



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

Jonathan Tobin notes, "peace is further off in the Middle East, a nuclear Iran is a virtual certainty, and victory in Afghanistan over the Taliban is more doubtful than ever." The closest Obama has come to playing the peacemaker was the "beer summit" he

hosted at the White House in July. Someday, perhaps, he will accomplish something genuinely deserving of an international peace prize. Luckily for him, the Norwegian politicians who confer the Nobel are considerably more interested in headlines today than in genuine accomplishments "someday."

"Awarding a peace prize," former Norwegian Nobel Committee Chairman Francis Sejersted once said, "is, to put it bluntly, a political act." As the award to Obama makes clear, that hasn't changed. (Boston Globe Oct 9)

Events...

Sunday, October 18, 7pm

Shilo resident **Marc Prowisor** of the One Israel Fund will speak on "**Judea and Samaria: An Insider's View**" at **Shaarei Tefillah**.

Thursday Oct 22, 8pm

Jerusalem Post military correspondent and defense analyst **Yaakov Katz** will be speaking on "**Israel, Iran and Obama**" at **Shaarei Shomayim**.

December 13-22

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Commentary...

A Bluntly Political Act By Jeff Jacoby

There's a reason why the Nobel Peace Prize so often sets off heated political arguments: It's conferred by politicians.

All the other Nobel prizes are awarded by scholars: The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, for example, chooses the laureates in physics, chemistry, and economics. The Karolinska Institute, a medical university, names the recipients of the prize for medicine. But for reasons that have never been clear, Alfred Nobel specified in his will that the peace prize should go to someone selected by a committee of Norwegian parliamentarians. And politicians in Norway, like politicians in most places, are apt to care much more about their short-term impact than their long-term credibility.

President Obama is obviously not being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for anything he has done. After all, the deadline for nominations was February 1 -- just 10 days after Obama took office. But the point of the peace prize isn't concrete achievements in the past, it's the effect the award can have in the present. The chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, explaining the decision to honor Obama, told skeptical journalists this morning: "We hope this can contribute a little bit to enhance what he is trying to do." When former President Jimmy Carter was given the prize in 2002, the Nobel judges readily agreed that the award was intended to be a "kick in the leg" to the Bush administration, which was then gearing up for war in Iraq.

By contrast, the science laureates are always honored for work the significance of which is well-established -- work that in many cases took places decades earlier. Ada Yonath, one of this year's Nobel laureates in chemistry, was chosen because of her pioneering investigation of ribosomes in the 1970s and 1980s. Physicists Charles Kao, Willard Boyle, and Charles E. Smith are sharing this year's Nobel in physics for breakthroughs in the science of fiber optics and digital photography that got their start in the late 1960s. The three recipients of the 2009 prize in medicine -- Jack Szostak, Carol Greider and Elizabeth Blackburn -- are being hailed for discoveries in the field of cell biology that they made 20 years ago.

Nine months into the Obama presidency, as Commentary magazine's

This week's issue is dedicated by
Harry Moskoff
in honour of his wife **Sadie**
on the 4th anniversary of their aliyah

Zionism at The Crossroads By Isi Leibler

After 2000 years of dispersion, persecution and powerlessness and in the wake of the greatest disaster ever to have encompassed the Jewish people, Zionism rose like a phoenix from the ashes of the Shoah and achieved the impossible. In what must be the most remarkable achievement of any people and unique in the annals of mankind, it resurrected a homeland and empowered the Jews.

After fulfilling its principal objective of creating a Jewish state, it is not surprising that the Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization are now mere shadows of their former glory. Even after being substantially downsized because of a drastic decline in donor income, the Jewish Agency remains a bloated bureaucracy. Aside from a few prominent personalities, the World Zionist Organization is widely perceived as a retreat for failed or retired Israeli politicians or apparatchiks who compete fiercely for paid executive positions with the perks of overseas travel. With a few notable exceptions, most Diaspora Zionist organizational affiliates have eroded and become marginalized.

For most Israelis, especially younger people, the term Zionism has become an anachronism and an expression of derision or contempt.

Yet despite this, the Zionist movement has a vital role to fulfill for the Jewish people - especially today, when post-Zionists or Hebrew-speaking Canaanites seek to transform Israel into "a state of all its citizens," a euphemism for the dejudaization of the Jewish state.

For many Jews and Israelis, the Holocaust and the struggle to create a Jewish homeland are dim historical memories relegated to history books. In the Diaspora, many have become disillusioned and traumatized by the burgeoning anti-Semitic climate and intensive media campaigns demonizing the Jewish state. Some have distanced themselves from Israel and even endorsed the anti-Zionist chic.

This was highlighted in Stephen Cohen's survey of non-Orthodox American Jews in 2007. The findings displayed apathy and an alarming decline in attachment to Israel among the younger generation. This has particular relevance because aside from religious observance, Israel is now the key factor sustaining Jewish identity.

In such an environment, only a vigorous Zionist movement in conjunction with the government could reverse the tide, strengthening the Israel-Diaspora relationship and endeavoring to maintain the centrality of Israel in Jewish life.

Yet alas, aside from the unquestionably important 10-day Birthright visits - which since its inception in 2000 has brought 215,000 Jewish youngsters to Israel - and other programs for young people, there is no concerted strategy to deal with these issues.

Indeed, in recent times, successive Israeli leaders have themselves contributed to the erosion of Israel-Diaspora relations. They focus almost

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exclusively on wooing wealthy donors to fund their interests in lieu of nurturing Zionist leaders. Former interior minister Meir Sheerit even went so far as to suggest the curtailment of aliya and abrogation of the Law of Return.

Jewish Agency policy, which in the past was always determined by Zionists, has now been hijacked by wealthy - primarily American - donors who have sought to transform it into a replica of the non-Zionist American Federation system. The newly elected chairman, Natan Sharansky, whose Zionist credentials are impeccable, was forced by his board to desist from assuming the traditionally parallel role of chairman of the World Zionist Organization. This reflected the efforts of the agency board to marginalize the Zionist ideological component and transform it into an efficient charity - no more.

The dominant influence of the American funders was further evidenced by the abrupt termination of a major promotional campaign against intermarriage initiated by MASA, a Jewish Agency subsidiary. Whereas the campaign presentation may have been tasteless and warranted revision, the cancellation was unjustified and was allegedly imposed by board members who feared confrontation with donors, many of whom had intermarried couples within their own families. The prevailing mood of "sensitivity" in relation to confronting assimilation and intermarriage was also exemplified in the recent article "What Israelis need to know about intermarriage in North America," published in The Jerusalem Post by Edmund Case, CEO of Interfaith Family.

Aside from denying that the vast majority of children born to interfaith unions are lost to the Jewish people, Case broke new ground by making the preposterous assertion that intermarriage was "not a threat but an opportunity" and represented a great benefit because "intermarriage actively enlarges Jewish communities."

Needless to say, every Jew has the option of marrying whom he or she chooses. But it is hardly surprising that growing assimilation in an open society leads to increased intermarriage. Still, one would at least assume encouragement of conversion so that children of such unions would have some hope of remaining Jewish. To describe the tragic erosion of the Jewish community via intermarriage as grounds for celebration is surely obscene. While the strongest resistance to intermarriage understandably emanates from religious Jews, opposition to intermarriage has always been a central tenet of Zionist ideology. The failure of today's "Zionist" leaders to adopt a strong stand concerning this issue reflects the growing influence of wealthy assimilated Jews.

Another disturbing manifestation of the dilution of Zionist values is the inclination to avoid all discussion related to aliya. The Jewish Agency has already subcontracted aliya to Nefesh B'Nefesh, an independent body that has handled this issue with far greater efficiency and humanity than the agency bureaucrats.

The negative attitude toward this central Zionist ideal was exemplified by the recent capitulation to demands of American donors that those directing Birthright categorically desist from any encouragement of aliya. "Momo" Lifshitz, a former IDF officer who heads Oranim (by far the largest trip provider for the project), - a secular program strongly supported by non-Orthodox groups, and by far the largest trip provider for the project - recently broke away from Birthright. Lifshitz passionately proclaimed that Oranim would henceforth operate as a separate program because he refused to accept prohibitions by Birthright organizers from urging participants to "raise your children Jewish," encouraging aliya or providing free honeymoons to Israel for couples who met during their visits.

The bulk of Jews in Western countries are unlikely to pack their bags tomorrow and come to Israel. But it is imperative that committed Jews continue making aliya because this represents the most important bridge linking Israel and the Diaspora.

Continued dilution of fundamental Zionist objectives will have disastrous repercussions for the Jewish people. In addition to weakening Jewish identity and intensifying assimilation, it will lead to further alienation of Jews from Israel and weaken Diaspora Jewry's efforts on behalf of Israel, with particularly damaging consequences to Israel-US relations.

One would hope that the current government will be more positively inclined toward supporting Zionism than their less-ideologically-motivated predecessors. Together with Sharansky, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu should concentrate on encouraging the emergence of a vigorous new Zionist leadership to focus on reinforcing the centrality of Israel in Jewish life and strengthening the morale of Diaspora Jews suffering in the

wake of the intensified efforts to criminalize and delegitimize the Jewish state. (Jerusalem Post Oct 12)

Peace vs. the 'Peace Process' By Jeff Jacoby

"Whom the Gods would destroy," the late Irving Kristol once observed, "they first tempt to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict." Maybe "destroy" was putting it a bit strongly, but there is no denying that American presidents seem irresistibly drawn to the belief that they can succeed where others have failed and conjure a lasting peace between Israel and its Arab enemies. This diplomacy has gone by various names -- Oslo, the Roadmap, Camp David, and so on -- but time and again it has led not to the end of the conflict but to its intensification.

In his memoirs, former President Bill Clinton describes Yasser Arafat's refusal to accept the extraordinarily generous terms for a permanent settlement offered by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak at Camp David in 2000. That refusal led to a Palestinian terror war, the bloody Second Intifada, and when Arafat called Clinton in January 2001 to tell him what a great man he was, Clinton was bitter. "I am not a great man," he told Arafat. "I am a failure, and you have made me one."

Of course, if Clinton was a failure so were the two George Bushes. Each made it his goal to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, each convened a grand international conference for that purpose (Bush 41 in Madrid, Bush 43 in Annapolis), and each left the situation worse than he had found it.

In his first nine months as president, Barack Obama has shown every sign of succumbing to the same temptation. Two days after moving in to the White House, he named George Mitchell, the former Senate majority leader, his special envoy to the region. He pressured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu into endorsing a "two-state solution." He declared that "the moment is now for us to act" to achieve peace in the Middle East.

Unlike his recent predecessors, Obama has gone out of his way to signal a distinct coolness toward Israel and its interests. At a White House meeting with the leaders of American Jewish organizations in July, he suggested that because there had been "no daylight" between Israel and the United States when George W. Bush was president, there had been "no progress" toward peace. In fact, there had often been "daylight" between Washington and Jerusalem during the Bush years. There had been plenty of movement too, from the adoption of the Roadmap to the Israeli "disengagement" from Gaza to the final-status negotiations that followed the Annapolis conference.

Still: Obama was right when he said there had been no progress toward Arab-Israeli peace under Bush. Nor had there been any under Clinton. Nor, as things stand now, will there be any under Obama.

Why? Because the "peace process" to which all of them, their sharp differences notwithstanding, have been so committed is not a formula for ending the decades-long war in the Holy Land, but for prolonging it.

Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat shake hands at the White House in September 1993, launching the Oslo "peace process." What resulted was not peace but an intensified war.

In an important article in the current Middle East Quarterly, Daniel Pipes reviews the terrible failure of the 1993 Oslo accords, and homes in on the root fallacy of the diplomatic approach it embodied: the belief that the Arab-Israeli war can "be concluded through goodwill, conciliation, mediation, flexibility, restraint, generosity, and compromise, topped off with signatures on official documents." For 16 years, Israeli governments, prodded by Washington, have sought to quench Palestinian hostility with concessions and gestures of goodwill. Yet peace today is more elusive than ever.

"Wars end not through goodwill but through victory," Pipes writes, defining victory as one side compelling the other to give up its war goals. Since 1948, the Arabs' goal has been the elimination of Israel; the Israelis', to win their neighbors' acceptance of a Jewish state in the Middle East. "If the conflict is to end, one side must lose and one side win," argues Pipes. "Either there will be no more Zionist state or it will be accepted by its neighbors."

Diplomacy cannot settle the Arab-Israeli conflict until the Palestinians abandon their anti-Israel rejectionism. US policy should be focused, therefore, on getting them to abandon it. The Palestinians must be put "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."

So long as American and Israeli leaders remain committed to a fruitless Arab-Israeli "peace process," Arab-Israeli peace will remain unachievable. Let the newest Nobel peace laureate grasp and act upon that insight, and he may do more to genuinely hasten the conflict's end than any of his well-meaning predecessors. (Boston Globe Oct 14)

Sacrificing Peace for Propaganda Points By Barry Rubin

Should the Palestinian Authority be the main advocate pushing acceptance of the bizarre Goldstone Report in order to demonize Israel at the UN, or might it just stand aside and let a couple of dozen Arab and Muslim-majority states take the lead in doing so? This is - or should be - a minor issue, but it has escalated to push the real barrier to solving the Arab-Israeli conflict into everyone's face once again.

When the US government asked the PA not to be the main sponsor in demanding UN sanctions against Israel, the Palestinian leadership agreed for a few hours. But then, unable to resist flaunting its radicalism and obstructionism, it double-crossed the United States. This step further sabotaged President Barack Obama's efforts to advance the peace process, seemingly his No. 1 international priority.

The Palestinian leadership is once again shooting itself in the foot. It is throwing away a real opportunity for a state; it is sabotaging its relationship with Western patrons.

How to explain this apparent perverseness, which former foreign minister Abba Eban once called "never missing an opportunity to miss an opportunity"?

The answer is simple: When it comes down to a choice between continuing the conflict and trying to win a total victory that wipes Israel off the map, or making peace and getting a state, the Palestinian leadership always chooses the former.

And when it comes to choosing between being a bit more moderate and gaining Western support, or being demagogically radical and appealing to the most radical forces, the Palestinian leadership chooses the latter. The Fatah-dominated PA doesn't want peace with Israel; it prefers peace with Hamas, its rival that not only murders and tortures Fatah people but - one more irony - is the main beneficiary of the Goldstone Report.

Wishful thinkers beware! Reality is once again battering down your door. The Obama administration is trying to make peace and wants the PA's cooperation. If the UN goes ballistic and now bashes Israel as an evil, illegitimate war criminal - on the basis of Hamas propaganda, no less, which is all the Goldstone commission really purveys - this will not help the cause of peace and will wreck US policy. Israel will reject more concessions; Arab states will have another rationale for not making peace and will demand that the world punish Israel with sanctions or even extinction. The Obama administration basically said to the PA: "Look, we're getting you lots of money and diplomatic help on the basis of the idea that you want peace. No president in history has ever been more sympathetic and supportive of you. So stand aside on this issue for a few days. Do us this little favor."

But this is too much for the PA, which now faces protests and criticism at home for daring to make a small tactical concession that has no practical implication.

If the PA cannot even refrain from this kind of behavior because of internal dissension and popular pressure, can anyone expect it to compromise on territory, security measures, an end to the conflict, and the settlement of all Palestinian refugees in Palestine?

Think about that one for five minutes, please.

This is at least the fourth time in the short, nine-month history of the new administration that the Palestinians and Arab states have done this to Obama. Before the latest development:

- PA leader Mahmoud Abbas arrived in Washington for his first trip and said he had no intention of compromising on anything, but would just wait until the United States delivered an Israel that had to give up everything.
- Abbas refused to negotiate with Israel unless its completely froze construction on all settlements, with no exceptions, despite Obama's desperate efforts to get talks going.
- Arab states that were asked to make small confidence-building steps toward Israel to help the president said, "No!"

So much for Obama's apologies, his Cairo and UN speeches, strong words of support for the Palestinians (the people supposedly in an intolerable situation and desperate for a state), and his panegyrics for Islam. Flattery, Mr. President, will get you nowhere.

This strategy merely feeds the fires of radicalism. Unfortunately, the peace process of the 1990s and the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005 did the same thing. More concessions breed more violence; more apologies deliver more demands.

Remember that the peace process ended when then PA leader Yasser Arafat refused a state, along with more than \$23 billion in aid.

Remember that the Palestinians, handed all of the Gaza Strip, made it a launching pad for rockets aimed at Israel, instead of making it a model for launching peace.

Remember that when the Bush administration was trying to be supportive, the PA made a deal through Hizbullah with Iran to bring in massive amounts of arms on a ship. Discovering how the PA had lied turned that administration against them.

Remember that in 1989, when the United States initiated a dialogue with the PLO on the basis of its stopping terrorism, the organization instead dispatched a terrorist unit to gun down civilians on a Tel Aviv beach. This action led to the end of the dialogue.

Wake up, people. Peace would be preferable if possible. Peace is a beautiful dream. But that dream keeps getting interrupted by recurring nightmares.

Those who lead nations and are responsible for the lives and welfare of their people, those whose duty is to inform the people, and those who speak out publicly have a duty to cast aside wishful thinking and face the truth, as demonstrated by numerous examples and historical experience:

- Israeli-Palestinian peace is still a long way off.
- The PA is unwilling and incapable of making peace.
- Weakness in dealing with this issue breeds contempt; concessions create more violence and extremism.
- A responsible policy is one that maximizes stability by keeping Hamas from taking over the West Bank and brings down its rule in the Gaza Strip; minimizes violence by supporting Israel's right to self-defense; and does the utmost to raise the standard of living of Palestinians.

As for Obama and the European leaders, you've had the experience; now learn the lessons. (Jerusalem Post Oct 11)

Can Sanctions "Cripple" Iran? By Cliff May

In 1981, Israeli leaders sent bombers to destroy Saddam Hussein's nuclear reactor at Osirak. Rafael Eitan, then Israel's Army Chief of Staff, is said to have explained the motivation succinctly: "The alternative is our destruction."

Three decades later, the militant jihadist regime in Iran is developing nuclear weapons and the missiles to deliver them. It is also, not just coincidentally, supporting terrorists groups abroad, facilitating the killing of U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, vowing to wipe Israel off the map, and promising, in the longer term, "a world without America." It's a plan -- one that we will find a way to stop if we have learned anything from history. Both Presidents Bush and Obama have said it would be unacceptable for Iran's current rulers to have their fingers on nuclear triggers. The reality, however, is that the Bush administration took no serious steps to prevent Tehran from making progress toward that goal, and it remains to be seen whether the Obama administration will bring change on this critical issue of national and international security.

Israel's attack on Saddam's nuclear facilities resulted in a chorus of international condemnation. Over time, however, minds changed. "[W]hat the Israelis did at Osirak in 1981 ...in retrospect, was a really good thing," President Bill Clinton later said, articulating what has become the consensus view on both the moderate left and the moderate right.

Still, does history need be repeated? Must it come down to the United States and the "international community" doing nothing, and Israelis deciding whether to use military force against Iran's nuclear weapons facilities -- which have been dispersed and hardened in a way Saddam's were not?

There is one other possibility, one non-military tool that has not been utilized: serious economic sanctions, or as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has phrased it: "crippling sanctions." If sanctions were to cause Iran's rulers to worry whether their drive for nuclear weapons is weakening -- rather than strengthening --- their hold on power, that could lead to a breakthrough. Or, if the discomfort caused by the sanctions were to prompt Iranians to rise up even more strongly against their oppressors, that also might bring a positive result - for Iranians and for the rest of the world.

What would serious sanctions look like? To begin, the US, perhaps with the assistance of some European allies -- French President Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown have all indicated support -- would cut off shipments of gasoline and other refined petroleum products to Iran.

Only a few companies, mostly European, now supply these products which Iran desperately needs because, though a major oil producer, it has constructed few oil refineries. Shipping companies, banks and insurance companies that underwrite the trade also could be discouraged from continuing to participate in this business. Legislation to achieve such results, for example, the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act, has strong bipartisan support -- three-quarters of both the Senate and the House.

James Woolsey, CIA director under President Clinton, has suggested that the White House and Congress, in addition, should make clear that from now on "any company that does any kind of business with an Iranian entity - not just the Revolutionary Guards, not just oil and gas companies, but any entity - can do no business with the United States government."

Time is of the essence: Iran's rulers already are conspiring with anti-American autocrats - in Russian, China, Venezuela and Turkmenistan, for example - to find ways to break such an embargo, should it be imposed.

There are those advising President Obama that such pressure can only serve to antagonize Iran's rulers - who, they insist, have legitimate grievances against us but really only crave respect and are eager for dialogue, compromise and cooperation. It requires forbearance -- given repeated Iranian nuclear cheating, the fraudulent elections and the brutal oppression of protestors, the empowerment of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the use of Iranian weapons and perhaps operatives to kill Americans in Iraq, Afghanistan and, before that, in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, the Holocaust denial and the genocidal threats -- not to regard these advisors as terminally naïve.

Others argue that nothing short of military force can be effective, that Iran's rulers will withstand economic pressure, no matter how crippling, in order to get their hands on weapons of mass destruction they can use to intimidate - or incinerate -- those they see as enemies of God. They believe it is too late for sanctions to work. But why not test that theory - and quickly given that Iran is now sprinting toward the finish line? If sanctions prove ineffective, at least we will know for certain that only two options remain. The first is bad: the use of force by the U.S. or, more likely, Israel. The second is worse: watching passively for the second time in less than a hundred years as fanatical and ruthless tyrants acquire the capabilities to match their clearly stated intentions. (Townhall.com Oct 1)

Mahmoud Abbas's New Rules Of Diplomacy By Evelyn Gordon

With so much attention understandably focused on the Palestinian Authority's efforts to get Israel prosecuted for so-called "war crimes" in Gaza, the other obstacle to renewed peace talks is receiving less scrutiny than it deserves.

The PA's demand that talks with Binyamin Netanyahu resume from where they broke off under his predecessor, Ehud Olmert, is nothing less than a demand to completely rewrite the principles of diplomacy. Were it accepted, countries would no longer be bound only by signed agreements. Instead, they would be bound by any offer ever made during negotiations, even if the offer were rejected by the other party.

A brief recap: In September 2008, when he had already resigned as prime minister but not yet left office, Olmert made PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas a far-reaching offer. The offer, which Olmert and his advisors later detailed to various media outlets, and which Abbas confirmed to The Washington Post, gave the Palestinians even more than the 1996 Clinton plan, long considered the blueprint for any agreement. It included an Israeli withdrawal from 94 percent of the West Bank, with territorial swaps to compensate for the remainder; international control over Jerusalem's holy sites, with Muslim countries holding three of the governing body's five seats; and a symbolic absorption by Israel of some 5,000 Palestinian refugees. It was backed by a detailed map of the proposed border.

According to Israeli reports, Abbas wanted a copy of the map, and Olmert replied, "if you sign it, you can have it." Abbas requested a day to think it over and promised to return for another meeting the next day.

But Abbas never returned; he never even called. Olmert remained in office for another six months, but throughout that time he heard nothing

from Abbas. In February, he made one final effort, using US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as an intermediary, but to no avail.

Only in May 2009 did he finally learn - via Abbas's Washington Post interview - what the PA chairman thought of his offer: He rejected it, Abbas told the paper, because "the gaps were wide."

Now, Abbas is demanding that the offer he rejected become the starting point for future negotiations. "There were maps prepared by both sides and proposals for territorial swaps, so we can't go back to square one," he told the pan-Arab daily Al-Hayat last month. He has reiterated this position in discussions with American officials, vowing not to resume the talks unless it is accepted. In short, he is demanding that Israel be bound not by signed agreements, but by an offer to which he never even deigned to respond.

Nor is he alone in this demand. Just last week, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak told his country's Armed Forces paper that it would be "unreasonable and unacceptable" for talks not to begin where they left off, while Jordan's King Abdullah II made similar comments to Haaretz.

Were this position actually accepted, the consequences for all diplomacy, worldwide, would be devastating.

First, if negotiators fear that offered concessions will bind their governments even if no agreement is reached, they will be loath to offer such concessions, making it impossible ever to conclude any agreement. After all, no country wants to forfeit negotiating assets without receiving anything in exchange. Yet that is the meaning of Abbas's demand: Once a concession is offered, it remains on the table even if the other side offers nothing in exchange, and can thus no longer be traded for reciprocal concessions.

Second, this eliminates a crucial tool that all negotiators and mediators use in trying to close deals: the threat that an offered concession will no longer be available tomorrow, so it is in the other party's interest to say yes today. Under the Abbas principle, any concession, once offered, would always be available, so saying yes is contrary to the other party's interest: It is better off waiting to see what additional concessions might be forthcoming.

But beyond its consequences for diplomacy, this principle would also destroy a fundamental democratic right: the public's right to replace a government whose policies it opposes. A decisive majority of Israelis voted for parties opposed to Olmert's concessions precisely because they deemed his offer reckless. But should Abbas's demand be accepted, the policy Israel's majority rejected would nevertheless remain in force. In other words, voters would no longer have the right to change their country's foreign policy; they would be limited to replacing the personnel administering this policy.

Granted, all democracies accept such limits in one particular case: Signed, ratified agreements - which require parliamentary or popular approval and apply to both sides - obligate subsequent governments regardless of those governments' views. But under the Abbas principle, any lone negotiator - even one who, like Olmert, had already been so repudiated that his own government compelled him to resign - would have the power to bind his country's future governments while imposing no reciprocal obligations on his interlocutors, merely by offering a concession that the other side rejected.

Acceding to Abbas's demand would obviously sound the death knell for the peace process. Not only can Netanyahu's government not accept some of Olmert's concessions, but it would be deterred from offering any concessions of its own by the knowledge that these would be deemed binding even were no agreement reached. And Abbas would have no incentive to sign anything if he could instead keep pocketing concessions without offering anything in exchange.

For this reason alone, one would have expected the West to unceremoniously reject this condition. Astoundingly, however, neither the US nor the European Union has yet done so publicly, nor is there any indication that they have even done so privately.

Their silence becomes even more incomprehensible when one considers the destructive implications of this principle for both democracy and diplomacy in general. It would be a pity if brand-new Nobel Peace Prize laureate Barack Obama, who won precisely for striving "to strengthen international diplomacy" by preferring "dialogue and negotiations" as the means of resolving international conflicts should be the very person to render those tools utterly ineffective. (Jerusalem Post Oct 14)