



## 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*

take any steps toward normalization will not in any way influence the Obama administration's willingness or intention to continue pressuring Israel to bar Jews from building.

Netanyahu's very willingness to conduct negotiations on a construction

## Commentary...

### Netanyahu's Wrong Turn By: Caroline Glick

Israel's leftist media is happy with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. And as Israelis have learned repeatedly in recent years, when the media are happy with a political leader, trouble is our doorstep.

Netanyahu owes his current media popularity to his decision to play ball with the Obama White House. Since Netanyahu took office in the spring, President Obama and his advisers have exerted unrelenting pressure on him to ban all Jewish building in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. Until last week, the Netanyahu's government's official position rejected the administration's demand.

The Likud's electoral platform and the government's guidelines stipulate that any settlement with the Palestinians must guarantee that Israel has secure borders. Netanyahu has argued repeatedly that the only way Israel can have secure borders is by retaining control over a significant amount of land in Judea and Samaria in perpetuity.

Until last week the Netanyahu government also rejected the traditional Arab/European position that Jews have no right to live in any of the lands that Israel took control over during the 1967 Six-Day War. The government viewed this position - which has become the foundation stone of the Obama administration's Middle East policy - as inherently anti-Semitic.

Apparently, all that has now changed. Ahead of his trip to London to meet with Obama's Middle East envoy George Mitchell, Netanyahu reversed course. He has received the support of four out of six members of his security cabinet (himself, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Intelligence Minister Dan Meridor and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman) to accept Obama's demand. Netanyahu is negotiating a compromise with the Obama administration in which Israel will reportedly ban Jews from building in Judea and Samaria but not in Jerusalem.

While Netanyahu insists he is only talking about outlawing Jewish construction for a few months, last week we learned from Housing and Construction Minister Ariel Attias that the ban was actually enacted four months ago. So without the government or the public being informed, and while Netanyahu was publicly rejecting the administration's insistent demand as unacceptable and bigoted, he has actually been bowing to administration pressure all along. Now he just wants to make it official policy.

Netanyahu's associates assure us that the proposed ban will be dropped if the Arab world doesn't normalize its relations with Israel or if the Palestinians refuse to negotiate in good faith with the government in Jerusalem. But the fact is that this is a concession that is difficult to roll back. By accepting Obama's demand even temporarily, what Netanyahu is actually accepting is the Arab/European/U.S. position that all land surrendered by Israel to Palestinian control be first emptied of all Jews.

That is, Netanyahu is accepting as reasonable the idea that a Palestinian state will be predicated on anti-Semitism and ethnic cleansing of Jews.

Netanyahu's associates claimed on Monday that Netanyahu is now conditioning a construction ban against Jews on whether Saudi Arabia takes a step toward normalizing its ties with Israel. Such a step would involve, for instance, allowing Israeli planes to fly over Saudi airspace. While Netanyahu's position seems reasonable on the surface, the fact is it only serves to entrap Israel.

Even in the unlikely event the Saudis agree to take a step in Israel's direction, they could cancel it at any point and blame their bad-faith action on whatever fabricated Israeli offense they wish. Moreover, since Netanyahu has already agreed that the U.S. demand that Jews not be allowed to build in certain areas is basically legitimate, a Saudi refusal to

ban - not to mention his actual ban on Jewish construction for the past four months - has in itself simply paved the way for further U.S. pressure on Israel. Netanyahu and his advisors have all stated that it is important to conduct negotiations with the Americans on their demand for a Jewish construction freeze because it is important that Israel improve its relations with the Obama administration. Officials argue that Israel's relationship with the U.S. is so crucial to the country that it makes sense to make enormous concessions in order to maintain close ties to the White House.

It is certainly true that maintaining good relations with Washington is a vital Israeli interest. But it is also clear that the Obama administration is not interested in good relations with Israel. From his first day in office, when Obama gave his first interview as president to Al Arabiya, to his anti-Israel speech in Cairo on June 4, to his latest bid to cozy up to the Muslim world with his Ramadan greetings, Obama has repeatedly demonstrated that he views putting the squeeze on Israel as a means of cultivating close ties with the Arabs rather than achieving peace between Israel and the Arabs. Indeed, his massive and public pressure on Israel has made the Palestinians more unwilling to make peace with Israel than ever before.

It is the supposedly moderate and U.S.-supported Palestinian "prime minister" Salam Fayyad who is now saying the peace process is dead and the Palestinians have no reason to talk to Israel. As several leading Palestinians have stated in recent months, they will only agree to sit down with Netanyahu after the U.S. has forced Israel to accept and implement all Palestinian demands including a ban on Jewish construction in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem and an Israeli release of all convicted terrorists from its prisons.

As Obama sees things, applying pressure on Israel is a tool for improving the Washington's posture in the Arab world. Consequently, an Israeli concession on Jewish construction will not lead to better U.S.-Israel relations. It will only lead to U.S. pressure on Israel to make further concessions.

Netanyahu's critics on the Right argue the time has come to make their opposition to his new leftist, media-friendly policies known. But they must tread carefully. Today there is no plausible candidate to replace Netanyahu as prime minister aside from opposition head Tzipi Livni. Livni of course will have no compunction about barring Jewish building in Judea and Samaria as well as in Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. So too, she will not hesitate to use the IDF to enact mass expulsions of Jews from their homes in Judea and Samaria in the name of "peace" with the likes of Fayyad and his boss Mahmoud Abbas.

Rather than seeking to bring down Netanyahu's government, his critics on the Right should follow the path forged by their coalition colleagues from the Labor Party and use their positions within his government to make him pay a political price for his leftward tilt. Members of Knesset from the Right should introduce bills that would bar discrimination against Jews in Judea and Samaria and throughout the country. They should remarkably all come down with the flu on days when government-sponsored bills come up for votes in the Knesset plenum. And they should wage a public battle against a ban on Jewish building in order to rally the public - and particularly voters from Likud and its coalition partners - to their side.

Netanyahu's aides spent the days ahead of his meeting with Mitchell on Wednesday attempting to dampen expectations of a deal in the works with the administration. But the fact that these negotiations have even taken place has caused Israel great damage. Coalition members who oppose his leftward swing should make clear their dissatisfaction by showing Netanyahu that there is a price to be paid for deceiving his voters and his government. (Jewish Press Aug 26)

### **Much Ado about Nothing** By Moshe Arens

Now that the media has had a field day lambasting Moshe "Bogie" Ya'alon for his remarks at a gathering of supporters of Likud member Moshe Feiglin, the time has come to take a sober look at this incident that has caused such a splash on the political scene.

First, Ya'alon chose a very poor venue to explain his views on the situation. For some years now, Feiglin has been leading a band of followers who are not traditional Likud supporters and may not even vote for the party in the Knesset elections. He has been leading them in a transparent effort to impose his views on the majority of Likud members by exploiting the permissiveness of the party's constitution that permits anyone prepared to pay the annual membership dues to join its ranks. By entering Likud's ranks in an organized manner, they have been planning to leverage their relatively small numbers to gain a dominant position in the party.

Although not successful so far, they have not given up and keep trying. The majority of Likud members do not see them as an asset to the party. Quite the contrary, their noisy presence in Likud probably loses the party votes at election time. Since Likud would be better off without them, it makes little sense for one of the party's leaders to legitimize them by appearing before them and creating the impression that he may share their extreme views. So the venue was really a poor choice. But what about the contents of his remarks? That, after all, is the important thing.

When Ya'alon declares that Jews have a right to settle in all the Land of Israel, he is voicing an opinion shared by the vast majority of Likud supporters, and probably by many other Israelis who are not Likud voters. From the beginning, this right was and continues to be a foundation stone of Zionism. It is what brought us here and what keeps us here. A minority of Israelis believe that this right is limited to the area west of the 1949 armistice lines, or in the view of some, should not be exercised beyond these lines. If we have a difference of opinion with the Obama administration at present it is on this very principle, a principle not fully understood by those in Washington who mistakenly believe that the Holocaust led to the creation of the State of Israel.

In response to a question, Ya'alon said the rebuilding of the Homesh settlement was something that needs to be considered. The settlers of Homesh, a settlement in northern Samaria, were uprooted from their homes four years ago during the disengagement. Whereas the proponents of the move insisted that the disengagement from the Gush Katif settlement bloc would allow the Israel Defense Forces to withdraw from the area and thus improve Israel's security situation, no such claim was made for the disengagement from the settlements in northern Samaria. As is well known by now, the disengagement from Gush Katif led to a deterioration of Israel's security situation, and the IDF did not withdraw from northern Samaria and remained in control there. That being the case, the possibility of rebuilding Homesh is worthy of reexamination and should not be rejected out of hand. In any case, there is nothing here in Ya'alon's answer to get excited about.

Whereas many people may not have liked Ya'alon's characterization of Peace Now, it should come as no surprise that this movement is opposed by Likud and its leadership, just as it itself opposes Likud. Moreover, its tactics of spying on the settlement movement and passing information it garners to friends and foes abroad are downright distasteful. The funding it obtains for the support of these activities from foreign groups verges on the illegitimate. So don't be surprised if Likud members think Peace Now does not serve Israel's best interests.

Last, but not least, we should all remember that Moshe Ya'alon was the chief of staff who led the IDF to a brilliant victory over Palestinian terrorism that had been making life intolerable for all Israelis. It was a victory that many claimed was unachievable, and it's now being studied by the armed forces of nations facing terrorist threats throughout the world. So a little respect, please! (Haaretz Aug 25)

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### **There May Be Worse To Come** By Isi Leibler

President Obama's naïve efforts to appease the Arabs by bullying and distancing the United States from Israel has backfired. However despite increasing unease extending to some of Obama's most fervent supporters, the administration has yet to signal any change in policy.

The futility of trying to appease tyrannies is evident everywhere; the tuggish behavior of the Iranian regime toward its own people makes a farce of Obama's efforts to reason with Ahmadinejad; in response to unilateral US overtures to the Syrians, President Assad visited the Iranian president, congratulated him on his bogus reelection and declared that their alliance had never been stronger; the North Koreans displayed utter

contempt for Obama's friendly outreach; Arabs states all responded negatively to Obama's entreaties to provide a few crumbs of recognition in return for Israeli concessions; Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was publicly humiliated by the Saudi Foreign Minister, who insisted there was nothing to negotiate unless Israel accepted all Arab demands.

The Palestinian response was even more noxious. Clearly emboldened, the Fatah General Assembly displayed contempt for any initiative that could further the peace process. Their intransigence again demonstrated the absurdity of the notion that this corrupt and duplicitous leadership could be a genuine peace partner. There were even elements of surrealism when the Fatah Assembly unanimously accused Israel of having assassinated Arafat and provided standing applause for a mass murderer.

They decreed that unless Israel acceded to all their demands, no further negotiations would take place and they could renew the "armed struggle." Far from encouraging Arab moderation, Obama's tough approach to Israel simply bolstered the hardliners.

The facts on the ground today make prospects for peace more remote than ever. The only clear message emerging from the Fatah Congress is that, as with Hamas, elimination of Jewish sovereignty in the region remains its ultimate objective. Were that not so, Mahmoud Abbas would have accepted Ehud Olmert's offer, which virtually granted him all his territorial demands and even hinted at a compromise over the Arab right of return.

Obama's advisers must have been bitterly disappointed when their diktats against Israel backfired. Indeed, their one-sided demands and bullying tactics can take credit for having created a rare consensus among the Israeli public, which today overwhelmingly supports Netanyahu.

To add to Obama's problems and despite predictions to the contrary, American Jewish leaders have begun to openly challenge some of his policies. There is a growing unease even among some Jewish Democrats that Obama is betraying the unequivocal undertakings he made during the elections to faithfully preserve the alliance with Israel.

This was exemplified in remarks made by Howard Berman, the influential Democratic chair of the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, who in a closed meeting with Jewish leaders explicitly criticized the Obama administration's pressure on Israel over settlements. Berman said Abbas was now "waiting for the US to present him Israel on a platter". Steny Hoyer, the Democratic House majority leader visiting Israel, made similar comments at a Jerusalem news conference.

Obama must also have been stunned when his friend and loyal supporter Alan Solow, the Chairman of the Presidents Conference representing 52 major American Jewish organizations, condemned his demands to limit Jews settlements in Jerusalem and its suburbs.

In a full page New York Times advert Abe Foxman of the Anti Defamation League stated "The problem is not settlements, it's Arab rejection...Mr. President, it's time to stop pressuring our vital friend and ally". David Harris of the American Jewish Committee expressed similar feelings to a Congressional group. Whilst usually ritually reiterating their belief that Obama would not abandon Israel, Jewish leaders have begun openly criticizing the administration's behavior toward the Jewish state.

Obama's standing with American Jewish activists plummeted further when, contemptuously dismissing a rare virtually unanimous Jewish protest, he personally participated in the ceremony honoring former Irish president and 2001 UN Durban hate-fest convener Mary Robinson with the highest human rights award in the US. This was perceived as yet another manifestation of Obama's new love affair with the UN and its anti-Israel affiliates.

It must also have been disappointing for Obama's Jewish advisers promoting the J Street line when they became aware that despite expensive media promotions, opinion polls indicated that most Jewish activists remained contemptuous of the left-wing Jewish fringe groups urging Obama to force Israel to make further concessions.

However, as of now, while continuing to avoid any initiative which could irritate the Arabs, the US is maintaining its heavy-handed approach toward its erstwhile ally, Israel. While a face-saving compromise may soon eventuate, appreciating the unprecedented backing he currently enjoys from his constituency, Netanyahu would be unwise to capitulate to Obama's demands.

Alas, irrespective of the settlement issues, there may be worse to come from this administration. After Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's recent warm meeting with Obama in Washington, he effusively praised the

policy changes introduced by the president and hinted of further impending "positive" US initiatives.

There are also chilling predictions that without prior consultations with Israel, Obama intends to unilaterally submit a US plan for a comprehensive settlement at the UN or elsewhere. It is rumored that this plan would use as a starting point the irresponsible offers made to Abbas by Olmert during the death throes of his tenure - offers which would unquestionably have been repudiated by the Knesset and people of Israel in a referendum. Such a move would be an unprecedented betrayal of a long-standing ally.

Until such time as a genuine Palestinian peace partner emerges, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu cannot be expected to create a miraculous magic plan which would bring about a comprehensive final settlement. But his task now must be to preempt a disastrous imposed settlement by the Americans.

In doing so he must he speedily identify the red lines which his government, backed by the vast majority of Israelis, would never contemplate crossing.

To this end he should also marshal the support of the mainstream American Jewish leadership and encourage them to convey to their president that they too have red lines. They have already begun to signal that they will not remain passive if their government attempts to unilaterally impose a solution which could endanger the Jewish state. (Jerusalem Post Aug 25)

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### **Losing the Secular Public** By Jonathan Rosenblum

No Torah Jew finds it difficult to justify Israeli government expenditures on Torah education. For us, it is clear that without the citadels of Torah that all the efforts of the IDF to protect us from the dangers all around will be for naught.

But obviously few secular Israelis share that view. From their perspective, the most notable aspect of Torah education - at least that of males - is that it leaves many of its recipients lacking basic numeracy and unable to enter the workforce at anything above menial jobs, which will, in any event, prove insufficient to feed their large families. At most, some will acknowledge that the intellectual acuity attained in Talmud study makes it possible for many chareidi men to acquire later some of the missing skills and knowledge.

In *Yoder vs. Wisconsin*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Free Exercise Clause of the United States constitution prevented Wisconsin from enforcing its mandatory school attendance laws against religious groups who opposed education for those over 14. In reaching that conclusion, the Court noted that the religious groups in question are, in general, law-abiding citizens almost never found on the welfare rolls. Few secular Israelis look at the chareidi community in the same way.

Should we be concerned about the view of the secular public? Or is it enough for us to rely on the power of the chareidi parties in the governing coalition to preserve some level of government funding of chareidi educational institutions?

Perhaps. But there is no guarantee that the major parties will not unite one day for the express purpose of changing Israel's electoral system to greatly reduce the power of the chareidi parties. We have already seen, in recent years, government coalitions in which the chareidi influence was minimal. In addition, the Supreme Court, not the Knesset, might take upon itself the question of state funding of chareidi education.

At the very least, then, a case can be made for the development of arguments designed to persuade secular Israelis if not of the value of a Torah education, at least of the justice of funding the chareidi educational system. The most likely form for such an argument goes under the rubric of "multiculturalism" - the idea that states should respect the various subcultures that make up the citizenry. (A number of Western democracies do fund religious education (albeit not without strict curricular requirements).)

Multiculturalism has the advantage that it holds sway over much of the Left elites. That is why so many feminists are willing to look the other way to abuses of women in Muslim societies around the world.

At the same time, some of the negative consequences of multiculturalism have begun to be noticed. Many blame multiculturalism for fostering the emergence of cultural minorities in the West who are deeply hostile to their host country, while enjoying many benefits from those host countries. A Moslem takeover of a number of Western European countries no longer seems a far-fetched nightmare scenario. Every Western European country today has a significant and fast-growing Moslem

minority that does not feel any allegiance to the laws of its host country, insists on the enforcement of its cultural norms, even in the face of the governing law, in areas where Muslims constitute a majority, and which contains cells of those violently opposed to the civil authorities and prepared to resort to terror against them.

If Torah Jews are perceived by secular Israelis the way that Western Europeans perceive their Moslem enclaves, then any argument based on the multicultural ideal is bound to fail. Unfortunately, such comparisons are becoming more and more frequent, in large part triggered by the recent rioting in Meah Shearim and attempts to aggressively enforce chareidi cultural norms in mixed neighborhoods.

Ma'ariv's Ben-Dror Yemini entitles a recent oped, "The Taliban is Here." His piece is, inter alia, an attack on the multiculturalism, which in his view has allowed the most extreme elements in Moslem societies, whether in the Gaza Strip or Western Europe, to impose their will on those societies. And the same, he writes, is taking place today among the chareidim. He does not claim that the majority of chareidim support the rioting, only that the violent minority of chareidim will dictate to the majority and from there to the larger society. He concludes with a call on Israel's political leaders political parties to act quickly to curtail chareidi autonomy, including our educational system.

I have known Yemini for more than a decade, and worked closely with him for many years on the issue of the Israeli Supreme Court. As oped editor at Ma'ariv, he brought me to the oped page, in large part to provide a chareidi voice. Chareidim has never been a particular subject of his, and in all the time we worked together, I never detected the slightest hint of animus towards chareidim. But clearly the recent rioting and news reports of the aggression of certain groups in Ramat Beit Shemesh have traumatized him.

In a similar vein, the Jerusalem Post's Evelyn Gordon recently urged Mayor Nir Barkat to employ collective punishment against Meah Shearim, until the damage is paid for and the riots stop. She employed exactly the same justification used for cutting off electricity to Gaza: If the majority opposes the terrorists, then they must be forced to act to stop them; and if they support them, we have no reason to continue facilitating their attacks on us.

Gordon is herself Orthodox, and has a number of close chareidi friends. As a columnist, she is the voice of calm, patiently building her case block-by-block. That she is now drawing parallels between chareidim and Gaza terrorists is an ominous indication of just how much damage the recent riots have caused to our image.

I cite Gordon and Yemini not in agreement -- the rioters constitute a tiny fraction of chareidi society -- but as sociological data of how damaging the riots have been to our image with the secular public.

In the midst of the Viet Cong's 1968 Tet Offensive, CBS's respected anchorman Walter Cronkite, uncharacteristically interjected into his nightly broadcast his opinion that "victory" in Vietnam was impossible. President Lyndon Johnson, watching in the White House, commented, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost the nation."

If we've lost Yemini and Gordon, we've gone a long way towards losing any chance of convincing secular Israelis of the justice of our position. (Mishpacha Magazine Aug 19)

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### **It's Open Season on Israel** By Israel Harel

Avigdor Lieberman is a nuisance - a nuisance to those who hide their heads in the sand and deny that a storm is raging around us. Lieberman broke official Israel's conspiracy of silence in the face of the worldwide smear campaign being waged by various media outlets and countless nonprofit organizations (including Israeli ones), which are preparing public opinion - and the governments that follow public opinion - to see the Jewish state as a virus that endangers world peace.

Only due to the uproar that Lieberman fomented did the public become aware of the anti-Israel zealotry of many of these nongovernmental organizations, which are financed, inter alia, by donations from Arab oil powers, huge western foundations like the Ford Foundation, countries such as Britain, the Netherlands and Switzerland, and the European Union.

The assault on the Israel Defense Forces by a Swedish newspaper is part of a worldwide blood libel campaign. When this campaign's participants include organizations that present themselves as global guardians of human rights, it stops being merely absurd (the IDF traffics

in organs and kills women and children waving white flags), and becomes another link in the chain of depredation.

Millions of people worldwide are deluged morning and evening with a flood of libelous op-eds and reports, broadcasts full of crude lies, and hate-filled caricatures. The language used to criticize the globe's worst tyrannies does not even come close to the hate-filled language used against Israel.

If a Swedish newspaper, albeit a tabloid, decided to publish this libel about organ trafficking, that means the author and the editor deem it conceivable that it really happened. If the Los Angeles Times published an op-ed by an Israeli who urged a total boycott of his own country, there is only one possible conclusion: A global boycott of Israel would be perfectly legitimate.

Indeed, since the reports issued by Breaking the Silence (an Israeli organization) and Human Rights Watch (an international organization) include allegations of crimes against humanity committed by members of a nation that was itself a victim of such crimes just 70 years ago, it must be proper to impose a boycott. In the past, before the demonization had gained a foothold even in the serious press, no American paper would have dreamed of publishing an op-ed like this.

Lieberman's response in the affair of the Swedish paper was not the opening shot of a comprehensive campaign against the dehumanization of Israel. It seems doubtful that his statements will succeed in breaking the conspiracy of denial about the gravity of the problem, even within his own ministry. The Foreign Ministry, even if the minister assigns it this task, is not built - primarily due to lack of motivation and deep faith in the justice of Israel's cause - to wage a multipronged strategic campaign against the numerous tentacles of organizations whose main goal, and perhaps even their only one, is to bring about Israel's collapse. Fact: It is not the Foreign Ministry, with its hundreds of employees, that has gathered most of the information we have about these organizations, but NGO Monitor, a small nonprofit headed by Prof. Gerald Steinberg, which obtained this information via patient, diligent footwork.

Words, screamed Peace Now earlier this week, can kill. That is true. And what about the millions of words denouncing Israel that this organization, and others like it, export overseas, where they serve as weapons of propaganda against Israel? (In 2007, to take one example, the British government donated more than NIS 4 million to radical leftist organizations like Peace Now and Breaking the Silence in order to fund these words. And that is on top of the money from private donors, the European Union and various foundations.) Can these words not also kill?

As far as is known, Military Intelligence and the Mossad have not identified the globalization of anti-Israel hatred as a strategic threat. Nor has the "sexet" of key cabinet ministers ever dealt with this issue, even though each one of them personally understands that the delegitimization of Israel undermines the rest of the world's motivation to stand up to Iran's rulers over that country's nuclear program. Maybe now that the National Security Council, under Uzi Arad's leadership, is assuming both an authority and a strategic vision that it lacked before his arrival, there will be someone capable of correctly identifying the magnitude of the threat. But merely identifying it is not enough.

This ongoing, organized, global and completely unbridled campaign of demonization is liable (and who should know better than we?) to end in a new license for genocide - against us. (Haaretz Aug 27)

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### **Iran And Syria: So Happy Together** By Barry Rubin

One can learn a great deal by analyzing the visit of Syrian President Bashar Assad to Iran last week. Statements made by Assad and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reveal a great deal about the allies' strategy which seems to escape Western observers.

The first point is that they are indeed close allies. I would estimate that analyses by Western "experts" that Syria can be pried away from Iran outnumber explanations that this is impossible by about 10 to one.

This mistaken conception is also the official policy of the United States and France, perhaps Britain as well.

There are, of course a huge number of benefits Syria derives from its alliance with Iran including Islamist legitimacy, protection against being attacked or pressured, money, weapons, cooperation in anti-Israel terrorism and spreading both countries' influence among the Palestinians, Lebanese and Iraqis. Once Iran gets nuclear weapons, which is on the horizon, the alliance's value for Syria will rise dramatically.

This is why it was silly for US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to suggest recently: "Given what's been going on in Iran and the instability that appears to be present there, it may not be in Syria's interest to put their eggs into that basket." Well, Assad apparently doesn't agree with her. Perhaps she should listen to what he's saying and watch what he's doing in order to draw the opposite conclusion.

Assad said: "I think that what happened in Iran is an important thing and a big lesson to the foreigners, and therefore they are not very satisfied. I believe the Iranian people's reelection [of Ahmadinejad] is another emphasis on the fact that Iran and Syria must continue the regional policy as in the past." In other words, he correctly views Ahmadinejad and the regime as even stronger after the election. Dictators respect repression; they aren't impressed by an opposition which stages demonstrations and whose leaders get thrown into prison. That's especially true when they don't even receive Western support.

Watching the gradual concessions made by the West to the Iran-Syria block, and its evident fear of confronting them, Assad stated that he was confident the international community would accept Iran and Syria more than it had done in the past. Note also that the two countries are very consciously coordinating strategy in a war against Western interests and the relatively more moderate Arab regimes, a conflict that Western governments don't even perceive as existing: "Iran and Syria are on the same front, and any political event is an opportunity which must be used at the best way possible while helping one another," said Assad.

Iranian Supreme Leader (and the real leader of the country) Ali Khamenei agreed: "The result of this unity is evident in the Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq issues and also in the entire region." The tide is in favor of the resistance, he added, referring to the combination of Iranian, Syrian, Hamas, Hizbullah, Iraqi insurgents and other members of the radical alliance.

What does this mean?

Palestine: Hamas is entrenching itself further, while European governments seem less willing to isolate it. There is no prospect of bringing down that regime and the West isn't even trying to do so. Khamenei probably assumes - wrongly - that Hamas is steadily making gains in subverting Fatah's rule in the West Bank.

Lebanon: While Hizbullah didn't win the last election, it is clear that the Iran-Syria client increasingly owns the country. The country's president is fairly subservient to Iranian and Syrian influence; the tribunal investigating Syrian terrorism in Lebanon seems pretty dead itself. Hizbullah seems on the verge of reestablishing veto power in the government, and the most courageous opponent of Iran-Syria influence, Walid Jumblatt, has changed sides (or at least gone to neutrality).

Iraq: The US forces are withdrawing. Iran's money, agents and clients seem to be able to operate freely, though Teheran is nowhere near taking over the country. Khamenei also said something truly shocking. After remarking about Syria's improved relations with Iraq (a country against which it is daily sponsoring terrorist attacks), he added that unity (the translation probably should say "alliance") between Iran and Syria, on one hand, and their neighbors Iraq and Turkey would benefit the region.

What does this mean? He is showing Iran's longer-term plan to pull Iraq (under a more friendly faction) and Turkey (currently ruled by an Islamist-oriented regime) into a broad alliance. That statement should send shock waves throughout the West, and cause intelligence analysts to pick up the phone and inform someone who has Obama's ear.

Iran and Syria, along with their clients, are at war with America, and the US government doesn't even know it. That's why Khamenei remarked, "America's blade has become blunter in the region." He's right. That's why if anyone is worried about putting all the eggs in one basket, nowadays it is America's Arab partners. The fact that the US is perceived as weaker and foolish in the region is far more important than the fact that Obama might be more popular in public opinion polls.

With a US government so intent on apologizing to everyone, all but ruling out the use of force or power politics and apparently - in Iran's perception - afraid to confront its enemies, they're concluding in Teheran and Damascus, as Ahmadinejad put it: "Today the world has realized that Western theories are not working anymore and that is why it needs the help and cooperation of Syria and Iran."

An increase in economic sanctions, which is the main US plan against Iran at present, is not going to change this perception - or Teheran's behavior. But before effective action can be taken, there must be the realization that a conflict is going on, one that is far more important than the one between the US and al-Qaida. (Jerusalem Post Aug 23)