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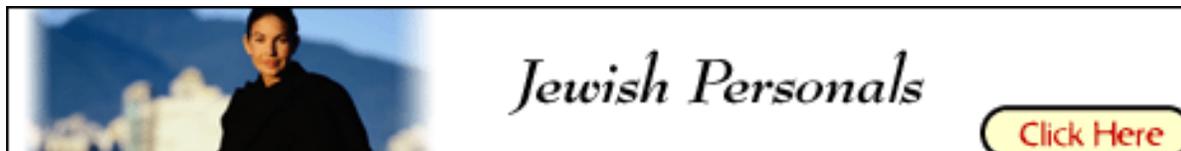
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## The Post under fire -- again Pro-Israel activists slam article on Jerusalem

by Eric Fingerhut

Staff Writer

Local pro-Israel activists had a hard time keeping down their breakfast on Tuesday morning of last week when they read a *Washington Post* article charging that Israel wants to cut off Palestinian access to Jerusalem.

The story, "Israel Hems in a Sacred City; Encircling Complicates Prospects for Peace" by John Ward Anderson, has set off a flurry of letters, action alerts and advertisements responding to the Feb. 10 front-page piece. Activists fault the article's recitation of Middle East history, its selective quoting of sources and omission of virtually any mention of Palestinian terrorism.

The article received prominent above-the-fold placement on the front page as well as two full pages inside the A section, and was accompanied by eight pictures and two large maps.

The piece argued that, according to documents, maps and interviews, Israel is "close to finishing a decades-long effort to surround Jerusalem with Jewish settlements, walls, fences and roads that will severely restrict Palestinian access to the city and reduce the chance of its becoming a Palestinian state."

*Post* ombudsman Michael Getler said that he had received a "sufficient number" of letters and e-mails about the article -- as many as two dozen, he estimated -- but said he did not want to compare the response to last week's piece to reaction

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### Local News

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to other Middle East-related stories which raised readers' ire.

(Three letters about the article, one supporting it and two criticizing it, appeared in Saturday's edition of the paper.)

Getler's initial reaction was that the article should have mentioned the "toll terrorism and suicide bombings" have taken on Israelis during the Palestinian uprising, an opinion he has expressed in previous columns.

"That's always important," he said.

Getler said Friday that he was not sure whether he would write a column about the piece or discuss it in his weekly memo to the staff, and was planning to talk to *Post* foreign editor David Hoffman about the issue.

American Jewish Committee Washington-area director David Bernstein sent a critique of the article to the *Post*, emphasizing that the story "makes scant reference to the suicide terrorism that has shaken Israeli society" and never asks the "obvious question": whether stopping terrorism would have prevented the erection of the security fence.

Bernstein also pointed to the article's lack of "moderate mainstream Israeli voices that could shed light on what's happening." Other than Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's spokesperson Raanan Gissin, all the Israelis quoted in the story are either those who live in West Bank settlements and their supporters, or peace activists like Jeff Halper, who has endorsed a binational state of Israelis and Palestinians.

Many local activists also took issue with the way Anderson described the 2000 Camp David peace talks. He wrote that then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak "appeared to accept a U.S. proposal that would have given Palestinians control over the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, but the negotiations collapsed."

No mention is made of what participants in the talks, including then-President Bill Clinton, have said was the cause of that collapse -- Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's walking out of the meeting while failing to accept the proposal or to suggest a counteroffer.

While the article blames Barak's "concessions" at Camp David for the fall of his government, Bernstein asserted that the Palestinian terrorism campaign that began after the talks' collapse and Barak's continued willingness to negotiate during the violence were the true reasons for his loss in the

next election.

The article spurred a decision by EyeOnThePost, Inc. -- a grassroots organization set up to monitor *Post* coverage of the Middle East -- to start an "open letters to the *Washington Post* [ad] campaign," beginning in *Washington Jewish Week* and, provided the needed funds are raised, *The Washington Times* and possibly even the *Post* itself.

The first letter, addressed to *Post* chair Donald Graham, charges the paper with "vicious anti-Israeli bias" and says the Feb. 10 article "baldly and falsely asserts that Israel is involved in a land grab."

The ad also asks four questions, including "Why does *The Post* rank inconvenience to Palestinians above Israeli lives and security?" and "Why does *The Post* downplay that the security fence is designed to keep out terrorists?"

EyeOnThePost co-chair Robert Samet of Potomac particularly took issue with the article's reference to Israel's "war for independence" instead of the usual "war of independence" -- implying that Israel started the war in 1948 instead of being attacked by the surrounding Arab states.

The article was an "abomination" because of its "huge play" in the publication and its numerous misleading statements, Samet said. He also charged that *Post* writers and editors "deliberately slant the news."

Samet, however, praised the fairness of last Sunday's *Post* piece about anti-Semitism in Great Britain, although he charges that the *Post* often overlooks anti-Semitic incidents in Europe in its daily reporting.

Bernstein also believes many *Post* writers and editors often betray a "preconceived ... worldview" that sees Israeli actions, like the building of a security fence, as an obstacle to peace rather than perhaps being a spur to peace talks, as others might argue.

The Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington sent out an action alert urging local activists to speak out against the "misleading" article by sending letters to the newspaper, the ombudsman and foreign editor Hoffman.

The alert, written in cooperation with Eric Rozenman, the Washington director of CAMERA (the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America), charges that the article used "historical revisionism" in its summary of the

Arab-Israeli conflict since 1947 and fails to report Sharon's statement that he is willing to "negotiate the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," among other things.

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