

PERSPECTIVES

Gen. Matti Peled discusses Israel's recent policy

By Alexander Cockburn
and James Ridgeway

AMONG THE BEST-KNOWN Israeli doves regularly traveling to the U.S. in recent years has been General Matti Peled. Now in charge of Arab studies at the University of Tel Aviv, he served in the Israeli Defense Force between 1947 and 1969. In 1956, after the Sinai campaign, he was commander of the Southern Territory. In 1957 he was appointed governor of the Gaza Strip and of the Jerusalem area. In 1959 he became a member of the General Staff, and in 1967 he fought in the Sinai.

In recent years he has been deeply involved in efforts to initiate an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. He has long argued that Israel can coexist, within its pre-1967 borders, with a Palestinian state. In the spring of 1981 we interviewed him, in a conversation with two West Bank Palestinian mayors. In a moment of pessimism toward the end of the colloquy, he remarked that it was quite possible for Israel to "sink deeper and deeper into a situation that is simply insoluble. In fact there are already good doves in Israel who feel that we have crossed the Rubicon—there is no way back...."

This was just before Begin was re-elected to office. Last week, Matti Peled passed through New York. What follow are his preliminary remarks at an informal session held in Columbia one recent Saturday afternoon:

"A lot of people seemed surprised when the invasion of Lebanon took place, although the intention to invade

had been expressed by Israeli officials with great frankness, ever since the ceasefire agreement in June 1981, arranged by Philip Habib between Israel and, essentially, the PLO. Sharon was particularly active in looking for excuses to break the ceasefire, sometimes to the point of making himself quite ridiculous, as when he called a big press conference to maintain that three infiltrators who were arrested trying to enter Israel from Jordan constituted a threat to Israel's security.

By September 1981, no one in Israel doubted that there was going to be a war. There were even articles giving outlines of its probable course and goals. And we now know that by September—from what Sharon has said—the probable war was seriously discussed by both the Israeli and American governments. Apparently the turning point came when the Americans accepted the Israeli argument that the ceasefire agreement applied all over the world: thus some act against an Israeli institution or personality would suffice. In an interview Sharon gave after the invasion, he repeated that everything had been discussed with the American government, and that it had been agreed that in the event of an act of terror, Israel had the right to attack. They he was asked, 'Did you also agree on the date,' and he said, 'No. How could we know when it would happen,' which aroused in some people the suspicion that maybe the whole thing was not so accidental.

Once the decision to start the war was taken, all opposition previously expressed by the Labor Party disappeared, and it immediately backed the government. The excuse was of course made

that this only applied to the initial goals of the war: the secure area of 40 kilometers. For anyone who was there, it was clear right away that there was a tremendous disproportion between a goal of 40 kilometers and the number of Israeli forces involved. Probably three infantry brigades and some artillery would have sufficed, against 6,000 guerrillas in the 40-by-60 kilometer area.

But the forces mobilized for this war were greater than those used against the Egyptians in 1967: something like three to four armored divisions—which in terms of relative strength would have sufficed to go all the way to Turkey. So when the Labor Party endorsed the invasion, looking at the numbers involved, it knew that the army was going all the way to Beirut, as discussed in plans circulating for months. The minimum goal would be to go all the way to Beirut; if possible eliminate physically the PLO; establish a friendly government in Lebanon; expel all Palestinians from the occupied area; annex certain parts up to the Litani; push the Syrians out.

The vulnerability of Israel to the U.S. is greater than ever before.

The question asked after a couple of months was whether any of these goals had been achieved. Elimination of the PLO was not possible. The Syrians suffered some defeats but were not pushed out of Lebanon completely. The possibility of establishing a friendly government was there, but as everyone knows, after the election of Bashir Gemayel he had second thoughts about many things. In difficult discussions between him, Begin and Sharon, it became clear that he did not intend to fulfill all Israel's expectations.

So far as the expulsion of Palestinians from south Lebanon is concerned, the situation is not clear. There is much conflicting evidence about what has happened. I suppose that there is a quiet tragedy going on for over 100,000 refugees, without anyone paying any attention. Precautions are being taken by the Israelis not to allow people to travel freely in south Lebanon, to find out what is happening.

But I must say that it was clear that in order to effect a real exodus (of Palestinians) there would have to be a second Deir Yassin on a larger scale in Lebanon. (The Deir Yassin was a massacre of 240 Palestinian men, women and children in 1948 by the Irgun.) Again, the fact that this came as a surprise to the whole world is

one of the most inexplicable things to me, because Israel is open to guests and reporters, and the situation in Israel is known in detail abroad. About a year ago a certain person well known in Israel, a former chief of intelligence Yariv, stated in a colloquium held in Jerusalem that he had first-hand knowledge that there were files, including detailed plans to bring about a massive exodus of Palestinians from the occupied territories.

Since we are talking about a government headed by Begin, there was no doubt in anybody's mind that the same technique would be applied in Lebanon. To me it was so clear that in interviews I gave in Paris in the middle of August I actually said that we had to watch out very carefully for a situation where the Israeli army sent the Phalange into the camps to effect a massacre. By the middle of August I don't think anyone should have doubted that this would happen. And it did happen.

Even so, it did not contribute to the elimination of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. So it remains to be asked: what did Israel gain? None of its declared goals has been achieved. It has sunk into the terrible mess of Lebanon, to which we cannot contribute, and where we can only make things worse.

The whole thing was in fact a joint American-Israeli venture. Israel could not allow itself a war like that without prior American consent. It was clear that this would be—in terms of money—a very costly war to Israel. It was very easy to calculate how much it would cost, bearing in mind the plan. In fact we are now speaking of a bill of some \$2.5 billion, which Israel is presenting to the U.S. Israel got full backing from the U.S. all through the war. But has America achieved anything? Probably more than Israel.

The vulnerability of Israel to the U.S. is probably greater than ever before. This business of having to pay \$2.5 billion for a war on top of everything else...Begin knows better than anyone else that if this war has to be paid for out of Israel's own resources, it would be the end of his government. It is not so difficult to be a popular leader when he offers the public an easy war, full of glorious successes, and at the same time allows something like three-quarters of a million Israelis to go and have a vacation in Europe. This is an unimaginable situation! In the summer months when the war is being fought, these Israelis go to Europe for vacation, and if you assume that every Israeli takes no more than the law allows him, \$3,000, you get something around the \$2.5 billion that the war cost. In such circumstances it is difficult to be a popular leader. Put Begin in the position where he had to pay for the war out of Israel's own resources and I am sure his popularity would diminish in no time.

Where do we go from here? I think the answer is simple and blunt: it all depends on Washington. Washington now has the power to bring about a change of government if it wants in Israel. Washington can now initiate an overall settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. There are certainly some matters not resolved yet: relations between Israel and the PLO. Evidence in recent interviews with Arafat and Hawatmeh shows that there is an awareness in the PLO that here is an opportunity that should not be let go. Whether the U.S. will do it, I don't know. A reasonable settlement along lines that are pretty obvious—a political solution to the Palestinian problem based on the legitimate rights of the Palestinians—is now possible, more than ever before, and contrary to the expectations of Begin and Sharon. But more than ever this depends on what decisions are taken in Washington."

Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway write regularly for the Village Voice, where this article originally appeared.

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Thanks Highlander
Keep Going Strong!

—Peter Wood

Reruns and cheap shots

By Paul Choitz

What's good for CBS is good for children. At least that's the philosophy around the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) since the Reagan administration took over.

After years of seeing children's programming as a hole in the pocket, the networks have gotten the nod from FCC Commissioner Mark Fowler to maximize profits and let the "market forces" decide what goes on the tube.

Gone are the days of 1974, when the FCC believed that "broadcasters have a special obligation to serve children." With the spirit of "deregulation" permeating the industry, ideas like that are as hard to find now as decent children's programs.

Right now there is no daily

for the eyes of women between 18 and 49 than they will for men over 49. And they will pay almost nothing for the eyes of little kids under the age of 6, who are notoriously penurious when it comes to parting with large quantities of money."

But are market forces actually making the decisions? Johnson says no. If the buyer were choosing the product, then pay-by-the-movie television would be the only clear example of market-place determination. Instead of running the best possible programs to attract viewers, commercial television is much more interested in putting out what Paul Klein of NBC used to call "LOP"—least objectionable programming.

"It's all wretched," Johnson said of television programming, "but there is a high proportion of the American people who are going to watch the television

the market forces give them to watch: rich boys on mega-buck capers, brutal barbarians, scantily clad she-heroes, muscular he-heroes and incessant canned laughter.

"When they make comic book video for kids, they're doing it to sell products," said Peggy Charren, president of Action for Children's Television (ACT). "In a system that permits you to pitch to children, that's not the end of the world. But when that's all there is, when only the comic book shelf in the library is filled and all the rest are empty—it's a national disgrace."

ACT has been struggling against this sort of stuff since the late '60s. Over the years they have pressured and cajoled the networks and the FCC to come up with something better for the nation's 51 million children.

"The fact is, like it or not, television has become just about the most important educational institution in this country," said Charren.

What are the kids learning? Captain Kangaroo likes to tell the story of a musician who came up to him once and said: "I'm a concert pianist today because of your program."

That may be a bit of an overstatement about what a little exposure to classical music will do. Yet after a few droning hours of video comics, you can imagine these children walking up to producers and saying: "I'm a sadist today because of your show." Or, "I'm a moron today..." With role models like Thundarr the Barbarian and his grisly band of wonder-thugs, or Pac Man (and Ms. Pac Man and Pac-Baby) cavorting through Pacland protecting power pellets for the Paclanders, what can we expect?

Saturday television not only feeds sexism and violence, it is the Skinner-box of paranoia. Evil is everywhere. From nasty sheiks trying to take over oil fields (that's right) to sinister aliens (that's right) trying to capture magic pyramids, the plots are reduced to a simplistic good-guys, bad-guys context. Scripts call for the star of the show

to kill, wound, vaporize, jail, scare away or otherwise remove the evil.

The long-term effects of television viewing—which averages 24 hours, 48 minutes a week for children 6-11 and 27 hours, 4 minutes for children 2-5—are getting clearer. This year a government-sponsored analysis of a decade of scientific research on the tube's effect on behavior supported one belief parents and teachers have held for some time: violence on television leads to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers.

"In magnitude, television violence is as strongly correlated with aggressive behavior as any other behavior variable that has been measured," said the report by the National Institute of Mental Health. The report is an update to the 1972 Surgeon General's report that showed a

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cializing agent of American children."

The industry already recognizes the problem, according to Shawn Sheehan, spokesman for National Association of Broadcasters and he says they have already moved to screen violence out of new children's programming. Even if that were true, violent adult shows like *Starsky and Hutch* and *Kojac* are popular with children.

The role of the parents is of course important to all this. Studies have found that in families with the heaviest viewing, TV shows are the main topic of conversation. Kids who watched less were more likely to have their choices restricted and to watch things like *Meet The Press*, *Nova* and *Masterpiece Theatre*.

There are a few excellent children's shows on television. By



morning programming for children on the commercial networks. CBS booted *Captain Kangaroo* to a Saturday and Sunday morning slot, just as they pulled the plug on their award-winning news magazine for kids, *30 Minutes*. NBC introduced *Special Treat* in 1975, and although it is still scheduled for this season, nothing but reruns are planned. Their *Pearlman Showcase*, begun January 17, lost its feathers by February 21 and disappeared from its Sunday dinner-time slot. And ABC's Sunday morning *Kids Are People Too* is now nothing but reruns. What remains is a depressing Saturday morning death-march of would-be superheroes, stale cartoons and video game schlock. According to former FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson, a lesson in basic broadcasting is this: Television has nothing to do with programming. Television is the selling of audiences to advertisers.

After all, Johnson said, viewers don't guarantee that a program will stay on the air. "What you're doing is selling a commodity. You sell human eyes to an advertiser at a cost per 1,000. And they will pay more

screen at night regardless of what's on it."

But with kids, the problem is even worse. "You know there are kids out there that are going to watch anything that moves on the screen on Saturday morning, so you're going to put on whatever is cheapest," Johnson said. Why should the networks bother with child psychiatrists and psychologists and pediatricians and story writers? Why bother to spend \$8 million putting out another *Sesame Street*? "Their return isn't there," he said. "Not when they can spend \$15,000 and buy old cartoons."

Meanwhile, back at the bottom line, the networks are earning capital investment returns that often exceed those of the oil industry.

Cut-back kids.

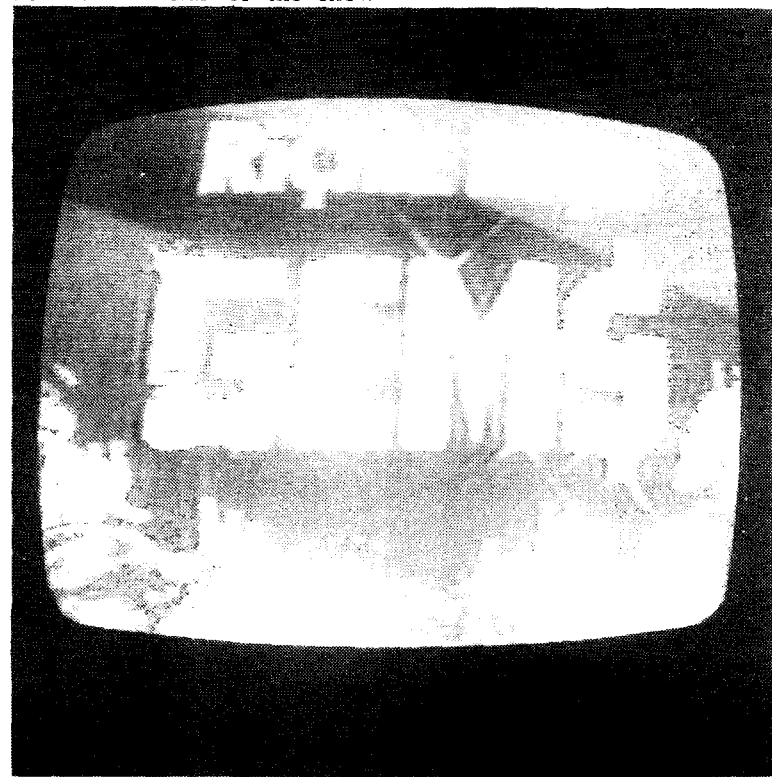
Washed by the cathode ray glow, the Saturday morning children of the '80s watch TV in their "Star Wars" pajamas with catatonic eyes. They are the children of budget-cut schools without school lunch programs—the children likely to be abused because of rising unemployment and an economy wallowing in depression. They are getting what



connection between viewing and short-term aggressive behavior, but left questions about long-term effects.

The questions are gone. Television is "a formidable educator whose effects are both pervasive and cumulative." And the report chillingly calls television "a beguiling" instrument that has become "a major so-

Scripts call for the stars to kill, wound, vaporize, jail or otherwise remove evil.



flicking the dial to the network seemingly immune to the ravages of the market forces, children can find *Mister Rogers*, *Sesame Street*, *The Electric Company* and others. They are a lush oasis in the barren desert of television-land. But if Reagan has his way the budget-cutters will be spraying herbicides on these shows too, as public television fights for its life.

Peggy Charren likens regulation of children's TV to pollution control without government regulation. If a company decides to do something about pollution and installs equipment, it will have higher costs and be at a competitive disadvantage with companies that don't care about the air. By requiring a minimum amount of programming for children, the FCC can decrease competitive disadvantages.

Cable does offer some hope, Charren said, but it is still too early to tell. While there are some very good programs on cable, advertising is also creeping in. Nickelodeon, a children's channel with good reviews, plans to offer underwriting privileges to companies. USA Network's *Calliope* started without ads, but has them now. If ads take over, Charren wonders if that may be the end of real alternatives to network programming.

But even with good cable, pressure is needed to force the commercial networks to provide stimulating children's shows, said Charren. "We have to be very careful that we don't end up with diversity available for the rich and the lowest common denominator programming for the poor."

Paul Choitz writes for a variety of Philadelphia publications and has two children.