



Quote of the Week...

Binyamin Netanyahu on the BBC

Interviewer "How come so many more Palestinians have been killed in this conflict than Israelis?"

Netanyahu: "Are you sure that you want to start asking in that direction?"

Interviewer: Why not?

Netanyahu: "Because in World War II more Germans were killed than British and Americans combined, but there is no doubt in anyone's mind that the war was caused by Germany's aggression. And, in response to the German blitz on London, the British wiped out the entire city of Dresden, burning to death more German civilians than the number of people killed in Hiroshima. Moreover, I could remind you that in 1944, when the R.A.F. tried to bomb the Gestapo Headquarters in Copenhagen, some of the bombs missed their target and fell on a Danish children's hospital, killing 83 little children. Perhaps you have another question?" (BBC Feb 11)

Commentary...

Growing Evidence Of Obama's Troubling Mideast Mindset

By Caroline Glick

Since the Democratic Party's presidential primaries a year ago, there has been an ongoing debate about how Barack Obama perceives the U.S. alliance with Israel. After he entered office last month, the need to understand what President Obama thinks about Israel has become acute as we attempt to make sense of his emerging strategy of appeasement for dealing with Islamic terror groups, Pakistan, Iran, and the Arab world.

Starting with his first day in office, Obama has made clear he intends to end the U.S. war against Islamic terror. In his first week in office, he announced he will make good on his campaign pledges to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq, outlaw most of Washington's means of dealing with captured terrorists, slash the defense budget, and diplomatically engage rather than militarily confront state sponsors of terror and weapons of mass destruction proliferators Iran and Syria. And ever since, he has been actively implementing policies aimed at achieving these goals.

In Pakistan for instance, rather than encourage the Zardari government to fight the burgeoning Taliban forces throughout the country, the Obama administration reportedly supports Pakistan's decision to surrender much of the country to Taliban rule. So it is that the Pakistani government's decision to surrender the Swat Valley -- located just a hundred miles from Pakistan's nuclear arsenal in Islamabad -- to the Taliban reportedly enjoyed the quiet backing of the White House.

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Then of course there is Iran. Even as the UN acknowledges that by illegally enriching uranium Iran now stands at the cusp of a nuclear bomb, and despite the fact that Iran's satellite test earlier this month shows that Iran has the capacity to attack Europe and is close to the capacity to attack the U.S., the Obama administration insists it wants to talk to the mullahs. And while it is figuring out how to do that, it has opposed placing any new sanctions on Iran.

After Iran comes Syria. Over the past few weeks, the administration suspended the enforcement of U.S. sanctions against Syria. It has also expressed its interest in returning the U.S. ambassador to Damascus. The

ISRAEL NEWS

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Bush administration withdrew the U.S. ambassador after Syria ordered the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri. Obama has reportedly selected Frederic Hof, known for his hostility to Israel, as his designated envoy.

The Obama administration's eagerness to renew ties with Damascus was made explicit with Senator John Kerry's visit with Syrian President Bashar Assad last week. Kerry didn't seem to mind that while he was talking to Assad, Syrian-sponsored and Hizbullah-controlled terrorists lobbed Katyusha rockets at Israel. Instead of decrying Syria for its co-sponsorship with Iran of Hizbullah and Hamas, Kerry applauded Syria for its willingness to support the reestablishment of a Hamas-Fatah government and asked Assad to help stabilize the situation in Hizbullah-controlled Lebanon.

As to Hamas, before traveling to Damascus, Kerry became the first U.S. official to visit Gaza since Hamas seized control of the area in June 2007. While there, he accepted a letter from Hamas to Obama. Kerry is not alone in his willingness to accept Hamas's control of Gaza and its legitimacy as a political force. To the contrary, he was following the administration's lead.

Last week the administration gave three signs that it is preparing the ground for future U.S. recognition of Hamas. First, the administration announced its support for the reconciliation of Hamas with Fatah. Next, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that in her first official visit to the Middle East next month, she will participate in an international conference in Cairo whose goal is to raise money to finance the rebuilding of Hamas-controlled Gaza in the wake of its missile war against Israel.

Obama's supporters claim these moves stem from the president's basic belief that it is better to talk with U.S. opponents than to boycott them. While the net effect of all of them is to weaken Israel, none of them, it is argued, is directed against Israel, which Obama of course supports.

It is comforting to believe Obama is motivated not by hostility toward Israel, but by naiveté. After all, if true, it means that as his attempts to appease the Arabs, Iran, and the Taliban are rebuffed, he will change course.

Unfortunately, two recent developments lend credence to the view that in courting the likes of Mullah Omar, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Assad and Khaled Mashal, Obama is not motivated by naiveté but by a conviction that the U.S. should abandon Israel. The first was the administration's Valentine's Day announcement that it was sending a delegation to Geneva to participate in the planning sessions preceding the UN's Durban review conference set to be convened in Geneva on Yom Hashoah in late April.

The purpose of the Durban II conference is to oversee implementation of the 2001 Durban conference's declaration. The 2001 Durban conference, it will be recalled, was an anti-Israel diplomatic pogrom where the Jewish people's right to self determination was vilified and the final declaration claimed that the Jewish state is illegitimate and racist.

The Bush administration walked out of the Durban conference and refused to participate in the related UN events that followed it. Recognizing that the Durban conference was part and parcel of the war against Israel the U.S. realized its interests lay elsewhere.

In contrast, by sending a delegation to participate in the planning session last week, the Obama administration signaled its willingness to participate in this war against Israel. During the planning session, American delegates in Geneva chose not to object to a Palestinian draft declaration that defined Israel as a racist state with no right to defend itself and that called for international protection for the Palestinians. U.S. silence enabled the draft to be adopted by unanimous consent.

The second development was the report that Obama intends to appoint former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas Freeman to serve as director of the National Intelligence Council, which charged with advising the president on intelligence matters and composing the National

Intelligence Estimate.

Freeman is an outspoken opponent of Israel. He has stated repeatedly that the source of Islamic and Arab hostility toward the U.S. and violence against Americans -- including the September 11 attacks -- is the American alliance with Israel. Were the U.S. to abandon Israel - which he believes is solely to blame for the Arab world's rejection of its right to exist and for Iran's stated intention to destroy it -- then the U.S. would have no further difficulties with the Arabs or Iran.

Obama's support for Freeman, like his support for Samantha Power and Susan Rice, who largely share Freeman's view, make clear that contrary to what Obama's supporters believe, hostility toward the American alliance with Israel has played and will continue to play a central role in determining Obama's strategies vis-à-vis the Arab and Islamic worlds. If, as Freeman has argued, the only reason the Arabs and Muslims hate the U.S. is due to its support of Israel, then the U.S. should be able to end the war simply by abandoning Israel and reaching out to the Arabs. Taken collectively and individually, all of Obama's policies toward the Arab and Islamic world and toward Israel comport with this basic notion.

This, of course, is distressing. But to forge a strategy to contend with the Obama administration, it is important to first understand what motivates the White House. Only by recognizing the ideological origins of Obama's policies can Israel and its allies in the U.S. have any hope of contending with them successfully. (Jewish Press Feb 24)

Eight Souls, Eight Scrolls By Moshe Kempinski

Eight Torah scrolls for eight souls. Eight Torah scrolls were completed one year to the day after eight young Jewish boys were gunned down by a Palestinian murderer. Eight Torah scrolls were brought together with singing and dancing through the streets of Jerusalem back into the yeshiva where the flame of those eight young souls was extinguished.

I struggled during the day as to whether I wanted to join the ceremony in memory of those boys, a ceremony that would be so interlaced with sadness and loss. The evening was called "Remembering and Continuing" and I finally decided that, in fact, I could not detach myself from that sadness and loss.

As I approached the area of the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva I found myself joining a steady stream of young people, families with little children, and older Jews walking on canes. Every face set with determination and every set of eyes glistening with a tear. Yet, as we got closer the stream became a river and the mood seemed to change. Soon, I was engulfed by a sea of people singing and dancing as they approached the gates of the yeshiva.

The numbers of people were so great it became almost impossible to enter the narrow entryway. There was a little pushing and pressure at the front, but each push was accompanied with an apology and a sheepish grin. Everyone, it seems, knew that every other person there had as much an obligation, right and privilege to be there. We were all there to honor the souls of eight young people who had still so much to achieve in their young lives. We were there to offer strength and comfort to eight families who had lost the most precious of gifts that G-d and life have to offer. At the deepest level, we were also there to be comforted and strengthened ourselves.

As I entered the yeshiva study hall, I was again engulfed in a sea of pain and joy, hope and loss. The new Torah scrolls were held aloft amidst the dancing, each scroll with the name of one of the eight young boys embroidered on the Torah cover. The Torah scrolls of Avraham David Moses, Ro'i Aharon Roth, and of Neria Cohen were dancing with the scrolls of Yonatan Yitzchak Eldar., Doron Maharete, Yochai Lifshitz, Segev Peniel Avichail and Yonadav Chaim Hirschfeld.

It was probably because I wanted it to be so, but as I closed my eyes I imagined eight souls dancing in a circle above us and above the circling Torah scrolls. Then the Torah scrolls mixed in and joined the other Torah scrolls of the yeshiva.

The thunderous singing shook the large windows of the building with the words of psalm 24: "O you gates, lift up your heads and lift up the everlasting doors so that the King of Glory will enter. Who then is this King of Glory? HaShem Tzvakt, He is the King of Glory forever."

It was impossible to do anything else but jump up and down; and that very action added to the intensity of the moment. Thousands of people trying to reach to the very heavens with leaps and bounds. The song then changed to "Open up the gates of Prayer, HaShem, and listen to our prayers" - and the prayers kept pouring out and up.

The evening was also an opportunity to bring to a culmination a study cycle of the Talmud that was begun in the memory of the eight boys. Over the course of the year, those who wished to study a section of the Talmud in memory of the slain students had signed up via an Internet site designated for the purpose, specifying the pages they planned to study. The entire Talmud was completed more than three times in this manner.

As Rabbi Shapira began the siyum ("conclusion") ceremony, each bereaved father sat with his son's Torah scroll. It was clear that they were not holding up the Torah scroll at all, but rather the scroll was holding them up and strengthening their broken souls.

I remembered a story that I had heard a very long time ago.

After the end of the madness of the Holocaust, a small community tried to regather in one of the small towns of Poland. It was the eve of Simchat Torah, the holiday celebrating the study and reading of the Torah. When the congregants opened the ark to dance with the scrolls, they were shocked to find it empty. The scrolls had been stolen. At that point, the children began to cry uncontrollably. Several men simply picked up the children, some of whom were orphaned in the camps, and began to dance with the children.

The Torah scrolls became children.

In Jerusalem, over sixty years later, the children became Torah scrolls. (IsraelINN.com Feb 26)

Netanyahu's Three-Headed Nemesis By Caroline Glick

Who can recall the olden days when Kadima was young and proudly proclaimed its identity as the one Israeli political party that stands for nothing? Two days before the 2006 elections, Kadima's Meir Sheerit grandly announced that his party was the only party in Israel that "has disengaged from ideology."

But look at Kadima now. As far as its leader Tzipi Livni is concerned, ideology is all that matters. Never mind that her ideology - of surrendering land to the Palestinians - was completely discredited by Hamas's electoral victory and subsequent seizure of power in Gaza. Never mind that Kadima's assertion that establishing a Palestinian state is the key to solving all of Israel's problems has been overtaken by Iran's rise as a regional hegemon and aspiring nuclear power dedicated to the eradication of Israel.

As Livni put it Sunday as she rejected Prime Minister-designate Binyamin Netanyahu's request that Kadima join his government as a full partner, "If we compromise and concede our ideology by joining a government with a path that is not ours, it would violate the trust of our voters."

To try to coddle Kadima into setting aside its newfound ideological fervor, Netanyahu harkened back to its past as party that in Sheerit's words was "unburdened by ideological baggage" and "looking only to the future." Netanyahu argued that since today there is no chance of establishing a Palestinian state that will live at peace with Israel, Kadima can set aside its differences with Likud and cooperate on preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, overthrowing Hamas's regime in Gaza and protecting Israel's economy from the global economic meltdown. But Livni would have none of it.

Since Livni has been a post-Zionist radical ever since she underwent her ideological conversion from Right to Left in 2004, her position is understandable. Less understandable is her opportunistic party members' willingness to back her up. What accounts for their readiness to leave their cushy ministries for the Knesset's back benches?

Since the election, Kadima's leaders, their fellow leftists in Labor and Meretz and the media have all proclaimed that Netanyahu's rightist coalition is unsustainable. Knesset speaker Dalia Itzik even suggested that Kadima shouldn't discard its campaign literature since new elections will be declared within a year.

On their face these assertions make little sense. A rightist coalition will be comprised of 65 members of Knesset who have nowhere else to go. What possible reason would they have to agree to new elections?

But Livni and her colleagues have three formidable assets giving credence to their claim: The Obama administration, President Shimon Peres, and the IDF General Staff under Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi. If these forces act in concert to oppose Netanyahu, his ability to govern and remain in office will indeed be significantly diminished.

Over the past week, the Obama administration has taken a series of steps that show that it plans to push the traditional US policy of pressuring Israel to make unreciprocated concessions to its Arab neighbors to an entirely new level. Whereas the Bush administration rejected the legitimacy of the Iranian-supported Hamas terror group, the Obama administration gave three signs this week that it is willing to recognize a Hamas-led Palestinian regime. First, its surrogate, Senator John Kerry, who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited Hamas-controlled Gaza and so effectively accepted Hamas protection. While there, he accepted a letter from Hamas to President Barack Obama and duly delivered it to the US consulate in Jerusalem.

Second, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that she will participate in next month's Egyptian-sponsored conference which aims to raise money to rebuild Hamas-controlled Gaza in the aftermath of its unprovoked missile war against Israel. This is the first time that the US has willingly participated in raising money for Gaza since Hamas seized power in June 2007.

Finally, Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas has decided to participate in negotiations aimed at reestablishing the Hamas-Fatah unity government. Abbas claims that the US now supports such a government that would again render Fatah Hamas's junior partner. US recognition of such a government would constitute US recognition of Hamas as a legitimate actor.

Then there was Kerry's visit to Syria. Not only did Kerry indirectly praise Syria for its support for Hamas by extolling its willingness to support a Palestinian government in which Hamas plays a leading role, he called for the abandonment of the Bush administration's decision to withdraw the US ambassador from Damascus after the Syrians oversaw the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005.

Obama's willingness to treat with Hamas and Syria is part and parcel of his apparent belief that the principal reason that the Arab and Islamic worlds are hostile towards the US is because the US supports Israel. The notion that Obama blames Israel for the Arab and Islamic hatred of the US gained credence this week when it was reported that Obama intends to appoint former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas Freeman to serve as the director of the highly influential National Intelligence Council.

Freeman is known for his virulent animus towards Israel. In numerous public statements he has placed all the blame for Arab and Islamic hostility towards the US on Israel and argued that the US's conflicts with the Arabs will disappear the minute the US abandons Israel.

In one such statement in 2007, Freeman, who extols Hamas as "democratically elected," said, "Those in the region and beyond it who detest Israeli behavior, which is to say almost everyone, now naturally extend their loathing to Americans. This has had the effect of universalizing anti-Americanism, legitimizing radical Islamism, and gaining Iran a foothold among Sunni as well as Shiite Arabs."

By refusing to submit to its Arab enemies, Freeman argues that Israel has earned their wrathful retaliation, which Freeman claims, also places Americans in danger. In his words, "Such retaliation - whatever form it takes - will have the support or at least the sympathy of most people in the region and many outside it. This makes the long-term escalation of terrorism against the United States a certainty, not a matter of conjecture."

President Shimon Peres for his part doesn't share Washington's enthusiasm for Syria or its animus towards Israel. But he does believe that Israel can and must do more to establish a Palestinian state. As the uncontested leader of the Israeli Left, on Friday Peres came out in favor of the so-called "Saudi peace plan." In an indirect, fawning interview with Ma'ariv's political commentator Shalom Yerushalmi, Peres embraced the Saudi initiative, which calls for an Israeli withdrawal to the indefensible 1949 armistice lines and acceptance of millions of hostile foreign Arabs as part of the so-called "right of return."

Both in the interview and in his remarks in the lead-up and the aftermath of the elections, Peres has established himself as the bulwark against a non-leftist government that hopes to place the issue of Palestinian statehood on the back burner. Like Livni, in spite of the fact that there is no Palestinian leader willing to live at peace with Israel, Peres insists that Israel's most pressing challenge is to establish a Palestinian state.

In their bid to discredit the Netanyahu government, Peres and Obama will apparently enjoy the support of the IDF General Staff. According to a report in Ma'ariv on Friday, IDF Chief of General Staff Gabi Ashkenazi has embraced defeatism as a national strategy. Ma'ariv's diplomatic commentator Ben Caspit reported that Ashkenazi claims that while it is true

that Israel has military capacity to set back Iran's nuclear program significantly, there is no point in doing so.

According to Caspit, as far as Ashkenazi is concerned, rather than removing the immediate threat to its survival, Israel should appease Iran's Arab puppet - Assad. Ashkenazi reportedly believes that Israel should leave Iran alone, and beg Obama to convince Assad to accept the Golan Heights from Israel. Once Assad has the Golan, Ashkenazi argues that he will stop pointing his missiles armed with chemical and biological warheads at Israel, stop supporting Hamas and Hizbullah and generally become a member in good standing of the Western alliance. Why Syria would do such a thing, when it would owe an Israeli surrender of the Golan Heights to its alliance with Iran, is a question that Ashkenazi hasn't seen fit to consider.

Ashkenazi is extolled by the leftist media as non-political, but this is untrue. The Chief of General Staff is exceedingly close to former IDF chief of General Staff Amnon Shahak, who signed the post-Zionist Geneva Initiative in 2004 and has established business partnerships with Fatah leaders. As chief of General Staff during Netanyahu's first term as prime minister, Shahak openly rebelled against the government by refusing to meet with the prime minister or attend cabinet meetings. Shahak announced a failed bid to unseat Netanyahu as prime minister shortly after retiring from military service in 1998.

Ashkenazi, who brought Shahak on as his "professional coach" after replacing Dan Halutz as Chief of General Staff in 2007, clearly shares his political views. He opposed fighting Hamas until missiles began raining down on Ashdod, supports signing a new ceasefire with Hamas today that will give Israeli legitimacy to the terror group, and supported ending Operation Cast Lead without first toppling or even significantly degrading Hamas's ability to control Gaza.

Ashkenazi is also extremely close to former IDF OC Military Intelligence Uri Saguy. Since the mid-1990s, Saguy, who owns large tracts of land in the Galilee, has been one of the greatest champions of an Israeli surrender of the Golan Heights. Like Shahak, Saguy serves in the unofficial role of Ashkenazi's professional mentor.

Caspit claimed that right after Netanyahu forms his government, Ashkenazi intends to tell him that the IDF rejects the notion of attacking Iran. That is, according to Caspit, upon entering office, Netanyahu will find the IDF General Staff standing arm and arm with Obama and Peres in a bid to overthrow him.

No wonder Kadima has now found ideology.

If Netanyahu wishes to survive in office and actually accomplish the clear aims he has set for his government, he must begin aggressively selling his agenda to the public. By doing so, he will build the kind of public credibility he will need to prevent Ashkenazi from rebelling against him. With Ashkenazi sidelined, Peres and Obama will have less direct ability to prevent Israel from attacking Iran.

During the campaign, Netanyahu chose to keep a low profile in the hopes of neutralizing the media's criticisms by denying their headlines. At the time, there was some justification for that policy. But now that he is forming the next government, the public must know why he wants to do what he plans to do and why we must support him. Otherwise, Kadima is right. There is no reason to join his government. (Jerusalem Post Feb 23)

Let's Leverage the Good Demographic News By Yoram Ettinger

The bubble of demographic fatalism is bursting, according to the most recent data, published by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS). The data should be leveraged by the new government to formulate a demographic policy aimed at increasing the current 67 percent Jewish majority west of the Jordan River (without Gaza). The policy would uproot demographic fatalism and advance demographic optimism, thus energizing Aliya, the economy, overseas investments, diplomacy, national security, posture of deterrence and minimizing Jewish-Arab tension, which is fed by demographic fear.

According to the ICBS, the country's Jewish population is getting younger and the Arab population getting older. The number of annual Jewish births increased by 45% between 1995 (80,400) and 2008 (117,000), as a result of Aliya from the USSR, the shift by the Soviet Olim from a typical Russian rate of one birth per woman to a typical Israeli rate of two-three births, the rising secular Jewish rate and the sustained high Orthodox and haredi rate. The number of annual Arab births has stabilized

- since 1995 - at around 39,000, reflecting a most successful integration by Arabs into the country's infrastructures of education, health, human services, commerce, finance, culture, sports and politics. The fertility gap is down from six births per woman in 1969 to 0.7 in 2009, and the proportion of Jewish births has grown from 69% (of total births) in 1995 and 74% in 2007 to 75% in 2008.

The downward trend typifies, also, the Arabs in Judea and Samaria due to large scale emigration, entrenched family planning, reduction of teen pregnancy, rapid urbanization, expanded education especially among women, record divorce rate and higher median marriage age.

The Westernization of Arab fertility rate (3.5 births per woman in pre-1967 Israel and four in Judea and Samaria) is apparent throughout most of the Arab and Muslim world. For instance, the 2008 map of the UN Population Division documents an average fertility rate of two-four births, compared with over four births 30 years ago. Even Yemen, the flagship of robust Arab demography, is adopting family planning. This month it approved a new law setting the minimum age for marriage at 17 for boys and girls, prohibiting marriage without the consent of the woman and benefiting divorced women.

The Jewish demographic tailwind behooves the new government to introduce a demographic road map, which would increase the Jewish majority, while respecting the rights of the Arab minority:

1. Placing Aliya at the top of the order of national priorities, as expected from the Jewish state and as required by economic and security challenges. The global economic meltdown, and the rise in anti-Semitism should be leveraged to increase Aliya from the former USSR, US, Europe, Latin America and South Africa.
2. The conversion of some 250,000 Olim from the former USSR - in accordance with Jewish laws - should be expedited.
3. Jewish immigration to - instead of emigration from - Jerusalem would be facilitated by the availability of jobs and lower-cost housing, created through entrepreneurs attracted by a drastic enhancement of the city's infrastructure (airport, fast railroad, Loop, additional freeway, industrial and residential zones).
4. Enticing the return of expatriates and reducing the number of quality emigrants by improving education and research and development infrastructures.
5. Expanding high school and academic programs for prospective Olim.
6. Significant development of infrastructure in the Galilee and in the Negev, triggering emigration from the Greater Tel Aviv area, which would yield economic, environmental and demographic benefits.
7. Synchronizing industrial and educational 9-5 schedule, which would facilitate raising children and obtaining employment.
8. The establishment of a global Jewish foundation, which would support Jewish fertility worldwide, in view of high assimilation, low fertility rates among non-Israeli Jews and Holocaust-driven demographic challenges.

In 1949, David Ben-Gurion considered demography a top priority to salvage the Jewish state, thus transferring to his successors a foundation for a long-term robust Jewish majority. In 2009, the new government will enjoy an impressive critical mass of demography, military, economy and technology. Will it resurrect the Ben-Gurion legacy and buttress the future of the Jewish state by reinforcing Jewish majority? (Jerusalem Post Feb 23)

Bibi Outlines His New Government Policies By Michael Widlanski

Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud Party are actively seeking a broad national unity government, including participation by the left-of-center Kadima and Labor parties. But, in briefings early this week, Netanyahu and his closest colleagues said they would not permit Kadima to set the tone for the government. Likud already has a clear shot at a governing majority of 65 in the 120-seat Knesset, Israel's parliament, but Prime Minister-designate Netanyahu underscored his desire for a still broader government because of major challenges Israel faces:

A looming confrontation with Iran, which is aiming to produce nuclear weapons;

A major economic crisis brought on by the global financial collapse that began in the American housing and banking markets;

And, continuing war situations along the borders of Lebanon and the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, both of which serve as bases for continued terror attacks on Israel.

"Because at this fateful hour, the state of Israel faces enormous challenges," he said, referring to Iran's nuclear program, and Netanyahu stated he would seek a "unity government" to meet "the greatest threat to our existence since our War of Independence." As he formally accepted the assignment to form a new government, Netanyahu explained that "Iran's terror proxies confront us in the North and South"- a reference to Hizballah and Hamas.

"For many decades, Israel has not faced an accumulation of so many great challenges at one time," added Netanyahu, offering "a full partnership" to Kadima and Labor, but his entreaties have been so far rejected by Ms. Livni, the current foreign minister who has demanded that Likud explicitly support forming a Palestinian state. She and her Kadima colleagues have been insisting on a "rotation agreement" under which she and Netanyahu would take turns as prime minister, as well as calling for Likud to adopt Kadima's more accommodating line in negotiations with the Palestinians and Syria. Netanyahu and his colleagues have rejected this.

Livni and some of her colleagues have demanded that Netanyahu publicly support the "two lands for two peoples"-Israel and Palestine-but most in the Likud and its religious and rightist partners seem to have no desire to do this.

"We believe in compromises, but not in being dictated to," declared Prime Minister-designate Netanyahu Sunday (Feb. 22). He stressed that he was offering major cabinet posts to Kadima chairwoman Tzippi Livni and Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, but the right-of-center Likud would set the tone.

"One thing is sure," declared Dr. Ze'ev Binyamin Begin, one of Likud's top leaders, "the former policy of the Kadima-Labor government will be abandoned," speaking in an exclusive briefing. "The era of partial and intermediate agreements is over," said Dr. Begin, a geologist who is often referred to by his nickname "Benny." He and other Likud leaders, such as former Foreign Minister Sylvan Shalom-have made it clear that there is no real negotiating option with Syria, Hamas in Gaza or even the PLO-Fatah faction led by Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank.

"One of the tasks of this government is to pull people back to reality," declared Begin, explaining, "No peace agreement is possible not because of the situation in Israel but because of the position of the Arabs." He said that this point has even been acknowledged by Shimon Peres, Israel's president (largely ceremonial post) who was one of the architects of ties with the PLO, and he said that even major advisors of the Obama Administration-such as Aaron David Miller-had admitted that negotiation options were very limited.

Dr. Begin, who is the son of Israel's late Prime Minister Menachem Begin, said that his own father had joined a national unity government with the Israeli Labor Party in 1967 and 1969, even though there were many differences in views. He said the key was constructing a platform for action on immediate areas of shared interest, while formulating government guidelines that permitted all parties to preserve their views.

Likud officials and even politicians of the even more right-wing/religious Ihud Leumi (National Union) Party have suggested strongly that they would have no problem in sitting in the same government with almost any other Zionist party-leftist or even far-left-because negotiating options with the Palestinians (who have been killing each other and terrorizing Israel) do not really exist.

Begin asserted that the Western countries in general and Western journalists needed to begin taking a more realistic assessment of Arab/Islamic intentions rather than applying wishful thinking to their analysis. He accused the liberal/left in Israel with producing policies which required Israel to make major military moves such as the 2006 Lebanon War and the 2008 Gaza War.

He said that in the areas of Samaria and Judea-the traditional names for the West Bank-Israel had avoided the need for such policies by keeping a constant "hands-on" military and intelligence presence. "War mongers' like myself want to use force in a limited and sensible fashion," said Begin, and he said that major use of aircraft had only become necessary due to Israel's unwise unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. *The writer is a research fellow at the Shalem Center, specializing in Arab politics and communication as well as counter-terror issues.* (Feb 24)
