

## CNN IS BACK

**T**hat counts as good news, I suppose; they were gone for a year or so because of a dispute with our local cable company. I understood that it was a matter of money. Whatever, they're back, and we now have five foreign news providers on our television screen plus three television newsrooms of our own.

1. There's the steady, reliable BBC, which is really very good, committed to covering the world at large, with the staff and budget big enough to do it, not parochial, and first-rate in quality except when dealing with us, when the BBC is usually obnoxious.

2. There's Sky News, which is British, and naturally full of local (for them) news items and gossip which don't generally interest non-Englishmen. They were very good—balanced and thorough—during the last winter's Gaza incursion, by the way. We stayed with Sky News then.

3. Then there's Fox News. That's where you see what interests the folks in "the old country" these days. Interesting and entertaining, if not always serious. But too much loud arguing and too much animosity towards the present Administration makes that channel tiresome after a while. But Fox News does show and tell things nobody else does. I have had people say simply "they're lying," but I don't believe that.

4. Then there's the "sleeper": France 24 News. That got brought in to make up for the loss of CNN but has stayed on even though CNN is back. They broadcast in English, are really thorough and fair, even to us, and have the great advantage of doing a complete news summary every *half* hour around the clock, so you can tune in more often to see what's going on. We trust them.

5. And now CNN is our 5<sup>th</sup> news provider. (The program here is not the same as CNN in the USA.) All in all I find them reliable and as fair as one can reasonably expect. (Not everybody agrees on this.)

As for local broadcasts, we have three Hebrew TV channels for local news and comment; other channels do other things. Channel 1 is official, government sponsored, and supported by a TV license fee everybody must pay. But you don't need to be a genius to see that Channel 1 broadcasts the things that the government wants you to see and hear. And doesn't what it doesn't. The other channels—2 and 10—are commercial, not governmental, and are indeed more daring in exposing corruption, crime, mismanagement, and local issues, but do not go past a national consensus on important matters of Palestinians, security, etc.

When all is said and done, the fact is that I get most of my information from the radio, which is a good deal freer than the television channels, and that's it for me for local news. But international news is a different affair; it seems to me that having the international channels in

addition to the local television stations is really an advantage. In the end you sort-of really know what's going on in the world.

## **But what are they all talking about?**

**T**hat's the real puzzlement. Because despite all of the above, the Israeli news media spent the entire month of July obsessing on American pressure to stop building on the other side of the Green Line.<sup>1</sup> But until the very last week of the month (for reasons we will soon see) that issue was entirely absent in the international media. We were having kittens about not building in East Jerusalem, Ma'aleh Adummim, Ariel, etc., and the rest of the news world ignored the issue entirely. They were worried about Iran, the swine flu, health care reform and Michael Jackson, which were important enough for them but simply non-issues here.

Then came the extraordinary last 2 weeks in July when two things happened to change the media focus.

A) Irving Moskowitz announced his plans to convert the old Shepherd Hotel into housing. And

B) four of the biggest wigs in American foreign policy descended on Jerusalem in the space of a week. For reasons still unknown.

The Shepherd Hotel was built in Wadi Joz<sup>2</sup> in the 1930s by Hajj Amin el-Husseini, the Mufti, leader of the Muslim community of Mandatory Palestine. The British, who had appointed him, soon realized what a vicious enemy he was for them (and for us; he ended up making Nazi propaganda with Hitler during the war) and deported him. They confiscated the hotel and used it for offices. Then the Jordanians took it over after 1948 and used it as a hotel again. Then it fell into our hands after the unification of the city in 1967 and got used for offices again. Then it became a Border Police barracks (which is how I always saw it), and finally stayed empty and abandoned for a dozen years. Then it got sold to Moskowitz who wants to fix it up for Jews to live there. That's what the big fuss is all about.

Moskowitz is the easy part. Look him up on Google. He is a retired doctor who made a fortune on buying and selling hospitals and now runs a

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<sup>1</sup> And on haredi violence against the city of Jerusalem and against their own children: horrible stories of child abuse in the ultra-orthodox world. But that's local news; it wouldn't interest the world

<sup>2</sup> Wadi el-Joz is what they call that part of the Kidron valley that goes through the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem.

very large (and controversial) bingo and gambling empire in California. And, to our point, uses his profits to fund right-wing Israeli settlement activity, buying property and settling Jews wherever he can in Arab parts of Jerusalem and elsewhere.

The Americans have used this town planning decision to expand their pressure on Israel. Now they are arguing that not only must we stop building in the West Bank, but in East Jerusalem too. That's a bit much; they can't seriously imagine any Israeli government would agree to that. Well, the Israeli government has dismissed it out of hand: Jerusalem is one city and we are the government. The Arabs see it differently: no Jews on their side. "Arab territory" needs to be *judenrein*. Nobody seems to mind this unpleasant policy, nor do I know of any parallel policy of "no Jews" anywhere else in the world, but it is seen as a perfectly normal position when dealing with Fatah, Hamas and us. Very odd.

## Maybe Iran?

**C**ould the Shepherd Hotel, *nebbish*, be what they were all talking about? Hard to imagine. Still, it must have been important. You don't often see Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense, AND George Mitchell, the President's Special Emissary to the Middle East, AND Dennis Ross, long time Special Advisor, AND General James Jones, the National Security Adviser, all in Jerusalem at the same time over one week in July.

Cheer up! It could have been worse; we could have had Hillary here (help!) & Bill too (yikes!). And Tony Blair, Jimmy Carter (oy!) and Xavier Solana (the EU contribution to the solution of our problems). But we got a break; they didn't show up. Yet.

As far as I can learn, nobody knows at all what they were talking about. The international news channels are sure it was all about Iran. But WHAT about Iran? They can't seriously believe that Israel is supposed to attack Iran so the Americans don't have to spoil Obama's feel-good speech in Cairo. Can they? Or (as some other analysts are suggesting) the Israeli government cannot be seriously considering bombing Iran on our own initiative, so the Americans are here to talk us out of it. Can it? Or (a third possibility) can it be that the Americans are explaining to Israel why they have to do it and hope we will understand. Is that possible?

NONE OF THESE ALTERNATIVES MAKE SENSE. BOMBING IRAN, NO MATTER WHO DOES IT, MEANS THOUSANDS OF ISRAELIS KILLED IN RETALIATION. THE IRANIANS HAVE SAID THEY WOULD RETALIATE AND THEY HAVE THE MEANS TO DO THAT. SO NO SANE MAN CAN BE PLANNING SUCH A THING; UNLESS HE DIDN'T CARE HOW MANY JEWS GET KILLED IN EXCHANGE, WHICH IS A THOUGHT TOO DREADFUL TO EVEN THINK ABOUT.

Well, I am no smarter now than I was last month. Despite all the news channels, and a hundred talking heads, nobody knows what's going on. Any of you reading who has a good idea is invited to write in. ■