



Events...

December 7-16

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Commentary...

Olmert's Malingering Legacy By Caroline Glick

What a difference a year makes. It was just one year ago this week that the IAF destroyed the North Korean built, Iranian financed nuclear reactor in Syria. The raid exposed Syria as a full partner in the Iranian-led jihadist axis. Its prolonged diplomatic isolation was a foregone conclusion.

But just one year later, Syria is being feted by France. It's signing billion-dollar oil and gas deals with France's oil giant Total. A triumphant President Bashar Assad is openly demanding that the US follow France's lead and start licking his boots.

Syria has Israel to thank for its stunning reversal of fortunes. It opened the door that Assad gleefully walked through this week as he played the role of responsible international leader while remaining loyal to Iran, Hizbullah, Hamas and the terror militias in Iraq.

Israel opened the door by participating in Turkish-mediated talks with Syria regarding a surrender of the Golan Heights. Although both sides referred to the talks as "peace negotiations," it was obvious that no peace would come from them.

Since the early 1990s, Syria has recognized that intermittent, fruitless discussions with Israel about the Golan Heights are the best means of maintaining or reestablishing its acceptability in the West. After Assad ordered the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005, he immediately turned to Israel to pull his fat from the fire by offering to renew negotiations regarding a surrender of the Golan Heights. Israel held out for two and a half years and during those years, Assad wasted away in international isolation. With even the UN breathing down his neck, Assad and his regime were hanging on for dear life.

But then suddenly, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert came to the rescue. Thanks to Olmert, Syria is back in the driver's seat and as one could have expected, Assad's first order of business was to throw Israel under the bus. No longer in need of its assistance, as he stood next to French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Assad announced that the "peace talks" are suspended. And both Assad and Sarkozy blamed their suspension on Israel, whose "political instability" makes it impossible to proceed.

There is no doubt that the country will pay a price for Olmert's decision. But it is also fairly clear that the next government - whether led by Kadima or the Likud - will be unlikely to repeat his mistake. Olmert's political opponents warned him that his move would endanger Israel by legitimizing Syria and rewarding it for its strategic alliance with Iran. And his opponents' view that Olmert was wrong to reach out to Assad is shared by a majority of the public and a fair amount of the media. Indeed, since Israel began negotiating the surrender of the Golan Heights in 1992, the consistent view of the majority has been that the country is better off with the Golan than without it, even if that means no peace treaty with Syria.

WHEREAS OLMERT's Syrian gambit is unlikely to cause any irreparable damage and is unlikely to be repeated by his successors, the same cannot be

ISRAEL NEWS

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From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee
of Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

said of his gambit with the Palestinians. There Olmert acts against little organized or coherent opposition. And his actions are openly supported by his colleagues in Kadima, who have to varying degrees all committed themselves to continue his policies.

Kadima was elected on a platform of unilateral withdrawal from Judea and Samaria. While it never disclaimed its intention to expel up to 100,000 Israelis from their homes in the areas and

withdraw, after the Hamas takeover of Gaza and after the war with Hizbullah in 2006, the government claimed that it would only expel them after it signed a deal setting out the contours of a Palestinian state with Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas. And in the interest of achieving just such a deal, the government has been carrying out negotiations for the past year.

As has been the case with the talks with Syria, the government has precluded public debate about the wisdom of a potential deal by hiding the details of its discussions and its intentions from the public. Backed by the Bush administration, which has championed the negotiations, the Olmert-Livni-Barak government has kept their content secret.

At the same time, it has quieted its opponents by loudly proclaiming that the chances that a deal will be concluded before President George W. Bush, Abbas and Olmert leave office are slim.

Moreover, in light of Hamas's control of Gaza and its threat to Fatah in Judea and Samaria, both the government and the Bush administration have argued that the agreement being negotiated will not be implemented even if it is concluded. It will only be implemented after Palestinian society accepts Israel's right to exist and agrees to live at peace with the Jewish state.

The agreement, they claim, will provide impetus to the Palestinians to accept Israel because it will commit all future governments to treat Judea, Samaria and parts of Jerusalem as Palestinian territory and so offset any lingering doubts about Israel's commitment to peace.

THE CONCERN has lately arisen that although the Palestinians will certainly not implement their side of the agreement, Israel will implement its pledged withdrawal from Judea and Samaria. This is the case for two reasons. First, unlike the situation with Syria, Olmert's support of the deal with Fatah is shared by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who is expected to succeed him, by Kadima and Labor and by the media. It is quite possible that they will argue that the existence of the agreement suffices to move ahead with their original intent to destroy Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria and expel their residents.

The concern that the Olmert-Livni-Barak government or its successor is planning to withdraw has increased in recent weeks, as military and police authorities have begun abrogating the legal rights of residents of Judea and Samaria in a way they haven't done since the expulsions from Gaza.

Two weeks ago, OC Central Command Maj.-Gen. Gad Shamni issued orders evicting three residents of Samaria from the area for four months. No criminal charges were filed against the three; they are suspected of no crimes; they have been arrested for no crimes. Yet the IDF has decided to expel them from their homes and separate them from their families by arguing that they are "provocateurs."

Last Tuesday, the men's supporters and families decided to stage a protest outside Shamni's house in Re'ut. The police had other ideas. A bus holding 50 protesters was stopped en route to the protest. Its passengers were arrested and brought to the police stations in Ramle and Modi'in and told they were being held due to suspicion that they were intending to attend an illegal demonstration.

There is of course, no crime on the books regarding a person's "intention" to participate in a demonstration. And yet the would-be demonstrators were held until the middle of the night. The last time such draconian actions were taken against law abiding citizens was in 2005 in the lead-up to the expulsions from Gaza.

The fear that the government is planning to begin expelling Israelis intensified on Sunday when, in a surprise move, the government convened a discussion of a bill setting out the levels of restitution those who are forced

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to leave their homes in Judea and Samaria will receive. Why would the government debate such a bill if it doesn't believe it is about to sign a deal with Abbas? And why would it debate such a bill if it truly intended to shelve its agreement until after the Palestinians eschewed their hopes for Israel's destruction?

THE SECOND reason justifying concern that the government is planning to withdraw from Judea and Samaria is due to the contrast between how the public views a withdrawal from the Golan and how it views a withdrawal from Judea and Samaria. Whereas the consistent majority view is that the country is more secure with the Golan Heights than without it, since 1993 there has been sustained majority support for the view that we will be better off without large swathes of Judea and Samaria. This view has been cultivated by leftist activists and their supporters in the media who claim that Israel's chief strategic challenge is not the Iranian axis, but the presence of what they consider an unabsorbable Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria.

The belief that the Palestinians are the greatest strategic danger to the country is belied by reality. Putting aside the open question of whether they are truly incapable of integrating into Israel society or whether they challenge the country's identity as a Jewish state, the fact is that Judea and Samaria today constitute the least dangerous front Israel faces. And this is so because the IDF controls the area. Iran, Gaza, Lebanon and Syria are Israel's primary concerns today. And Gaza and Lebanon are dangers precisely because Israel followed the left's demographic and political arguments and surrendered them to Iranian proxies.

The fact that a majority has been convinced that the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria is a critical threat just because it exists means that the threat of a withdrawal will remain acute until the Kadima-Labor-Shas triumvirate is driven from power in a general election and replaced by a Likud-led government and even then it will not abate. The threat will only abate if a Likud-led government is able to lead a public discussion about an alternative strategic assessment of Judea and Samaria.

Such an assessment would necessarily begin with the following assertions: Israel should not be rewarding the Palestinians for their aggression and has a duty to secure areas necessary for its national security. Such assertions engender the conclusion that far from ceding its rights to Judea and Samaria, Israel should apply its law to the parts of them that are critical to its defense, including Gush Etzion, Gush Adumim, Gush Ariel and the Jordan Valley.

To a degree that exceeds the dangers of Olmert's ill-advised talks with Assad, his talks with the Palestinians imperil the country by setting the conditions for disastrous withdrawals. Unfortunately, this danger will remain in place for as long as Israelis believe that our only viable option in Judea and Samaria is retreat. (Jerusalem Post Sep. 9)

Gearing Up to Strike Iran By P. David Hornik

According to a recent article (in Hebrew) in the Israeli daily Maariv, Israel's top political and security officials have taken a decision to attack Iran's nuclear program if nothing else is done to halt it.

Senior journalist Ben Caspit writes that "the debate between those who think everything must be done, including a military operation, to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb and those who think one can live with it, has been decided. If the Iranian regime doesn't fall during the coming year, if the Americans don't deliver a military blow and if the sanctions don't break the Iranian nuclear program, Israel will have to take action. In other words: the preparations for an Israeli military option...are already underway."

Caspit adds by way of explanation: "In the Tehran-Jerusalem-Washington triangle, things haven't been going well. Israel is desperate to get American permission for an attack on Iran, but is not obtaining it.... The shortest flight route to Iran passes over Iraq, where the Americans are in control."

Instead of the needed overflight codes, Caspit claims, the U.S. is offering Israel defensive radar—"We'll help you defend yourselves, but we'll prevent you from attacking," say the Americans." That description dovetails with recent reports of opposition to a strike on Iran—Israeli or American—particularly by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, National Intelligence Director Mike McConnell, and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Michael Mullen. A security source told Caspit that "the Americans have accepted a nuclear Iran and are trying to get us to accept it." (Another report in the rumor mill has claimed the opposite—that the U.S. is itself preparing for a strike.)

In any case, Israel, according to Caspit, is not at all inclined to countenance a nuclear Iran, and former deputy defense minister Ephraim Sneh (now head of a new political party) has been especially active trying to get that point across. Caspit says Sneh sent a document to both U.S. presidential candidates, John McCain and Barack Obama, in which he stated: "No government in

Jerusalem will accept a nuclear Iran. Once it is clear Iran is at the point of nuclearization, an Israeli military action to prevent it will be on the agenda."

To avoid that, Sneh wrote to McCain and Obama, the time has come for an all-out U.S. effort to get Europe to cooperate in imposing "real" sanctions aimed at toppling the Iranian regime. Those sanctions, Sneh believes, would have to be a complete embargo on replacement parts for Iran's oil and refined-oil industry and a total boycott of the Iranian banking system.

Apparently aware himself of how hard that would be to achieve, Sneh recently went to Switzerland and Austria—countries that, as Caspit notes, "have announced huge investments in Iranian gas and oil fields for the next decade."

Caspit quotes Sneh as telling him that "words about a Holocaust of Jews or Israeli security don't impress those folks." So instead Sneh told them it was "too bad" about their investments, "because Iddo's going to set it all on fire"—referring to recently appointed Israeli air force chief Iddo Nehushtan. "'Investing in Iran in 2008,' Sneh told the Austrians, 'is like investing in the Krupp steelworks in 1938, a high-risk investment.' The Austrians, according to Sneh, turned pale."

Caspit goes on to mention assessments of the likely military response to an Israeli strike on Iran—not only from Iran itself but also from Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Gaza with their stocks of thousands of missiles. It's with this in mind, Caspit claims, that Olmert has been holding his talks with Syrian president Bashar Assad. Olmert, according to Caspit, has said in closed forums that "Assad is a smart, sober man.... He's capable of restraint and doesn't belong to the world of radical Islam."

1. Caspit's status and contacts as an Israeli journalist mean his report shouldn't be taken lightly. Israel is indeed in political flux, with Olmert possibly facing indictment on corruption charges and his Kadima Party set to hold primaries in less than two weeks that may further lead to general elections. Caspit describes, however, a situation where alarm at Iran's nuclear progress is predominant, with left-of-center Labor Party figures like Sneh and Defense Minister Ehud Barak among the most alarmed. And as if Israel's political flux wasn't enough, its leaders will naturally be watching keenly what happens on November 4 and—if there are still no major events in the security sphere by then—will see the situation as even more stark if the winner is someone who believes everyone is basically nice and just needs to be talked to.

2. Caspit describes the Israeli leaders as, albeit deeply concerned, having a time frame that may not be realistic. Britain's Sunday Telegraph reports that both the U.S. and Israel now fear that Russia stands to supply the sophisticated S-300 air-defense system to Iran in retaliation for Washington supporting NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. The S-300 is so effective that it's said to be a "game-changer" that would rule out an Israeli raid and seriously complicate a U.S. attack. The system would take up to a year to become operational but the Israel sense of urgency would only be escalating.

3. It's striking how loath even some Israelis like Sneh, who have no illusions about the Iranian threat, are to give up on the idea of concerted sanctions against Iran in which the Europeans would participate. In addition to Sneh's Austrian and Swiss interlocutors, most recently Germany—led by the ostensibly conservative, pro-American Angela Merkel—has granted permission to the SPG engineering firm to build three plants in Iran for liquefying natural gas in a 100-million-euro deal. Even in the close-to-impossible scenario that Europe would at last sign on to severe sanctions, Iran's friends outside the NATO sphere like Russia, China, and India would help it get past the rough patch.

4. Also striking is Olmert's ongoing insistence on Assad's reasonableness and potential benign role even in the aftermath of the Syrian leader's trip to Moscow where he reportedly requested his own S-300 system as well as offensive weapons capable of affecting the Israeli-Syrian strategic balance. Olmert apparently is also not impressed by Assad's praise for Russia's invasion of Georgia and what that says about Assad's geopolitical alignment. Although not shared by the current Bush administration, the belief in the Assad pere et fils regime's pliability and openness to be enticed—with the Golan Heights—into the Western camp despite decades of drastic evidence to the contrary appears to be an incurable affliction.

5. Although current Israeli leaders Olmert, Barak, and Livni are aware of how badly Israel's strategic position is complicated by the Hezbollah threat in Lebanon and the Hamas threat in Gaza, creating the possibility of a four-pronged missile barrage in addition to Syria and Iran, these leaders have not been able to draw the right conclusions or improve the situation. Despite frequent threats to act against Hamas, Barak has remained passive and has now grasped at the straw of a "ceasefire" in which Hamas is feverishly building its forces. It was largely Olmert and Livni's bungling in the summer

2006 war that further empowered Hezbollah in Lebanon and since then they've done nothing to impede that process. Add this to the ongoing U.S. and Israeli impotence toward Syria, and U.S. and Western fecklessness toward Iran, and the situation is indeed acute. (FrontPageMagazine.com Sep 8)
The writer is a freelance writer and translator living in Tel Aviv.

Jewish Pride, and Shame By Judy Montagu

Figures as diverse as Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Ilan Ramon, Daniel Pearl and Joseph Cedar have been called "proud Jew." It's what comes to mind when one sees footage of Menachem Begin addressing the Israeli nation or foreign leaders. I understand it's how he conducted himself with ordinary citizens he met.

But what does it mean to be a proud Jew? And its opposite, a shamefaced one?

Webster's offers two helpful definitions of "proud": "having proper self-respect" and "marked by stateliness." You could call it standing tall in your Jewishness.

A PROUD Jew needn't be a religiously observant one, but it makes this Jew proud to see Israelis upholding their beliefs abroad, when taking the line of least resistance is so much easier.

On February 27, the Post's Greer Fay Cashman wrote: "Although he didn't win the Oscar for foreign film at this week's Academy Awards, Israeli director Joseph Cedar won points for being a proud Jew. His black kippa remained in view in Hollywood, and when invited to participate in a panel discussion on the Saturday... Cedar consulted with his rabbi, who told him it would be OK provided he did not use a microphone.

"It took Cedar the best part of an hour to walk to the venue, and the moderator explained that for religious reasons, he would not be using a mike.

"That public display was worth a lot more than an Oscar," Cashman commented.

Ramon, the Israeli astronaut, was not an observant Jew, but he too was a proud one - "a nation's pride," as a Post reader from Wisconsin wrote in 2003. Ramon, who that year crashed fatally aboard the Columbia space shuttle, went into outer space proudly armed with a picture of the Earth as seen from the moon drawn by a Jewish boy in Theresienstadt, a Torah scroll from Bergen Belsen, a microfiche copy of the Bible, the national flag and a kiddush cup.

ALSO IN 2003, journalist Daniel Pearl was kidnapped and slaughtered by Islamists in Pakistan. In *I Am Jewish*, his father, Judea, wrote:

"A young man... in a moment of extreme crisis, looked straight in the eye of evil, and said: 'My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish. Back in the town of Bnei Brak, there is a street named after my great-grandfather, Chayim Pearl, who was one of the founders of the town.'"

These unequivocal affirmations of identity were the words of a proud Jew. A contributor to *I Am Jewish* compares Daniel Pearl to the Ten Jewish Martyrs we read about on Yom Kippur, who died for their beliefs.

IF ONLY we saw more examples of Jewish "self-respect and stateliness" among our current leadership, instead of dodgy dealings at home and a kowtowing to foreign rulers that makes one wince.

Why must our premier act so obsequiously when he visits foreign capitals, including Arab ones, lavishing over-effusive compliments on their leaders while they stand on their dignity?

And if only our leaders didn't shy away from all public mention of the deity, so unlike the US presidential candidates' "God bless you all, and God bless America." Such an invocation here, a recent Post reader's letter conjectured, could jeopardize a political career.

THE WAY I see it, Jews today - whether as individuals in the Diaspora or as a nation in Israel - have two broad choices: They can either claim their Jewishness without apology, or shrug off this awkward "accident of birth" and try to act like good gentiles.

Neither course is easy. Those who choose the first must accept that their position vis-a-vis the world will be marked by the starkness of "being different" rather than the comfort of "blending in." Those who opt for the second must, however assimilated, live with a nagging sense of having denied a part of themselves.

In the 1970s, I worked at the Language Tuition Center in London's Oxford Street, where foreign students came to improve their English. In between classes, we had private students, and one of mine was an Italian businessman, friendly, confident and suave as only Italians can be.

Toward the end of his lessons, our conversation became more personal and I told him I was moving to Israel. He became still.

"You are Jewish?"

"Yes."

Silence. Many seconds passed.

"Now I will tell you something. I too am Jewish. Yes. My wife, my children think I am a good Catholic. Sunday, we attend mass. They do not know, nobody knows."

His face darkened. "We are a cursed people - look what the Nazis did to us. I will never expose my children to the cursed Jewish fate. Never."

His resolve was unmistakable, yet I sensed his relief at having connected his core self, for a brief moment, to a fellow Jew he would never meet again.

That Italian Jew was ashamed of his Jewishness to the extent of hiding it completely. Less extremely, his is an attitude echoed by not a few left-lib Westerners today.

While we aren't in the 1930s or '40s, there's a lot of Jew-hatred around, and a fair amount of it is directed at the "collective Jew," Israel. So obsessive is this negative preoccupation with Israel that it's hard to claim it is free of anti-Semitism.

I see two basic ways of confronting hatred: to repel it or to internalize it; and one might think that we Jews - especially since acquiring the state our Zionist founders held was essential to our salvation - would have become adept at repelling it.

It seems not. People today, including many Jews, find it difficult to believe that "baseless hatred" can exist. If Israel is so reviled, they say, it must have done something really wicked to deserve it.

Into this uncritical view the Palestinians have almost effortlessly slotted their charge of "They stole our land" as the original sin that justifies unremitting enmity and freeing themselves of all ethical constraints in "liberating" that land.

Jews who have let this hatred of Israel infiltrate their psyches find it impossible, "under the circumstances," to be proud Jews. A friend who works for a large Jewish women's organization in New York told me that the first words to her audience of an Israeli theater director invited there to lecture were: "I am ashamed to stand before you considering what Israel is doing to the Palestinians."

Such Jews' way of tikkun olam, of "mending the world," is to adopt the narrative of the "other" in the hope that this will bring absolution and Israel will at last become an ordinary country, and Jews become like everybody else.

BUT - sorry to say - ordinariness is probably out of the Jewish reach, individually and collectively. History shows quite clearly that the world won't allow Israel to be "like any other nation." True, the world can't quite make up its mind where to put us - but it won't be with everybody else.

So if we are fated to be "special," shouldn't we try to gain an understanding of what sets us apart - a covenant which encapsulates the Jewish civilizational journey and its promise of continuity - and be proud of it? It seems the logical thing to do.

Jewish self-respect, however, will be marked by true stateliness only when we make sure that every Jewish child knows where we've come from as a people, and why it is worthwhile for us to pursue a common destiny.

As for our attitude to the "other," when it stems not from self-negation but from genuine Jewish pride, we will be on the right track to achieving what we most desire. (Jerusalem Post Sep 9)

Waiting For Something By Barry Rubin

One would think from many sources that if only President George Bush tried harder or Israel had a more stable government that there would be an Israel-Palestinian peace treaty next week. Comforting and hopeful, perhaps, but stupid

If I had to nominate the funniest cartoon I've ever seen, it was a very simple one showing a driver in a car at a "T" junction. He was staring desperately at three signs that read: No Left Turn; No Right Turn; No U-Turn.

The Middle East isn't quite like that, but the current moment--though surely temporarily--seems somewhat akin to that drawing.

It isn't as if there weren't lots of action, but that the action is merely like the above-mentioned driver revving his engine and honking his horn. I wouldn't go so far as to invoke William Shakespeare's line from "Macbeth": "Full of sound, and fury, signifying nothing." But the current moment's antics surely don't signify progress.

The Israel-Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel-Syria peace negotiations are going nowhere; the French plan to charm Syria into moderation is going nowhere; the Western attempt to lightly press (not push) Iran into abandoning its nuclear campaign is...well, you get the picture.

And then we await upcoming changes in Israeli politics (who will be prime minister and when will be elections), in American politics (who will be the next president in January), in Palestinian politics (how long will PA

head Mahmoud Abbas's term last, a year or less?), in Egyptian politics (when will Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak name a successor or die), and in Iranian politics (who will be elected president next June).

Contrary to conventional wisdom, it's important to understand that the impasses within the Middle East are not determined by those events, which have their own deeper, internal causes. One would think from many sources that if only President George Bush tried harder or Israel had a more stable government that there would be an Israel-Palestinian peace treaty next week. Comforting and hopeful, perhaps, but stupid.

Come to think of it, the most interesting aspect of Middle East politics today is not so much what actually happens but whether leaders will understand what is going on and devise policies that have some relationship to reality.

What's really important? While terrorist attacks make the headlines, the real historical news is being made by the quiet, daily battles for hearts, minds, and institutions between Arab regimes and Islamist oppositions. The future is being written in the internal maneuverings in which the hard-hardliners in Hamas have kicked out the relatively less-hard hardliners in the Gaza Strip. It is being assembled by the PA's total immobility regarding economic or social development and reducing corruption.

The trend is being set as the West convinces Iran and Syria that they can get away with anything, specifically continuing radical policies not only without cost but even with apparent diplomatic gains. It won't be much longer, they are saying in Tehran and Damascus, until the West gives way entirely. Syria gets Lebanon and no investigation of its terrorist assassinations there; Iran gets nuclear weapons; while Europe and America accept this new status quo.

In search of having a list of great achievements for U.S. policy under the Bush Administration, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visits Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi, who is being good this week. Nothing has changed substantially except Qadhafi was intimidated by a moment of perceived U.S. power, which has now passed. Given Qadhafi's proverbial restlessness, imaginative brain, and likely view that America is not so strong, this era of good feelings might not last very long.

In Iraq, every turnover of a province or statistical downturn of terrorist attacks is a signal of relative success for recent U.S. policy there. Yet this development, as good as it is, surely isn't a one-way street. Sunni tribes may not stay bought; tremendous factionalism within the Shia majority could blow up the situation. Trying to handle the repeatedly postponed issue of who controls the city of Kirkuk could lead to Arab-Kurdish conflict.

Again, though, the story is being written in the details. A new Iraq could be emerging whose main allies are the United States and Iran, a result of the Sunni Arab world's terrible mishandling of the Iraq issue, treating the Iraqi regime as a virtual pariah state.

The misunderstanding of all of this relates to what a high-ranking State Department official used to privately call "the sword in the stone" thesis. (It's such a powerful concept that even this person nowadays has fallen under its spell). Only the true king, went some variants on the legend of King Arthur, could pull the sword Excalibur from the rock. The Arab-Israeli conflict, or more generally the unstable Middle East, becomes the diplomatic equivalent. Solve it, and your name will live for all time. Oh, and you get a Nobel Peace Prize for your mantelpiece.

And so many believe that if only there was some brilliant ruler with the right ideas, everything in the Middle East could be solved. Unfortunately, this idea is usually embraced by naïve politicians with the wrong ideas. Senator Barrack Obama is currently on that list, and French President Francois Sarkozy has apparently nominated himself.

In the Middle East, the same thing takes the form of a great resistance fighter, with Salah al-Din the role model. At this point, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Syrian President Bashar al-Asad raise their hands and shout, "Me! Me!"

Note well that in the West this idea is associated with being nice to the extremists through concessions and confidence-building, while in the Middle East it is associated with being tough and violent, smiting the infidels hip and thigh. That contrast alone should tell you something.

What is needed is not some super new plan, a surfeit of charm, or the great leader but rather a great change in Middle East ideologies and societies. Not only is that process a difficult one, but it isn't even starting. To cite one example, in 2008, Palestinian moderation and realism is no greater than it was in 1988 and arguably worse than it was in 1998. To note another, there are more radical Islamists than ever. If anything, things are headed in the wrong direction and a lot of the mainstream ideas about in the West would make things worse.

Sort of makes nothing happening sound better.

The writer is director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center, Interdisciplinary Center, and editor of the Middle East Review of International Affairs. (Jewish World Review Sep 8)

Dangerous Peace Talks By Giora Eiland

Every few weeks we see headlines about the possibility of securing a peace deal with Syria. Beyond the legitimate question of whether a peace treaty is a good or bad thing, it is difficult not to be bothered by the way we run things. The three most bothersome issues are as follows: The order of our actions, the absence of a genuine security assessment, and the disregard shown to the United States.

Order of actions: When the political leadership wishes to advance a strategic move (whether peace or war,) it would be best to do it in the following sequence: Describe reality by drafting basic assumptions, outline Israel's interests (and rank them,) and prepare a "map of interests" (showing what the various players want to achieve.) Based on the three abovementioned factors, the leadership should define the "required achievement" (the desirable and possible negotiation outcome.) Only then, the fifth phase should be entering negotiations.

The definition of the required achievement is a decision that the political leadership should approve before embarking on talks. Yet has the cabinet convened for such session? Has such discussion taken place in any other forum? Did some kind of professional team analyze the components that must precede negotiations and presented them, at the very least, to the prime minister, defense minister, and foreign minister? It appears that we are starting our strategic planning process in the fifth phase.

Security assessment: In the negotiations with Syria about nine years ago, the Israeli position was premised on the unequivocal assessment that Israel cannot defend itself without controlling the Golan Heights. If so, how did former Prime Minister Ehud Barak agree to hand over the Golan to the Syrians? The "trick" was as follows: Our troops were indeed to evacuate the Golan, but were expected to be deployed nearby. The Golan Heights was to be demilitarized, and the Syrian armored divisions would have been pushed back to the east. And so, had we later realized a war is about to erupt, we would have enough time to take over the Golan before the Syrian army arrived.

This doctrine was very problematic back then already, and in my view it is unreasonable today. Therefore, a thorough assessment involving the army is required at this time. After that, if we indeed decide that we are willing to hand over the Golan Heights, we need to take one of the following two decisions: Either we adopt the doctrine presented nine years ago (that is, evacuating the Golan only if we estimate that we would be able to retake it before the Syrian army arrives) or alternately, deciding that it is possible to start the war with our army deployed south of the Golan and defend Israel from there.

Those who engage in talks with Syria and deal with questions pertaining to the drawing of a border without clarifying this major issue are showing dangerous superficiality.

Disregarding the US: It is no secret that the current American Administration is not thrilled with the Israeli-Syrian talks. In the past, when the US Administration was excited (during Clinton's era,) Israel had the possibility of asking the Americans for something in exchange for our "painful concessions." Today, this element is missing, and moreover, the US elections are two months away. Should the next American president be interested in promoting Israeli-Syrian peace, we would not be able to condition various concessions on American compensation if we already made these concessions before. As such, the timing of the accelerated talks is truly odd.

The manner in which negotiations with the Syrians have been conducted is reminiscent of the Oslo agreement, as well as the talks with the Americans on the question of disengagement. We saw a secret team engaging in negotiations, with a detailed document presented to the government only after a detailed agreement was secured with the other side. At that point it was impossible to hold a discussion on the fundamentals of the agreement, and we could not change course, because, after all, "we already promised."

This is a dangerous and undemocratic approach. One wonders why the ministers do not demand to discuss the fundamental questions, only few of which were represented here, before we send our representatives to engage in talks. Even if they fail to reach an agreement, the words uttered by official Israeli representatives will bind us in the future. (Ynet Sep 9)

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