



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*

ד"ר
disputations or forcibly
converting us. After all, in our prayers,
we explicitly reject their faith as false.
And this is to be expected.

Every religion asserts itself as the
one true faith and demeans all others as
false. As the American Jewish radio
host Dennis Prager noted at a lecture
for the David Horowitz Freedom Center
in Santa Barbara, California this
weekend, "There is no Judeo-Christian
faith. There are Judeo-Christian

Events...

Sunday, June 15, 8:00 PM

*Concert featuring the North American Debut of Israeli Roots/Soul/ Reggae
Superstar **Mosh Ben Ari**, at The Mod Club, 722 College St., to benefit Sderot.
Tickets available at Israel's.*

Tuesday, June 17, 8:00 PM

*Aish Hatorah presents Aaron Klein of WorldNetDaily.com speaking on
"Shmoozing with Terrorists" at Shaarei Shomayim.*

Tuesday June 24, 7:00 PM

*Tehilla program on Buying Property in Israel, at the Sephardic Kehila
Centre.*

Commentary...

Jews United for Israel's Friends By Caroline Glick

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad suffered a humiliating setback this week in his quest for international legitimacy. Ahmadinejad is expected to arrive in Rome this week to participate in a UN summit on the global food crisis (which has been caused by the rise in oil prices that Ahmadinejad is so pleased to have had a role in fomenting).

Ahmadinejad was hoping that while in the Italian capital he would be able to have a photo-op with Pope Benedict XVI. To secure the meeting, Ahmadinejad - who has called for all nations to convert to Islam or be destroyed (except for the Jews who can do nothing to avoid destruction) - has been sweet talking the Vatican for months. In his latest move, during a meeting in April with Archbishop Jean-Paul Gobel, the Vatican's representative in Iran, Ahmadinejad referred to the Vatican as a "positive force for justice and peace."

But Benedict was unmoved by Ahmadinejad's flattery. His request for an audience with the pontiff was unceremoniously rejected.

Not surprisingly, the Israeli government has nothing to say about Benedict's humiliation of Ahmadinejad. This is unsurprising because the Olmert-Livni-Barack-Yishai government has never bothered to pay attention to anything that the pope does. His bold moves in recent years to challenge Islamic leaders to repudiate murder and coercion in the name of Allah have elicited no support and indeed no reaction of any kind from Jerusalem.

The Olmert-Livni-Barack-Yishai government's neglect of the Vatican is regrettable, but it is par for the course for this government which has limited Israel's foreign policy to appeasing Palestinian terrorists and kowtowing to the State Department. The best that can be said for this state of affairs is that at least Israel's neglect of the Catholic Church - like its neglect of Africa, Asia, Europe, South America and Australia - is benign. In contrast, the treatment that the Vatican has received from some American Jewish leaders has been far from neglectful and far from benign.

Rather than stand with the Catholic church as Benedict moves boldly against radical Islam, American Jewish leaders led by ADL Director Abe Foxman have been attacking the church for its theological decisions. Last year, fresh from his bitter campaign against Mel Gibson's movie about Jesus, Foxman began targeting the Vatican for its decision to permit wider use of the traditional Latin Mass which includes a prayer for Jews to convert to Christianity.

While it is unpleasant for Jews to consider millions of Catholics praying for us to abandon our faith, it is unclear why what they say in their churches should interest us so long as they aren't demanding our presence at

values."

Judaism and Christianity are different religions. But they share common moral values and it is on the basis of these values that joint action can be taken and separate actions can be judged. Jews and Christians cannot judge each other on the basis of theology, only on the basis of morality.

Pope Benedict's actions clearly show him to be a friend of Israel and the Jewish people. Unfortunately, due to the grave absence of Jewish leadership in both Israel and the US today, he has little to show for it.

But any grief that Israel's neglect, and men like Foxman's unnecessary criticisms may have caused the pope are nothing compared to the insults Jewish leaders have heaped in recent months on our most prominent Protestant Christian friend. The humiliating treatment that Pastor John Hagee, the founder and national chairman of Christians United for Jews has suffered at the hands of American Jewish leaders is simply a travesty.

This week in Washington, DC, AIPAC is hosting its annual policy conference. It will be an illustrious affair. Heavy-hitters from both American political parties will be in attendance, as will scholars and activists from Israel and the US. But one name is noticeably absent from the three-day program. John Hagee - who in three years has transformed CUFI into a grassroots pro-Israel movement that dwarfs AIPAC in size - is not on the program. And this is a horrible thing.

AIPAC's decision to shun Hagee says something terrible about the state of American Jewish politics today. Quite simply, Hagee has become a victim of liberal American Jewish leaders' decision to place their leftist political preferences above their concern for Israel's survival and for the well-being of American Jewry.

Senator Barack Obama, the presumptive Democratic nominee for President, has a problem with his religious background. Until last weekend, Obama was a 20-year member of the Trinity United Baptist Church in Chicago. In recent months, his former pastor Jeremiah Wright, the man who converted him to Christianity, officiated at his wedding and baptized his daughters, has been exposed as an anti-American, anti-white and anti-Semitic political activist who preaches a black supremacist version of Christian teachings to his enthusiastic congregation. Then too, Obama's Catholic friend, and friend of Trinity United, Father Michael Pfleger, has been exposed as an anti-American, anti-white and anti-Semitic political activist who preaches a black supremacist version of Christian teaching to his enthusiastic congregation.

Obama's longstanding and deep connections to these spiritual mentors have placed him in a problematic position vis-à-vis the American electorate. To mitigate the damage, Obama's supporters have sought to counterbalance Wright with a conservative clergyman of equal weight in the Republican camp. And Hagee, with his avowedly anti-homosexual, anti-abortion views and public prominence was the chosen target.

The first Obama supporter to hone in on Hagee was Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism. Yoffie has long sought to discredit Hagee who he sees as a threat to his view that the only way to be pro-Israel is to support the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Hagee endorsed Republican John McCain for President in March. In early April, Yoffie called on McCain to reject Hagee's endorsement and he called on American Jews to reject CUFI, claiming that CUFI's unconditional support for Israel precluded its support for a Palestinian state.

In his words, "No, we cannot cooperate with Christian Zionists. What [Hagee and his allies] mean by 'support of Israel' and what we mean by 'support of Israel' are two very different things. Their vision of Israel rejects a two-state solution, rejects the possibility of a democratic Israel, and supports the permanent occupation of all Arab lands now controlled by

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Israel."

Following Yoffie's lead, Democratic activists desperate to find a Republican counterpart to Wright, focused their fire on Hagee. They attacked him for anti-homosexual remarks he has made. And they grossly distorted remarks he made on historical Christian anti-Semitism to portray him as an enemy of the Catholic church. Then too, they attacked him for a sermon he gave where he argued that the Holocaust was God's way of getting the Jews to Israel and so absurdly implied that a man who has devoted his professional life to improving Jewish-Christian relations, ending Evangelical Christian drives to convert Jews and supporting Israel is an anti-Semite.

The Democratic Jewish charge against Hagee compelled McCain to reject Hagee's endorsement, and so drove another wedge between McCain and the Republican voting Christian Right. It also successfully created an illusion of symmetry between Wright and Hagee.

This in and of itself is morally repugnant since there is no moral equivalence between Hagee and Wright. Hagee clearly loves America, doesn't have a problem with whites or blacks and loves Jews. Wright is a man defined by his hatreds. But even more insidious than Hagee's forced estrangement from McCain is the effort to have him disowned by the American Jewish community and Israel. Yoffie, together with the pro-Palestinian Jewish American lobbying group J Street, have been pressuring Jewish leaders to distance their organizations from Hagee and CUFI and to boycott CUFI's annual conference in Washington next month. Not surprisingly, Foxman answered their call by announcing that he was placing the ADL's relations with CUFI "on hold." And no doubt bowing to their pressure, AIPAC neglected to invite Hagee to its policy conference this week.

As for Israel, just as Yoffie made his initial attack on Hagee, Hagee was setting out to Israel with a thousand CUFI members on a solidarity mission. He held a rally of his supporters at the Jerusalem Conference Center. There he distributed six million dollars in contributions from CUFI members to Israeli charities and educational institutions. No doubt in response to Yoffie's pressure, the only prominent Israeli politicians who attended the event were Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu and former Likud minister and MK Uzi Landau. No government minister attended and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert sufficed with a private meeting with Hagee.

Happily, not all American Jewish leaders have agreed to toe the line. Senator Joseph Lieberman has rejected demands by Yoffie and J Street to boycott CUFI's conference in Washington. The American Jewish Committee and the Zionist Organization of America have refused to distance themselves from Hagee. Israel and American Jewry should follow their example.

These are terrible times for world Jewry. Islamic Jew-hatred is genocidal. The international Left has betrayed us. Our leaders are weak. Our friends are few and far between. If we wish to persevere in this environment we must embrace those who support us while eschewing those - even in our own ranks - who tell us that support for Israel is conditional. Now is not the time to quibble over Christian theology. Now is the time to stand united with our friends against our common enemies. (Jerusalem Post Jun 2)

Broken Engagements By Barry Rubin

Engagement doesn't always produce marriage. In the US-Iran case, for example, diplomatic engagements have been repeatedly disastrous. Yet many think the idea of engagement was just invented and never tried.

- President John Kennedy pressed Iran for democratic reforms in the early 1960s. The shah responded with his White Revolution, which horrified traditionalists, provoking them to active opposition. One of them was named Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.
- President Richard Nixon urged Iran in the early 1970s, under the Nixon Doctrine, to become a regional power, since America was overextended in Vietnam. The shah embarked on a huge arms-buying campaign and close alliance, stirring yet more opposition and fiscal strain, further contributing to unrest.
- In the late 1970s president Jimmy Carter pushed Iran to ease restrictions. The result was the Islamist revolution. Next, Carter urged the shah not to repress the uprising, which helped bring about his downfall.
- After the 1979 revolution, Carter engaged the new regime to show Khomeini that America was his friend. National security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who today advises Barack Obama, met Iranian leaders. Teheran interpreted this engagement as an effort to subvert or coopt the revolution, so Iranians seized the US embassy and took everyone there hostage.
- The Reagan administration secretly engaged Iran in the mid-1980s to help free those hostages. Result: a policy debacle and free military equipment for Iran.
- In recent years there has been a long engagement in which European states negotiated for themselves and America to get Teheran to stop its nuclear weapons drive. Iran gained four years to develop nukes; the West got

nothing.

The history of US engagement with the PLO and Syria is similar.

The Oslo era (1992-2000) was engagement as disaster, establishing a PLO regime indifferent to its people's welfare. It increased radicalism and violence, with no gain for peace. Aside from its worsened security situation, Israel's international image was badly damaged by concessions made and risks taken. America's making the PLO a client brought it no gratitude or strategic gain.

Similarly, Syria used the 1991-2000 engagement era to survive its USSR superpower sponsor's collapse while doing everything it wanted: dominating Lebanon, sponsoring terrorism and sabotaging peace. US secretaries of state visited Damascus numerous times and achieved nothing, a process that continued up to 2004. Syria first helped Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, then sponsored terrorists who disrupted Iraq and killed Americans.

There have, of course, been successful engagements - but not with Iran, Syria or the PLO. The most successful was Egypt's turnaround by Nixon and Henry Kissinger. A partial success was changing Libya's behavior.

In those two cases, American power, not compassion, achieved success. Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi and Egyptian president Anwar Sadat ("America holds 99 percent of the cards") knew they were weak and needed to stop America from hitting them hard.

Engagements, of course, have effects other than direct success. One is to buy time for someone. But for who? If one party subverts other states, builds nuclear weapons, demoralizes the other's allies and sponsors terrorism during talks while the other side... just talks, the first side clearly benefits far more.

Secondly, if one side gets the other to make concessions to prove good faith and keep talks going, that side benefits. Keeping engagement going becomes an end in itself as the weaker side uses a diplomatic version of asymmetrical warfare to make gains.

Finally, while using talks to de-escalate tensions apparently benefits everyone, matters are not so simple. By talking, a stronger side can throw away its leverage. The weaker side does not have to back down to avoid confrontation.

So engagement without pressure or threat benefits the weaker side. If the stronger side is eager to reach agreement, the weaker side has more leverage. The advantage is transferred from the strongest side to the most intransigent one. Here, Iran, Syria, Hamas and Hizbullah have the upper hand.

Sen. Obama doesn't understand these points. He favors direct presidential diplomacy with Iran, without preconditions. A normal liberal concept of foreign policy is alien to him. What he should be saying is:

"America must be strong to protect its interests, values and friends against ruthless adversaries. But if America is strong, it can also be flexible. Let us engage countries and leaders by telling them clearly our demands and goals. Once Iran understands the United States will counter its threats of genocide against Israel, involvement in terrorism against Americans, and threats to our interests, it may back down. If Iran gives up its extremism, we are ready to offer friendship. But if Iran remains extremist, we will quickly abandon engagement and never hesitate to respond appropriately."

This way, a leader shows he knows how to use both carrots and sticks.

But Obama has never said anything like this. He has no concept of toughness as a necessary element in flexibility, nor of deterrence as a precondition to conciliation. Nor does he indicate that he would be steadfast if engagement failed. He defines no US preconditions for meeting or conditions for agreement. He offers to hear Iran's grievances, but says nothing about American grievances.

Radical Islamists interpret this strategy as weakness - of which they will take full advantage.

That's why Iran, Syria and Hamas favor Obama. Thus spoke Lebanese cleric Muhammad Abu al-Qat on Hizbullah's Al-Manar television on May 10: "The American empire will very soon collapse... This won't happen as a result of war... An American Gorbachev will surface in America, and he will destroy this empire." (Translation by Memri)

Islamists and radicals want Obama because they understandably expect him to play into their hands. By the same token, more moderate Arab regimes and observers are horrified.

Obama is so scary and is accused of appeasement not because he wants to meet enemies in person, but because he doesn't want to meet them in struggle. He doesn't know how international politics works through power, threats, deterrence, self-interest and credibility. He doesn't comprehend that totalitarian ideologies cannot be moderated by apology or weakness.

Whatever you think of Sen. John McCain, he understands these basic concepts. That's why he's a centrist who can be trusted to protect American national interests. Whatever you think of Sen. Hillary Clinton, she understands these basic concepts. That's why she's a liberal who can be trusted to protect American national interests.

And that's why Obama is both a dangerously naive amateur, and a leftist posing as a liberal. (Jerusalem Post Jun 1)

Israel, Don't Undermine Beirut

By David Schenker

Developments in Lebanon are being viewed with great concern in Israel. In the aftermath of Hizbullah's recent military and ostensible political victories, many Israelis are saying that Beirut has gone the way of Gaza. Lebanon is now "Hizbullahstan" - just like Gaza, only worse.

This assessment is alarmist, defeatist, and premature. No doubt, the events of early May were a setback. The militia's blitz on Beirut was a humiliation not only for the pro-West March 14 ruling coalition, but for Washington, which could do little to protect its ally in its time of need. Hizbullah emerged strengthened from its showdown with the government. Still, the government in Beirut is not finished - yet.

Hizbullah's modest gains have come at a considerable price. By turning the "weapons of the resistance" against the Lebanese people, the Party of God undercut much of its local and regional legitimacy. Moreover, while the mediated agreement has provided Hizbullah with a "blocking third" of the cabinet, and thus the ability to veto major government decisions, this "gain" only formalized the militia's extant veto power, changing little in the status quo.

Today, in the aftermath of the Doha agreement, the future of the March 14 coalition lies in the balance. And its survival - indeed, the future disposition of Lebanon - depends at least in part on what Israel does. Israel, like its Arab neighbors, has a lot at stake on what happens in Lebanon. The struggle in Lebanon today is nothing short of a battle to shape regional trends, a fight between moderation and militancy.

While Washington has sided with the government of Lebanon against Hizbullah, it would be unseemly if not counterproductive for Israel - technically still at war with its neighbor - to publicly pick favorites in local Lebanese politics. Nevertheless, given its pro-Western stance, it's difficult to understand Israel's ambivalence toward the disposition of the Saniora government and the Cedar Revolution vis-à-vis Hizbullah.

Supporters of the Lebanese government have long claimed that Israel is actively protecting the Assad regime in Syria and, in the process, undercutting the Saniora government. The recent announcement of the resumption of Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations in Turkey - coming so closely on the heels of the Syrian-backed Hizbullah military offensive - has been yet another blow to the morale and survivability of the March 14 coalition.

In Beirut, it's widely feared that an Israeli-Syria deal would come at the expense of Lebanon. This view has merit: many current and former Israeli officials and academics make no secret of their belief that an agreement could be facilitated by recognizing a return of Syria to Lebanon and by ensuring somehow that the Assad regime be insulated from the sanctions which would accompany the regime's implication by the International Tribunal in the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafik Hariri.

Even if Israeli-Syrian talks don't come to fruition - and there is little to indicate they will considering Damascus' repeated declarations that it will not undertake a strategic reorientation from Teheran to the West nor change its relationships with Hamas and Hizbullah - peace talks with Damascus undercut those who oppose the agenda of Hizbullah and Syria in Lebanon. Negotiations alone stand to erode international support for the tribunal, one of the few real levers of pressure held by the majority. This is what the March 14 coalition fears, and of course, this is why the Syrians are so interested in talking with the Israelis now.

The ultimate nature of the government in Beirut - whether pro-West or aligned with Teheran and Syria - should be an important policy concern for the Israeli government. A Lebanon under Damascus means increased Hizbullah influence in Beirut and thousands of rockets permanently aimed at Israel. Israel should by all means make peace with its neighbors, but negotiations now prejudice the work of the Tribunal and only alleviate political and economic pressures on the Assad regime. By voluntarily taking steps to remove these pressures without extracting a single concession, Israel is effectively strengthening Damascus' hand at the negotiating table.

For Israel, peace with Syria no doubt has some allure. Given current regional dynamics, however, it is all but guaranteed that the collateral damage of these peace talks will be the March 14 coalition. If the democracy argument does not sway the Israeli government, national interests should. While the weak government in Beirut is not by any means optimal, the alternative - a Syrian and Iranian-backed Hizbullah-dominated state - is even less appealing. And when the talks with Syria eventually break down - as they undoubtedly will when the topic of strategic realignment is broached - this is what waits in the wings.

The US and Israel do not see eye to eye on Lebanon. Washington sees real value in preserving the only democratically-elected pro-west Arab Government. If Israel doesn't start to recognize the significant, but fleeting moment of March 14 soon, this fragile bulwark against Iranian hegemony in the Levant may disappear.

Although it is a bitter pill for peacemakers in the Jewish state to swallow, by trucking with Syria now, Israel risks inadvertently contributing to the eventual establishment of Hizbullahstan on its northern border.

The writer is a senior fellow and director of the Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute. From 2002 to 2006, he served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as the political affairs advisor for Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories. (Jerusalem Post Jun 2)

The Iran Difference

National Review Editorial

Given Barack Obama's tendency to speak in abstractions, it's easy to forget how different his administration would look from a John McCain presidency. But on Monday, McCain helped voters remember, by outlining some of the tough measures he would take against Iran.

Speaking to a gathering hosted by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the main U.S. pro-Israeli lobbying group, McCain vowed to seek new economic penalties against the mullahs. He favors sanctioning the Central Bank of Iran, freezing the assets of regime leaders and imposing a visa ban on them, and restricting Iran's ability to import gasoline. He also said: "We should privatize the sanctions against Iran by launching a worldwide divestment campaign" — much like the campaign against South Africa in the 1980s, in protest of its apartheid government.

These measures would likely have different degrees of efficacy. The U.S. has long imposed unilateral economic sanctions against Iran, banks included. The EU, for its part, has been more willing to deal with Iran, which in turn has done much to keep the regime afloat. But in recent days the EU has hinted at its readiness to freeze the assets and funds of Iran's state-owned Bank Mellat. It's unlikely that Europe would be equally willing to punish Iran's central bank, but, even if it is not, the U.S. has additional arrows in its quiver.

It could, for instance, invoke Section 311 of the Patriot Act — which would allow the Treasury Department to effectively freeze Iran out of the international financial system. This is the same provision that the U.S. invoked against a Macanese bank accused of laundering money for Kim Jong Il. The consequence: Banks all over the world suddenly refused to have dealings with Kim's regime, even through a proxy, for fear that sanctions would be expanded to cover them. Section 311 has been invoked seven times since the Patriot Act's passage, but never against an Iranian entity. McCain should make a point of asking why.

McCain's calls for targeted sanctions against regime leaders extend by degree the type of sanction already imposed by the U.N. Security Council over Iran's refusal to cease enriching uranium. Such targeted sanctions have the advantage of not punishing Iran's population for the sins of its rulers. This is also their disadvantage: They can do little to foment popular revolt against the regime (something that, in Iran's case, may require very little fomenting indeed — anti-regime protests are regular, and occasionally shut down Tehran and other large cities). But we should certainly welcome any effort to make life harder for officials of the Iranian government.

As for preventing Iran's gasoline imports, that is the McCain proposal with the sharpest teeth. Iran is such an economic basket case that it must import some 25 percent of its refined gasoline, despite sitting atop one of the biggest crude-oil reserves in the world. The regime spends about \$5 billion per year doing so (which of course invites the question: Why does it feel that building nuclear reactors is more important than building refineries?). Blocking its gasoline imports would cripple the country, provoke widespread unrest, and greatly ratchet up pressure on the regime.

Of course, sanctions on gasoline imports will have teeth only if they are enforced. In practice, this might well require blockading the Persian Gulf, by which most of Iran's gasoline is imported. (Iran receives a share of its gas via mainland pipelines, but this share is small.) A blockade would likely be regarded by the mullahs as an act of war, and could provoke just that. As such, it should be placed among the options of last resort. McCain did not call for a blockade, but he is right to put the question of gasoline imports on the table.

He is right to do so because, in this case, effective diplomacy is tough diplomacy. We can all agree that it is best to counter the Iranian threat without resorting to force of arms, if lesser measures can be effective. What McCain's likely general-election opponent seems not to understand is that arms become less necessary to the degree that these lesser measures are invoked, and the threats associated with them believed. Barack Obama has said he favors unconditional negotiations with Iran's rulers. These same rulers have said they will not change their plans for us, and their actions show they mean it. (Specifically: They charge full speed ahead on uranium enrichment, despite a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding that they stop.) What could Obama the Diplomat say to change their minds, if he is not willing to make clear that they will be punished for defiance?

The threat posed by Iran is severe and metastasizing. We have every reason to believe the regime seeks nuclear weapons. We know it has a history of sponsoring and executing terrorist acts. (Speaking of which, didn't Barack Obama vote against designating its Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist entity?) We see plainly that negotiation without penalty has not worked: For

years the European Union pursued this tack, even as Iran grew closer to having the capacity to manufacture a nuclear weapon. What John McCain offers is diplomacy backed up by credible threats. What Barack Obama offers is appeasement at worst and naïveté at best. It will be good for John McCain, good for America, and good for the world if McCain continues to explain the difference. (National Review Jun 3)

Election Echoes In Israel By Hillel Halkin

It's been a fast clip of a week in Israel. Although it was already clear a week ago that Prime Minister Olmert's days were numbered, it was uncertain when or how the ax would fall. Would Mr. Olmert resign or suspend himself from office of his own volition? Be brought down by a revolt within his Kadima party? Lose his coalition in the Knesset and be forced to agree to new elections? And if the latter, when would these elections take place?

A week later, the picture has clarified. There will be elections in the autumn, most probably in November. Mr. Olmert will not run in them and Kadima will have another leader, most likely Foreign Minister Livni, who will be chosen in a primary vote this summer to run against the Labor Party's Ehud Barak and the Likud Party's Benjamin Netanyahu.

Whether Mr. Olmert resigns immediately in favor of this vote's winner, or stays in office until election day, will probably depend on whether a criminal indictment is served against him or the charges of corruption that have brought about his downfall remain in the realm of moral turpitude.

In either case, this would mean that Israel and America will both be holding elections in the same month, with America's scheduled for November 6 and Israel's to be determined by the Knesset. The only time I can remember this happening in the past was in 1988, when Yitzhak Shamir edged out Shimon Peres on November 2 and George Bush Sr. beat Michael Dukakis on November 8. Despite the unique nature of the America-Israel relationship, it is unlikely that any American voter in 1988 was influenced by what happened six days earlier in Israel. But if this autumn America's elections come first, it is conceivable that some of Israel's voters will be influenced by them. The question is how.

Suppose, for instance, that the winner on November 6 is Barack Obama. Will Israel's citizens then tend more to vote for Ms. Livni or Mr. Barak, knowing that, being less hard-line on the substance of a peace settlement with the Palestinians and the Syrians, they will get along better with a Democratic president who has made his preference for negotiation over confrontation clear? Or will some of them, rather, swing to Mr. Netanyahu in the belief that a tough prime minister of Israel is needed to stand up to an American president who may put pressure on Israel to make the kinds of concessions that President Bush never asked it to make?

The last time a Democrat was in the White House, Bill Clinton and his Middle East negotiating aides had poor relations with Mr. Netanyahu when he was Israel's prime minister between 1996 and 1998. In part, Mr. Netanyahu simply rubbed them the wrong way personally. More consequentially, though, they found him unyielding on issues that - so they exasperatedly felt - could have been resolved with more a bit more give on Israel's side.

Mr. Obama, who does not appear to have Mr. Clinton's viscerally warm feelings toward Israel, is likely to find Mr. Netanyahu even more frustrating. What difference, if any, will this make to Israel's voters?

Should John McCain win the presidency, on the other hand, all this would be reversed. Perhaps Israel's citizens, feeling confident that Mr. McCain will not seek to twist Israel's arm, would be likely to vote for more flexible leaders of their own.

Or perhaps, in the belief that President McCain and Prime Minister Netanyahu would have a better relationship than Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Obama, they would feel freer to cast their ballots for the Likud Party.

It is on the issue of Iran, however, that the question of who is in the White House could be most momentous for Israel's voters. Here, after all, is where the difference between an Obama and a McCain presidency might be most dramatic. Mr. McCain has repeatedly declared that, as president, he would not allow Iran to have nuclear weapons - and as a former Air Force pilot who has supported the war in Iraq and is in favor of a strong American military posture, he might order an air strike against Iran if all other efforts to keep it from going nuclear were to fail. From everything that we know about Mr. Obama, there is close to zero possibility of this happening with him in office.

Yet here, too, it is far from obvious how this would affect the decisions of Israel's citizens. Of the three prime minister candidates, Mr. Netanyahu most likely would be to risk Israel's hitting Iran on its own if it were clear that America had no intention of doing so, with all the grave consequences - including a rift with Washington - that this might entail. Is this a consideration that would move more citizens of Israel to vote for him or against him were Mr. Obama to win on November 6?

And again: If Mr. McCain wins, are there citizens of Israel who would then vote for Ms. Livni, the least likely leader of Israel to attack Iran unilaterally,

in the belief that Mr. McCain could be counted on to act in Israel's behalf?

Unless such questions are asked by professional pollsters, we will not know the answers to any of them. Quite possibly, the answers would show that the effect of America's elections on Israel's would be negligible and would change the minds of few citizens of Israel.

What polls are not needed to show is that no persons outside of America will be following the American election campaign more intently than the citizens of Israel. It could hardly be otherwise, for no other people will be more affected by its outcome. (NY Sun Jun3)

Another Defeat By Moshe Arens

It may not be only Ehud Olmert who is so busy worrying about his legal problems that he does not have enough time to address Israel's urgent security issues. Many Israeli citizens, except of course residents of the South, are probably also completely engrossed in studying the details of the current investigations and have little time left to worry about what really needs to be worried about - the ongoing war in the South. One can only hope that the Israel Defense Forces and its commander, Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi, are continuing to take seriously the awesome responsibility with which they are charged - assuring the safety of the people of Israel.

Maybe our chief of staff needs to be reminded of what he said shortly after he assumed his present position: "In the next war, there will be no doubt about who won." This was said after his predecessor, Dan Halutz, declared after the Second Lebanon War that "the IDF won on points," though it was clear that the IDF had actually been defeated in that war by a few thousand Hezbollah fighters. Halutz did not want to recognize the obvious: that when the largest and strongest army in the Middle East is confronted by a mere few thousand terrorists, yet finds itself incapable of protecting the civilian population and reaches a standoff with the terrorists, it is the terrorists who have won the war. That is the terrorists' perception, and that is the world's perception. And perception nowadays is reality. It was Halutz's inability to comprehend this that led to the faulty management of the Second Lebanon War.

After agreeing to a cease-fire with Hezbollah that allowed it to declare victory, rearm and become the dominant power in Lebanon, Israel had a second chance in the war against terrorism: the war in the South against Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists, who, like Hezbollah in the North, are backed by Iran. Again, Israel's civilian population was attacked by short-range rockets. These attacks have now lasted for many months and are reaching deeper and deeper into Israel.

As during the Second Lebanon War, the IDF tried futilely to stop these attacks via air power. But just as it did then, it became obvious that this mission had to be carried out by ground troops. And having learned nothing from past experience, Israel's government refused to order ground troops into the Gaza Strip. Residents of the South continue to pay the price.

Should this confrontation also end in a standoff, with Israel agreeing to a cease-fire with the terrorists, it would be another defeat for the IDF. Not a "victory on points," and not even a victory on points for the terrorists, but a defeat of the IDF by the terrorists. A defeat, pure and simple. That is how it is going to be seen by all concerned. Israel will be seen admitting that it is incapable of defending its territory and assuring the safety of its civilian population.

This is no minor matter. To those who wonder how Israel has been able to survive for many years in the hostile environment of the Middle East, the answer is that it has been able, time and again, to defeat the enemies that have risen up against it. The peace agreement with Egypt that Israel eventually reached was the direct result of the IDF's victories on the battlefield. The peace agreement with Jordan was based on Jordan's conviction that Israel could not be defeated on the battlefield.

Thus if Israel's ability to defend itself should be called into question, this would not only spell the end of any chance to widen the circle of peace, but would also increase the probability of another full-scale war. That is what hangs in the balance in the confrontation with the terrorists in the South. They know - and we must relearn, if we have forgotten - that the life expectancy of a Middle Eastern country that shows it cannot defend itself is likely to be very short.

That is the challenge that faces the IDF and its commander today. Only a decisive victory in the war against the terrorists in the South will assure Israel's safety. A cease-fire will be a victory for the terrorists and a defeat for the IDF.

Of course, it is the government, even in its present state, that will have to make the decision. But it is the chief of staff who must tell the government that he is capable of scoring a victory that will leave no doubt over who won this war. (Haaretz Jun 4)
