

WESTWORLD



**Israel support
threat to U.S.
domestic security**

w Suhail Ansari
World Editor

The plight of the Palestinian people is rarely brought to light in this country, as it seems that the unfair Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is overlooked and/or supported by the majority of Americans. However, amid the media firestorm surrounding the alleged abuse by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), some light finally has been shed. Although the allegations are of questionable credibility, this public relations crisis allows the opportunity to show the past and continued humanitarian and economic abuses carried out by Israel.

Many already know about the terrorist-labeled political faction Hamas and its longtime use of Qassam rockets to terrorize Israeli citizens; many already know about the high civilian death toll of Palestinians in Gaza during the recent offensive by IDF. However, many fail to acknowledge the fundamental causes of these issues.

Although it may be morally questionable to defend the actions of Hamas in recent months, it is not morally questionable to deduce the cause of these actions.

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The United Nations Resolution 242 in 1967 called for “the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East” by “the application of both the following principles: withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict [and] termination of all claims or states of belligerency.”

In addition to the constant presence of fully uniformed IDF soldiers, an actual wall was built by Israel separating the West Bank into two sides, something that was ruled illegal by the United Nations’ International Court of Justice in 2004. The wall is still up and prevents access to advance medical care with large waits to cross checkpoint lines.

After researching the details for this column, all I could remember was a picture depicting a girl alone in a Palestinian school that had been destroyed by the IDF; the caption under it read that two young brothers were also killed.

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America’s security**

The dead were not cold empty figures on an unnatural white screen; rather, they were people who once walked among us and hoped and aspired to become something better in order to escape their desperate situations.

Although I may be said to have an unfair bias toward this international crisis, my opinion is relevant because I attend a federally funded institution and work at a job where I pay federal taxes. The several dollars knocked off my paycheck each half month go to support U.S. foreign policy, and in this case, those taxes help to fund Israel’s expansion of settlements and economic subjugation of the Palestinian people—whether I like it or not.

In 2007, the U.S. agreed to give Israel \$30 billion in military aid, money that no doubt went to fund the January offensive in Gaza.

Such actions promote ill will in the Middle East (at least those sections outside Israel) toward the U.S. As such, it is counterproductive for this nation to foster sentiments that might eventually threaten America’s security.

The rationale behind U.S. support for Israel is a classic case of chicken or egg logic. The government says that the U.S. supports Israel because it is America’s only ally in the region. However, the reason Israel supposedly is America’s only ally is because the U.S. gives it such unlimited support, a sentiment not lost on Arab nations. The resulting anger and desperation of the Palestinian people could breed extremists. With two wars on two fronts and the threat of terrorism a constant and ominous presence, the last thing the U.S. needs is more hostility directed at it.

ELL influx presents challenges to West

w Zoe Ljubic
Editor in Chief

“This is the only week since the semester started that we did not have a minimum of two students come into the school and [enter the] program,” English Language Learner (ELL) teacher Leslie Natzke said regarding the influx of ELL students this year.

Beginning this school year, the ELL program has experienced rapid growth. According to Natzke, the flow of students began in the first week of the school year and has not stopped. Since Aug. 1, 2008, 70 students have entered the ELL program.

“This is the third year we have had the [Intro one class]. The first year we got up to 16 people,” Natzke said. “The class is [said to be] successful when we reach that number.”

This year, the intro one class has up to 40 students enrolled. In addition to the five full time teachers in the department and four part time teachers, the students are “blessed” with two aides this year, Natzke said.

The students enrolled in intro one classes spend the first four periods interacting with various ELL students and their teacher, learning English.

“The special program brings students from Niles North as well. Traditionally, [Niles West has] had a much larger group of Intro kids, but North’s program is growing this year too,” Natzke said. “Two vans come from North each day.”

Learning an unfamiliar language causes the students to face many challenges, Natzke added.

“A lot of the ELL students have been out of school for a while, and a lot of them have lived as refugees in Jordan and only recently have been able to go to school. Some of the kids have been out of school for more than four years,” Natzke said. “[However], the kids can make a lot of progress in a short amount of time.”

Parfait Kanam, a senior who traveled to America for the first time from Togo four years ago, expressed gratitude for the program.

“When I first came to West as a sophomore, I felt really alone because I had never been to such a big school. I came from Minnesota, where they did not have an ELL program,” Kanam said. “When I walked into the ELL office here, I met so any people that had the same problems as I did; we were all learning the English language together. Two weeks later, I was already making friends and speaking English, especially [with] kids in the theatre department. Being in this program helped tremendously because I really improved my writing and speaking skills just after two years.”

Many students are the only ones in their household that speak English.

Natzke said the program is helping students succeed and that she loves working with such encouraging students.

“The students are very motivated for the most part. You know that what you are giving them and what you’re doing is really valuable because it will make a major difference in their life,” Natzke said. “I can show the kids websites here at school that they can show their parents. The kids are sort of a gateway for the whole family and to succeeding in the US; knowing that, even if they leave our school district next year, I know that I put a key in their hand.”

ELL teacher Brad Wilson concurred.

“First of all, the students that we get are very driven to succeed to learn English. They understand the value of what they are learning, because they know that English is their ticket to success in many different areas. They work very diligently, they struggle, no question about it, but they understand the deficit in which they sit,” Wilson said. “Many of the students coming in having missed school, and they know their skills aren’t at the level as everybody else. These students are fighting an uphill battle while trying to keep up with everyone else.”

ELL students who choose to take the ACT must take it in English, even those who are not yet fluent in the language.

“There are a lot of obstacles [before these new ELL students], but most of them seek help by coming into [the resource center],” Wilson said. “We try to bridge the gap from here to the Lit Center, but we want them to feel comfortable. We need to find a way to help them look past these academic hurdles; it is a good challenge because they understand it.”

A student enrolled in the ELL program may be the only English speaking family member. According to Wilson, this can transform the role of the student from teenager to playing the parent figure.

“We see a lot of our students performing the tasks that would normally be assigned to parents, such as translating the bills that come in. Frequently, [the responsibility of completing these tasks] is going to fall on our students. They have a lot more responsibility than most high school students at this point in their lives, but they handle it very well,” Wilson said.



Students work to complete homework in the English language learner's resource center during ninth period.
Photo by Zoe Ljubic

Wilson said that there are two sibling that attend West who support their family.

“The parents do not work, and the kids work, pay the rent, do the shopping and go to school full time,” Wilson said. “Those sorts of things that our students are doing are inspiring for us because here they are doing these things as full time students. Imagine how successful they will be, college educated or not, when they are just doing a job. If they can get all this done, trying to balance their home, work and school, how successful will they be when they are just doing two or three things?”

ELL students appreciate the program.

“[District 219] has the greatest ELL program ever. Other schools in Chicago teach students English by using the student’s language as a guide,” said senior Sheyam Bitar, who moved to Skokie from Assyria four years ago. “Let’s say you speak Spanish; teachers would use Spanish to teach you English. This will not help. Here, I was forced to speak English, and it was really helpful. In just two months, you can start speaking out from scratch.”

Sophomore Cherdel Zakharia agreed and said that he is learning a lot of English. His favorite class is Algebra because it is “fun and easy.”

Kanam said that the teachers are to thank for his success.

“The teachers are the greatest. The way [Natzke] teaches you is not something you will forget later. You will always remember it because of the fun way she teaches you. Both [Natzke and Wilson] are really pushing us forward to learn English,” Kanam said. “I would love to thank them for getting me up to this level.”

The feeling is mutual.

“Every year with a new group of students, there is always something new. There is always a story that comes with everything we do that inspires me and makes me understand [the students] a little bit better,” Wilson said. “It makes me appreciate how hard they work a little more. I hear the way they got here, how long it took, how many years they spent in a refugee camp without school, how many applications were sent in for a visa for permission to come into this country and how many countries they traveled through with various stops just to get here. Just hearing about that makes the time and work spent planning very worth while.”

Natzke agreed. “This is the best job in the world,” she said.

Bipolar disorder affects mood

w Helen Salamanca
Staff Writer

On any given day in any high school in the United States, students witness incidents that most write off as “adolescent drama,” including fighting, weeping, shouting matches, insubordination to staff and a host of other manifestations of emotional stress. Rarely do most consider the source of such behavior or consider that it might be an outgrowth of bipolar or other mood disorders.

According to www.nationalyouth.com, 2 percent of adolescents (and 2.6 percent of young adults) will suffer some sort of mood disorder. Of that 2 percent, 8-10 teenagers per year commit suicide. The most serious of these is bipolar disorder.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) website (www.nimh.nih.gov) defines bipolar disorder as a condition that originates in the brain and can cause major mood swings which negatively affect a person’s ability to function. More

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President's support for charters, merit pay draws mixed reaction

W Naomi Prale
Around Town Editor

"I was not happy with his comments, mostly because he was a little misinformed. There is a lot of research out there about the academic quality of charter schools, and it is generally pretty poor," North Suburban Teachers' Union (NSTU) president Dan Montgomery said of President Barack Obama's support for charter schools and merit pay for teachers.

Obama recently told the Associated Press that proposed charter schools will help educate American citizens and that "too many supporters of my party have resisted the idea of rewarding excellence in teaching with extra pay, even though we know it can make a difference."

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Anne Roloff shares Montgomery's issues with charters. "I am concerned about charter schools. There is little research that shows great success with charter schools. There are not a lot of examples where charter schools are successful in student achievement," Roloff said.

Niles Township Federation of Teachers (NTFT) president Steve Grossman agrees with Montgomery. "[The union] supports [Obama's economic plan]. The fact that he's making education a top priority and providing increased funding for that is great. However, the devil is in the details. Unions don't necessarily oppose charter schools. The problem is that [the quality of such schools is] inconsistent," Grossman said. "Research on charter schools says that they are poor and not successful."

Math teacher Vanessa Brechling taught briefly at Perspectives Charter School in Chicago and explained the concept.

"Charter schools are public schools founded with public money—tax dollars," Brechling said. "[However], they are outside of a school district and manage themselves."

Grossman sees this as part of the problem. "Unions don't want to see public money going to fund a private enterprise."

Compounding the problem, Brechling adds, is that "teachers are paid less to do more work, [and] charter schools are poorly managed. There are lots of excessive requirements on teachers to do things that make the job difficult. However, they [do] emphasize a smaller community. Charter schools like to do things within a small learning community."

Montgomery feels that charter schools aren't necessarily helping the education system. "It would be one thing if the charter school [movement] in America were humming along and outpacing [conventional public] schools, but that is not the case," Montgomery added.

Grossman says that other problems with charter schools are

teacher contracts and school codes. "Employees should have a right to collectively bargain their contracts. This doesn't happen in charter schools, and contracts should be able to be negotiated. Also, charter schools get leeway around school codes. They do not have to meet the same standards as other public schools," Grossman said.

Junior Amanda Ruiz attended Northtown Academy Charter School in Chicago for two years before coming to Niles West and notes a number of differences between her past and present schools. "It was different [at Northtown Academy]. I had to wear a school uniform. The classes there were more difficult and smaller in number," Ruiz said.

At charter schools, Ruiz also noted social distinctions at the schools.

"People separate themselves here. At charter schools people of all diversity hang out together," Ruiz said. One positive aspect of Northtown was the faculty, Ruiz said. "The teachers are also different. At [Northtown Academy] the teachers were a lot younger and therefore, they [understood] students a lot better."

Ruiz cited the advantages of going to a charter school. "Charter schools help prepare you for college better, and some people get scholarships. They help you prepare for the ACT more."

While Brechling advocates experimentation in teaching, she sees problems with charter schools. "There are pros and cons. It is good to encourage experimentation new ideas and try new things in teaching. However, there is very little oversight. People don't really know after the fact what will happen with the charter schools; when something does happen, it is a little too late for those kids."

"[Former Chicago Public Schools CEO] Arne Duncan is in charge of education," Brechling said. "He is innovative; however, I think [the government] needs to find ways within the existing structure of public schools [to help schools] rather than closing down schools and opening up new ones."

Roloff agrees with the Obama's overall plan. "It is good that he is making education a top priority," she said.

Montgomery cites some charter schools' exclusive enrollment

as a problem. "Charter schools don't [let all students in]; they let in who they want. Research has to take that into account. I think it is hard to use public tax dollars for [charter] schools and then exclude students. That is an issue of concern for me. I am all for the [American Federation of Teachers'] stance not to organize charter schools," he said.

On the subject of merit pay, Roloff feels that while it is a good idea to give teachers recognition for the extra work they do, merit pay can sometimes mistreat teachers. "The general concept of finding ways to compensate people for the work that they do is something that the union

supports. I strongly oppose the measurement of a teacher based on the test scores of their students," Roloff said.

Grossman agrees. "[The union] is not opposed to [teachers getting recognition for] extra ways to give incentives to do well. We do oppose looking at student test scores as a form of merit pay. It all depends on how one defines merit pay," Grossman said.

According to Roloff, some teachers are not given opportunities to earn merit pay. "How does a Spanish teacher get merit pay if the PSAT doesn't test Spanish? The complexities involved are too difficult," Roloff said.

Montgomery supports merit pay for National Board Certification (NBC), among other options. "I am for varieties of merit pay. The best, most extensive, merit pay is NBC; we have a number of [NBC applicants in the district], and that is great. It is one thing that you can look at and say, 'That is a great program, and teachers should be paid more,'" Montgomery said.

Montgomery said that he believes that quality of teaching cannot be measured by the amount of money that teachers receive.

"No one really goes into teaching for the money. So, when someone tells you, 'Hey, be a better teacher, I will give you an extra \$700, it is not going to change what you do. There are ways that it can work, such as NBC, that serve as a form of merit pay, but it has to be done very carefully and very thoughtfully with the cooperation of teachers.'"



Northtown Academy is one of several Chicago Public charter schools. Photo by Naomi Prale

'Sexting' trend labeled 'misguided,' 'dangerous' by students and staff

W Helen Salamanca
Staff Writer

"Sexting is a misguided attempt at affection," junior Gabriel Nash said. "I know of people that 'sext,' and I believe that it is pointless. Sexting should not be a way of showing your affection to someone. There are other ways of showing emotion to others rather than just sexting."

According to The Verdict section in *Newsweek*, sexting seems to be an epidemic among teenagers nowadays. Sexting is described as teenagers' sending nude pictures of themselves via text message. Not only are teenagers sending nude pictures of themselves, but they are also making "crude animations and PowerPoint presentations" with these pictures, *Newsweek* reports, adding that sexting teenagers are being charged with distributing child pornography, a felony.

On one occasion, two teenage girls from Greensburg, PA, were charged with "disseminating child pornography for sexting with their boyfriends." According to www.msnbc.com, an incident similar to the girls in Greensburg occurred in Florida where a 19-year-old sexted a picture to his girlfriend. As his punishment he

was "thrown out of college and had to register as a sex offender for 25 years," the report said.

"There needs to be emphasis about how dangerous [sexting] is, whether it is a nude picture or any activity," dean Elizabeth Gomez said. "The phone should be used in a certain way and not in a way that will show harmful images. Students should know how it could affect them later on in life."

The www.msnbc.com article added that in July of 2008, Jessica Logan, a victim of harassment due to sexting, committed suicide. Before her death, Logan spoke out about sexting on live television. She wanted to inform others, especially teenage girls, not to sext and about the dangers that could spring from it. Although peers throughout the year harassed her, she managed to graduate from high school. However, during the month of July when she attended the funeral of a friend who had committed suicide, she decided to do the same thing herself.

Such incidents elicit strong reactions from West students.

"When I heard about the teenager girl who committed suicide from sexting, it just made me so appalled and amazed. I was amazed because you do not that someone could break down from just a text message. It should just make us all aware that things like this could happen and should be used as advice," junior Jennifer

Dimano said. "I also believe that sexting is degrading and that people sext because their morals are blocking them from actually having intercourse. Teenagers think that sexting is a safer way to be intimate rather than actually doing anything physical."

Senior Anett Zlotorzycski agrees.

"I am against sexting and feel that teenagers sext out of pressure. They are looking for acceptance from their peers. Teenagers think that if they do this, they will feel more accepted by their boyfriend or girlfriend," Zlotorzycski said. "I also feel that girls sext more than boys just because I have heard of more stories of girls sexting rather than the guys."

Sexting rose to national prominence in 2007, when (then) teenaged star of the Disney *High School Musical* (HSM) franchise Vanessa Hudgens reportedly sent nude photos of herself to fellow HSM cast member Zac Efron.

A National Campaign to Support Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy nationwide survey reports that around 20 percent of teens revealed that they have sexted, a statistic that concerns Zlotorzycski.

"[I] worry about future generations and what the world has come to. I just hope that future generations will change for the better and not for the worse," Zlotorzycski said.

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commonly known manic depression, bipolar disorder adversely can affect students' school performance and social activities, and interpersonal relationships can be negatively affected from bipolar disorder.

NIMH calls these periods of highs and lows episodes of mania and depression. The organization's website notes that some symptoms of mania are poor judgment, spending sprees, abuse of drugs and alcohol and denial that destructive behavior represents anything unusual. Some of the depressive episodes' symptoms include feelings of guilt/unhappiness, oversleeping or lack of sleep, change in appetite, thoughts of suicide and restlessness.

According to www.cnn.com, teenagers who have parents with bipolar disorder are 14 times more likely to acquire the disorder as opposed to teenagers whose parents are not bipolar. "The longer

you wait, the more complicated the condition could become," Boris Birmaher, M.D. of the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic in Pittsburgh, PA told CNN. However, the article stated that not all teenagers who have bipolar disorder manifest the symptoms.

Fox News' website (www.foxnews.com) reports that Candida Fink, an adolescent psychiatrist, believes that bipolar disorder is 75-80 percent hereditary. "Different stresses are likely contributors. Vulnerability and emotional and psychological stress [are] partly related, but it isn't always one, and this is important to know. One can develop bipolar with stress or other things combined. We don't know if it is something biological or a mixture of developmental, hormonal imbalances," Fink said. Fink added that child/teenager with one parent who has the disorder is 7-10 times more likely to develop the condition, and

a child/teenager whose parents are both bipolar is 20 times more likely to acquire the condition.

As technology and medical research have progressed, treatment for those suffering from bipolar disorder has ameliorated the condition somewhat. Chief of the Genetics Unit of the Mood Anxiety Disorders Program at the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, MD, Francis McMahon added that the only downside to the medications for bipolar disorder is that such medications probably will be permanent factors in sufferers' lives because the condition currently cannot be "cured."

Diagnosis is key. According to West school psychologist Dana Kantor "the best way for a student to find out if (s)he may have bipolar disease is through a doctor's diagnosis. Although [school staff] may know about the symptoms, the best way to check is through a doctor to be sure."