

# The Canadian Jewish news

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## A revealing tale of two governments

**T**he government of Israel is being hectoring by various foreign policy experts to re-open diplomatic discussions with Syria. Just last month, for example, British journalist Patrick Seale urged that the latest Syrian "overtures" toward Israel be taken seriously. Seale was the biographer of the late Syrian president Hafez Assad and is known to have excellent connections to the current Syrian ruler, Hafez's son, Bashar Assad.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem told the *Washington Post* last month that his government is willing to hold talks with Israel without any preconditions. Bashar had left such talks dangling with former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, who, it was reported, had been willing to make far-reaching concessions to secure a full peace agreement with the Damascus regime.

The government of Israel, though, is not convinced that the recent purported peace overtures are sincere. Nor does it wish to reward the Syrian strongman for his antagonistic, anti-Israel behaviour.

Damascus was deeply involved with Iran on the side of Hezbollah during the war last summer, and it also hosts the headquarters of Hamas and a cadre of other extremist Palestinian terrorist groups. Damascus' attitude toward the Jewish state and toward the fostering of peace in the region is clearly and manifestly hostile.

Syria is also anti-humanitarian in the extreme. Time and again, Bashar has callously refused to surrender the remains of Eli Cohen for burial in Israel. As *The CJN* reports today, Israelis are continuing to pressure Bashar to release Cohen's bones to the Cohen family, and they are right to do so. They are also correct in asking, more than rhetorically, what kind of person Bashar is and what kind of regime he runs.

In contrast to the enigmatically cruel regime in Syria, however, is the enigmatic but pragmatic regime in Amman, with whom Israel signed a peace accord in 1994. Though the peace is more between governments than it is between peoples, it does still demonstrate the benefit that can flow to the citizens of the area.

An incident last week shows how.

Israel's Foreign Ministry reported that it was able to help facilitate the rescue of 47 Israeli Arabs from a precarious situation in Saudi Arabia. The 47 were returning to Israel from the Haj pilgrimage when their bus broke down in the heat and sand of the Saudi Arabian desert.

Their rescue followed a quick chain of events in which the government of Amman played a key role that could be sung like a song from the Passover seder. One of the travellers called the tour operator in Israel; the tour operator called the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem; the Foreign Ministry called the Israeli embassy in Amman; the embassy secured the assistance of someone at the Jordanian royal palace; the Jordanians quickly called the Saudi royal palace in Riyadh; the Saudi royals then arranged for the rescue of the Israeli pilgrims from the desert.

Damascus and Amman: a tale of two very different governments.

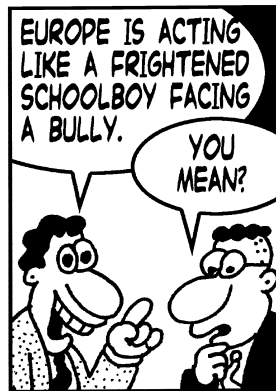
## 25 years ago in *The CJN*

Israel and Syria lashed at each other as the United Nations Security Council debate on the Golan Heights continued into its second week.

As the Israelis and Syrians traded insults, the United States sought to tone down a Syrian plan to force political, economic and military sanctions against Israel.

## Editorials & Letters

### Dry Bones



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### Golan part of historic Land of Israel

I applaud Frances Kraft's article on the Golan Heights ("One of the safest places in Israel," *CJN*, Nov. 23). As an Israeli who enjoys exploring the Golan as often as possible, I urge your readers to make the Heights a "must-see" on their next visit to Israel.

There are, however, a couple of points I would like to add. The claim of the State of Israel and the Jewish people to the Golan Heights predates the period 1947 to 1967, when Syria controlled this strategic area and used it as a base for aggression against northern Israel. The Golan is in fact part of the historic Land of Israel, notwithstanding that its degree of sanctity in a religious sense does not approach that of Jerusalem. Moreover, the Golan was included as part of the British Mandate over Palestine to which the Balfour Declaration applied.

It is unfortunately a widespread misconception that Syria's claim to the Golan predates Israel's and that the return of the Golan Heights is the only basis upon which peace with Syria can be obtained. Let us also not forget that in 1981, when Menachem Begin was prime minister, the Knesset officially annexed the Golan Heights to the State of Israel, as well as united Jerusalem.

Martin S. Kalson  
Ginot Shomron, Israel

### Golan key to Israel's survival

To give the Golan Heights to Syria is nothing short of insane. There is nothing Syria can give Israel in return, nothing at all. Even less than the zero we got from Egypt through the peace agreement of 1979. Right now Egypt is actually moving further into the negative as it is allowing arms smuggling into Gaza. The Golan is key to our survival. As a nation, we cannot afford to capitulate anymore.

Ze'ev Shemer  
Ramat HaGolan, Israel

### The world needs more Cotlers

Irwin Cotler, member of Parliament and former minister of justice and attorney general, continues to show that he is a man of courage, compassion and integrity and one who is guided by the talmudic principle, "Justice, justice, you shall pursue." In his latest public writings, Cotler has not only mounted another vicious and well-deserved attack against Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, but he also draws our attention to the plight of Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury, a Bangladeshi national who is on trial and faces the possibility of execution for trumped-up charges, while

having been denied almost every single basic fundamental right that has been recognized in international law ("Bangladeshi suffers for advocating Israel ties," *CJN*, Jan. 4).

In alerting Canadians to Choudhury's case, Cotler continues to defend his international clients not only in the courts, but also in the "court of public opinion." This, as he has shown in the past in defending clients such as Nelson Mandela and Natan Sharansky, is often more important than the actual legal defence in court, as it often embarrasses a rogue country into action and reminds those of us in the democratized world of the importance of continuing to fight for the rights of the oppressed and the vulnerable.

In continuing his attacks against Iran's hateful, anti-Semitic leader, Cotler is cognizant of the old saying that if history is forgotten, it will repeat itself. If the world continues to sit by and allow Ahmadinejad and others to call for the destruction of an entire country and to deny that the Nazi Holocaust occurred, then history may very well repeat itself.

The world needs more Irwin Cotlers.

Leigh Lampert  
Toronto

### Engaging the intermarried

I would like to applaud the Conservative movement for continuing to take steps to be more welcoming to interfaith families ("Schechter schools may revise admissions policy," *CJN*, Toronto, Jan. 4; "Schechter schools consider more flexibility for non-halachically Jewish students," *CJN*, Montreal, Jan. 4). When Rabbi Jerome Epstein announced his plans for a movement-wide initiative to engage the intermarried last year, it wasn't clear what the practical consequences would be. But his impassioned plea to day schools to "make a special effort to enroll the children of intermarried Jews even if they are not halachically Jewish" shows that he is backing up his words with action.

Too often, people in the Jewish community talk about outreach (efforts to engage the intermarried) and "in-reach" (efforts to engage born Jews and socialize them with other Jews) as if they are mutually exclusive projects. But if Conservative day schools admit the children of non-Jewish mothers, they will be performing outreach and in-reach at the same time. Admitting the children of interfaith families into Jewish day schools is a win-win for the Jewish community and the intermarried.

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