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Commentary**Time of Special Challenges**

By Marc H. Tanenbaum
 (JTA)

Israel's Independence Day, Yom Ha'atzmaut, observed this year on April 18, was a time of important commemoration, but also one of special challenges.

The challenges flow from the fallout of the Persian Gulf war and the emergent transformations in Middle East alliances.

The heady sense of victory that followed the triumph over Saddam Hussein's aggression seems diminished in the face of Hussein's continued survival and his ability to employ his war machine effectively against his own people.

For Israel, does that mean a reduced but continued threat in the near future?

Are the United States and its allies snatching defeat from a clear victory?

Do the new alliances being forged between the United States and the "moderate" Arab nations — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Gulf emirates, Egypt, and possibly even Syria — betoken a weakening of the strategic alliance between the United States and Israel? The moves to pre-position substantial American weaponry in Arab countries cannot be good news for Israel.

The peace process for resolving the Palestinian problem and bringing an end to the belligerency against Israel on the part of the Arab states will need to go forward in Israel's long-term interests. But has an international pressure cooker now been created which would compromise Israel's security, and cast the Jewish state in the role of the sole "enemy" of Middle East peace?

If none of these challenges existed today, Israel and world Jewry would be concentrating on the immigration of thousands of Soviet Jews as the central preoccupation of Jewish life.

This host of major challenges will require a massive recommitment of Israeli and world Jewry to the historic, religious and moral meaning of Israel to Jewish existence and continuity.

Yom Ha'atzmaut is a unique time to reflect on the ultimate meaning of Israel in Jewish historic experience which transcends all the present difficulties and challenges.

Reviewing the desperate conditions of Jewry prior to the creation of Israel, Dr. Leo Pinsker, the Jewish doctor from Odessa, wrote in his classic "Auto-Emancipation," that because of the Jews' statelessness and lack of power over their lives, "the world beheld the Jewish people as the eerie figure of a corpse wandering among the living."

This "ghost-phenomenon of a wandering corpse" among the nations inspired "a ghost terror, Judeophobia."

Israel's existence as a sovereign state has ended the ghostliness of the Jewish Diaspora. It is the one sure haven whose gates are open to any Jew anywhere.

Yom Ha'atzmaut reminds us that Israel's existence has transformed the role of Jews as victims of history and has invested the whole of Jewry with the power of mastery over our fate and destiny.

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, for 30 years the director of the international relations department of the American Jewish Committee, is now a lecturer, writer and consultant.

The Turtles and the Jews...

By Irving Greenberg
 (JTA)

First, the bad news: Excessive hunting and fishing have threatened the survival of numerous species throughout the world. Now, the good news: The conscience of the world is being increasingly sensitized to this abuse of God's creatures. As a result, numerous international treaties are now in place to protect endangered species.

Who will ever forget the worldwide outcry at the slaughter of the seal pups? Or the "Save the Whales" campaign that led to international restrictions on whaling? Or the banning of the ivory trade that was wiping out African elephant herds?

Many types of turtles are also endangered. This ancient reptile lives on land, in fresh water and in the sea. Some of its noblest exemplars live longer than humans. But neither reverence for old age nor respect for the beauty and variety of the turtle has shielded the turtle from assault. A lethal combination of despoiled breeding grounds, increased pollution of habitats and excessive hunting is relentlessly destroying the breed.

Consider the hawksbill turtle. Individual hawksbills can grow up to 110 pounds. Once plentiful in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in the Caribbean Sea and elsewhere, the beauty of their amber and gold shells made them ideal for eyeglass frames and ornamental combs. As a result, they have been hunted close to extinction.

Good news: In 1975, a Convention on International Trade

in Endangered Species prohibited trade in hawksbill turtles. Bad news: Japan signed the convention in 1981, but then exercised its right under treaty to continue to import them. Last year Japan imported 18,000 hawksbill turtles — 20 tons of shells. The Japanese Embassy in Washington insists that Japan is pursuing its centuries-old tradition of using marine resources. The spokesman rejected criticism of Japanese behavior as the product of a Western "cultural gap."

Of course, there is a cultural gap and we all know what it is. In current Japanese culture, the economic boom is *uber alles*. Damn the Western, environmental hang-ups; profits, full speed ahead! Why else would the Japanese continue to hunt whales (brazenly using the cover of "scientific research"), import most of the world's ivory, use enormous drift nets for fishing and practice unrestrained tuna fishing, which causes the slaughter of tens of thousands of porpoises annually?

But all is not lost. In the United States, at least, morality comes ahead of business...sometimes. More than two decades ago, the turtle was declared an endangered species; importing turtle shells was prohibited in 1973. And under the Fishermen's Protective Act of 1967, the United States government can impose sanctions on countries engaging in trade that undermines any international program to protect endangered marine species.

The Commerce and Interior departments have now found Japan guilty of such behavior

vis-a-vis the hawksbill turtle. Unless President Bush reverses the finding within 60 days, the sanctions will go into effect. So if you love God's creatures, write the White House.

On second thought, there is a deeper lesson and call to action in this story. Like the hawksbill turtle, Jews are also an endangered species. Once plentiful in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Jews were hunted to near-extinction in Nazi Europe and are all but extinct in Arab lands, former Soviet satellites and Africa.

One of the last great concentrations of Jews — Israel — has been under relentless attack and boycott for four decades now. And guess what? Japanese companies have overwhelmingly cooperated with the boycott, refusing to trade with Israel — leaving it isolated, weaker and more vulnerable to destruction.

There is no Jewish Protection Act of 1967 to impose sanctions on Japan. But remember how American schoolchildren were galvanized to save the porpoises? What if the tens of thousands of students who wrote to the American tuna packing companies now sent letters to the Japanese car companies — Toyota and Nissan — which continue to boycott Israel? What if thousands of teachers taught them how fragile is the economic habitat of the Jewish state and how the Japanese are destroying thousands of Israeli jobs?

The kids turned Ralston Purina (Chicken of the Sea) around on porpoise hunting. They turned McDonald's around on the use of foam packaging. Maybe they could convince Sony to spare a VCR for Israel. Maybe they could melt Mitsubishi's hard heart and save a job for an Ethiopian (or Russian) Jew.

American Jews buy billions of dollars of Japanese cars and electronics goods — not to mention the fact that we sell them "Jewish" firms like MCA. Isn't it time to apply our own sanctions?

What if, like the kids, we took a pledge not to swallow another Japanese product until they stop their despicable Arab business hunting tactics? In the post-Gulf war situation, attention is focused on the Arab boycott of Israel; there are widespread calls to stop it. Let's talk to the Japanese in language that they understand. Toyota, I hate what you are doing to me! Nissan, help save the human race; start with Jews. Let's withhold American buying power from the Japanese until they stop harming Israel.

It is true that Jews are not as cute as the turtles. Mostly, we do not have the beauty of amber and gold shells. We do not live to be 110 years old or fit cuddly into the palm of a hand. But "hath not a Jew eyes?...If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?" If you boycott us, do we not shrivel on the vine? If you isolate us, are we not vulnerable?

Strike a blow for God's creation. Let's save the turtles...and the Jews!

Irving Greenberg is president of CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, and author of "The Jewish Way" (Summit Books). The views expressed are solely those of the author.

**Emigration of Jews from Albania Said to be Successfully Completed**

NEW YORK (JTA) — The entire Jewish population of Albania, numbering some 300 families, has been successfully moved out of the country under a semi-secret exodus arranged by the Albanian and Israeli governments.

Most of the families — an estimated 400 people — are already in Israel, but 37 Albanian Jews are in Italy awaiting transfer to the United States under the family reunification program.

The exodus started close to three months ago, just as Albania, Eastern Europe's last Stalinist regime, began tentative moves toward a more open and democratic system.

The tiny Balkan country, with a total population of 3.3 million, has been one of the most closed in the region. Until recently, few people were allowed in, and even fewer were allowed out.

Over half the population is Moslem, and restrictions on religion have been eased, although

travel remains somewhat restricted.

Before an Albanian Jewish family was allowed to emigrate, the Albanian government required that one family member travel to nearby Rome or Athens and collect Israeli visas for the entire family.

The families then traveled from Tirana, the Albanian capital, to either Rome or Athens, where they were flown to Israel, officials said.

The announcement of the successful end to "Operation Flying Carpet," as the exodus was called, comes as the Albanian and Israeli governments are discussing establishing diplomatic relations.

The two countries, which never had diplomatic relations, are expected to make a formal announcement shortly.

Editor's note: At press time, we learned that the remaining Albanian Jews have arrived in Israel.