

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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<http://www.sazionfed.co.za>

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UN human rights advisers are UN-fit to serve: They have soft spots for the world's worst dictators

By Hillel Neuer, NY Daily News, 21 January 2011

http://www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2011/01/21/2011-01-21_un_human_rights_advisers_are_unfit_to_serve_they_have_soft_spots_for_the_worlds_.html

Why does the United Nations' Human Rights Council turn a blind eye to systematic repression in countries such as Cuba, Iran and Zimbabwe? Here's one reason: Its Advisory Committee, meeting this week in Geneva, is dominated by apologists for the world's worst dictators.

The Obama administration is rightly calling to abolish this body of 18 advisers. It's time for other UN stakeholders to do the same.

According to the UN's website, the Advisory Committee is a "think-tank" whose goal is "to ensure that the best possible expertise is made available to the council." The experts, we are told, possess "recognized competence and experience in the field of human rights," "high moral standing" and "impartiality." Their decisions, the UN would have us understand, are based on principle, evidence and logic.

In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. A quick glance at three of the committee's leading members - all chosen by politicized regional groups - makes it clear that they are guided by an extreme ideological agenda.

First is Halima Warzazi, chosen by her peers last year as chairwoman. In the halls of the UN, the former Moroccan diplomat is noticeable for her brightly colored, traditional robes. Those who know UN history, however, remember her for something else.

In 1988, the precursor to the Advisory Committee was considering a resolution to condemn Saddam Hussein for having gassed thousands of Kurds in Halabja. It was an auspicious moment. Two years before Saddam would brutalize Kuwait through torture, murder and rape, and three years before he would kill more than 30,000 Kurds and Shiites, here was an opportunity for a UN body to show the Iraqi dictator that the eyes of the world were upon him.

But it was not to be. Warzazi initiated a "no action" motion to kill the resolution - and won the vote. Saddam went on to murder thousands more. So much for this adviser's "high moral standing."

Then there is Jean Ziegler, who served last year as Warzazi's vice-chair. The former socialist politician from Switzerland has authored numerous books accusing America and the West of being responsible for the world's ills.

Ziegler is a life-long cheerleader for Fidel Castro. In 2002, he praised the dictator of Zimbabwe, saying, "Mugabe has history and morality with him."

In 1989, as reported by Time magazine, Ziegler co-founded the Moammar Khadafy International Prize for Human Rights, with \$10 million from the Libyan regime. Awardees have included Castro, Hugo Chavez and Louis Farrakhan. In 2002, the prize was given to convicted French Holocaust denier Roger Garaudy - and to Ziegler himself.

Finally, there is the newest expert adviser, Nicaragua's Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann. In the 1980s, he was foreign minister under the Sandinista regime of Daniel Ortega.

In 2008-2009, Brockmann served as president of the UN General Assembly, nominated by Ortega after he regained power. While there, Brockmann named his own official advisers, including Anti-American guru Noam Chomsky, Khadafy's U.S. lawyer Ramsey Clark and Hamas sympathizer Richard Falk. In 2009, Brockmann designated Castro a "World Hero of Solidarity."

In 2008, after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad used the opening of the UN to attack America and "deceitful" Zionists, Brockmann rushed to hug him.

And in 2009, he sided with Sudan's President Omar Hassan al Bashir after he was indicted for genocide, saying the charge was "racist."

Warzazi, Ziegler, Brockmann - these are the "impartial" and "competent" experts guiding the Human Rights Council, whose 47 members already include China, Libya and Saudi Arabia. Not even George Orwell could have imagined this.

Leaks from peace talks don't show Palestinians making shocking concessions

Edmund Sanders, Los Angeles Times, January 24, 2011

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2011/01/west-bank-leaks-about-mideast-peace-talks-reveal-little-new-or-shocking.html>

If there's a lesson from Sunday's leak of alleged meeting minutes from 2008 Mideast peace talks involving Palestinian, Israeli and U.S. officials and from the previous WikiLeaks dump of U.S. diplomatic cables, perhaps it's this: Governments needn't be so afraid of having their private business aired in public.

After the initial U.S. embarrassment from the WikiLeaks disclosures, many came to believe that the cables actually showed U.S. diplomats to be rather astute and well-informed. In the same way, Palestinians so far don't really seem to have anything to be ashamed of in the leaks from the 2008 talks. Despite the spin by Al-Jazeera and critics of the Palestinian Authority, the documents released don't show Palestinian negotiators giving away the store.

To the contrary, they're depicted as taking a surprisingly hard-line stance against giving up massive West Bank settlements such as Maale Adumim, Givat Zeev,

Har Homa and Ariel, which most experts have long presumed would be retained by Israel with little fuss or cost.

Yes, Palestinians appear to have agreed to concede most of the large Jewish developments that are located across the Green Line in areas that are today considered part of Jerusalem. In a quip he likely now regrets, chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said the offer provided Israel with the "largest Jerusalem in the history of the Jewish people."

But giving Jewish areas of Jerusalem to Israel and Palestinian areas to the Palestinian Authority is an idea that been supported widely for years, since it was proposed by President Clinton.

Also, many of those developments were never historically part of what Palestinians considered to be inside the borders of Jerusalem. Much was rural West Bank land that only became part of Jerusalem when Israel annexed it after the 1967 Six-Day War and substantially increased the borders of Jerusalem. So although those areas were clearly part of the West Bank, they shouldn't necessarily carry the same emotional attachment for Palestinians or Arabs worldwide as the Old City or the historic parts of East Jerusalem. And rather than give away the land in exchange for nothing, as has been widely reported in the Arab press, the documents suggest that Palestinians were demanding in return Maale Adumim, Givat Ze'ev, Ariel and most other settlements east of Highway 60.

That's such a painful concession for Israel that you have to question whether the Palestinian offer was even serious.

To most Mideast experts, exchanging Jerusalem developments such as Gilo and French Hill for settlements such as Maale Adumim and Ariel sounds like a great deal for Palestinians and a non-starter for Israelis. And that's pretty much how it played out, with Israel's then-Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni rejecting the offer.

On the key issue of the Old City, which is what most Palestinians and Arabs worldwide care most about, both sides appeared to be prepared to punt the issue and deal with it at a later date, though Erekat was quoted as offering to allow Israel to retain control of the Jewish and Armenian quarters.

Generally, the negotiations appeared largely to have mirrored previous ones that Israelis and Palestinians had been having since Camp David in 2000. The documents so far haven't revealed anything that someone moderately familiar with the Mideast hasn't already heard.

Neither side is shown offering anything very fresh or sweeping, though it appeared the talks were serious, detailed and respectful. And in contrast to the usual Israeli depictions of Palestinians as evasive and always saying no, the documents suggest the Palestinians came to the table prepared to make a deal.

In a blunt self-assessment in January 2010, Erekat was quoted as saying the stakes for the Palestinian Authority in reaching a peace deal had never been higher. "Our credibility has never been so low," he is quoted as saying to U.S. diplomat David Hale. "Now it's about survival."

Navi Pillay's Cronyism

Anne Bayefsky, The Weekly Standard, 25 January 2011

http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/navi-pillay-s-cronyism_537245.html?nopager=1

The world of U.N. human rights, best known for a human rights council with members like Libya, Saudi Arabia, and China, has just outdone itself. A short press release on Monday announces that U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay has made some new appointments. The biographies attached leave out a few salient facts – and for good reason. The U.N.'s top human rights officer turns out not to be the model of independence and justice she professes.

Pillay has chosen Sweden's Lennert Aspegren for the job of "independent expert" and upgraded current U.N. "independent expert" American Mary McGowan Davis to become Aspegren's boss. Both are charged with assessing how "independently" Israel and its judiciary have responded to the notorious Goldstone Report. But the connections among Pillay, Goldstone, Aspegren and McGowan Davis, as well as other Pillay choices, are dizzying – and disconcerting.

The saga begins a few months after Pillay's ascendancy to the job of high commissioner in September 2008, during the Gaza war in late 2008 and early January 2009. The U.N. Human Rights Council began the New Year by doing everything in its power to prevent Israel from exercising its right of self-defense against Palestinian rocket attacks emanating from Gaza.

Despite the fact that High Commissioner Pillay was for many years a judge on the Rwandan Criminal Tribunal, which should have taught her to listen to all sides before making up her mind, she immediately drew the central legal conclusion only one day after Israel began its military operation in Gaza. On December 28, 2008, she issued a press release in which she "condemned Israel's disproportionate use of force." At the Human Rights Council on January 9, 2009, she first declared Israel guilty of "egregious violations of human rights" and then she demanded "credible, independent, and transparent investigations ... to identify violations and establish responsibilities."

She got her wish. Three days later, on January 12, 2010, the Council created what came to be called the Goldstone inquiry, a so-called "independent international fact-finding mission." Notwithstanding the title, the Council's resolution made sure that the point of the mission was to investigate what the Council and Pillay had already decided were "violations of human rights by Israel against the Palestinian people."

The council asked Pillay to prepare a separate report – despite the fact that she had already drawn her own conclusions – on the same alleged Israeli violations that she had spoken about so soon after coming into office.

The four members of the Gaza inquiry were carefully selected over the next few months and announced by the president of the Council on April 3, 2009. Every one of them, including the man who was appointed chair, South African judge Richard Goldstone, had published their views, uniformly claiming that Israel was guilty of the very crimes they were being hired to investigate, before they were selected for the Council.

Pillay had her own personal connections with Goldstone. Goldstone had been a judge on the highest courts in South Africa. Post-apartheid, Pillay was also named a judge of the High Court of South Africa. Goldstone was appointed the first prosecutor of the Rwandan Criminal Tribunal. Less than a year later, Pillay was part of the first cohort of judges appointed to the Rwandan Criminal Tribunal. When they were both at the Tribunal, Goldstone and Pillay cooperated closely. By the time of the Gaza conflict, then, the Goldstone-Pillay tag team was primed.

Pillay had no qualms about the prejudicial mandate that she had been handed by the Council. The reasons were soon clear. Rather than recognizing and condemning Hamas as a terrorist organization that openly advocates genocide, her August 2009 report lauds Hamas for having "made public statements that it is committed to respect international human rights and humanitarian law."

A month later, in Pillay's words, she and "Justice Goldstone made a similar assessment." Goldstone released his report on September 15, 2009. Extreme, even by U.N. standards, his report contains blood libel that, in the Gaza war, the Israeli government deliberately set out to murder Palestinian civilians, rather than to protect Israeli civilians from a deadly eight-year assault.

Goldstone also went out of his way to hand Pillay a means to keep the anti-Israel drumbeat going. He asked the high commissioner's office to "give attention to the Mission's recommendations in its periodic reporting." Pillay in turn became Goldstone's lead champion, endlessly repeating the words she wrote in the *Huffington Post* shortly after the report's release: "I lend my full support to Justice Goldstone's report and its recommendations."

Pillay was just warming up. She began to press the Human Rights Council and others to move to the next stage, and take "urgent action to counter impunity" and "ensure accountability" for the crimes Goldstone alleged. Council members like Saudi Arabia, Kyrgyzstan and company couldn't have agreed more. On March 25, 2010 the Human Rights Council decided to create another committee as a follow-up mechanism to the Goldstone report.

Among other things, the new Goldstone follow-on committee was charged with determining “the independence, effectiveness, [and] genuineness” of Israel’s response to the report and its “conformity with international standards.” The word “ Hamas ” was missing from the Council resolution, which referred only to an enigmatic “Palestinian side.” By this point, the Council felt it could count on Pillay and left it to her “to appoint the members of the committee of independent experts.”

In June 2010 Pillay chose three lawyers for the follow-on committee: German Christian Tomuschat as chair, Malaysian Param Cumaraswamy, and Mary McGowan Davis. She chose them with all the elements of independence and accountability that were becoming her signature – that is, accountability to her or to her personal predilections. Tomuschat had once provided legal advice to Yasser Arafat’s PLO. And all three members had close affiliations with an NGO that compromised their impartiality and was linked directly to Pillay’s own staff.

The interrelationships here are not just indicative of the usual collegiality among professionals. The body had been handed the power to assess the adequacy of the implementation of the Goldstone report. It could decide either to breathe new life into the Goldstone recommendations or to retire them. So relationships between Pillay, Goldstone and the new recruits matter to the integrity of the exercise. The members of a committee key to the future of the Goldstone report had been handpicked for their ideological biases and personal connections in order to perpetuate that very report.

Pillay’s moves undermined any pretense of integrity, impartiality or independence.

Committee members Christian Tomuschat and Param Cumaraswamy are both currently honorary members of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). Both had been members of the ICJ’s executive committee, and Cumaraswamy was the ICJ’s vice president until 2006. For her part, McGowan Davis is currently on the board of directors of the American Association for the ICJ.

The ICJ, however, is an NGO that had lobbied for the creation of the positions that the three Pillay appointees had assumed. ICJ representatives had also declared their views on the answers that were supposed to result from the new investigation. In October 2009 and March 2010 at the Human Rights Council, the ICJ declared that the Israeli investigations into the Gaza conflict “failed to meet international standards of effectiveness and independence.” The ICJ also claimed that the prosecution and punishment of Israeli “civilian leaders and military commanders” for Goldstone’s list of crimes is “essential” in order for Israel to conform to those standards.

Now meet Mona Rishmawi, a legal advisor to Pillay and chief of her “rule of law” branch. Both Tomuschat and Cumaraswamy, appointed to the Goldstone follow-

on committee, were members of the ICJ's executive committee during Rishmawi's stint as an ICJ director. Rishmawi had also been executive director of Al-Haq, the Palestinian affiliate of the ICJ. Her published articles include such gems as "Land Use Planning as a Strategy for Judaization" – "Judaization" being the horrible conception of a Jew living on Arab land – and an article where she denounces the "unfortunate parity between the claims of Nazi defendants in the post World War II trials and those put forward by the government of Israel."

All of this meant that Pillay's newly appointed "independent experts" were theoretically committed to assessing the "independence" and "effectiveness" of Israeli proceedings and their conformity with international standards. But in practice, the NGO to which they were also closely connected had specifically declared before the Council that Israeli processes "failed to meet international standards of effectiveness and independence." And in case the triumvirate needed any help coming to that conclusion, they could always count on assistance from the High Commissioner's office and her partisan advisor on the rule of law.

In addition to her ICJ connections, appointee McGowan Davis had another problem with fitting the "independent expert" mold – her own connection to Pillay. McGowan Davis was a consultant both to the Rwandan Tribunal and to the International Criminal Court during the time that Pillay served as a judge on each of these courts.

Pillay's office also selected South African lawyer Ahmed Motala as the in-house contact to serve as the Tomuschat committee's facilitator. Motala, however, doubled as an anti-Israel blogger. He had written in the middle of the Gaza war that Israel targeted Palestinian civilians in order to impress voters: "What better way to gain the support of the Israeli electorate than to ... kill innocent civilians." After Motala's comments were widely circulated, Pillay was forced to remove him from the committee post.

But Pillay seems to have been undaunted, making no pretense of an even-handed approach when it came to Israel. On July 7, 2010 she made an unusual appearance before the U.N. Security Council, having been invited to address the issue of "situations where the protection of civilians has been and remains of great concern." After noting the millions affected by atrocities around the world, the only plea she made in her statement to the Security Council on behalf of the peoples of this earth was: "I urge the Security Council to support the recommendations of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict," a.k.a., the Goldstone report.

The Goldstone follow-on committee performed as Pillay and the Human Rights Council anticipated. Their September 2010 report repeated the odious claim that Israel engaged in "violence against civilians as part of a deliberate policy" and criticized Israel's legal system for failing to hunt down "officials at the highest

levels.” Referring to a Hamas internal “investigation,” in which Hamas exonerated itself from all wrongdoing, the committee could only conclude that it was “not in a position to ascertain the veracity of any of these assertions.”

The Human Rights Council rewarded the committee with a job renewal, a request for another report in March of 2011, and a demand that the U.N. system open its coffers and pay for it all. However, given the obvious biases and lack of independence among Pillay’s crew, the professional reputation of committee members was starting to suffer. Perhaps the glow from impressing Libya, Saudi Arabia and company was also wearing off. So in late November of last year, Tomuschat, followed a week later by Cumaraswamy, resigned from the Goldstone follow-on committee.

It was left to Pillay to find a replacement. Which brings us to Monday’s unassuming press release. Pillay promoted McGowan Davis to the position of chair and chose Lennert Aspegren to join McGowan Davis on the Goldstone campaign.

Again, Pillay’s twisted notion of an “independent expert” is on full display. Aspegren and Pillay were both elected to the Rwandan Criminal Tribunal at the same time in 1995, frequently assigned to the same three-judge chamber, and worked as full-time colleagues until 1999. Pillay was taking no chances on a stranger with whom she couldn’t pick up a phone. Moreover, just like Pillay, Aspegren had once worked in close cooperation with the Tribunal’s prosecutor, Goldstone – who had a vested interest in the findings of the follow-on committee.

It gets worse. With Goldstone deservedly under fire, so-called human rights organizations have begun giving him awards. One such award is the Stockholm Human Rights Award, tailor-made for the Goldstone resuscitation campaign, with Goldstone being the first-ever recipient in 2009. This award is a joint initiative involving three organizations, one of which is the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC). One of the four “founding organisations” of ILAC is the International Commission of Jurists, the NGO connecting so many of the dots.

Prior to giving Goldstone his award, ILAC and the other two organizations sponsoring the prize wrote and widely distributed a letter, entitled, “The Goldstone report must be taken seriously.” Goldstone was on the ILAC governing body (the ILAC Council) at the time it decided to create and award him the prize. Cumaraswamy, the former Pillay appointee to the Goldstone follow-on committee, is one of a small group of specially-appointed ILAC “individual members.” The unseemly optics of it all evidently passed unnoticed.

It is less difficult to overlook the award recipient in its second year. The 2010 Stockholm Human Rights Award was given to none other than Goldstone-crusader, High Commissioner Pillay. The award was given out in a small ceremony on November 30, 2010, and in the room was her old colleague at the

Rwandan Criminal Tribunal and soon-to-be-member of the Goldstone follow-up committee, Lennart Aspegren. Pillay singled him out for individual praise in her acceptance speech.

It also transpires that while Goldstone was on the ILAC Council and Cumaraswamy was an individual member, Aspegren was selected to serve on a number of ILAC delegations, which sent him on missions around the world, a debt he may just want to repay.

So this is how the U.N. works. A High Commissioner with a clear bias, shared by the U.N.'s most unscrupulous set of state actors, contrives to create a series of committees to forward her agenda. The job descriptions are liberally sprinkled with the word "independent." But, in fact, she ensures that individuals who are anything but "independent" fill the positions. They are either indebted to her or to each other. They share her biases or are tied to those who do. And in the face of criticism, they manufacture and give each other awards. Those with bruised reputations depart, only to be replaced by other reliable friends.

It is hard to know which of these many steps is more deplorable than the next. In the name of "independence" and "accountability," the U.N.'s top human rights official is busy promoting a vicious campaign to demonize one U.N. member state and throwing the rules about impartiality and fairness out the window.

Commissioner Navi Pillay and her appointments, Lennert Aspegren and Mary McGowan Davis, are the wrong people to take any leadership role in demanding accountability from others.

Why the call to "Boycott Israel" is crap

Bernard Henri-Levy, The Huffington Post , 26 January 2011

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernardhenri-levy/why-the-call-to-boycott-ib-813856.html>

Since it is necessary to spell things out, let's do so.

Obviously, I have never, directly or indirectly, pressured anyone to cancel a meeting in support of the partisans of the boycott of Israel, with Palestinian Leila Shahid, Frenchman Stéphane Hessel, and others scheduled to appear, at the Ecole normale supérieure in Paris.

This would have been all the more absurd because, by nature and by conviction, I believe in the power of ideas and, even more, that of the truth. In such circumstances, I am always in favor of debate, the clash of opinions, even the confrontation of convictions--hence, not of censure.

And the fact is that, in this particular circumstance, that is to say in this matter of the BDS ("Boycott, Disinvestment, Sanctions") campaign that was to be the main issue of the Ecole normale meeting, I would have been more than happy to be able to present those who speak sincerely with facts and, basically, evidence that seems to have escaped them: namely that we are faced here with a skilfully orchestrated but calumnious, bellicose, anti-democratic and, in a word, perfectly despicable campaign.

Why?

First of all, because one boycotts totalitarian regimes, not democracies. One can boycott Sudan, guilty of the extermination of part of the population of Darfur. One can boycott China, guilty of massive violations of human rights in Tibet and elsewhere. One can and should boycott the Iran of Sakineh and Jafar Panahi, whose leaders have become deaf to the language of common sense and compromise. One can even imagine, as we once did with regard to the fascist generals' Argentina or Brezhnev's USSR, boycotting those Arab regimes whose citizens' freedom of expression is forbidden and punished, if necessary, in blood. One does not boycott the only society in the Middle East where Arabs read a free press, demonstrate when they wish to do so, send freely elected representatives to parliament, and enjoy their rights as citizens. Regardless of what one thinks of the policies of its government, one does not boycott the only country in the region and, beyond the region, one of the unfortunately limited number of countries in the world where voters have the power to sanction, modify, and reverse the position of said government. To such an extent that finding, like Mr. Hessel, the source of its "main indignation" in the workings of a democracy that, like all democracies, is by definition imperfect but perfectible (yet, on the contrary, having nothing to say about the millions of victims of Africa's forgotten wars, about the persecution of Christians in the Middle East or, yesterday, about the massacre of Bosnia's Muslims) is at best profoundly stupid and at worst, disgraceful.

And then because, in any event, this boycott campaign is in reality indifferent to the stance of the government of Mr. X or Mrs. Y. It is unaware, nor does it care to know, of what Israeli citizens themselves think, for example, of the resumption of settlement construction in the West Bank. It doesn't give a hoot about demands, parameters, actual conditions of peace between the citizens in question and their Palestinian neighbors. Of the latter, their aspirations, their interests, their possible hopes and the way the Hamas regime has smashed those hopes in Gaza, it doesn't give a tinker's damn and never says anything, either. No. Regardless of what its promoters and its useful idiots say, the only real, accepted, hackneyed goal of this boycott campaign is to de-legitimize Israel as such. That is what the comparison with the South Africa of apartheid implicitly expresses. That is what the anti-Zionist rhetoric that serves as the common denominator of all the groups constituting this BDS movement explicitly says and, if words have any meaning, what signifies their intent to undermine the very idea that today, like it or not, binds the Israeli nation. And that is why this campaign, in fact, contravenes the customs, rules and laws of international and, in this case, French or American national law.

And then, lastly, there are those at the heart and, sometimes, at the origin of this campaign whose inspiration is, to say the least, not that of De Gaulle's Free French nor of those who penned the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, nor of those in favor of a just peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. I submit, to whomever wishes, the declarations of Omar Barghouti, one of the movement's founders, affirming that his goal is not two States but two Palestines. And those of Ali Abunimah, co-founder of Electronic Intifada and also opposed to the two-state solution, who does not hesitate to compare Israel to Nazi Germany and this or that of its philosophers to the columnists of *Der Stürmer*. And the declarations of the leaders of Sabeel, this group of Palestinian Christians firmly implanted in North America who, anxious to lend the idea of "responsible investment" a "theological" basis, do not hesitate to subtly but surely reactivate the Christ-killing Jews stereotype. Not to mention some rather shady initiatives whose purpose is to mark Jewish--sorry, Israeli--merchandise with supposedly derogatory stickers intended for the attention of the vigilant French consumer.

All that is deplorable and, once again, indisputable. Presenting the promoters of this discourse of hatred as victims speaks volumes of the current state of confusion - intellectual and moral - of a Western world one would have hoped cured of its worst criminal past.

Left-wing criticism is not right

By Miriam Shaviv, London Jewish Chronicle, December 20, 2010

<http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/columnists/42832/left-wing-criticism-not-right>

What is really behind the objections to Jewish Leadership Council chief Mick Davis's criticism of Israel? Is it what he said? To whom he said it? Or is the real issue, perhaps, who said it?

At that now notorious panel debate, Davis seemed to blame Israel for the collapse in the peace process, blasting Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for "lacking courage" to take steps towards a "great advance". He implored the Israeli government to recognise that its actions "impacted" him in London - implying that diaspora Jews were equal stakeholders in the Middle East conflict. And he confessed that Anglo-Jewry's leaders are afraid to speak openly about Israel's problems, re-enforcing the myth (proven false by his own words) that those holding dissenting opinions are suppressed.

To many, all this added up to an unjustified attack on the Jewish state. Others took no issue with the content of his talk, or respected his right to hold these

views, but questioned his judgment in saying all this publicly. "He is giving ammunition to our enemies", they said - and this at a time when Israel is battling delegitimisation.

I do wonder, though, whether many of his criticisms would have been judged to be quite so contentious had they been made by someone else - someone from the opposite end of the political spectrum.

Mick Davis is head of the UJIA, which is considered by many British Jews to lean left. Seated on the same panel as US journalist Peter Beinart, author of a much-discussed essay critical of America's Zionist leaders, and Guardian and JC columnist Jonathan Freedland, his comments were, before he even opened his mouth, going to be interpreted as reflecting a leftist bias.

Davis went out of his way to reinforce this impression, positioning himself as part of British Jewry's "left-of-centre leadership". His comments were then all couched in the language of the left - using the dreaded phrase, "apartheid state" (although denying Israel was one - yet), referring to Israel's "minority issues" and doubting that Israel is a "moral nation"- again, yet.

It was inevitable that he was going to be slammed. Over the past few years, the quality of our communal discourse has deteriorated so shamefully that leftist Zionists who query Israel's path find their loyalty to - and love for - the state routinely doubted (see what happened to Beinart). Those on the right are so involved in defending Israel that some of them seem to have convinced themselves that it is perfect.

But, of course, you do not have to be on the left to be deeply concerned about Israel's future. Even on the right, only those wearing blinkers can deny that Israel is on a very worrying path.

Unlike Davis, I do not believe that the impasse with the Palestinians is Netanyahu's fault; no "courageous" steps will bring about an agreement in the absence of a Palestinian partner. And yet, I know that every day that goes by without a settlement is a demographic time-bomb for Israel. Peace is currently not in Israel's hands to deliver. But Davis is right - where is its strategy for handling the conflict in the meantime?

As an Israeli citizen, I would have voted for Netanyahu (had I been in the country) and would vote for him again. Opposition leader Tzipi Livni seems invisible. Nevertheless, there is no denying Netanyahu is a weak, indecisive leader. His Israel is ungovernable, with policies driven by coalition parties looking out only for their own constituents. I really miss Arik Sharon, who could get things done.

I worry, too, about the shrinking number of Israeli citizens equipped to enter the workforce because of their poor education. For how long can Israel's economic miracle last? And my heart is broken by Israel's secular population, which has become alienated from Judaism, and by Israel's religious establishment, which has done much of the alienating.

As for the way Israel treats its Arab population, I don't think Israel behaves "immorally" - every country, including the UK, has difficulty integrating its minorities and closing socio-economic gaps. Add the nationalistic element into the mix, however, and Israel is clearly playing with fire.

But let me repeat: I am solidly on Israel's right, a supporter of Sharon and Netanyahu. Is my loyalty to Israel suspect now, too? Or is that the kind of treatment reserved only for those on the left sharing their concerns, those like Mick Davis?

***Bits and Pieces* Clips from various media in the Middle East and elsewhere**

JTA, 25 January 2011: Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries who were among the first responders to the bombing at Moscow's busiest airport comforted families and said they tried "to uplift their spirits." Rabbi Sheah Deitsch, one of a group of Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries who are first responders on behalf of the Moscow Chief Rabbinate, described the scene as "horrifying and said that "families were screaming and wailing." Monday's bombing at the the Domodedovo Airport killed at least 35 and injured 130. "From the preliminary information we have, it was a terror attack," Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said in a televised briefing, adding that those responsible would be "tracked down and punished."

Imra.org, 26 January 2011: Hamas has withdrawn its authorization of President Mahmoud Abbas as the head of negotiations. Hamas official Khalil Al-Hayya said Abbas' mandate was not valid without the party's recognition. He also dismissed the PA's claim that it negotiated on behalf of Palestinians. Hamas does not participate in talks with Israel. The move follows the release of secret PLO documents covering a decade of negotiations with Israel, leaked to the Qatar-based satellite channel Al-Jazeera.