



Jerusalem 7:08 Toronto 8:44

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

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ali Khamenei that he is incapable of responding to actual events, or even of taking them into account for anything other than fleeting media appearances meant to neutralize his critics.

Commentary...

Ideologue-in-Chief By Caroline Glick

For a brief moment it seemed that US President Barack Obama was moved by the recent events in Iran. On Friday, he issued his harshest statement yet on the mullocracy's barbaric clampdown against its brave citizens who dared to demand freedom in the aftermath of June 12's stolen presidential elections. Speaking of the protesters Obama said, "Their bravery in the face of brutality is a testament to their enduring pursuit of justice. The violence perpetrated against them is outrageous. In spite of the government's efforts to keep the world from bearing witness to that violence, we see it and we condemn it."

While some noted the oddity of Obama's attribution of the protesters' struggle to the "pursuit of justice," rather than the pursuit of freedom - which is what they are actually fighting for - most Iran watchers in Washington and beyond were satisfied with his statement.

Alas, it was a false alarm. On Sunday Obama dispatched his surrogates - presidential adviser David Axelrod and UN Ambassador Susan Rice - to the morning talk shows to make clear that he has not allowed mere events to influence his policies. After paying lip service to the Iranian dissidents, Rice and Axelrod quickly cut to the chase. The Obama administration does not care about the Iranian people or their struggle with the theocratic totalitarians who repress them. Whether Iran is an Islamic revolutionary state dedicated to the overthrow of the world order or a liberal democracy dedicated to strengthening it, is none of the administration's business.

Obama's emissaries wouldn't even admit that after stealing the election and killing hundreds of its own citizens, the regime is illegitimate. As Rice put it, "Legitimacy obviously is in the eyes of the people. And obviously the government's legitimacy has been called into question by the protests in the streets. But that's not the critical issue in terms of our dealings with Iran." No, whether an America-hating regime is legitimate or not is completely insignificant to the White House. All the Obama administration wants to do is go back to its plan to appease the mullahs into reaching an agreement about their nuclear aspirations. And for some yet-to-be-explained reason, Obama and his associates believe they can make this regime -- which as recently as Friday called for the mass murder of its own citizens, and as recently as Saturday blamed the US for the Iranian people's decision to rise up against the mullahs -- reach such an agreement.

In staking out a seemingly hard-nosed, unsentimental position on Iran, Obama and his advisers would have us believe that unlike their predecessors, they are foreign policy "realists." Unlike Jimmy Carter, who supported the America-hating mullahs against the America-supporting shah 30 years ago in the name of his moralistic post-Vietnam War aversion to American exceptionalism, Obama supports the America-hating mullahs against the America-supporting freedom protesters because all he cares about are "real" American interests.

So too, unlike George W. Bush, who openly supported Iran's pro-American democratic dissidents against the mullahs due to his belief that the advance of freedom in Iran and throughout the world promoted US national interests, Obama supports the anti-American mullahs who butcher these dissidents in the streets and abduct and imprison them by the thousands due to his "hard-nosed" belief that doing so will pave the way for a meeting of the minds with their oppressors.

Yet Obama's policy is anything but realistic. By refusing to support the dissidents, he is not demonstrating that he is a realist. He is showing that he is immune to reality. He is so committed to appeasing the likes of

Rice and Axelrod demonstrated the administration's determination to eschew reality when they proclaimed that Ahmadinejad's "reelection" is immaterial. As they see it, appeasement isn't dead since it is Khamenei - whom they differentially refer to as "the supreme leader" - who sets Iran's foreign policy.

While Khamenei is inarguably the decision maker on foreign policy, his behavior since June 12 has shown that he is no moderate. Indeed, as his post-election Friday "sermon" 10 days ago demonstrated, he is a paranoid, delusional America-bashing tyrant. In that speech he called Americans "morons" and accused them of being the worst human-rights violators in the world, in part because of the Clinton administration's raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas in 1993.

Perhaps what is most significant about Obama's decision to side with anti-American tyrants against pro-American democrats in Iran is that it is utterly consistent with his policies throughout the world. From Latin America to Asia to the Middle East and beyond, after six months of the Obama administration it is clear that in its pursuit of good ties with America's adversaries at the expense of America's allies, it will not allow actual events to influence its "hard-nosed" judgments.

Take the administration's response to the Honduran military coup on Sunday. While the term "military coup" has a lousy ring to it, the Honduran military ejected president Manuel Zelaya from office after he ignored a Supreme Court ruling backed by the Honduran Congress which barred him from holding a referendum this week that would have empowered him to endanger democracy.

Taking a page out of his mentor Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chavez's playbook, Zelaya acted in contempt of his country's democratic institutions to move forward with his plan to empower himself to serve another term in office. To push forward with his illegal goal, Zelaya fired the army's chief of staff. And so, in an apparent bid to prevent Honduras from going the way of Daniel Ortega's Nicaragua and becoming yet another anti-American Venezuelan satellite, the military - backed by Congress and the Supreme Court - ejected Zelaya from office.

And how did Obama respond? By seemingly siding with Zelaya against the democratic forces in Honduras who are fighting him. Obama said in a written statement: "I am deeply concerned by reports coming out of Honduras regarding the detention and expulsion of president Mel Zelaya." His apparent decision to side with an anti-American would-be dictator is unfortunately par for the course. As South and Central America come increasingly under the control of far-left America-hating dictators, as in Iran, Obama and his team have abandoned democratic dissidents in the hope of currying favor with anti-American thugs. As Mary Anastasia O'Grady has documented in The Wall Street Journal, Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have refused to say a word about democracy promotion in Latin America.

Rather than speak of liberties and freedoms, Clinton and Obama have waxed poetic about social justice and diminishing the gaps between rich and poor. In a recent interview with the El Salvadoran media, Clinton said, "Some might say President Obama is left-of-center. And of course that means we are going to work well with countries that share our commitment to improving and enhancing the human potential."

But not, apparently, enhancing human freedoms.

From Iran to Venezuela to Cuba, from Myanmar to North Korea to China, from Sudan to Afghanistan to Iraq to Russia to Syria to Saudi Arabia, the Obama administration has systematically taken human rights and democracy promotion off America's agenda. In their place, it has advocated "improving America's image," multilateralism and a moral relativism that either sees no distinction between dictators and their

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victims or deems the distinctions immaterial to the advancement of US interests.

While Obama's supporters champion his "realist" policies as a welcome departure from the "cowboy diplomacy" of the Bush years, the fact of the matter is that in country after country, Obama's supposedly pragmatic and non-ideological policy has either already failed - as it has in North Korea - or is in the process of failing. The only place where Obama may soon be able to point to a success is in his policy of coercing Israel to adopt his anti-Semitic demand to bar Jews from building homes in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. According to media reports, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has authorized Defense Minister Ehud Barak to offer to freeze all settlement construction for three months during his visit to Washington this week.

Of course, in the event that Obama has achieved his immediate goal of forcing Netanyahu to his knees, its accomplishment will hinder rather than advance his wider goal of achieving peace between Israel and its neighbors. Watching Obama strong-arm the US's closest ally in the region, the Palestinians and the neighboring Arab states have become convinced that there is no reason to make peace with the Jews. After all, Obama is demonstrating that he will deliver Israel without their having to so much as wink in the direction of peaceful coexistence.

So if Obama's foreign policy has already failed or is in the process of failing throughout the world, why is he refusing to reassess it? Why, with blood running through the streets of Iran, is he still interested in appeasing the mullahs? Why, with Venezuela threatening to invade Honduras for Zelaya, is he siding with Zelaya against Honduran democrats? Why, with the Palestinians refusing to accept the Jewish people's right to self-determination, is he seeking to expel some 500,000 Jews from their homes in the interest of appeasing the Palestinians? Why, with North Korea threatening to attack the US with ballistic missiles, is he refusing to order the USS John McCain to interdict the suspected North Korean missile ship it has been trailing for the past two weeks? Why, when the Sudanese government continues to sponsor the murder of Darfuris, is the administration claiming that the genocide in Darfur has ended?

The only reasonable answer to all of these questions is that far from being non-ideological, Obama's foreign policy is the most ideologically driven since Carter's tenure in office. If when Obama came into office there was a question about whether he was a foreign policy pragmatist or an ideologue, his behavior in his first six months in office has dispelled all doubt. Obama is moved by a radical, anti-American ideology that motivates him to dismiss the importance of democracy and side with anti-American dictators against US allies. For his efforts, although he is causing the US to fail to secure its aims as he himself has defined them in arena after arena, he is successfully securing the support of the most radical, extreme leftist factions in American politics.

Like Carter before him, Obama may succeed for a time in evading public scrutiny for his foreign-policy failures because the public will be too concerned with his domestic failures to notice them. But in the end, his slavish devotion to his radical ideological agenda will ensure that his failures reach a critical mass.

And then they will sink him. (Jerusalem Post Jun 29)

The World According To Fayad By Barry Rubin

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's big policy speech received global attention. Not so that of his Palestinian Authority counterpart, Salaam Fayad, whose June 22 presentation deserves careful analysis.

Fayad is prime minister for one reason only: to please Western governments and financial donors. Lacking political skill, ideological influence or a strong support base, he does keep the money flowing since he's relatively honest, moderate and professional on economic issues.

But his own people don't listen to him. Most PA politicians want him out; international pressure keeps him in. So here's the Fayad paradox: If he really represented PA stances and thinking, there'd be some hope for peace. Since he's so out of tune with his colleagues, though, Fayad sounds sharply different from them. And even he's highly restricted by what's permissible in PA politics, limits which ensure the PA's failure, absence of peace and nonexistence of a Palestinian state.

His first problem is that Hamas controls the Gaza Strip and seeks the PA's overthrow in the West Bank. Most Fatah and PA leaders prefer peace with Hamas rather than Israel. Make no mistake: This is a mutually

exclusive choice. If Hamas merged with the PA, the result would be far too radical to negotiate a solution and would eventually be dominated by Teheran-allied radical Islamism.

Moreover, to keep the door open for such conciliation, the PA can't come closer to making a deal with Israel. But that's not all. In veiled - an appropriate word here - language, Fayad says Palestinians must avoid "politicizing" the Gaza issue that would enable sanctions to continue against the Hamas regime there.

By not opposing the suicide bombers, Fayad follows suicidal policies. By fighting any isolation or sanctions on Hamas, the PA ensures that Hamas tightens its hold on the Gaza Strip. By supporting Hamas's ability to attack Israel without costs, the PA ensures its Islamist rival appears the more effective fighter.

Second, while not directly endorsing terrorism and violence - in contrast to most of his colleagues and the PA's own institutions - Fayad argues that Israel holding any Palestinian prisoners in jail is "a violation of international law." In other words, if a Palestinian attacks or murders Israelis, Israel has no right to imprison him. What option does it have? Only to set them free to try again. Here, too, Fayad supports and glorifies cost-free terrorism.

Third, Fayad argues that it's not the PA's job to convince Israel by its good behavior or to negotiate bilaterally on the basis of mutual concessions and compromises. Instead, as other PA leaders have openly stated recently, the PA's strategy is to get the world to pressure Israel to give it everything it wants.

While presenting his speech partly as a response to Netanyahu, Fayad confronts none of his points, merely dismissing his position as vague, which it certainly wasn't. (Ironically, in contrast to most Western observers, Fayad acknowledges that Netanyahu endorsed a two-state solution six years ago.) It's Fayad who is vague - Netanyahu gives a list of specific conditions; Fayad does nothing of the kind. In fact, he does something peculiar. According to him, Netanyahu is presenting an "Israeli narrative" about the conflict, while Palestinians say they have their own "narrative" - one which Fayad says he won't talk about. Why is he vague and not presenting his own case? Because he cannot do so. The narrative as laid out by Netanyahu is clear: Jews want and merit a state; the conflict is due to an Arab refusal to accept that state's existence. This does not prevent a two-state solution, one state for each people.

The Palestinian narrative, to this day, is that Jews have no such right to a state and that all the land is rightly Palestinian, Arab and (for the most part) Muslim. This narrative does prevent a two-state solution. That is what Fayad cannot admit.

He does claim that Palestinians' "main aspiration" is to have their own homeland, which he promises will live in peace, cooperation and respect with its neighbor. But he cannot say it will resettle all Palestinian refugees within its borders, won't bring in foreign troops, will end the conflict permanently or will provide security guarantees. Fayad might prefer such an outcome, but that's not the Palestinian position.

Fayad says the PA has done a good job and that "the citizens sense this progress." Why, then, is the PA afraid to hold elections, even in the West Bank? It is no secret that the PA isn't popular and fears Hamas's appeal. Fayad speaks of building a strong economy, dealing with poverty and developing social services, yet gives no sense of how this might be done. Even given massive international subsidies, the PA's management remains poor, riddled with corruption and incompetence. Fayad can do nothing to reform it since the political elite isn't with him and he has no power over the warlords and their gunmen, who are often the real powers in the West Bank.

Finally, he predicts a Palestinian state within two years. Yet he has no way to make this happen except to prove that the real reason the peace process hasn't succeeded is the misconception "that it is always possible to exert pressure on the weaker side in the conflict, as if there is no limit to the concessions that it could offer." In other words, the reason why peace has not been achieved is because the PA had to make all the concessions.

The truth, of course, is the exact opposite. Israel withdrew from most of the territory, allowed 200,000 Palestinians to come in, cooperated in the establishment of security forces, agreed to large-scale subsidies for the PA and so on.

And what concession did the Palestinians make? They said to international audiences - though not in their own media, mosques, schools or internal statements - that they accepted Israel's existence and

sometimes, but far from always, stopped some terrorist attacks - when it suited them.

Doesn't Fayad see the irony in his words? He views Israel as the weaker side in relation to the West and thinks those other countries will force it to make concessions without limit.

By feeding the PA's false belief that the West will pressure Israel into giving it a state in the borders it wants, without concessions, restrictions or even implementation of past promises, the US and European governments are doing a very effective job in sabotaging any possibility for peace.

(Jerusalem Post Jun 28)

In Defense of 'Settlements' By Yisrael Medad

No one, including a president of the United States of America, can presume to tell me, a Jew, that I cannot live in the area of my national homeland. That's one of the main reasons my wife and I chose in 1981 to move to Shiloh, a so-called settlement less than 30 miles north of Jerusalem. After Shiloh was founded in 1978, then-President Carter demanded of Prime Minister Menachem Begin that the village of eight families be removed. Carter, from his first meeting with Begin, pressed him to "freeze" the activity of Jews rebuilding a presence in their historic home. As his former information aide, Shmuel Katz, related, Begin said: "You, Mr. President, have in the United States a number of places with names like Bethlehem, Shiloh and Hebron, and you haven't the right to tell prospective residents in those places that they are forbidden to live there. Just like you, I have no such right in my country. Every Jew is entitled to reside wherever he pleases."

We now fast-forward to President Obama, who declared on June 15 in remarks at a news conference with Italy's prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, that Jewish communities beyond the Green Line "in past agreements have been categorized as illegal."

I believe the president has been misled. There can be nothing illegal about a Jew living where Judaism was born. To suggest that residency be permitted or prohibited based on race, religion or ethnic background is dangerously close to employing racist terminology. Suppose someone suggested that Palestinian villages and towns in pre-1967 Israel were to be called "settlements" and that, to achieve a true peace, Arabs should be removed from their homes. Of course, separation or transfer of Arabs is intolerable, but why is it quite acceptable to demand that Jews be ethnically cleansed from the area? Do not Jews belong in Judea and Samaria as much as Palestinians who stayed in the state of Israel?

Some have questioned why Jews should be allowed to resettle areas in which they didn't live in the years preceding the 1967 war, areas that were almost empty of Jews before 1948 as well. But why didn't Jews live in the area at that time? Quite simple: They had been the victims of a three-decades-long ethnic cleansing project that started in 1920, when an Arab attack wiped out a small Jewish farm at Tel Hai in Upper Galilee and was followed by attacks in Jerusalem and, in 1921, in Jaffa and Jerusalem.

In 1929, Hebron's centuries-old Jewish population was expelled as a result of an Arab pogrom that killed almost 70 Jews. Jews that year removed themselves from Gaza, Nablus and Jenin. The return of my family to Shiloh -- and of other Jews to more than 150 other communities over the Green Line since 1967 -- is not solely a throwback to claimed biblical rights. Nor is it solely to assert our right to return to areas that were Jewish-populated in the 20th century until Arab violence drove them away. We have returned under a clear fulfillment of international law. There can be no doubt as to the legality of the act of my residency in Shiloh.

I am a revenant -- one who has returned after a long absence to ancestral lands. The Supreme Council of the League of Nations adopted principles following the 1920 San Remo Conference aimed at bringing about the "reconstitution" of a Jewish National Home. Article 6 of those principles reads: "The administration of Palestine ... shall encourage ... close settlement by Jews on the land, including state lands and waste lands." That "land" was originally delineated to include all of what is today Jordan as well as all the territory west of the Jordan River.

In 1923, Britain created a new political entity, Transjordan, and suspended the right of Jews to live east of the Jordan River. But the region in which I now live was intended to be part of the Jewish National Home. Then, in a historical irony, a Saudi Arabian refugee, Abdallah, fleeing the Wahabis, was afforded the opportunity to establish an Arab kingdom where none had existed previously -- only Jews. As a result, in an area where

prophets and priests fashioned the most humanist and moral religion and culture on Earth, Jews are now termed "illegals."

Many people insist that settlements are illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention. But that convention does not apply to Israel's presence in Judea and Samaria and the Gaza district. Its second clause makes it clear that it deals with the occupation of "the territory of a high contracting party." Judea and Samaria and Gaza, which Israel gained control of in 1967, were not territories of a "high contracting party." Jewish historical rights that the mandate had recognized were not canceled, and no new sovereign ever took over in Judea and Samaria or in Gaza.

Obama has made his objections to Israeli settlements known. But other U.S. presidents have disagreed. President Reagan's administration issued a declaration that Israeli settlements were not illegal. Support for that position came from Judge Stephen M. Schwebel, former president of the International Court of Justice, who determined that Israel's presence in Judea and Samaria did not constitute "occupation." It also came from a leading member of Reagan's administration, the former dean of the Yale Law School and former undersecretary of State, Eugene Rostow, who asserted that "Israel has a stronger claim to the West Bank than any other nation or would-be nation [and] the same legal right to settle the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem as it has to settle Haifa or West Jerusalem."

Any suggestions, then, of "freezing" and halting "natural growth" are themselves not only illegal but quite immoral. (LA Times Jun 28)

In The Footsteps Of The Mufti By David Wilder

A few days ago I escorted a lovely woman originally from Guyana around Hebron. A writer, speaker and diplomat, she seemed very aware of the events taking place throughout the world and in Israel.

But one thing perturbed her: Why were people like us - Hebron residents, and others throughout Judea and Samaria - seemingly persecuted by our own people? My explanation was very simple.

"Understand, there are people who don't want us here because they believe we are living in, and occupying, an 'Arab' city, and are 'obstacles to peace.' These same people are convinced that we will sooner or later be expelled from Hebron and other communities in Judea and Samaria. However, it's not easy to decree expulsion. Such actions are quite harsh, and not easy to implement. Therefore it is necessary to prepare the public at large psychologically for such a possibility.

"The best way to do so is to vilify the future victims of expulsion, creating an atmosphere whereby it seems that 'they deserve what they get.' In other words, an attempt is being made to delegitimize us, depicting us as 'enemies of peace,' and as such, 'opponents of the state.' That being accomplished, it is much easier to throw us out of our homes, no questions asked, no holds barred.

"An example of such deception is the most common word used to describe people living in Judea and Samaria, as well as the Jordan Valley and the Golan Heights. We are all lumped together in the category of 'settler.' Should I move to Tel Aviv, the moment my official identity card is stamped by the Interior Ministry, I am a 'resident' of Tel Aviv even if I've only lived there for a day. However, even after having lived in Hebron for 28 years, I'm still labeled a settler - a word with negative connotations today, symbolizing 'colonization' or in the words of others, 'occupation.' Settlers equals occupiers equals evil."

As world pressure on Israel seems to be mounting, originating in Washington and running through Paris, Madrid, London and most other capitals, an even more disturbing element of delegitimization seems to be emerging. That is, the comparison of settlers with terrorists.

A New York Times article by Ethan Bronner on June 6 overtly compares the Israeli Right to Hamas terrorists. Bronner wrote: "There are striking parallels between the hard-core opponents of a peace deal on each side." Quoting Yossi Alpher, he added: "Look at how settlers go to wealthy Jews and evangelical Christians to raise money, and how Hamas taps into a huge reservoir of Islamist money."

This, of course, ignores the fact that Hamas's stated goal is the destruction of the State of Israel, and toward that aim it has participated in murdering thousands of Jews in cold-blooded terror attacks and has launched thousands of rockets into Israeli cities. It's implied that the "Jewish Hamas" has yet to reach such stages of bloodshed and violence.

A series of articles written by Dina Kraft for JTA is titled "Special Report: Jewish Extremists." One article, headlined "Israel wrestles with settler challenge" depicts settlers as rampaging, radical and lawless. The article quotes attorney Michael Sfard, who represents the most left-wing groups in Israel but does not speak with anyone from Human Rights in Yesha, which represents a different point of view. In a second article called "The view from a West Bank hilltop," Kraft, writes about residents of such communities. "Critics, including some voices within the mainstream settler movement, say they pose a violent and dangerous threat to the future of Israeli democracy." Of course, this is said without quoting anyone by name. The author also refrains from speaking to anyone who has anything positive to say about hilltop youth or their communities.

Two recent articles point in the same direction. Writing in Haaretz, Yair Sheleg seemingly rejects the comparison between Hamas and the Jewish Right, but readily accepts that there is Jewish terror: "I do not intend this as a justification of settler terror... It is not enough to fight terror; it is also necessary to drain the swamp in which it breeds." His solution is to leave Jews in Judea and Samaria following an Israeli withdrawal. "If it is possible to enable Palestinian sovereignty without uprooting 200,000 Jews from their homes, this would be the most just and moral solution of all. There is also a practical advantage: If the settlers do not accept the offer, the justice of evacuating them will increase." Sheleg conveniently forgets one significant point, that being the security of the Jews "morally left behind." The article is aptly titled, "Leave the settlers there."

Writing in The Jerusalem Post, Larry Derfner, who offers a similar answer, did not forget this aspect of the issue: "I don't think there would be a wholesale slaughter of settlers in a newly independent Palestine, because I don't think any Palestinian leadership that made peace with Israel would want to enter the international community with such a thing on its head. But I do think there would be individual acts of revenge against settlers... and if a few nut cases, a few modern-day Masada types, want to die sanctifying God's name or something, I'm sorry - let them."

Next month will mark the 80th anniversary of the 1929 riots and massacres which left hundreds of Jews dead, wounded and maimed. The worst of these riots was in Hebron, where 67 were killed, 70 injured, and the survivors expelled by the then-ruling British.

The 1929 massacre was the direct result of hateful incitement spewed out by the Mufti Haj Amin el-Husseini against the Jews living in pre-state Israel. The day before the riots began, on Thursday, August 22, four Jews belonging to the Hagana, including Rahel Yanait, future wife of Israel's second president Izhak Ben-Zvi, visited Hebron. Warning the city's Jewish leadership of impending violence, they offered to leave weapons for self-defense. The weapons were refused because Hebron's Jews believed their Arab neighbors would protect them. That naivety led to the annihilation of a Jewish community that had existed for thousands of years.

At present, the major source of incitement is not entirely clear. On the one hand, US President Barack Obama and the Europeans maintain exceedingly clear expectations; a total building freeze is only the first step. Following that, the demands to empty Judea and Samaria will certainly follow. That is no surprise. What is much more troubling and problematic is the systematic effort from within Israel to demonize our own people, even to the point that Jews do not really care if other Jews live or die.

Some months ago I met a man in Hebron who identified himself as a journalist for a publication called Yisrael Hayom. The bottom line of our conversation was his concluding remark: "I think a good settler is a dead settler." Sheleg, Derfner, Kraft and others seem to be walking in the footsteps of the mufti, whose vile agitation led to the 1929 atrocities. Is this really the road Israel is traveling 80 years later? (Jerusalem Post Jul 1)

The writer is spokesman for the Jewish community of Hebron.

Israeli Take on Obama's Policies By Prof. Ira Sharkansky

Allow me to ride my horse somewhat further along the path of criticizing the Obama administration's campaign to stop all construction in Jewish settlements in the West Bank, including some neighborhoods that have been part of Jerusalem for 40 years. Recall that I do not claim that Barack Obama is a Muslim, some other kind of demon, or beholden to the Palestinians and other Arabs.

However, I wonder at an American president who says that he wants to engage with Iran, Palestine, and other Arab authorities, and is dictating the small details of policy that he insists that Israel adopt.

The absurdity is stark in the presence of Israel's democracy, with a high level of education and political interest among its citizens along with an active and critical media, in contrast with authoritarian governments, controlled media, and low levels of education in Muslim countries.

Obama is dictating to the democrats and engaging with dictators and religious fanatics. Israelis know their country's problems at least as well as Americans. They are more familiar with their country's problems of security than Americans are familiar with their own problems of security, and infinitely better informed about Israel's problems of security than are Americans. Jewish education in security begins with concerns inherited along with family memories of persecution, along with the present realities of living in a small country that has been at war at least five times in its 60 year history, and maybe eight times, depending on what one counts as a war. Most Israeli adults have served in the military, with numerous men active in the reserves for 30 years. Their parents served, and much of the population over the age of 50 has children in the military. Israelis know the pressures and the imperfections of national defense. Endless discussions on radio, television and in the press keep them abreast of political maneuverings by officials of Israel and neighboring countries. Neither the perspectives of the military nor the government are anything close to monolithic. Israel's Jews debate military and political options, and are better equipped than anyone else to decide what is best for them.

The men and women who make policy for Israel have not sprung overnight or even in a few years from business, the universities, or local government. The story of Benjamin Netanyahu is not unusual among those at the pinnacle of government. He began his government career in 1982, was Ambassador to the United Nations 1984-88, elected to the Knesset in 1988, served as head of several ministries and an earlier term as prime minister. One does not have to admire his style of speaking or his body language to recognize that he has considerable experience, and currently has assembled a government supported by a substantial majority of the population. One can be suspicious about claims of a political mandate to follow one policy or another, insofar as voters choose their candidates or party for a variety of reasons. Yet it is hard to escape the conclusion that the Israeli electorate supports a government that is reluctant to move toward recognizing a Palestinian state or stop all construction in the settlements or Jerusalem's neighborhoods. Among the elements producing those postures are the intifada that began in 2000, seven years of rocket attacks from Gaza, and the widely perceived weakness, stubbornness, and unreliability of the Palestinians responsible for the West Bank.

Against this, Barack Obama's commitment to engage personally in the Middle East, and his pressuring Israel to halt all construction over the 1967 borders, appears naive in the extreme. He may be brilliant, but there is much that he does not appear to know, or to recognize. Likewise for his military and political advisers. Some of them may have learned Arabic and spent time in the Middle East, but they cannot compete with the street smarts of Israelis who have lived all their lives close to their neighbors, and who hear the comments of Arab leaders on a daily basis.

We can disagree about what is best for Israel. Israelis themselves disagree. My point is that Israelis are well enough informed to ponder the alternatives and decide for themselves how to deal with their challenges.

Among those challenges are the demands coming from American and European governments. (Those from other regions do not count for much.) No matter how ill informed and mistaken those demands appear to be, Israeli officials are careful not to ignore them.

Long ago the Jews learned how to deal with powerful others. Lesson #1 is not to annoy them.

What we hear in public are the efforts of Israel's prime minister and foreign minister to dissuade Americans and Europeans from demanding a total freeze on construction. So far the undiplomatic language from the Secretary of State and her spokespersons indicate that the message is not getting through.

Whether Israel or the United States wins this tussle, the greater test is how the Obama policy of engagement will work with the Palestinians, as well as with Iranians, Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, and Pakistanis. Others have tried before him. Humility is not widely recognized as a trait of Americans who think themselves capable of deciding what is best for others. Past performance does not encourage optimism.

The writer is Professor (Emeritus) of the Department of Political Science, Hebrew University. (NaomiRagen.com Jun 28)