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Parting Shot: Yesterday's news

By DAVID BRINN
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During my two weeks' break, one thing became clear: Our national obsession with the news is just that – an obsession.

With two weeks away from work concentrating on an outside project, I recently found myself in a rare convergence of circumstance in which I was in Israel but wasn't required to follow the news.

So I didn't.

My life wasn't the worse for missing out on the play-by-play lead-up to the Palestinians' failed draft resolution at the UN. I was still able to function even though I wasn't aware that Moshe Kahlon had given his party a name in English that sounded like a Hawaiian luau. And I was able to figure out the weather by simply walking outside in the morning and determining if it was hot or cold.

That isn't an endorsement for ignoring the events taking place in the country, or, perish the thought, putting aside The Jerusalem Post (I did read the headlines every morning, and of course, checked the sports.) However, during the two weeks' break, one thing became clear: Our national obsession with the news is just that – an obsession.

It's evident everywhere, but most clearly in the on the half-hour bulletins that are broadcast frantically on Israel Radio's Reshet Bet station throughout the day – as if we can't wait for the top of the hour, or, dare I say, until the nightly news to find out who is the latest politician being investigated by the police.

It contributes to the sense that Israel is a country in crisis – all the time! On the halfhour bulletins are fine during a real crisis, like Operation Protective Edge. But isn't it time for us to chill out a little and realize that not every day and every news item presents a life or death existential dilemma for us? So, for one news junkie, going cold turkey for two weeks proved not to be agonizing, but liberating. I literally woke up and smelled the flowers outside my home, took long walks in the wadis around town, lost a slew of Scrabble games to my wife and went to a bunch of movies.

One of them uncannily brought the point home that news as we consume it every day isn't so new. The Prime Ministers: Soldiers and Peacemakers is the second installment of a two-part documentary based on the phenomenal book of the same name by former ambassador to Britain Yehuda Avner.

Directed by Richard Trank for Moriah Films, a division of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the film focuses on the prime ministerships of Yitzhak Rabin (1974-77) and his successor Menachem

Begin (1977-1983), both of whom Avner served as a close aide. Among the genuinely newsworthy issues covered in depth are the early efforts at negotiating agreements with Egypt, the 1976 raid on Entebbe, Anwar Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem in 1977, the 1978 Camp David Accords and the bombing of Iraq's nuclear facility in 1981.

Expertly interweaving Avner's astute commentary with spellbinding archival footage, the film is a must for any student of Israeli's storied past. And it reveals a truism about history – things change very slowly.

Many of the discussions between Israeli and US leaders 30 years ago were focused on the same issues that are astonishingly still being debated – mainly the Palestinian question.

The film provides insights into the glacier-like movement in the Middle East landscape that left me with a couple of conclusions that challenge conventional wisdom.

First is the oft-held belief that the assassination of Rabin in 1995 proved to be the spoke in the wheel that threw the Oslo process off track for good.

Based on the film, I would take it back even further, to two other assassinations that may have forever changed the landscape of the region – the 1981 slaying of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and the 1982 assassination of newly elected Lebanese president Bashir Gemayel. Those two tragic events suffocated the momentum that may have led toward a regional atmosphere that would have led to a solution agreeable to both Israel and the Palestinians years before Oslo.

The other take-away from the film was observing the complex relationship between Israel and its main ally the US. Those who call Barack Obama anti-Israel, an enemy of the Jews and Satan's first cousin would do well to review the policies of presidents Gerald R.

Ford, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan – the primary US leaders covered in the film.

Threats, coercion, distrust and pressure amid the close friendship and shared values mantra were no strangers to the US-Israel relationship in the "good old days."

And those highs and lows have continued and are likely to continue post-Obama – which comes back to my original point that despite the never-ending cycle of news every day, nothing much ever changes.

However, two weeks does go by quickly and old habits are hard to break. So please excuse me, an on the half-hour radio update is about to come on.



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