's destruction and renounces terrorism. Otherwise, in Israeli acting prime minister Ehud Olmert's words, the election will be seen as legitimization of terrorism.

So far, this is a good strategy, as other countries seem on board with it. But it's not clear

what Israel would or could do if the international community starts moving toward recognition of and dealing with Hamas.

Second, Israel must decide how it wants to proceed with the peace process. Should it take unilateral measures similar to the Gaza disengagement? Should it continue to help the Palestinians by keeping the flow of people and goods from the West Bank-Gaza into Israel, and releasing tax earnings held by Israel to the PA? Or should it punish them because they voted for Hamas? Or should it simply not care and worry about its own problems first? These questions are more difficult.

It is far too early to make any predictions about the aftermath of the elections. Hamas could well become either moderate or use its hard-line stance to garner support for achieving movement on the peace front as Rabin did with Oslo, and Sharon did with Gaza.

On the other hand, if Hamas is unable to deliver on its promises, it may well resort to violence and terrorism and conflict with Israel to shore up support. It is likely, though, that regardless of what Hamas does, Israel will, in the short term, take a tougher position against dealing with it, but in the longer term, take a more pragmatic approach. There simply won't be anyone else to deal with. Unilateral actions can only go so far.

The major benefit of the elections for Israel is that there won't be much pressure on it to move on peace. The disengagement generated an enormous amount of goodwill and political capital for Israel, while the Hamas victory has concentrated attention on Hamas and how to deal with it.

The ball is in Hamas's court for now. Israel has some breathing space to consider its options. It should use this to carefully consider longer-term political/diplomatic strategy - something that it normally does not do very well. Given Hamas's extensive victory and the resulting redefinition of the Middle Eastern political landscape, it's high time to start.

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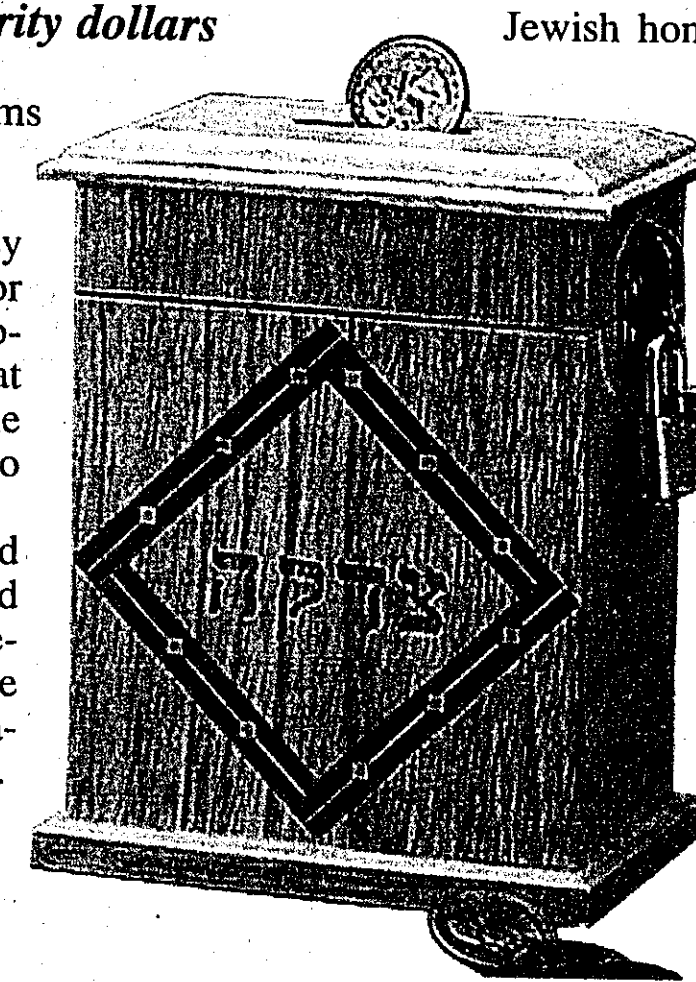
Comment

Be smart with your charity dollars

(Cont. from page 3.) tzedaka to anyone who claims to need it unless we know differently. However, any substantial amount of money that we have earmarked for charity should not be distributed without making sure that it is going to a worthwhile cause. In fact, it is our duty to do so.

"The nickels, dimes and quarters that we carry around in our pockets and change-purses are not part of the money designated for tzedaka," Rabbi Teitelman says. "These loose coins can be distributed to anyone stretching out his hand." He reminds us that this advice comes from Hagon Horav Eliashuv shlitza.

Tzedaka is no different than any other mitzvah, or good deed, and we have an obligation to do it properly. The tzedaka-box, sitting on the kitchen counter, is a fixture in most



A tzedaka box: It's best to have firsthand knowledge of the organization or person we give our hard-earned money to, Rabbi Teitelbaum advises.

Jewish homes, as it has been for generations. You might wonder what the commonplace tzedaka-box, full of pennies on our counters, has to do with the sacred esrog or mezuzah. Rabbi Teitelman cautions, "We must examine an esrog or a mezuzah to make sure it is, indeed, kosher because it may be the product of a scam."

The rabbi goes on to tell us that currently, "there are some people who have decided that smearing ink over a silk screen is also considered a kosher form of writing, and have begun producing sifrei Torah, mezuzos and tefillin through the process known as silk screening which is no more than placing a stencil over a piece of parchment."

For thousands of years, tefillin, mezuzos and sifrei Torah have been hand-written on parchment in the very same

Basketball coach sells Western Wall

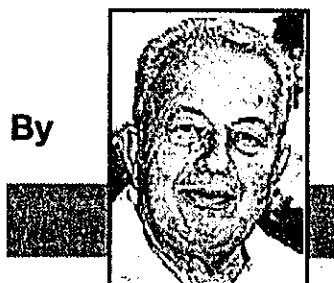
'Whole generation of young Israelis have never visited wall,' rabbi says

Visitors to Jerusalem's Western Wall last week were surprised to see famous basketball coach Pini Gershon being photographed in front of the wall, where he was delivering an impassioned statement about the site's importance to the Jewish people.



PINI GERSHON, Maccabi Tel Aviv's coach, held aloft after a recent victory: He's spearheading a campaign to get all Israelis to visit the Western Wall.

ISRAEL UPDATE



NECHEMIA MEYERS

Though hardly an expert on such matters, Gershon became a genuine Israeli hero after the European basketball championship. So he was chosen to spearhead the campaign to persuade all Israelis, and particularly Israeli youth, to visit the Western Wall.

It seems strange that such a campaign is required, as for quite some time after the unification of Jerusalem in 1967 the wall was constantly thronged with visitors. "But now," says Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, "there is a whole generation of young people who have never visited the wall. This is most unfortunate as the wall is not primarily a tourist attraction. Its main role is to be a place where Jews from all over the world can come face to face with their roots and with the chain of Jewish continuity. Therefore, we must see to it that every Jewish child comes here in order to connect with his people's past."

Rabinowitz is not pleased with the fact that such a campaign is necessary. "However, in the situation that exists today, we must use contemporary methods to reach the younger generation," he declares.

In those years when Jordanian control of the Old City made the Western Wall inaccessible to

Jews, other places served as alternative national shrines. Masada is a case in point. It was once customary for senior members of youth movements to hike through the Judean Desert to that hilltop redoubt. There a group of 960 Jewish zealots from Jerusalem held out for three years against the Roman Tenth Legion, and then committed suicide rather than become Roman slaves. The youth movement members would end their visit by reciting the famous poem, "Masada will not fall again."

Now induction ceremonies of some army units take place in Masada and conclude with the same poem. Tel Hai was another substitute shrine for several decades. It was there that the heroic Yosef Trumpeldor and seven of his comrades fell in defence of the Jewish settlement against Arab attackers, preferring to defend their home rather than retreat. Here again youth movement members would come to identify with the heroes of the past and pledge to follow in their footsteps.

Masada and Tel Hai have not disappeared from our collective memory, just as Iwo Jima and the Alamo remain in the collective memory of Americans. But in both countries the youth don't necessarily feel attached to the symbols and heroes of previous generations. Where Israel is concerned, younger people may be more interested in the ashrams of India and the peaks of the Andes than in Masada and the Western Wall, and their role models may well be contemporary pop singers and soccer stars rather than dead icons like Trumpeldor.

It is hard for me to believe that messages from Pini Gershon, however impassioned, will bring them back to the Western Wall or increase their identification with the heroes of the past.

The writer lives in Rehovot, Israel.

manner. Even with the invention of the printing press, Jews continued to write them by hand. That's because the Torah says "u'ksavstom", which means that they be written, and not produced by any other means such as spraying or pouring.

All that is required in a scam is to paint, or smear, the ink over the stencil, a process that can easily be performed by even a small child who is not yet able to transcribe a single letter. Using this method, one can produce a perfect mezuzah or sefer Torah for only pennies. "If we put up a mezuzah that isn't kosher we have not fulfilled the mitzvah. So, too, we must make sure that our tzedaka dollars go to a worthy charitable cause," Rabbi Teitelman emphasizes.

It is best to have first-hand knowledge of the organization or person to whom we give our hard-earned money. There are many trustworthy people in our community to whom we should give our money, rather than give it to phone solicitors whom we don't know, or to those who skim off a large portion of the money that is donated, and use it for office and other expenses.

"When we buy a diamond we make sure to buy it from a reputable firm and get it inspected by someone who knows how much it's worth. A mitzvah is no different," Rabbi Moshe Feinstein of Toronto notes with some dismay. "People ask me questions on all sorts of topics, yet fail to ask me questions relating to tzedaka."

The Jewish community gives lots of money to charity and could easily support all our institutions and needs. The only problem is that those who don't really need it, siphon much of it off. Rabbi Teitelman sums up by saying, "If you want to make sure you are truly receiving a mitzvah, you had better do your homework and give that charity money to a genuine, honest-to-goodness cause where it gives you the greatest dividends in the World-to-Come. That way you give for today, and tomorrow."

Sharon Melnicer is a Jewish Winnipeg high school language arts teacher on leave of absence, an artist and freelance writer.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"I don't want anyone to go through the experience I went through, and not derive anything positive out of it."

- Ron East, a brain-injured former phys ed teacher, spearheading a new organization to educate young people about the risks posed by activities that can cause brain injuries. See story starting on page 1, top left.

"We've spent less money this year, and we've gone out to the broader community."

- Elaine Goldstine, CJA Campaign director, commenting on the record set in this year's campaign.

"Dad was always a schmooser."

- Alicia Matas, daughter of the late Chuck Ludwig, commenting on her late father in an essay. See Myron Love's column starting on page 6.

"The first time I visited the (Asper Jewish Community) campus and there was a big ad at the entrance speaking about the immigrants, I felt that here we are welcome."

- Luis Rubin, commenting on his move here with his wife and children in 2002. See Chana Thau's "A New Life" feature on page 12.

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