

OPINION



Pointing the finger at Israel

THERE IS a world of difference between what is stated publicly and privately in the political cauldron of the Middle East. Quite how vast this disparity has become was emphatically underlined this week amid revelations which, if accurate, have the capacity to turn the Israel-Palestinian peace process on its head.

More than 1,600 files leaked to Al Jazeera, purportedly documenting talks between the two sides between 2000 and 2010, portray the Palestinian Authority as surprisingly pragmatic and keen to compromise and the Israelis as lacking the will to find a way forward.

This week's revelations have been remarkable and relentless. Among the most jaw-dropping is Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas agreeing Israel should keep swathes of East Jerusalem and dismissing the return of five million Palestinian refugees as "illogical".

Further bombshells include his chief negotiator Saeb Erekat recognising Israel as a Jewish state and showing off his Hebrew by telling the Israelis: "We're offering you the biggest *Yerushalayim* in Jewish history."

These dynamite documents depict the Palestinian Authority as bearers of unbelievably generous gifts. Gifts which, judging by the hostile reaction on the streets of the West Bank, they are entirely without the mandate to offer.

The finger of blame for the absence of progress now seems to point squarely at the Jewish state.

Rather than lacking a partner for peace, these files suggest it has failed to engage in anything approaching meaningful progress despite apparent conciliation and compromise by the other side.

Ultimately, though, the blame game is of no consequence. All that counts is that the current stalemate is resolved as swiftly as possible.

And, in the end, any decision about how much Israel is prepared to risk for a final settlement with the Palestinians is Israel's alone.

No matter how compelling they may seem at first glance, out-of-context fragments of private conversations should not be viewed as a reliable reflection of the importance Israel attaches to two states living side-by-side in peace and security.

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Letters to the Editor

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THE CHIEF RABBI IS BEING DISINGENUOUS

Dear Sir
Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks misleads the public (*Jewish News*, 13 January) by saying he has "asked the National Organ Donor Registry to explore how it can facilitate an option for Jews" to donate their organs within halacha. Lord Sacks, a modern-Orthodox rabbi, rejects modern medicine and does not accept brain death as death. Since most critical organs are donated from brain-dead patients, if Jews follow Rabbi Sacks's ruling – and I hope they don't – they will not donate any critical organs.

Even if one were to donate organs upon cardiac death, the transplant team has to turn the ventilator off to cause the heart to die. Rabbi Sacks won't allow this.

So what changes in the transplant process is Rabbi Sacks asking for? What kind of organ donor card that comports with halacha is he requesting?

Does it seem equitable that Jews should be allowed to receive hearts, lungs, liver and pancreas transplants from gentiles while Jews only donate skin and corneas? Any optimism about Rabbi Sacks's statement is misplaced.

Since Rabbi Sacks claims that a brain dead patient is alive, he was asked whether he permits Jews to ask doctors to "murder" – presumably gentile – brain dead patients by removing their critical organs. Rabbi Sacks responded that if the donor voluntarily offers to be "killed" then it is halachically acceptable.

This position is morally reprehensible and, with due respect, not halachic. I call upon Rabbi Sacks to share with the public his halachic sources, and logic for that matter, that serves as his basis for this ethically untenable and self-serving double standard.

I also find it curious that Rabbi Sacks discourages people from getting organ-donor cards that "purport" to be halachic when Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch, the person who gave Rabbi Sacks his *semicha*, has just such a card from the Halachic Organ Donor Society.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel accepts brain death as death and supports organ donation. The Rabbinical Council of America, the modern Orthodox umbrella organisation in the United States, also accepts organ donation after brain death as a valid halachic option.

Only Rabbi Sacks and his Beth Din have issued a black and white ruling against brain death and organ donation. What Torah insights do they have that others don't?

An increasing number of independent and free-thinking Orthodox UK rabbis, such as Rabbi Michael Rosenfeld and Rabbi Jeff Berger, who publicise that they carry a HOD Society organ donor card, will save lives in England. Sadly, this will not be because of Rabbi Sacks, but in spite of him.

Robby Berman
Founder and Director
Halachic Organ Donor Society

Dear Sir

It is regrettable that at present the Beth Din sanctions organ donation after cardiac death but not after brain-stem death and that the Chief Rabbi endorses this.

Diagnosing brain-stem death was an indeterminate issue when organ donation was in its infancy, but times have changed and advances in medicine have enabled a

universally accepted clear-cut diagnosis of brain stem death. It is important that this controversial subject is openly discussed within the UK Jewish community to push for a change analogous to the American orthodoxy, which now allows the carrying of organ donor cards.

In the UK, three people a day die waiting for an organ transplant. If we are willing to receive an organ, then we also must accept our obligation to donate.

Via our local communities in conjunction with medical professionals in the field of transplantation, these issues must be pushed to the forefront thereby encouraging the Beth Din to re-evaluate their organ donation policies.

Jeremy Crane MD MRCS (Transplant Surgeon)
Hendon

Dear Sir

Although I am not Jewish, I met Rabbi Moshe Feinstein in 1976 to discuss brain death and organ donation with him. He told me that brain death was death and that a beating heart was not a sufficient sign of life according to the Talmud, I reported his opinion in an article I wrote that was published on 10 October 1977 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

The website of the Halachic Organ Donor Society (www.hods.org) has hundreds of scholarly articles and dozens of videos showing prominent Orthodox rabbis and Orthodox neurosurgeons who accept brain death as death. It is a pity that Britain's Chief Rabbi, a modern Orthodox rabbi, has decided to reject modern medicine. It will be a tragedy if his statement causes more British citizens to die.

Moreover, I am shocked that the Chief Rabbi concluded that brain-dead people are alive so Jews should not donate organs, but he does not mind Jews taking critical organs from non-Jewish people like me who voluntarily sign up for organ donation.

Dr Frank Veith
Professor of Surgery
New York University Medical Center

Sketches & kvetches

By Paul Solomons www.daftoons.com



'Would you like my chopped liver?'

IS THE TELEGRAPH LOSING BALANCE?

Dear Sir

Your columnist Charlie Wolf was right to draw attention to the article in the *Daily Telegraph* by Peter Osborne, in which Osborne blew the lid on the divisions within government, and parties, on Israel (*Jewish News*, 6 January). Surely, though, this is hardly surprising to anybody. Neither is it a great secret that Israel cannot rely on the so-called friendship of Cameron, Hague or Miliband.

More surprising to me is that Charlie did not comment on the whole tone of this article which was virulently anti-Israel, full of unsubstantiated opinion presented as fact, repeated the usual UN and EU false accusations about Israel breaking "international law", enhanced by Osborne's personal rhetoric. As a reader of the *Daily Telegraph*, I found this article outrageous, simply providing Osborne with a national platform to air his anti-Israel opinions. In the nature of fair and balanced journalism, the *Telegraph* could have published an article on the same page presenting a different view from Osborne's or, perhaps, the following day.

Nothing has been forthcoming since, which would support the *Telegraph's* usual coverage from Israel, which I analysed during the past year as 82 percent negative towards Israel.

In the *Guardian* or the *Independent*, one has grown to accept that this is the case, but it seems that the *Daily Telegraph* is now no different. Surely, this is the surprising thing Charlie, isn't it?

Harry Levy
Pinner

WAS IT SARCASM OR UNDERSTATEMENT?

Dear Sir

Your correspondent, Jeremy Last, either has a wry sense of humour or is a master of the British flair for understatement.

By describing Jerusalem Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini as "a critic of Zionism during the Second World War" he has achieved a mind-boggling level of restraint.

Husseini was no critic; he was a rabid anti-Aemite, who worked assiduously to foment anti-Jewish feeling, violence and even pogroms in Palestine during the 1930s and until his none-too-untimely demise in 1974.

He met the Nazi leader, spent the war organising and distributing Nazi propaganda and was instrumental in recruiting Muslims to the SS, into their own special brigade.

He was promised that should the Nazis prevail in the war, then he would be entrusted to execute the fuhrer's plan for the Jews, in Palestine.

There was a price on his head on several occasions and he was fortunate not to have been executed at the end of the second world war.

It was he who rallied the Arab masses in 1948 to enlist and fight to exterminate the Jews of Palestine. He promised the volunteers participation in the greatest massacre that there'd been since Mohammed swept through Arabia.

From this point of view, one could also maintain that President Ahmadinejad is a critic of Zionism.

Rabbi M Lester
South London Synagogue