OPINION

Pointing the finger at Israel

THERE IS a world of difference between what is stated publicly and privately in the political caldron of the Middle East. Quite how vast this discrepancy has become is dramatically underlined this week amid revelations which, if accurate, have the capacity to turn the Israel-Palestine 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 swaths of East Jerusalem and dismissing the return of five million Palestinian refugees as ‘Bilgical’.

Further bombshells include the chief negotiator Saeb Erekat recognising Israel as a Jewish state and offering it (hebrew by telling the Israelis: “We’re offering you the biggest Jerusalemisation 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 entirely clearly pointed at the Jewish state.

Rather than lacking a partner for peace, these files suggest it has failed to engage in anything approaching meaningful preparation, readying apparent concession 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 case any decision about how much Israel is prepared to risk for a final settlement with the Palestinians is Israel’s alone.

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

The Chief Rabbi is being disingenuous

Dear Sir

Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks misleads the public (Jewish News, 15 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 organ systems are destroyed in 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 requiring?

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 donate organs 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 publish 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 signing organ donor cards that ‘purport’ to be halachic when Rabbi Nachum Rabbinovitch, the person who gave me mine, was also not halachic. It may be he is not aware of it.

Rabbi Berman, founder and director, Halachic Organ Donor Society

The Chief Rabbi is of Israel accepts brain death as death and supports organ donation. The Rabbinical Council of America, modern the 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-think Orthodox UK rabbis, such as Rabbi Michael Rosensweig and Rabbi Jeff Berg, 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 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.

Jerome Crane MD MRCS (Transplant Surgeon)

The IsraeU Telegraph Losing balance?

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 Torah. 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 video slide presentations promoting Orthodox rabbis and Orthodoxy neurologists 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 Jewish philanthropists 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 Yezh
Professor of Surgery
New York University Medical Center

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 Oborne in which the latter bemoaned the EU(make-up) and races against the American orthodoxy, which now allows the carrying of organ donor cards.

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Jerome Crane MD MRICS (Transplant Surgeon)

Was it Sarcasm or Understatement?

Dear Sir

Your correspondent, Mr Last, either has a very keen sense of humor or is a master of understatement for underemtation.

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 rabbi and extremist, who worked assiduously to foment anti-Jewish feeling, violence and even pogroms in Palestine during the 1930s and until his non-too-atmounstant demise in 1974.

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

He was promised that the Nazis would use the war to drive the Jews out of Palestine. He promised the volunteers participation in the greatest massacre that there’d been since Mohamed 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