



**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*

## Commentary...

### Canada Shows the Way National Post Editorial

Under Stephen Harper, Canada arguably has become the best friend that Israel has on the planet. On Tuesday, the National Post learned that Canada's UN delegation would walk out on a speech delivered this week by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — a Holocaust denier who rhapsodizes about exterminating Israel. It was a small gesture, but a valuable one, for it shows where Canada stands in the battle between the Jewish state and its would-be-genocidal enemies.

This is not the first time Canada has taken a strong stand for Israel. Mr. Harper has boycotted the Durban anti-racism charade, cast votes against ritualized UN denunciations of Israel, and refused to join the cynical chorus

Over the past three and half years, our government has consistently demonstrated leadership in foreign affairs with strong, principled action. This week, with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad set to address the United Nations General Assembly, on behalf of Canada, I proudly decided that I would stand up and walk out.

The reasons behind our decision to boycott may be obvious, but are nonetheless worth repeating.

Firstly, Iran has violated the human rights of its own citizens and foreign nationals, including Canadians Maziar Bahari (by unjustifiably detaining him) and Zahra Kazemi (whose death remains unexplained). This recently also has been demonstrated in its violent response against when Israel defended itself against Hamas terrorists in Gaza.

All in all, it makes us proud to be Canadian.  
(National Post Sep 24)

### There Is No Need For A Big Fuss By Alan Baker

Given the blatantly one-sided and slanted political mandate of the United Nations fact-finding mission headed by Justice Richard Goldstone, and being aware of the accusation against Israel of war crimes published by at least one of the members of the mission even before it began, one is tempted to wonder why on earth the leadership of Israel and the public is so surprised and shocked by this UN report.

While the lip-service reference in the report to the need to release Gilad Schalit, and the lukewarm criticism of Hamas rocket fire against Israel's civilian centers might be seen as a poor attempt at balancing against the bulk of the severe anti-Israel criticism, the report is nothing more, or less, than a typical UN report, written according to UN rules, with UN terminology ("occupied Palestinian territories"), run-of-the-mill UN criticism of Israel and based on a UN Human Rights Council mandate that determined in advance that Israel had committed war crimes.

Even the report's recommendations seek to put Israel through the gamut of UN bodies for punishment: the Human Rights Council - a body predominantly composed such nondemocratic and oppressive paragons of international virtue as Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Egypt, Nicaragua, Russia, South Africa, Libya and others; the Security Council and the UN-inspired International Criminal Court, the statute of which was drafted to include provisions deliberately slanted against Israel and which, by its own rules, could never elect an Israeli judge.

ONE MIGHT indeed be tempted to dismiss this report and repeat David Ben-Gurion's age-old and classic dictum "um shmum!" However, that being said, and despite this being another UN anti-Israel document, there are

some implications likely to arise out of this report that we cannot and should not ignore.

First, the heavily biased conclusions against Israel, a democratic country acting in self-defense, and the inexcusably lenient

treatment of blatant Hamas terror will doubtless be interpreted by Hamas and its colleagues throughout the area as justification for their tactics of shielding themselves behind civilians, operating in the midst of densely populated civilian areas and deliberately targeting Israeli civilians. It is highly likely that the report will serve as a green light for further developing such tactics, knowing that the organized international community has, through the Goldstone report, given its sanction.

Second, the report will likely give substantive and misguided moral impetus to those bodies and individuals functioning in the Western democratic countries, and working to manipulate the liberal legal systems practicing universal jurisdiction to delegitimize Israel and its leaders, through initiating war-crimes prosecutions. This could pose problems for Israeli leaders and senior officers travelling abroad, both to those countries (such as the UK, Spain and Switzerland) whose legal systems have no filtering mechanisms against such politically inspired prosecutions, and those party to extradition agreements. While it is highly unlikely - for substantive legal and evidential reasons - that such prosecutions would succeed, the attendant publicity and international posturing could be problematic.

The report will also likely serve as "cannon fodder" for a spate of new anti-Israel resolutions within the UN and its various constituent bodies and agencies and nongovernmental organizations.

The specter of Israeli leaders and military officers in the dock of the International Criminal Court at The Hague, while dramatic, is nevertheless

highly unlikely due to the lack of jurisdiction of that court vis-a-vis Israel, partly due to the fact that Israel (as well as the US, China, India, Russia and others) is not party to its statute. Similarly, any attempt to initiate an action in the court through a Security Council resolution would most likely fail, and in light of the politicized nature of the claims and their

background, it is doubtful if the court's prosecutor would initiate a viable prosecution pursuant to the narrow discretion granted him by the court's statute.

Perhaps the most important implication emanating from the Goldstone report is international law's lack of response on how to deal with international terror. As such, this report - in its lenient treatment of blatant Hamas terrorism and severe treatment of a democratic country defending itself against such terror - poses a very serious challenge to the various international bodies responsible for developing international humanitarian law. This body of law has not really been updated since the 1977 Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, and does not provide serious and practical norms and guidelines as to how to deal with terrorists that hide behind civilians and that bomb other civilians. Nor does it know what to do about suicide bombers and the like.

Once the dust settles on this report, and we all calm down from the indignation and insult wrought by "another UN document," we must rationally size up the practical and legal implications and determine how to deal with them. In the meantime, there is no doubt that the UN will continue to be the UN. Without Israel to bash, how would it maintain itself?

Um shmum indeed! (Jerusalem Post Sep 20)

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This week's issue is  
dedicated in memory of  
ישראל זאב בן יוסף ז"ל  
Irving Kristol z"l

## Meet the Next Palestinian Leader By Barry Rubin

Few subjects get written about more often - and inaccurately - than the Palestinians, yet there is curiously little interest in the politics and ideology governing their behavior. The same situation applies to the man slated to become their next leader, only the third to hold that post in 50 years, after Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas.

The fact that an issue that is supposedly the most important, high-priority question in the world is studied so little has a simple explanation. The contemporary narrative is that the Palestinian leaders yearn for a state, an end to the conflict, and peace, while the failure to achieve these can be blamed on Israel. Yet even the slightest real examination shows the exact opposite is true.

This point is only underlined by looking at the current candidate for next leader, Muhammad Ghaneim, often known as Abu Mahir. Of all those who might credibly have been considered for the leadership of Fatah - and hence of the PLO and Palestinian Authority (PA) - he is probably the most headline.

While media coverage of the 2009 Fatah Congress may have stressed the accession of "young" and "more flexible" leaders, the 72-year-old Ghaneim certainly doesn't fit that description.

Born in Jerusalem on August 29, 1937, his first political involvement was with the Muslim Brotherhood, but he became a founding member of Fatah in 1959 and has been active ever since, involved mainly in recruitment and organization.

It is difficult to say to what extent Ghaneim's early involvement with radical Islam has shaped his thinking, and whether it would make it easier for him to reconcile with the even more radical Hamas. Most Fatah and PLO members came from more secular Arab nationalist or leftist movements. The only prominent leader who seemed to blend an Islamist background with nationalism was Arafat himself.

Ghaneim's big career break came in 1968 when, at the age of just 30, Arafat appointed him commander of Fatah's forces in Jordan. Later that year, he was put on Fatah's Central Committee, in charge of organization and recruitment.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of these two jobs. At that time, Jordan was a Fatah stronghold and the group constituted a shadow government alongside that of King Hussein, the country's nominal ruler. Fatah guerrillas - and shortly after Arafat took over, the whole PLO - had military bases from which they launched attacks on Israel across the Jordan River. Arafat must have had an extraordinarily high opinion of Ghaneim to appoint him to such a sensitive post.

Since so much of this task was involved with military matters, Ghaneim took a short officers' course in China. On his return in 1969, Arafat gave him a third chore, as his deputy for military issues. While the details aren't clear, this means Ghaneim must have played a central role in planning and implementing scores of guerrilla and terrorist attacks. Ghaneim played a central role in selecting those to be given key jobs and just how much authority each had. Of course, everyone was far below Arafat, but Ghaneim was about as essential as a second-tier figure could be.

In 1970, Fatah overplayed its hand, was defeated by Jordan's army, and had to flee to Lebanon. Ghaneim continued his organizational and military duties there. When the PLO and Fatah were forced out of Lebanon in 1982, Ghaneim accompanied Arafat to Tunis. From 1982 to mid-2009 he remained there, though he may have begun visiting the PA-ruled territories as early as July 2007.

Ghaneim didn't return with Arafat in 1994 because, despite serving Arafat closely and loyally for 35 years, Ghaneim rejected the 1993 Oslo accords as too moderate. Only armed struggle, total victory, and Israel's destruction were worthy goals in his eyes.

While Arafat sought these things covertly, the compromises involved in such a pretense were too much for Ghaneim. He stayed in Tunisia despite numerous invitations from Arafat, starting in October 1994, to join the PA, and instead insisted Arafat cease all negotiations with Israel.

Ghaneim moved closer to the popular Farouq Kaddumi, often referred to as the second most powerful man in Fatah. Kaddumi rejected the Oslo agreement and kept up a close connection with Syria. Arafat undercut him, but Kaddumi was so strong in the movement that he could never be fired altogether.

Finally, Ghaneim decided to return and support Mahmoud Abbas. While the details are not clear, this coincided with Abbas naming him as successor. Despite some who claim Ghaneim has moderated his positions, there is absolutely no evidence of this.

Ghaneim has a definite appeal for Abbas as ally and successor. He is one of the few remaining founders of Fatah, and has wide contacts throughout the movement.

In addition, as someone who has been outside PA politics for 15 years he is seen as a neutral figure in many petty disputes.

But this is not the man to choose if your top priorities are making peace with Israel and maintaining good relations with the West. He is the man you would choose if you intend to reject compromise, rebuild links to Syria and Hamas, and perhaps return to armed struggle.

On arrival at the Allenby Bridge crossing from Jordan on July 29, 2009, just before the Fatah Congress, Ghaneim was picked up by Abbas' personal limousine, taken to his office, and welcomed in a ceremony.

At the reception, Ghaneim stated: "The struggle will continue until victory" and that if political means did not achieve Israel's destruction, the movement would return to armed struggle. (Al-Hayat al-Jadida, July 30, 2009). It is clear how Ghaneim defines victory, and it is not a West Bank-Gaza state with its capital in east Jerusalem living alongside Israel.

That Ghaneim would give up "the right of return," make any territorial compromise, or end the conflict permanently is extremely unlikely. These are things that even the supposedly less extreme Abbas has rejected.

Thereafter, Abbas promoted Ghaneim among the delegates to the meeting. He finished first in the Central Committee elections with 1,338 votes, about two-thirds of those participating and far ahead of every other candidate.

Ghaneim's success, and the others elected, show that the old Arafat crowd is still in control. If Ghaneim becomes leader of Fatah the PA and PLO, you can forget about peace.

No one should say a word about the Palestinian issue, the peace process, or Israeli policy without analyzing these factors.

Unfortunately, there isn't at present a Palestinian partner for peace. Fortunately, there is a Palestinian partner for maintaining a relatively peaceful status quo. But if and when Ghaneim takes over, even this consolation might be gone. (Jerusalem Post Sep 21)

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## Peace Process or War Process? By Daniel Pipes

When Barack Obama announced in June 2009 about Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy, "I'm confident that if we stick with it, having started early, that we can make some serious progress this year," he displayed a touching, if naïve optimism.

Indeed, his determination fits a well-established pattern of determination by politicians to "solve" the Arab-Israeli conflict; there were fourteen U.S. government initiatives just during the two George W. Bush administrations. Might this time be different? Will trying harder or being more clever end the conflict?

No, there is no chance whatever of this effort working.

Without looking at the specifics of the Obama approach - which are in themselves problematic - I shall argue three points: that past Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have failed; that their failure resulted from an Israeli illusion about avoiding war; and that Washington should urge Jerusalem to forego negotiations and return instead to its earlier and more successful policy of fighting for victory.

### *I. Reviewing the "Peace Process"*

The two hands of September 1993, when Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat shook hands with President Clinton watching.

It is embarrassing to recall the elation and expectations that accompanied the signing of the Oslo accords in September 1993 when Israel's prime minister Yitzhak Rabin shook hands on the White House lawn with Yasir Arafat, the Palestinian leader. For some years afterward, "The Handshake" (as it was then capitalized) served as the symbol of brilliant diplomacy, whereby each side achieved what it most wanted: dignity and autonomy for the Palestinians, recognition and security for the Israelis.

President Bill Clinton hosted the ceremony and lauded the deal as a "great occasion of history." Secretary of State Warren Christopher concluded that "the impossible is within our reach." Yasir Arafat called the signing an "historic event, inaugurating a new epoch." Israel's foreign minister Shimon Peres said one could see in it "the outline of peace in the Middle East."

The press displayed similar expectations. Anthony Lewis, a New York Times columnist, deemed the agreement "stunning" and "ingeniously built." Time magazine made Arafat and Rabin two of its "men of the year"

for 1993. To cap it off, Arafat, Rabin, and Peres jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize for 1994.

As the accords led to a deterioration of conditions for Palestinians and Israelis, rather than the expected improvement, these heady anticipations quickly dissipated.

When Palestinians still lived under Israeli control, pre-Oslo accords, they had benefited from the rule of law and a growing economy, independent of international welfare. They enjoyed functioning schools and hospitals; they traveled without checkpoints and had free access to Israeli territory. They even founded several universities. Terrorism declined as acceptance of Israel increased. Oslo then brought Palestinians not peace and prosperity, but tyranny, failed institutions, poverty, corruption, a death cult, suicide factories, and Islamist radicalization. Yasir Arafat had promised to build his new dominion into a Middle Eastern Singapore, but the reality he ruled became a nightmare of dependence, inhumanity, and loathing, more akin to Liberia or the Congo.

The two hands of October 2000, when a young Palestinian showed off his bloody hands after lynching two Israeli reservists.

As for Israelis, they watched as Palestinian rage spiraled upward, inflicting unprecedented violence on them; the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports that more Israelis were killed by Palestinian terrorists in the five years after the Oslo accords than in the fifteen years preceding it. If the two hands in the Rabin-Arafat handshake symbolized Oslo's early hopes, the two bloody hands of a young Palestinian male who had just lynched Israeli reservists in Ramallah in October 2000 represented its dismal end. In addition, Oslo did great damage to Israel's standing internationally, resurrecting questions about the very existence of a sovereign Jewish state, especially on the Left, and spawning moral perversions such as the U.N. World Conference against Racism in Durban. From Israel's perspective, the seven years of Oslo diplomacy, 1993-2000, largely undid forty-five years of success in warfare.

Palestinians and Israelis agree on little, but with a near universality they concur that the Oslo accords failed. What is called the "peace process" should rather be called the "war process."

## II. The False Hope of Finesse War

Why did things go so badly wrong? Where lay the flaws in so promising an agreement?

Yitzhak Rabin's understanding that "One does not make peace with one's friends. One makes peace with one's enemy" led Arab-Israeli diplomacy fundamentally astray.

Of a multiplicity of errors, the ultimate mistake lay in Yitzhak Rabin's misunderstanding of how war ends, as revealed by his catch-phrase, "One does not make peace with one's friends. One makes peace with one's enemy." The Israeli prime minister expected war to be concluded through goodwill, conciliation, mediation, flexibility, restraint, generosity, and compromise, topped off with signatures on official documents. In this spirit, his government and those of his three successors - Shimon Peres, Binyamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak - initiated an array of concessions, hoping and expecting the Palestinians to reciprocate.

They did not. In fact, Israeli concessions inflamed Palestinian hostility. Palestinians interpreted Israeli efforts to "make peace" as signals of demoralization and weakness. "Painful concessions" reduced the Palestinian awe of Israel, made the Jewish state appear vulnerable, and incited irredentist dreams of annihilation. Each Oslo-negotiated gesture by Israel further exhilarated, radicalized, and mobilized the Palestinian body politic to war. The quiet hope of 1993 to eliminate Israel gained traction, becoming a deafening demand by 2000. Venomous speech and violent actions soared. Polls and votes in recent years suggest that a mere 20 percent of Palestinians accept the existence of a Jewish state.

Rabin's mistake was simple and profound: One cannot "make peace with one's enemy," as he imagined. Rather, one makes peace with one's former enemy. Peace nearly always requires one side in a conflict to be defeated and thus give up its goals.

Wars end not through goodwill but through victory. "Let your great object [in war] be victory" observed Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese strategist. "War is an act of violence to compel the enemy to fulfill our will," wrote his nineteenth-century Prussian successor, Karl von Clausewitz in 1832. Douglas MacArthur observed in 1951 that in "war, there is no substitute for victory."

Technological advancement has not altered this insight. Fighting either continues or potentially can resume so long as both sides hope to achieve their war goals. Victory consists of imposing one's will on the enemy,

compelling him to give up his war ambitions. Wars typically end when one side gives up hope, when its will to fight has been crushed.

Defeat, one might think, usually follows on devastating battlefield losses, as was the case of the Axis in 1945. But that has rarely occurred during the past sixty years. Battlefield losses by the Arab states to Israel in 1948-82, by North Korea in 1953, by Saddam Hussein in 1991, and by Iraqi Sunnis in 2003 did not translate into despair and surrender. Morale and will matter more these days. Although they out-manned and out-gunned their foes, the French gave up in Algeria, the Americans in Vietnam, and the Soviets in Afghanistan. The Cold War ended, notably, with barely a fatality. Crushing the enemy's will to fight, then, does not necessarily mean crushing the enemy.

Arabs and Israelis since 1948 have pursued static and opposite goals: Arabs fought to eliminate Israel; Israelis fought to win their neighbors' acceptance. Details have varied over the decades with multiple ideologies, strategies, and leading actors, but the twin goals have remained in place and unbridgeable. If the conflict is to end, one side must lose and one side win. Either there will be no more Zionist state or it will be accepted by its neighbors. Those are the only two scenarios for ending the conflict. Anything else is unstable and a premise for further warfare.

The Arabs have pursued their war aims with patience, determination, and purpose; the exceptions to this pattern (e.g., the Egyptian and Jordanian peace treaties) have been operationally insignificant because they have not tamped hostility to Israel's existence. In response, Israelis sustained a formidable record of strategic vision and tactical brilliance in the period 1948-93. Over time, however, as Israel developed into a wealthy country, its populace grew impatient with the humiliating, slow, boring, bitter, and expensive task of convincing Arabs to accept their political existence. By now, few in Israel still see victory as the goal; almost no major political figure on the scene today calls for victory in war. Uzi Landau, currently minister of national infrastructure, who argues that "when you're in a war you want to win the war," is the rare exception.

### *The Hard Work of Winning*

In place of victory, Israelis developed an imaginative array of approaches to manage the conflict:

- Territorial compromise: Yitzhak Rabin (and the Oslo process).
- Develop the Palestinian economy: Shimon Peres (and the Oslo process).
- Unilateralism (build a wall, withdraw from Gaza): Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert, and the Kadima party.
- Lease the land under Israeli towns on the West Bank for 99 years: Amir Peretz and the Labor Party.
- Encourage the Palestinians to develop good government: Natan Sharansky (and George W. Bush).
- Territorial retreat: Israel's Left.
- Exclude disloyal Palestinians from Israeli citizenship: Avigdor Lieberman.
- Offer Jordan as Palestine: elements of Israel's Right.
- Expel Palestinians from lands controlled by Israel: Meir Kahane.

Contradictory in spirit and mutually exclusive as they are, these approaches all aim to finesse war rather than win it. Not one of them addresses the need to break the Palestinian will to fight. Just as the Oslo negotiations failed, I predict that so too will every Israeli scheme that avoids the hard work of winning.

Ehud Olmert speaking for the Israel Policy Forum in June 2005, where he announced that Israelis "are tired of fighting, we are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies."

Since 1993, in brief, the Arabs have sought victory while Israelis sought compromise. In this spirit, Israelis openly announced their fatigue with warfare. Shortly before becoming prime minister, Ehud Olmert said on behalf of his countrymen: "We are tired of fighting; we are tired of being courageous; we are tired of winning; we are tired of defeating our enemies." After becoming prime minister, Olmert proclaimed: "Peace is achieved through concessions. We all know that." Such defeatist statements prompted Yoram Hazony of the Shalem Center to characterize Israelis as "an exhausted people, confused and without direction."

But who does not win, loses. To survive, Israelis eventually must return to their pre-1993 policy of establishing that Israel is strong, tough, and permanent. That is achieved through deterrence - the tedious task of convincing Palestinians and others that the Jewish state will endure and that dreams of elimination must fail.

This will not be easy or quick. Due to missteps during the Oslo years and after (especially the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza of 2005 and the Lebanon war of 2006), Palestinians perceive Israel as economically and militarily strong but morally and politically weak. In the pungent words of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, Israel is "weaker than a spider's web." Such scorn will likely require decades of hard work to reverse. Nor will it be pretty: Defeat in war typically entails that the loser experience deprivation, failure, and despair.

Israel does enjoy one piece of good fortune: It need only deter the Palestinians, not the whole Arab and Muslim populations. Moroccans, Iranians, Malaysians, and others take their cues from the Palestinians and with time will follow their lead. Israel's ultimate enemy, the one whose will it needs to crush, is roughly the same demographic size as itself.

This process may be seen through a simple prism. Any development that encourages Palestinians to think they can eliminate Israel is negative, any that encourages them to give up that goal is positive. The Palestinians' defeat will be recognizable when, over a protracted period and with complete consistency, they prove that they have accepted Israel. This does not mean loving Zion, but it does mean permanently accepting it - overhauling the educational system to take out the demonization of Jews and Israel, telling the truth about Jewish ties to Jerusalem, and accepting normal commercial, cultural, and human relations with Israelis.

Palestinian démarches and letters to the editor are acceptable but violence is not. The quiet that follows must be consistent and enduring. Symbolically, one can conclude that Palestinians have accepted Israel and the war is over when Jews living in Hebron (on the West Bank) have no more need for security than Arabs living in Nazareth (in Israel).

### III. U.S. Policy

Like all outsiders to the conflict, Americans face a stark choice: Endorse the Palestinian goal of eliminating Israel or endorse Israel's goal of winning its neighbors' acceptance. To state the choice makes clear that there is no choice - the first is barbaric, the second civilized. No decent person can endorse the Palestinians' genocidal goal of eliminating their neighbor. Following every president since Harry S Truman, and every congressional resolution and vote since then, the U.S. government must stand with Israel in its drive to win acceptance.

Not only is this an obvious moral choice, but Israel's win, ironically, would be the best thing that ever happened to the Palestinians. Compelling them finally to give up on their irredentist dream would liberate them to focus on their own polity, economy, society, and culture. Palestinians need to experience the crucible of defeat to become a normal people - one whose parents stop celebrating their children becoming suicide terrorists, whose obsession with Zionist rejectionism collapses. There is no shortcut.

This analysis implies a radically different approach for the U.S. government from the current one. On the negative side, it puts Palestinians on notice that benefits will flow to them only after they prove their acceptance of Israel. Until then - no diplomacy, no discussion of final status, no recognition as a state, and certainly no financial aid or weapons.

On the positive side, the U. S. administration should work with Israel, the Arab states, and others to induce the Palestinians to accept Israel's existence by convincing them that they have lost. This means impressing on the Israeli government the need not just to defend itself but to take steps to demonstrate to Palestinians the hopelessness of their cause. That requires not episodic shows of force (such as the 2008-09 war against Hamas in Gaza) but a sustained and systematic effort to deflate a bellicose mentality.

Israel's victory also directly helps its U.S. ally, for some of its enemies - Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran - are also America's. Tougher Israeli tactics would help Washington in smaller ways, too. Washington should encourage Jerusalem not to engage in prisoner exchanges with terrorist groups, not to allow Hezbollah to re-arm in southern Lebanon or Fatah or Hamas in Gaza, and not to withdraw unilaterally from the West Bank (which would effectively turn over the region to Hamas terrorists and threaten Hashemite rule in Jordan).

Diplomacy aiming to shut down the Arab-Israeli conflict is premature until Palestinians give up their anti-Zionism. When that happy moment arrives, negotiations can re-open and take up anew the Oslo issues - borders, resources, armaments, sanctities, residential rights. But that is years or decades away. In the meantime, an ally needs to win. (Middle East Quarterly Fall 2009)

### Obama, Honduras and Israel By Yarden Gazit *President Obama's foreign policy has little regard for democracy*

After more than eight months in office, Americans are beginning to realize that Barack Obama's rhetoric and promises of hope and change differ significantly from his actions. But if the difference between rhetoric and action has become clearer, the driving forces behind Obama's foreign policy remain opaque. The way his administration dealt with the crisis in Honduras sheds some light on these forces, and carries a special lesson for Israel.

In his inaugural address, Obama promised to "extend a hand" to those dictators "willing to unclench their fist". At the same time, he told "those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent" that they are "on the wrong side of history." His policy toward Honduras is exactly the opposite: extending a hand to a leader attempting to clench his fist and take over the country, while treating those who stand for democracy and constitutionalism as if they were on the wrong side of history.

In June, the Honduran Supreme Court issued an order to arrest President Manuel Zelaya, an order supported almost unanimously by parliament. Zelaya had attempted to hold an unconstitutional referendum that would have allowed him to run for a second term. The Honduran constitution states that any president who attempts to extend his term limit shall be removed from office immediately. This might sound excessive, but the long history of Latin-American strongmen (Venezuela's Hugo Chavez is a prime example) is something the framers of the Honduran constitution wanted to break with. The constitution further states that referenda must be approved by parliament. The military followed the Supreme Court order, removed Zelaya from office, and instated the next-in-line according to the constitution, chairman of congress Roberto Micheletti, as temporary president until the general elections scheduled for November. Since then the Obama administration has pressured the interim government of Honduras to reinstate Zelaya, who had been allowed to leave the country. Secretary of State Clinton even met with him in Washington. She did not meet with interim president Micheletti, but she did warn him in a phone call of the consequences of not reinstating Zelaya.

Indeed the consequences followed. Last week, the State Department announced that it was suspending the issuance of visas to Hondurans (Zelaya did not have problems entering the US.) and that \$135 million in aid might be cut. So far Honduras, the second-poorest country in Central America, has stood firm. But Mary O'Grady of the Wall Street Journal reports that the administration's pressure on Honduras, overt as well as covert, "might work."

What made Obama abandon his pro-democracy rhetoric and support a Latin-American strongman? O'Grady and former US ambassador to Latin America Roger Noriega suggest it was his wish to avoid conflict with Hugo Chavez. As Noriega put it in an article in *The American*, "the clumsy response of the administration is rooted in its desire to run with the pack—in this case a pack led by Hugo Chavez." In other words, Obama's policy of engagement and his wish to avoid a crisis that would draw his attention from his domestic agenda led him to this course of action. Perhaps there was another reason too. Obama was elected on a wave of anti-Bush sentiment and has created himself as the unBush. A conflict with Chavez, who once called Bush the devil, would have undermined that image.

In the Middle East, Obama's policy of engaging dictators and his wish to avoid conflict with one of Bush's enemies, in this case Iranian President Ahmadinejad has led him to intervene in the internal affairs of another small country, Israel. The analogy, of course, is not perfect; Israel has much more influence in Washington than Honduras, and Ahmadinejad is a greater threat to American interests than Chavez.

Nonetheless, lessons can be drawn. Firstly, Obama's foreign policy has little regard for democracy or the interests of other nations. Israel should therefore be prepared to take an independent course and not expect Obama to look after Israeli interests. Secondly, for those Israelis on the Left who hope Obama will do their work for them and "save Israel from itself," be careful what you wish for. (Ynet Sep 21)