



## 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...

#### Team Obama's Anti-Israel Turn By John Bolton

The Obama administration is increasingly fixed on resolving the "Arab-Israeli dispute," seeing it as the key to peace and stability in the Middle East. This is bad news for Israel - and for America.

In its purest form, this theory holds that, once Israel and its neighbors come to terms, all other regional conflicts can be duly resolved: Iran's nuclear-weapons program, fanatical anti-Western terrorism, Islam's Sunni-Shiite schism, Arab-Persian ethnic tensions. Some advocates believe substantively that the overwhelming bulk of other Middle Eastern grievances, wholly or partly, stem from Israel's founding and continued existence. Others see it in process terms - how to "sequence" dispute resolutions, so that Arab-Israeli progress facilitates progress elsewhere.

Pursuing this talisman has long characterized many European leaders and their soulmates on the American left. The Mideast "peace process" is thus the ultimate self-licking ice cream cone - its mere existence being its basic justification. And now the Obama administration has made it US policy. This is evidenced by two key developments: the appointment of former Sen. George Mitchell as special envoy for the region, and Secretary of State Hillary's Clinton's recent insistence on a "two-state solution" sooner rather than later. Naming Mitchell as a high-level, single-issue envoy - rather than keeping the portfolio under Secretary Clinton's personal control - separates Israel from the broader conduct of US diplomacy. Mitchell's role underlines both the issue's priority in the president's eyes and the implicit idea it can be solved in the foreseeable future.

Obama and Mitchell have every incentive to strike a Middle East deal - both to vindicate themselves and, in their minds, to create a basis for further "progress." But there are few visible incentives for any particular substantive outcome - which is very troubling for Israel, since Mitchell's mission essentially replicates in high-profile form exactly the approach the State Department has followed for decades.

When appointed, Mitchell said confidently: "Conflicts are created, conducted and sustained by human beings. They can be ended by human beings." This is true, however, only if the conflict's substantive resolution is less important than the process point of "ending" it one way or another. Surrender, for example, is a guaranteed way to end conflict.

Here, Clinton's strident insistence on a "two-state solution" during her recent Mideast trip becomes important. She essentially argued predestination: the "inevitability" of moving toward two states is "inescapable," and "there is no time to waste." The political consequence is clear: Since the outcome is inevitable and time is short, there is no excuse for not making "progress." Delay is evidence of obstructionism and failure - something President Obama can't tolerate, for the sake of his policies and his political reputation. In this very European view, failure on the Arab-Israeli front presages failure elsewhere. Accordingly, the Obama administration has created a negotiating dynamic that puts increasing pressure on Israel, Palestinians, Syria and others. Almost invariably, Israel is the loser - because Israel is the party most dependent on the United States, most subject to US pressure and most susceptible to the inevitable chorus of received wisdom from Western diplomats, media and the intelligentsia demanding concessions. When pressure must be applied to make compromises, it's always easier to pressure the more reasonable side.

How will diplomatic pressure work to change Hamas or Hezbollah, where even military force has so far failed? If anything, one can predict coming pressure on Israel to acknowledge the legitimacy of these two terrorist groups, and to negotiate with them as equals (albeit perhaps under some artful camouflage). The pattern is so common that its reappearance in the Mitchell-led negotiations is what is really "inevitable" and

"inescapable."

Why would

America subject a close ally to this dynamic, playing with the security of an unvarying supporter in world affairs? For America, Israel's intelligence-sharing, military cooperation and significant bilateral

economic ties, among many others, are important national-security assets that should not lightly be put at risk.

The only understandable answer is that the Obama administration believes that Israel is as much or more of a problem as it is an ally, at least until Israel's disagreements with its neighbors are resolved. Instead of seeing Israel as a national-security asset, the administration likely sees a relationship complicating its broader policy of diplomatic "outreach."

No one will say so publicly, but this is the root cause of Obama's "Arab-Israeli issues first" approach to the region.

This approach is exactly backward. All the other regional problems would still exist even if Mahmoud Ahmadinejad got his fondest wish and Israel disappeared from the map: Iran's nuclear-weapons program, its role as the world's central banker for terrorism, the Sunni-Shiite conflict within Islam, Sunni terrorist groups like al Qaeda and other regional ethnic, national and political animosities would continue as threats and risks for decades to come.

Instead, the US focus should be on Iran and the manifold threats it poses to Israel, to Arab states friendly to Washington and to the United States itself - but that is not to be.

President Obama argues that he will deal comprehensively with the entire region. Rhetoric is certainly his specialty, but in the Middle East rhetoric only lasts so long. Performance is the real measure - and the administration's performance to date points in only one direction: pressing Israel while wooing Iran. Others in the world - friend and foe alike - will draw their own conclusions. (NY Post Mar 13)

*The writer, the former US Ambassador to the UN, is an American Enterprise Institute senior fellow.*

#### Is Anti-Zionism Hate? By Judea Pearl

*Anti-Zionism is in many ways more dangerous than anti-Semitism*

In January, at a symposium at UCLA (choreographed by the Center for Near East Studies), four longtime Israel bashers were invited to analyze the human rights conditions in Gaza, and used the stage to attack the legitimacy of Zionism and its vision of a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians.

They criminalized Israel's existence, distorted its motives, and maligned its character, its birth, even its conception. At one point, the excited audience reportedly chanted "Zionism is Nazism" and worse.

Jewish leaders condemned this hate-fest as a dangerous invitation to anti-Semitic hysteria, and pointed to the chilling effect it had on UCLA students and faculty on a campus known for its open and civil atmosphere. The organizers, some of them Jewish, took refuge in "academic freedom" and the argument that "anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism."

I fully support this mantra, not because it exonerates anti-Zionists from charges of anti-Semitism but because the distinction helps us focus attention on the discriminatory, immoral and more dangerous character of anti-Zionism. Anti-Zionism rejects the very notion that Jews are a nation - a collective bonded by a common history - and, accordingly, denies Jews the right to self-determination in their historical birthplace. It seeks the dismantling of the Jewish nation state: Israel.

Anti-Zionism earns its discriminatory character from denying the Jewish people what it grants to other historically bonded collectives (e.g. French, Spanish, Palestinians), namely, the right to nationhood, self-determination and legitimate coexistence with other indigenous claimants.

Anti-Semitism rejects Jews as equal members of the human race; anti-Zionism rejects Israel as an equal member in the family of nations.

Are Jews a nation? Some philosophers would argue that Jews are a nation first and religion second. Indeed, the narrative of Exodus and the

vision of the impending journey to the land of Canaan were etched in the minds of the Jewish people before they received the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

But, philosophy aside, the unshaken conviction in their eventual repatriation to the birthplace of their history has been the engine behind Jewish endurance and hopes throughout their turbulent journey that started with the Roman expulsion in AD 70.

More importantly, shared history, not religion, is today the primary uniting force behind the secular, multiethnic society of Israel. The majority of its members do not practice religious laws and do not believe in divine supervision or the afterlife. The same applies to American Jewry, which is likewise largely secular. Identification with a common historical ethos, culminating in the reestablishment of the state of Israel, is the central bond of Jewish collectivity in America.

There are of course Jews who are non-Zionists and even anti-Zionists. The ultra-Orthodox cult of Neturei Karta and the leftist cult of Noam Chomsky are notable examples. The former rejects any earthly attempt to interfere with God's messianic plan, while the latter abhors all forms of nationalism, especially successful ones. There are also Jews who find it difficult to defend their identity against the growing viciousness of anti-Israel propaganda, and eventually hide, disown or denounce their historical roots in favor of social acceptance and other expediencies.

But these are marginal minorities at best; the vital tissues of Jewish identity today feed on Jewish history and its natural derivatives - the state of Israel, its struggle for survival, its cultural and scientific achievements and its relentless drive for peace.

Given this understanding of Jewish nationhood, anti-Zionism is in many ways more dangerous than anti-Semitism.

First, anti-Zionism targets the most vulnerable part of the Jewish people, namely, the Jewish population of Israel, whose physical safety and personal dignity depend crucially on maintaining Israel's sovereignty. Put bluntly, the anti-Zionist plan to do away with Israel condemns five and a half million human beings, mostly refugees or children of refugees, to eternal defenselessness in a region where genocidal designs are not uncommon.

Secondly, modern society has developed antibodies against anti-Semitism but not against anti-Zionism. Today, anti-Semitic stereotypes evoke revulsion in most people of conscience, while anti-Zionist rhetoric has become a mark of academic sophistication and social acceptance in certain extreme yet vocal circles of US academia and media elite.

Anti-Zionism disguises itself in the cloak of political debate, exempt from sensitivities and rules of civility that govern inter-religious discourse, to attack the most cherished symbol of Jewish identity.

Finally, anti-Zionist rhetoric is a stab in the back to the Israeli peace camp, which overwhelmingly stands for a two-state solution. It also gives credence to enemies of coexistence who claim that the eventual elimination of Israel is the hidden agenda of every Palestinian. It is anti-Zionism, then, not anti-Semitism that poses a more dangerous threat to lives, historical justice and the prospects of peace in the Middle East. (Ynet Mar 17)

*The writer is a professor at UCLA and the president of the Daniel Pearl Foundation*

---

### **When Lobbies Collide** By Jonathan Tobin

With a new Israeli government about to be put in place, supporters of the US-Israel alliance are preparing for possible conflict between the soon-to-be prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and President Barack Obama. But their battles won't be the only fight concerning Israel in Washington this year. Nor will it necessarily be the nastiest.

Instead, the real action may concern the coming conflict between two groups that, though both proclaim themselves "pro-Israel," in fact represent very different points of view about US foreign policy. One is the coalition of groups led by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) that sees its purpose as supporting the government of Israel no matter who may lead it. The other is composed of critics of the Jewish state who believe pressure on Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians is the best form of friendship.

The most conspicuous member of the latter group is the lobby group J Street which sees itself as a Jewish model along the lines of the moveon.org activist group that helped transform and propel the American Left to victory in the past two election cycles. Having labeled AIPAC as a creature of the Republicans and in thrall to the Christian Right, J Street and its fellow travelers, such as the more establishment-oriented Israel Policy Forum,

entered 2009 expecting to use their connections in the Obama administration to change the way Israel is discussed in Washington.

Their belief that the main obstacle to peace was an Israeli refusal to make further concessions on territory and settlements to the Palestinians seemed to be more in sync with the return of Clinton administration veterans to positions of influence now that the Democrats are back in power. As a result, J Street's leadership anticipates making progress toward its long-term goal of supplanting AIPAC as the voice that the White House and Congress take most seriously when measures concerning Israel are debated.

But despite these advantages, the Obama era got off to a rough start for J Street. Almost alone among Jewish groups, the left-wing lobby conspicuously opposed Israel's recent counteroffensive into Gaza, and did so in its customary self-righteous style which sought to brand all those who differed as opposed to peace. This stand reinforced the group's image as extremists and exposed its posturing about being more representative of American Jewish opinion than AIPAC as fraudulent.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Gaza fighting, J Street was undaunted. Obama's naming George Mitchell as his Middle East envoy seemed to vindicate the Left's call for more US intervention in the moribund peace process. And the prospect of a Netanyahu-led coalition in Jerusalem may also increase its influence. Since the Likud leader is deeply unpopular in official circles in Washington, J Street can look forward to being able to put AIPAC at a disadvantage since it will find itself obligated to defend his government as a matter of course.

Yet the first real fight of 2009 over Middle East policy may not concern Netanyahu or even the more controversial elements of his cabinet. Instead, the collision of the "pro-Israel" lobbies may have more to do with the Palestinians than anything the Israelis themselves are doing. The announcement that the US would donate approximately \$900 million to help rebuild Gaza was not initially considered controversial. Yet mindful of its pledge not to deal with the terrorists running Gaza and to support the Palestinian Authority, the administration promised the money would not go to Hamas. Instead it would be funneled through the PA and its highly respected Prime Minister Salaam Fayad as well as through humanitarian groups.

But this plan was unrealistic. Fayad soon resigned, ending the brief experiment in trying to have a Palestinian leader who was actually interested in developing the economy. His problems illustrate how misguided groups like J Street were about the Palestinians' willingness to make peace. Palestinian politicians who don't kill Jews are not as popular as those who do. But even with Fayad, the PA has no power in Gaza.

As for humanitarian outlets in Gaza, the prime recipient of such money would be the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the UN body whose sole purpose is to not only help the Palestinians but to perpetuate the misery of those still classified as refugees from the 1948 War of Independence and their descendants. UNRWA is heavily infiltrated by Hamas operatives. Aid given to it would either be directed to Hamas-oriented causes or stolen outright by the group.

The prospect of nearly a billion dollars in US taxpayer funds being poured into Gaza, with much of it likely to wind up in the hands of terrorists, is not likely to go without protest. Indeed questions are already being asked about whether the aid should be conditioned not only on complete accountability about its use but on more general policy questions such as the cessation of rocket fire and the release of kidnapped soldier Gilad Schalit, who has been in Hamas captivity since June 2006.

This past week, Nevada Democrat Rep. Shelly Berkley wrote to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asking that restrictions be placed on the disbursement of these funds. If, as anticipated, this move is supported by other members of Congress of both parties and some pro-Israel groups, we can expect a serious debate on this point in which J Street and its allies will seek to portray such conditions as being anti-peace.

Indeed, this conflict may well resemble similar arguments in the 1990s during the heyday of the doomed Oslo peace process, when efforts to point out that the billions being poured into the hands of Yasser Arafat and the PA were not only being stolen but were being used to finance anti-Israel incitement as well as terrorism were dismissed by the Clinton administration and the Jewish Left as "anti-peace." This time, the realization that the US is funding what amounts to a massive "stimulus" package for equally dubious Palestinian recipients may inspire opposition that is more broadly-based.

If so, we will have another chance to see if J Street's strident advocacy of appeasement of a Palestinian leadership that is as unlikely to promote

peace as was Arafat is as popular as it imagines it to be. As was the case a decade ago with Arafat, no amount of blather about peace and investing in hope will whitewash the reputations of terrorists. Nor will the current ascendancy of fellow liberals in Washington be enough to grant legitimacy to a "pro-Israel" group whose main efforts are geared toward undermining solidarity with the Jewish state. (Jerusalem Post Mar 12)  
*The writer is executive editor of Commentary magazine.*

---

### **Why The Silence When AIPAC Is Attacked?** By Shmuley Boteach

Last week Chas Freeman, who was nominated to be the chairman of the National Intelligence Council, was forced to withdraw from consideration because of his previous bile-ridden statements about Israel, his support for the Tiananmen Square crackdown and, most importantly, having been a leading apologist for Saudi Arabia, which is not surprising considering he was on its payroll.

But it was the only the Jews whom he decided to attack when he withdrew. In his official statement Freeman, sounding unhinged, wrote that the "tactics of the Israel lobby plumb the depths of dishonor and indecency and include character assassination, selective misquotation, the willful distortion of the record, the fabrication of falsehoods and an utter disregard for the truth." Heavens. Can no one stop those lying Jews?

And to think that this hothead came within a hair's breath of being responsible for "policy-neutral intelligence assessments" that would daily land on the president's desk. Barack Obama was largely elected president of the United States because of his temperament. Americans trusted a man who always exhibited a cool and collected manner to steward this country in a moment of real crisis. An unstable senior analyst who is so easily blows a gasket deserves no place in any senior position of authority.

But what really puzzled me about the fracas was how few public figures both inside and outside the Jewish community stood up to respond to the smear on the heroes in the Israel lobby.

I have been involved with AIPAC for 15 years. Its leaders are great Americans who lobby our elected officials not for an auto bailout or to rescue a bank which wants to buy a \$30,000 toilet or have Sheryl Crow sing to its shareholders, but for the support and protection of America's most trustworthy ally and the only democracy in the Middle East. If Israel flourishes, then American-style democracy triumphs in a critical region that controls most of the world's energy. What the 9/11 attacks taught us is that Israel is a canary-in-the-coal-mine for the United States and attacks against Israel presage imminent dangers to the US.

To know the leaders of AIPAC - David Victor, its president, Howard Kohr its executive director, and its many dedicated professionals - is to come into contact with men and women who subordinate ego and influence to a cause much larger than themselves. The same is true of Morton Klein of the ZOA and so many others who constitute "the Israel lobby." Theirs is a thankless task because all who despise Israel - and it's amazing, although no altogether surprising, to discover just how many do - end up despising them for advocating on Israel's behalf. So let me count myself among those who publicly salute them.

I love America. It's a country whose commitment to goodness, however imperfect, is without parallel. And America's greatness is demonstrated in its commitment to a tiny country that struggles to be free, despite the fact it has no natural resources that are of use to the United States. As an American I identify with a country that fights for its liberty, has a press so free that it regularly exposes the corruption of its leaders, and whose politicians are utterly beholden to the people. And I therefore am extremely proud to support and identify with the guardians of the American-Israel relationship. There is no shame to count myself among those who champion AIPAC, only immense pride.

And yes, I am aware of the suffering of my Palestinian brothers and sisters, equal children of God to every Jew. But I cannot, by any rational examination of the facts, hold Israel accountable for their suffering when it is their leaders who have repeatedly chosen violence and terrorism whenever Israel has stretched its hand out in peace.

By contrast, Chas Freeman's championing of Saudi Arabia at Israel's expense makes a mockery of American values. Is there anything American about a monarchy that brutalizes political opponents and throws critical newspaper editors in jail? Has Freeman forgot that we came into being by fighting a king who imposed tyranny on his colonies? Is there anything uniquely American about a regime which, just last week, sentenced a 75-year-old widow to 40 lashes and four months in prison for spending time with her 25-year-old nephew who delivered to her five loaves of bread?

And is there anything American about a country that allowed 15 teenage girls to burn to death in their religious school five years ago this month because they tried to run from the blaze without their face-covering?

Yet, Freeman's recent assessment of Saudi Arabia was this: "I believe King Abdullah is very rapidly becoming Abdullah the Great... Since he became king I've been struck by the scope of change. It has been quite extraordinary." For anyone who agrees with Freeman that Saudi Arabia is a reformed and newly liberal state, I would simply administer the kind of challenge which president Kennedy did in 1963 at the Berlin Wall. Given a choice of living in Israel or Saudi Arabia, which would you choose? Not sure? Ask a woman or a gay man?

I realize that there are other Chas Freemans out there who disdain Israel and subscribe to a belief that a Jewish cabal of pro-Israel activists controls the American government and has hijacked its foreign policy. To those of you who are still rational on the subject, I ask you this. Suppose that the Jews could be persuaded that Israel is a failed experiment and they ought to completely disband and be absorbed in friendly countries like Australia, Canada and the United States. Would good times suddenly come to the remaining inhabitants Middle East? Would Bashir Assad stop crushing democratic protesters with armed police? Would Hamas stop its reign of terror and assassination without trial in Gaza? Would the Saudis suddenly allow a woman to ride a bike or drive a car? And would the nearly 1 million Arabs whom The New York Times says Saddam Hussein murdered suddenly come back to life?

Since the probable answer to all those questions is no, we now know why even after Yasser Arafat was granted authority over 95 percent of the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank more than 1 million Arabs chose to continue to live under Israeli sovereignty in the Jewish state of Israel rather than choosing to live under the all-too-unfortunate oppression which is the lot of our nearly all our Arab brothers throughout the Middle East. (Jerusalem Post Mar 16)

---

### **Time For Obama To Stop Stalling About UN's Hateful Anti-Hate Conference** By Anne Bayefsky

Under the growing threat of a boycott by the United States and European countries, negotiators planning the U.N.'s Durban II "anti-racism" conference made a new move in Geneva Tuesday. They released a modified version of a draft declaration that is expected to be adopted at the April melee. The draft jettisons much of the extra baggage Islamic states had piled on throughout the 10-month drafting process (for the sole purpose of "compromising" at the end). The improvements, however, do not meet the minimal conditions that the Obama administration delineated for U.S. participation. It is time to end the equivocation and get out.

Durban II represents a global showdown on the ideological battlefield between Democrats and anti-Democrats, between tolerance and intolerance. For years, the worst abusers of human rights have commandeered U.N. vehicles to trample rights and freedoms. Given the close relationship between spewing hatred and reaping violence - which the first Durban Declaration adopted on Sept. 8, 2001, made abundantly clear - the stakes are high.

Two weeks ago, the Obama administration set out four conditions for U.S. participation in the Durban II. The new version of the Durban II declaration must be: "shorter," "not reaffirm in toto the flawed 2001 Durban Declaration," "not single out any one country or conflict" and "not embrace the troubling concept of "defamation of religion." On some of these counts, the document makes substantial changes. It is somewhat shorter, removes grotesque allegations like calling Israel an apartheid state and deletes the words "defamation of religions." But most important, it refuses to disavow the 2001 Declaration. On the contrary, it "Reaffirms the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) as it was adopted at the World Conference against Racism ... in 2001." That declaration says Palestinians are victims of Israeli racism - with Israel the only U.N. state found guilty of racism. And though today's draft divides provisions into the negotiable and non-negotiable, it announces that reaffirming Durban I is text which does not "remain to be negotiated."

This "new and improved" document, therefore, breaches President Obama's key conditions. It "reaffirms in toto the flawed 2001 Durban Declaration." In so doing, it does not satisfy the demand that no country or conflict be singled out. Unsurprisingly, behind the scenes, Palestinian negotiators in Geneva are expressing satisfaction with today's result.

For Americans, to reaffirm the Durban Declaration is to affirm precisely what our government rejected on Sept. 4, 2001, when the United

States - led by Congressman and Holocaust survivor Tom Lantos - walked out from Durban I in disgust.

The new draft is a textbook example of diplomatic double-talk. Diplomats often couch objectionable outcomes in superficially unobjectionable language, using a tool that lawyers call "incorporation by reference." Don't repeat the offensive words in the new document; just include them by referring to another document where they can be found - and which most people won't bother to read.

In plain language, here is exactly what it means to reaffirm the DDPA and its claim that Palestinians are victims of Israeli racism.

For one, reaffirming the Durban document will set the priorities of the U.N. human rights system. As U.N. High Commissioner Navi Pillay - who is also the Secretary-General of Durban II - proclaimed earlier this month: "The focus on victims is the cornerstone of OHCHR's [Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights] work. The office pays particular attention to the protection of the groups of victims identified in the DDPA." Among them, of course, the alleged victims of the diabolical Israeli state.

Second, Durban I went forth and multiplied. The DDPA spawned: the Intergovernmental Working Group on the effective implementation of the DDPA, the Independent Eminent Experts Group, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards and the Preparatory Committee of the Durban Review Conference and its working groups. In addition, U.N. High Commissioner Pillay has promised: "I will take the lead in encouraging mainstreaming of the implementation of the DDPA in the work of all relevant United Nations entities." In this case, mainstreaming is a U.N. euphemism for ensuring the cancer spreads to all parts of the body politic.

Driving the Durban committee dealing with "complementary standards" is the game plan of Islamic U.N. member states. They argue that existing standards on racial discrimination and related intolerance - which they ignore in practice - have normative gaps. What kind of gaps? Insufficient attention to the defamation of religions - Islam in particular.

There has been some push-back from other states on the concept of "defamation of religion," since Islamic governments would be both judge and jury on what counts as defamation. So this latest version of the Durban II declaration focuses on "incitement to hatred of religious communities." It "calls upon states ... to declare illegal and prohibit by law all organizations which ... attempt to justify or promote national, racial and religious hatred and discrimination in any form ..." It calls for more U.N. "workshops" on "the prohibition of incitement with a view to remedy any possible substantive or implementation gaps." It also insists that "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination ... shall be prohibited by law ... and that these prohibitions are consistent with freedom of opinion and expression."

The United States has formal legal reservations to U.N. treaties that attempt to impose fewer limits on free speech than Durban II. Those reservations insist upon the primacy of stronger American constitutional protections. Signing on to anything looking like this Durban II declaration would therefore be inconsistent with American law.

Tuesday's development sent diplomats in Geneva scurrying off in different directions. The Netherlands decided to play hardball in the defense of democracy. The Dutch took the U.S. conditions seriously and publicly disseminated a complete alternative text two pages long in stark contrast to the U.N.'s 17-page draft. The Dutch draft is direct; it highlights in plain language that "freedom of expression is a cornerstone of our fight against racism;" it includes protection for discrimination against sexual orientation; and it does not reaffirm Durban I.

Some members of the EU were not pleased. The French and the Germans are insisting the European Union act with one voice and are intent on dragging the Dutch back into the fold. The Italians have gone silent after announcing last week they were going to boycott, apparently succumbing to demands for European unity. American state officials are busy drafting alternative texts behind the scenes despite the pretense of non-participation. NGOs are pressuring the Obama administration not to leave for any reason. The Australians have been apparently struck dumb until President Obama tells them what he'll do. The Palestinians are threatening to make the draft a lot worse if "reaffirming the Durban I Declaration" is removed. The secretary-general of the Conference Navi Pillay - a native of Durban who promised the mayor to rescue the city's good name - is helping Islamic states fight the forces that are serious about combating racism.

As for human rights? What does that have to do with anything? This is the U.N. (Jewish World Review Mar 18)

*The writer is a senior fellow of the Hudson Institute.*

## **Caution and Confusion on Iran** By Michael Gerson

One of the snippiest arguments between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton during the Democratic primary concerned negotiations with Iran. Obama impulsively pledged to meet with the leaders of various outlaw regimes in his first year as president. Clinton countered, "I don't want to be used for propaganda purposes. ... We're not going to just have our president meet with Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez and, you know, the president of North Korea, Iran and Syria until we know better what the way forward would be."

So far, Clinton's approach has prevailed on Iran, for a number of reasons.

First, Iran has a presidential election set for June 12, in which the apocalyptic populist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad faces a strong reformist opponent. Ahmadinejad's political standing has been weakened by inflation running over 20 percent and estimated unemployment near 30 percent. His prospects might be strengthened by direct, high-level American engagement. The administration has properly avoided giving a demagogue a global stage during an election.

Second, Iran has not been in a cooperative mood. Ahmadinejad greeted Obama's inaugural appeal -- the outreached hand for the unclenched fist -- with the demand for an apology for "crimes" against Iran and "deep and fundamental" change in U.S. policy. Recently, for good measure, he repeated his assertion that the Holocaust is a "big lie." Earlier this month, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, gave his first public comments on the new era of openness and diplomacy. He attacked Obama for adopting George W. Bush's strategic commitment to Israel, calling that nation a "cancerous tumor." He expressed unequivocal support for terrorist movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and criticized Palestinian leaders for any compromise with the "Zionist regime."

Iranian leaders and proxies seem to be taking the offer of negotiations as a sign of American weakness. "The United States," taunts Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, "is ready now to talk with any party, not out of a sense of morality, but because it failed in its attempts to implement its plans in the region."

Meanwhile, the Iranian Quds Force continues to lead, train and arm Shiite terrorists within Iraq. And, in Senate committee testimony last week, Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair stated, "Some officials, such as Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Commander Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari-Najafabadi, have hinted that Iran would have a hand in attacks on 'America's interests even in far-away places,' suggesting Iran has contingency plans for unconventional warfare and terrorism against the United States and its allies."

Rather than unclenching its fist, Iran has been pounding it on the table.

Third, Clinton and special envoy George Mitchell have returned from trips to the Middle East sobered by the intensity of Arab fears of Iranian intentions. After visiting with Arab foreign ministers, Clinton recounted hearing "over and over and over again" grave concern about the Iranian threat. A high-profile outreach to Iran would likely be taken by Arab leaders as American betrayal. Given the conspiratorial assumptions of Arab diplomacy, they would assume that America is cutting a secret deal with Iran -- and be led to cut such deals of their own.

So the administration has adopted an incremental approach. Clinton has proposed an international conference on Afghanistan that would include Iranian officials, providing a chance for face-to-face meetings on the sidelines -- just as Condoleezza Rice called for an international conference on Iraq including Iranian officials, whom she met face-to-face on the sidelines. And Clinton has undertaken an outreach to Syria -- just as Rice reached out to Syria before the 2007 Annapolis peace conference.

Far from being impulsive on Iran, the administration has sent mixed signals about its sense of urgency. The International Atomic Energy Agency recently concluded that Iran has sufficient stockpiles of low-enriched uranium -- the most difficult part of the enrichment cycle -- to build a nuclear weapon after a short period of further enrichment. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Michael Mullen, says he believes "Iran is on a path to develop nuclear weapons." At the same time, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates contends, "They're not close to a weapon at this point" and asserts that the "barrier" for military action against Iran is the question "Are we going to be attacked here at home?" -- which doesn't offer much consolation to Israel or America's Arab friends.

At this point, the administration is combining a policy of caution with a message of confusion. And it does not seem likely to persuade or intimidate. (Townhall.com Mar 18)