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**ISRAEL NEWS**  
*A collection of the week's news from Israel*  
*From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of*  
*Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

city, with assured freedom of access and worship for all."

As a presidential candidate, Barack Obama said much the same thing. To a 2008 candidate questionnaire that asked about "the likely final status Jerusalem," Obama

replied: "The United States cannot dictate the terms of a final status agreement. . . . Jerusalem will remain Israel's capital, and no one should want or expect it to be re-divided." In a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Council, he repeated the point: "Let me be clear . . . Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided."

Palestinian irredentists claim that eastern Jerusalem is historically Arab territory and should be the capital of a future Palestinian state. In reality, Jews always lived in eastern Jerusalem -- it is the location of the Old City and its famous Jewish Quarter, after all, not to mention Hebrew University, which was founded in 1918. The apartment complex that Obama opposes is going up in what was once Shimon Hatzadik, a Jewish neighborhood established in 1891. Only from 1948 to 1967 -- during the Jordanian occupation -- was the eastern part of Israel's capital "Arab territory." Palestinians have no more claim to sovereignty there than Russia does in formerly occupied eastern Berlin.

The great obstacle to Middle East peace is not that Jews insist on living among Arabs. It is that Arabs insist that Jews not live among them. If Obama doesn't yet grasp that, he has a lot to learn.

*The writer is a columnist for The Boston Globe. (Boston Globe Jul 22)*

## Commentary...

### Jerusalem -- One City, Undivided By Jeff Jacoby

Late last week, the Obama administration demanded that the Israeli government pull the plug on a planned housing development near the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem. The project, a 20-unit apartment complex, is indisputably legal. The property to be developed -- a defunct hotel -- was purchased in 1985, and the developer has obtained all the necessary municipal permits.

Why, then, does the administration want the development killed? Because Sheikh Jarrah is in a largely Arab section of Jerusalem, and the developers of the planned apartments are Jews. Think about that for a moment. Six months after Barack Obama became the first black man to move into the previously all-white residential facility at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, he is fighting to prevent integration in Jerusalem.

It is impossible to imagine the opposite scenario: The administration would never demand that Israel prevent Arabs from moving into a Jewish neighborhood. And the Obama Justice Department would unleash seven kinds of hell on anyone who tried to impose racial, ethnic, or religious redlining in an American city. In the 21st century, segregation is unthinkable -- except, it seems, when it comes to housing Jews in Jerusalem.

It is not easy for Israel's government to refuse any demand from the United States, which is the Jewish state's foremost ally. To their credit, Israeli leaders spoke truth to power, and said no. "Jerusalem residents can purchase apartments anywhere in the city," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday. "This has been the policy of all Israeli governments. There is no ban on Arabs buying apartments in the west of the city, and there is no ban on Jews building or buying in the city's east. This is the policy of an open city."

Eastern Jerusalem, seen through the barbed wire that used to divide the city

There was a time not so long ago when Jerusalem was anything but an open city. During Israel's War of Independence in 1948, the Jordanian Arab Legion invaded eastern Jerusalem, occupied the Old City, and expelled all its Jews -- many from families that had lived in the city for centuries. "As they left," the acclaimed historian Sir Martin Gilbert later wrote in his 1998 book, *Jerusalem in the Twentieth Century*, "they could see columns of smoke rising from the quarter behind them. The Hadassah welfare station had been set on fire and . . . the looting and burning of Jewish property was in full swing."

For the next 19 years, eastern Jerusalem was barred to Jews, brutally divided from the western part of the city with barbed-wire and military fortifications. Dozens of Jewish holy places, including synagogues hundreds of years old, were desecrated or destroyed. Gravestones from the ancient Mount of Olives cemetery were uprooted by the Jordanian army and used to pave latrines. Jerusalem's most sacred Jewish shrine, the Western Wall, became a slum. It wasn't until 1967, after Jordan was routed in the Six-Day War, that Jerusalem was reunited under Israeli sovereignty and religious freedom restored to all. Israelis have vowed ever since that Jerusalem would never again be divided.

And not only Israelis. US policy, laid out in the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, recognizes Jerusalem as "a united city administered by Israel" and formally declares that "Jerusalem must remain an undivided city." US presidents, Republican and Democratic alike, have agreed. In former President Clinton's words, "Jerusalem should be an open and undivided

### Obama's Real Agenda By Anne Bayefsky

President Barack Obama last Monday met for the first time with leaders of selected Jewish organizations and leaks from the meeting now make one thing very clear. The only free country in the Middle East no longer has a friend in the leader of the free world. Obama is the most hostile sitting American president in the history of the state of Israel.

This was the very first meeting with Jewish community's leaders. Earlier requests for an audience with major Jewish organizations had reportedly been ignored. Six months after taking office the president finally got around to issuing an invitation to stop the bleeding. Increasing numbers of Jews even among the overwhelming number who voted for Obama -- have been voicing serious concern about his real agenda.

The meeting, however, did not showcase the president's trademark engagement and dialogue routine. Instead, he decided to cherry pick his Jewish audience to include pro-Obama newcomers with little support in the mainstream Jewish world, such as J Street, while blackballing the Zionist Organization of America. The oldest pro-Israel group in the United States, with an important presence on Capitol Hill, was not a voice Obama wanted to hear. This leaves the president willing to engage Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad but not ZOA President Mort Klein.

The growing alarm in the Jewish community was also something the White House was bent on covering up. They refused to put the meeting on the President's public schedule until it was outed. The White House demanded strict confidentiality and issued a terse couple of lines that it occurred when it was all over.

But there is no papering over the distressing reality that emerged. The president told his listeners that he preferred putting daylight between the United States and Israel. His reported justification: "there was no light between the US and Israeli positions for the last eight years, and no progress was made."

Evidently, unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip, 21 settlements and 9,000 residents counts for nothing. The Palestinian terrorist leadership and street have refused to accept a Jewish state for the past eight years (and the previous 53) because the United States did not add sufficiently to Israel's isolation.

The president apparently believes that the Palestinians are more likely

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to end terrorism, incitement to violence and rampant antisemitism if the United States applies more pressure on their victims. Even if Obama doesn't get it, Mahmoud Abbas does. He is now refusing to negotiate anything with the new Israeli government until Obama's settlement conditions are met.

During the meeting, the president repeatedly described his new policy in terms of one of Yasser Arafat's favorite mantras, "even-handedness." That's diplomat talk for a moral equivalence between an Arab war against Jewish self-determination launched from the day of Israel's birth decades before any "occupation" and the conditions of third-generation Palestinian "refugees" kept in limbo pending Israel's destruction. But Obama's even-handedness was no slip of the tongue. In his Cairo speech, the president equated the Holocaust to Palestinian "dislocation."

The president promoted his strategy of putting hard public "pressure" on Israel as a means to build more credibility with Arab states. He must have meant the kind of credibility that comes from his policy of leaving an "open door" to Iran after its discredited election.

Obama then claimed that the widespread perception of an anti-Israel agenda was all the media's fault because the media is only interested in a "man-bites-dog" story. When an administration sends a US ambassador back to Syria though it is still listed as a key state sponsor of terrorism, hosts terrorist kingpins pursuing Israel's annihilation, and was caught trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction, the story is far-fetched alright, but true.

The president joked that Al-Jazeera often airs pictures of him wearing a yarmulke at the Western Wall. Except the photo-op during the election campaign had been intended to fool a Jewish audience that is no longer amused.

Reports also quote the president as claiming Israel has yet to "engage in serious self-reflection." Considering Israel is a democratic country forced to send its children into the armed forces for two to three years and its men into reserve duty for another twenty-five, that isn't the audacity of hope. It's just plain audacity.

There is no doubt that the pressure on Israel from the Obama administration is going to get a lot worse, as the President told the group "there is a narrow window of opportunity for advancing the peace process." Everyone understood the threat. The narrow window is Obama's self-defined political ambitions bearing no relationship to the realities of the Middle East –or the welfare of either Israel or the United States.

The writer is a professor at Touro College and a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. (Jerusalem Post Jul. 19)

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### **Tough Love Is No Love at All** By Steven J. Rosen

*Why Obama's approach to Israel is collapsing. Rapidly.*

"Obama is not 100 percent right to confront Bibi on settlements," a Clinton advisor blew back at me after my July 1 ForeignPolicy.com piece "Cut Bibi Some Slack." "He is 200 percent right!" This from a guy who had argued for years that public confrontation is not the right way to deal with Israel because it undermines the confidence that is a prerequisite for progress in the peace process.

Barack Obama himself addressed the issue in a meeting with American Jewish leaders on July 13. Asked if it were a mistake to let "sunlight" show between the United States and Israel, the U.S. president demurred, "We had no sunlight for eight years, but no progress either."

Obama's conclusion that former U.S. President George W. Bush achieved nothing by working with Israel is amazing, considering that Bush brought the father of the Israeli settler movement, Ariel Sharon, to withdraw every soldier and every settler from every square inch of Gaza in August 2005 in the largest test of the "land for peace" concept in Israeli-Palestinian history. You would think the experience of the Bush years would have led the Obama team to an opposite conclusion: If settlements had been the obstacle to peace, why did Sharon's removal of 8,000 settlers from 21 settlements lead to the rise of Hamas, thousands of Qassam rockets fired at Israel, and war instead of peace?

And they might reflect on the testimony of Elliott Abrams, who negotiated the Bush administration's compromises on the natural growth of settlements that the Obama team now disavows. "There were indeed agreements between Israel and the United States regarding the growth of Israeli settlements on the West Bank," Abrams wrote in the Wall Street Journal. "The prime minister of Israel relied on them in undertaking a wrenching political reorientation ... the removal of every single Israeli

citizen, settlement and military position in Gaza. ... There was a bargained-for exchange. Mr. Sharon was determined to ... confront his former allies on Israel's right by abandoning the 'Greater Israel' position. ... He asked for our support and got it, including the agreement that we would not demand a total settlement freeze."

And they should heed the words of Sharon's negotiator in that bargain, Dov Weisglass: "Final-status peace treaties ... will require many American guarantees and obligations, especially in respect to long-term security arrangements. Without these, it is doubtful whether an agreement can be reached. Yet if decision-makers in Israel ... discover, heaven forbid, that an American pledge is only valid as long as the president in question is in office, nobody will want such pledges."

The theory of "tough love" toward Israel is also failing the test, if it is intended to win concessions from the Palestinian side. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, who just completed intensive negotiations with an outgoing Ehud Olmert government that was continuing "natural growth" of settlements within the agreed Bush limits, now says the incoming Benjamin Netanyahu government must "stop all settlement activities in order to resume peace talks over final status issues." His chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, adds, "There can be no half-solutions with regards to the settlements."

This is a hardening of the Palestinian position. Abbas did not cut off negotiations when Olmert said publicly to Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth in April 2008, "It was clear from day one to Abbas ... that construction would continue in population concentrations -- the areas mentioned in Bush's 2004 letter. ... Beitar Illit will be built, Gush Etzion will be built; there will be construction in Pisgat Ze'ev and in the Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem ... areas [that] will remain under Israeli control in any future settlement." Abbas continued meeting with the Olmert government. In fact, Erekat boasted to a Jordanian newspaper a few weeks ago that he and Abbas achieved considerable progress with the Olmert government between the November 2007 Annapolis talks and the end of 2008 in as many as 288 negotiation sessions by 12 committees -- all while the limited growth permitted by the Bush understandings continued.

Now, Obama has generated inflated and unsatisfiable expectations in the Arab world, a belief that the U.S. president can and will force total Israeli capitulation and an absolute freeze. The Los Angeles Times reports, "President Obama's public quarrel with Israel ... is developing into a test of the U.S. leader's international credibility, say foreign diplomats and other observers." Anything less than a 100 percent halt "will not only disappoint the Arabs whom the president has courted, but also will be read by adversaries around the globe as a signal that the president can be forced to back down." Or, as Erekat himself put it on Voice of Palestine radio, "If settlement continues ... Arabs and Palestinians [will] believe that the American administration is incapable of swaying Israel to halt its settlement activities." A prominent Palestinian observer, Ghassan Khatib, states, "Should the U.S. government ... fail to make Israel abide by its international commitments, especially regarding ending the expansion of settlements, it will sabotage efforts to renew the political process."

The Obama people might actually learn something from Abrams, who warns that, when eventually there is a compromise between the Obama and Netanyahu governments regarding settlements, the two sides will put "contrasting spins" on the agreement for their respective audiences. It will be difficult for the Obama administration to explain why there are what will be depicted by critics as loopholes. Maybe then they will ask themselves whether they were wise to do it with a public fight?

For now, they are still on the wrong track. Days ago, Israel's new ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren, was warned that the United States wants a halt to construction of 20 apartments in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem. Netanyahu responded, "There is no ban on Arabs buying apartments in the west of the city, and there is no ban on Jews building or buying in the city's east." How could the administration believe that any major Israeli political party could possibly agree to making any part of Jerusalem Judenrein? Just how far do they plan to go with this policy of confrontation? (ForeignPolicy.com Jul 21)

*The writer served for 23 years as foreign-policy director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and was a defendant in the recently dismissed AIPAC case. He is now director of the Washington Project at the Middle East Forum and a consultant to the Council for World Jewry.*

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## **Self-Exiled By Guilt** By Sarah Honig

Those little neglected news stories that rarely make front-page headlines and never receive airtime are often the most telling of all. It's through them that deliberately suppressed fundamental truths occasionally surface. It's there that big lies are sometimes, albeit inadvertently, exposed.

Scant attention was paid last week to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's revelations on Al-Palestina TV. Abbas talked about his youth in Safed, from whence he routinely claims his family was forcibly driven out by Israeli troops in 1948. Abbas revels in his supposed refugee status. It's his stock-in-trade on the Arab scene and the international arena. The pitiable pose of an aggrieved victim confers ostensible moral authority upon his cause.

This pose, moreover, becomes a basic Arab tenet - the crucial claim for justifying terror against Israel and for refusing to relinquish the so-called "right of return" by refugees to what are described as homes robbed from them by violent interloping Jewish conquistadores. Biased world opinion willingly and gladly falls for the Palestinian freedom-fighter fable.

But foolhardy carelessness - or trust that nobody listens to intra-Arab discourse - occasionally pulls off the painstakingly fabricated mask. That's what happened to Abbas (a.k.a. Abu-Mazen) on July 6. Fatah's cofounder reminisced at length about his Safed origins and haphazardly let the truth slip out.

"Until the nakba" (calamity in Arabic - the loaded synonym for Israeli independence), he recounted, his family "was well-off in Safed." When Abbas was 13, "we left on foot at night to the Jordan River... Eventually we settled in Damascus... My father had money, and he spent his money methodically. After a year, when the money ran out, we began to work.

"People were motivated to run away... They feared retribution from Zionist terrorist organizations - particularly from the Safed ones. Those of us from Safed especially feared that the Jews harbored old desires to avenge what happened during the 1929 uprising. This was in the memory of our families and parents... They realized the balance of forces was shifting and therefore the whole town was abandoned on the basis of this rationale - saving our lives and our belongings."

SO HERE it is from the mouth of the PA's head honcho himself. He and no other verifies that nobody expelled Safed's Arabs. Their exile was voluntary, propelled by their extreme consciousness of guilt and expectation that Jews would be ruled by the same blood-feud conventions that prevail in Arab culture. Unrealistically they anticipated that Jews would do to them precisely what the Arabs had done to Safed's Jews. If that was their premise, they indeed had cause to panic.

The "uprising" Abbas alluded to was one among the serial pogroms instigated by infamous Jerusalem mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini, who's still revered throughout the Arab world. He was a Berlin-resident avid Nazi collaborator during World War II and a wanted war criminal postwar.

In August 1929 Husseini rallied Arabs to slaughter Jews on trumped-up allegations of Jewish takeover attempts at the Temple Mount. Sixty-seven members of the ancient Jewish community of Hebron were hideously hacked to death. That was the most notorious massacre, but others were perpetrated throughout the country. In the equally ancient Jewish community of Safed, 21 were butchered no less gruesomely (a cat was stuffed into one old woman's disemboweled abdomen). A child and young woman, due to be married the next day, were cold-bloodedly shot dead by Arab constables whom British mandatory officers assigned to watch over the majority of Safed's Jews who sought safety in the police courtyard.

The British proposed that all Safed Jews be evacuated "for their own safety," as was the case in Hebron. The offer was vehemently refused. Thereafter, principally during the 1936-39 multi-led rampages, the Hagana and Safed's own IZL cells protected the town's 2,000 Jews.

Nevertheless, on the ill-fated evening of August 13, 1936 Arab marauders managed to infiltrate and invade the modest Unger home in the old Jewish Quarter, just as the family ate supper. They murdered the father, Alter, a 36-year-old Torah scribe, his daughters Yaffa and Hava (nine and seven respectively) and the six-year-old son, Avraham.

In his book *Safed Annals* author Natan Shor includes the following eyewitness account from one of the first neighbors who soon chanced by: "The boys heard groans from one of the houses. We entered and in the middle of a dark room - furnished only by a table, a broken chair and a bookcase crammed with mostly religious volumes - lay a man's body. His skull was bashed in. Half the head was missing. We saw only a beard, part of a nose and the right eye... The corpse lay in a pool of blood and brain matter... In the next room amid the dishes, lay three little bloodied lifeless children. Two of them were still open-eyed. An old woman, the

grandmother, ran around from room to room, crazed with grief. The mother, herself wounded (probably left for dead), went from child to child. She didn't yell or wail. Staring intently, she repeated quietly over and over in Yiddish: 'If it were only me instead of you.' Her hand bled profusely and an amputated finger hung by a strip of skin."

Such was the uprising for which Abbas's kinfolk assumed they deserved just reckoning. Ironically, Jews were alarmed by the Arab exodus, figuring it presaged a formidable onslaught by invading Arab armies (which indeed came). In many areas (Haifa, for instance) Jews begged and pleaded with local Arabs to stay. But Arabs in Safed and elsewhere - heeding their leaders' exhortations to pull out and hounded by fears arising from their own vengeful traditions (but not Jewish ones) - did what was prudent in light of their surmise that Jews would behave according to Arab codes.

On the eve of the April 16, 1948 British withdrawal from Safed, the mandatory authorities turned over the town's police facilities and Mount Canaan's military fort to the Arabs. They offered to escort all Jews out of town "for their own safety." As in 1929, the Jews refused unequivocally, though memories of the horrific carnage should have inspired more dread among them than among the fleeing Abbases.

Why wasn't Abu-Mazen's pivotal testimony accorded due resonance in our press? Why did Israel's mainstream media largely ignore Abbas's own recollections? Perhaps most editors aren't interested in the ideological underpinnings of the war against their own people. Preserving the myth of Israeli fault is de rigueur, a hallmark of enlightenment.

Nothing must be allowed to dent the potent-cum-fraudulent Palestinian refugee narrative, not even the memories of the Palestinian headliner, to say nothing of Jewish memories. The latter are altogether dispensable. Hence Safed residents must these days petition their own municipality not to demolish the old Unger home but to preserve it as a commemorative historic site. (Jerusalem Post Jul 17)

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## **Listen to the Left** By Evelyn Gordon

Too many articles lambasting the continued Jewish support for US President Barack Obama have overlooked a crucial point: Many American Jews agree with his positions on Israel. Like him, they think Israel should completely freeze the settlements, withdraw to the 1967 lines and divide Jerusalem, and that peace would break out if only it did so. None of these views are shared by a majority of Israelis. But as long as American Jews hold them, expecting them to echo mainstream Israeli concerns over these policies is delusional.

What is genuinely puzzling, however, is why Obama supporters appear equally deaf to the anguished cries of Israel's left, which has long advocated precisely these policies. When the editorial staff of Haaretz, a bastion of Israel's hard left, pens three opinion pieces criticizing Obama in the space of 10 days, it ought to be clear even to left-of-center American Jews that Obama has an Israel problem.

The first, by veteran diplomatic correspondent and columnist Aluf Benn, appeared on July 10. Titled "The left went to the beach," it sought to explain why Israeli leftists, who vocally supported previous American demands for a settlement freeze, have not rallied behind Obama's. Not only have there been no demonstrations, but at a Knesset debate in early July, he noted, not a single MK urged compliance with Obama's demand.

One reason, Benn posited, is that Obama never tried "to communicate with the Israeli public." He "spoke to Arabs and Muslims, but not Israelis. His neglect increased Israelis' fears that we do not have a friend in the White House."

This impression was bolstered by "the administration's pathetic attempt to deny the existence of understandings on settlement construction" between Obama's predecessor and Israel: "It was possible to accuse Israel of violating its promises, or to say that the policy had changed and explain why, but not to lie."

Additionally, "Obama obtained nothing from the Palestinians and the Arab states in exchange, and his insistence on a settlement freeze only encouraged Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in his refusal to negotiate with [Binyamin] Netanyahu. Under these circumstances, it is hard for the Israeli left to blame the government for ruining the chances for peace."

Finally, "the more time passes, the more it appears that the demand to freeze settlement construction was meant to demonstrate a distancing from Israel." Obama has turned a settlement freeze "into a matter of honor," and "when the argument is about who is stronger instead of the real issue,

anyone who urges Netanyahu to give in to Obama will be accused of being unpatriotic. And the Israeli left does not want to be backed into that corner."

Thus after six months in office, Obama has made even Israeli leftists, who enthusiastically supported his election, doubt his friendship with Israel, rendering them unable to support his policies without appearing unpatriotic.

And, equally grave, he has actually undermined the peace process by encouraging Abbas's refusal to negotiate.

A week later, Haaretz devoted its editorial to the Obama problem. Titled "Speak to us, too," it began by slamming Netanyahu for "entering into an unnecessary and harmful conflict" with Obama's administration and "rejecting Obama's essential desire" to bring peace. Obama's presidency, it asserted, has created "a unique opportunity" for peacemaking that "it would be a shame to miss."

But then came the punch line: "Now, the US administration must convince the Israeli public that it has a friend in the White House, and that the administration's positions correspond with Israel's national interests. After talking to the Arabs, Muslims and Iranians, in speeches and on television, it is only right that Obama also address the Israeli public."

Again, the message was clear: Even Israel's left wants convincing that Obama will not sacrifice Israel's interests.

Then, last Friday, star columnist Yoel Marcus chimed in. For all Obama's goodwill, he wrote, "there is something naive, not to say infuriating, about his policy of dialogue and about the whistle stops he has chosen in his travels regarding our issue. He spoke in Turkey, he spoke in Egypt, he appeared before students in Saudi Arabia, Paris, England, Ghana and Australia.

Even there the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was mentioned... The only place he hasn't been is Israel. He has spoken about us, but not to us."

Moreover, Obama "is behaving as though everything starts and ends with the question of whether Israel will or will not freeze construction in the settlements," completely ignoring such crucial details as that the Oslo Accords resulted in waves of suicide bombers and the Gaza pullout in daily rocket attacks. His "obscuring of the fact that the Palestinians have not managed to overcome their passions and be worthy partners for a peace agreement" is "upsetting."

Finally, while "Obama assumed he did a great thing when he spoke in Cairo about the Jewish people's suffering in the Holocaust," the "implied distortion: that we deserve a state because of the Holocaust" is "infuriating."

"As a leader who aspires to solve the problems of the world through dialogue," Marcus concluded, "we expect him to come to Israel and declare here courageously, before the entire world, that our connection to this land began long before the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Holocaust, and that 4,000 years ago, Jews already stood on the ground where he now stands."

In short, Obama is placing the onus entirely on Israel, thus absolving the Palestinians of any need to amend their behavior.

Moreover, by basing Israel's claim to statehood on the Holocaust rather than the Jews' historic connection to this land, he has fed the Arab fantasy that Jews are colonialist interlopers with no right to be here, and that the Palestinians are being sacrificed to atone for European misdeeds - thereby fostering Arab intransigence and unwillingness to end the conflict.

When even the hard-core leftists of Haaretz's editorial board feel that a) Obama seems hostile to Israel and b) his policies actually undermine the peace process, his American Jewish supporters ought to take note.

Because no matter how sincerely Obama wants peace, a president who has lost even Israel's hard left has no chance of delivering it. (Jerusalem Post Jul 22)

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### **New Era As British Hostility Reaches Crescendo** By Robin Shepherd

It has been a terrible month for Israel's reputation in Great Britain. The government has announced a partial arms embargo in protest of Operation Cast Lead. The Charity War on Want has held a launch event for a new book entitled *Israeli Apartheid: A Beginners Guide*. The Guardian has featured commentaries promoting the apartheid analogy as well as accusing Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of using Nazi language to defend settlement policy. The BBC and other media outlets have given massive coverage to the recent *Breaking the Silence* report slamming the IDF for committing "war crimes." Barely a day goes by without a new front being opened against the Jewish state.

Those of us who follow such matters are always in danger of getting too close to our subject. But, given that the IDF is not involved in combat operations, I for one have never seen a period like it. On Friday, the Guardian ran two anti-Israel opinion pieces on one and the same day.

There's something in the air. The Israel-haters smell blood, and they're going in for the kill. It could be that we are on the threshold of a new era. But why now?

The simplest explanation is that the relentless, unremitting stream of anti-Israeli invective that has been pumped into the public mind in Britain over the last decade or so was always going to reach critical mass at some point. There is nothing particularly significant about the timing. The clock has been ticking for years. Israel's time has simply come.

Ultimately, the simple explanation may be the best explanation. But there are a number of other factors now at play which may have helped bring the situation to a head.

First, the election of Barack Obama is perceived by many British opinion formers as heralding a refreshing new approach to Israel from the United States. For linguistic and historical reasons, political change in America is keenly felt in Britain. Obama's comments calling for a freeze on the settlements have provided the pretext for a renewed assault on Israel in general using the American president's huge popularity as cover.

Second, the election of Netanyahu combined with the appointment of Avigdor Lieberman as foreign minister have offered new opportunities to make the attack personal. Even for Israel's most virulent detractors, it was not easy to mount a hate campaign against Ehud Olmert and Tzipi Livni. Netanyahu has been demonized in Britain for years. Lieberman is portrayed as little better than a skinhead. The wolves have been thrown fresh meat.

Third, Foreign Secretary David Miliband has recently recast the tone of British pronouncements on the Middle East and relations with the Islamic world in a way that serves the broader agenda of Israel's opponents. For example, in a speech in Oxford in May and reported in the Guardian, he spoke of abjuring distinctions between "moderates and extremists" - a line that, despite Foreign Office denials, was widely interpreted as potentially paving the way for talks with Hamas and other militant groups. He also referred to "ruined crusader castles," "lines drawn on maps by colonial powers" and to the failure "to establish two states in Palestine."

Miliband cannot be held entirely responsible for the way his words are interpreted. But it is precisely in such guilty, post-colonial terms that Israel's opponents in Britain have always talked. To hear their own kind of language echoing back at them from the leading figure in the UK foreign policy establishment is likely to embolden them further.

Fourth, in a country whose opinion formers still fulminate about the invasion of Iraq - sometimes portrayed as a venture inspired by Israel and Zionist neoconservatives in America - the Netanyahu government's hard line stance on Iran has got the alarm bells ringing again. Are we going to get sucked in to yet another war in the Middle East for the benefit of Israel, they ask.

Fifth, Netanyahu's new emphasis on insisting that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a specifically Jewish state is pushing Israel's opponents against the wall and forcing them to declare themselves with greater clarity. Of course, this does not just apply to Britain. But as a country whose opinion forming classes rank among the most hostile to Israel in the Western world, the move has provoked a particularly hysterical reaction. Since the Palestinians have made it clear that they have no intention of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state, British opponents of Israel have been forced to choose between accepting that Palestinian rejectionism forms the real root cause of the conflict or themselves rejecting the Jewish character of Israel and the whole Zionist enterprise to boot.

Put all of these factors together and it becomes easier to understand why a situation which was awful to begin with has deteriorated so rapidly.

The obvious question now is where next. With the partial arms embargo in mind, we should obviously be watching for an extension of formal sanctions. Outside the governmental sphere, it is a racing certainty that unions will renew efforts for trade and academic boycotts. Media hysteria will grow as each new assault on Israel's integrity helps legitimize and validate the next. For the Jews of Britain, the prospect of increasing anti-Semitism against this backdrop is all too real.

The darkness is closing in. (Jerusalem Post Jul 20)

*The writer is director of international affairs at the Henry Jackson Society in London. His book, A State Beyond the Pale: Europe's Problem with Israel, will be published in September.*

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