



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*

Obama Is Pushing Israel Toward War

By Bret Stephens

Events are fast pushing Israel toward a pre-emptive military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, probably by next spring. That strike could well fail. Or it could succeed at the price of

oil at \$300 a barrel, a Middle East war, and American servicemen caught in between. So why is the Obama administration doing everything it can to speed the war process along?

At July's G-8 summit in Italy, Iran was given a September deadline to start negotiations over its nuclear programs. Last week, Iran gave its answer: No.

Instead, what Tehran offered was a five-page document that was the diplomatic equivalent of a giant kiss-off. It begins by lamenting the "ungodly ways of thinking prevailing in global relations" and proceeds to offer comprehensive talks on a variety of subjects: democracy, human rights, disarmament, terrorism, "respect for the rights of nations," and other areas where Iran is a paragon. Conspicuously absent from the document is any mention of Iran's nuclear program, now at the so-called breakout point, which both Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his boss Ali Khamenei insist is not up for discussion.

What's an American president to do in the face of this nonstarter of a document? What else, but pretend it isn't a nonstarter. Talks begin Oct. 1.

All this only helps persuade Israel's skittish leadership that when President Obama calls a nuclear-armed Iran "unacceptable," he means it approximately in the same way a parent does when fecklessly reprimanding his misbehaving teenager. That impression is strengthened by Mr. Obama's decision to drop Iran from the agenda when he chairs a meeting of the U.N. Security Council on Sept. 24; by Defense Secretary Robert Gates publicly opposing military strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities; and by Russia's announcement that it will not support any further sanctions on Iran.

In sum, the conclusion among Israelis is that the Obama administration won't lift a finger to stop Iran, much less will the "international community." So Israel has pursued a different strategy, in effect seeking to goad the U.S. into stopping, or at least

delaying, an Israeli attack by imposing stiff sanctions and perhaps even launching military strikes of its own.

Thus, unlike Israel's air strike against Iraq's reactor in 1981 or Syria's in 2007, both of which were planned in the utmost secrecy, the Israelis have gone out of their way to advertise their fears, purposes and capabilities.

They have sent warships through the Suez Canal in broad daylight and conducted widely publicized air-combat exercises at long range. They have also been unusually forthcoming in their briefings with reporters, expressing confidence at every turn that Israel can get the job done.

The problem, however, is that the administration isn't taking the bait, and one has to wonder why. Perhaps it thinks its diplomacy will work, or that it has the luxury of time, or that it can talk the Israelis out of attacking.

Alternatively, it might actually want Israel to attack without inviting the perception that it has colluded with it. Or maybe it isn't really paying attention.

But Israel is paying attention. And the longer the U.S. delays playing hardball with Iran, the sooner Israel is likely to strike. A report published today by the Bipartisan Policy Center, and signed by Democrat Chuck Robb, Republican Dan Coats, and retired Gen. Charles Ward, notes that by next year Iran will "be able to produce a weapon's worth of highly enriched uranium...in less than two months." No less critical in determining Israel's timetable is the anticipated delivery to Iran of Russian S-300 anti-aircraft batteries: Israel will almost certainly strike before those deliveries are made, no matter whether an Iranian bomb is two months or two years away.

Such a strike may well be in Israel's best interests, though that depends entirely on whether the strike succeeds. It is certainly in America's

כתיבה וחתומה טובה

Commentary...

Jews Also Have a Nakba By Ron Breiman

The extreme left sympathizes with the feelings of the Arabs that a disaster, or nakba, befell them when the State of Israel was established - a sympathy they lack for the feelings of most Jews. If the Arabs' lack of identification with Israel's independence and memorial days is understandable, even more understandable is most Jews' lack of identification with the "peace" that began September 13, 1993 and whose end cannot be foreseen.

And speaking of feelings, we should look at how the Oslo "peace" is perceived by the various sectors. The unholy alliance between the left and the media causes slanted coverage. There were the good days of hope that began in Oslo, and the bad days when those hopes were dashed and the gloomy forecasts came true.

But let's not forget that not everyone shared the euphoria: Many Israelis felt their world was shattered during that black September of 1993.

The people who were seduced into believing in the Oslo dream are unable or unwilling to acknowledge the feelings of the others. The latter group perceives the festive ceremony on the White House lawn as a surrealist event that launched the deterioration toward Israel's bitterest war, the Oslo war. The day one side saw a window of peace opening, and therefore the victims of terror as "the victims of the peace," the other side saw the first shot in that cruel war, and every terror attack strengthened this perception. The day that the peace-dreamers danced around the golden calf of Peace Now was the day of awakening for the others, who realized the Oslo war's danger must be blocked. They see the extreme left's identification with Arab nationalism and contempt for Jewish symbols as a threat as dangerous as those of the enemy.

The Oslo adventure, presented under the fallacious title "the peace process," is dangerous because it was and is understood differently by the two sides involved. The Arab side understood that the process would end with a sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and is therefore not prepared to make do with less. The naive Israeli side was fooled as if by a magic trick, and most Israelis continue to refuse to grasp the significance, or are still expecting a miracle. The sober Israeli side, which discerned the menace and tried to foil it, is accused of warmongering, precisely for that reason.

Sixteen years later, we should examine whether it was at all realistic to expect that in the wake of the accords, Israelis would enjoy a normal life, without any threats to national or personal security, free to achieve their goals, receiving help from the state instead of giving it their money and their lives. This may be the situation in Oslo, with the neighbors Norway has been blessed with, but it is not realistic in the old-new Middle East.

A normal state does not abandon its citizens' security to a group it defines as a terrorist organization. Neither does it put the "state-controlled" electronic media at the disposal of terrorists so they can speak to its citizens over the heads of its government. It does not allow senior terrorists ("VIPs") to drive around its territory escorted by junior terrorist bodyguards. And it does not impose freezes or evictions on its citizens to please the enemy.

In its 62nd year, Israel must decide between a Palestinian state or peace. A Palestinian state alongside Israel at the outset, but on its ruins in the future, is the diametric opposite of peace. Pushing toward such a state, and ignoring both common sense and the majority, rends the nation's fabric, and in itself sabotages the essential foundations of peace. (Haaretz Sep 14)

The writer is the former chairman of Professors for a Strong Israel.

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supreme interest that Iran not acquire a genuine nuclear capability, whether of the actual or break-out variety. That goes also for the Middle East generally, which doesn't need the nuclear arms race an Iranian capability would inevitably provoke.

Then again, it is not in the U.S. interest that Israel be the instrument of Iran's disarmament. For starters, its ability to do so is iffy: Israeli strategists are quietly putting it about that even a successful attack may have to be repeated a few years down the road as Iran reconstitutes its capacity. For another thing, Iran could respond to such a strike not only against Israel itself, but also U.S. targets in Iraq and the Persian Gulf.

But most importantly, it is an abdication of a superpower's responsibility to outsource matters of war and peace to another state, however closely allied. President Obama has now ceded the driver's seat on Iran policy to Prime Minister Netanyahu. He would do better to take the wheel again, keeping in mind that Iran is beyond the reach of his eloquence, and keeping in mind, too, that very useful Roman adage, *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. (Wall Street Journal Sept 15)

Trying to Outsmart Obama By Moshe Arens

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his advisors are exerting their best efforts in the search for ways to avoid a confrontation with the president of the United States, who has publicly called for a cessation of construction in West Bank settlements and East Jerusalem. But there should be no doubt about it: The government of Israel and the U.S. president are on a collision course. That became clear when Barack Obama declared in his speech in Cairo that "this must stop," referring to Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank.

There are surely ways of postponing the collision, but in the final analysis, it is unavoidable, unless either the Israeli government accepts this diktat from the U.S. president, or Obama and his advisors recognize that Jews have a right to live and settle in Judea and Samaria. No amount of "creative ambiguity" is going to resolve this problem.

So how is Netanyahu going to handle this conundrum? He had experience dealing with president Bill Clinton on the Palestinian issue during his previous term as prime minister, and it is unlikely that he looks back on that experience with nostalgia.

In January 1997, giving in to pressure from the Clinton administration, he signed the Hebron agreement - which called for removing the Israel Defense Forces from most of Hebron and introducing a small international force into the area - with Yasser Arafat. Since then, Hamas has been predominant in Hebron, and the city has remained a powder keg of tension between Jews and Arabs. And it was only years later, after the IDF was reintroduced into the area during the second intifada, that an end came to continuous acts of Palestinian terror.

The year after the Hebron agreement, he agreed to meet Arafat at Wye Plantation under Clinton's auspices. Nothing came of that conference except that the American president was drawn toward Arafat and subsequently visited Gaza, where he declared that the American people supported the Palestinian people's aspirations. So much for impartial arbitration.

So how is it going to be handled this time? From news reports, it seems that Netanyahu intends to keep Obama at bay for a limited period of time while he placates his own supporters with a permit to "complete buildings in Judea and Samaria that have already begun," and then declare a moratorium on further construction there for a period of nine months. On receiving this news in Washington, Rahm Emanuel, Obama's chief of staff, probably told the president the old joke about the Jew who asked for a year's stay of execution from the Polish count by promising him that during that time, he would teach the count's dog to talk.

Is this going to work? Obama has decided to take his position on Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria public, and though many things will surely happen during the next nine months, he is not likely to retract his position during that period. In other words, even if Washington were to accept Netanyahu's compromise position, the confrontation will not have been avoided.

That being the case, Netanyahu must consider whether it is not wiser to face Washington on a matter of principle - the right of Jews to live and settle in the Land of Israel - rather than engage in a war of attrition over a compromise formula. Anybody with experience representing Israel in the United States will tell him that there, you are better off fighting for a principle than trying to justify a compromise deal.

Over the years, Israeli governments have had differences of opinions with various administrations in Washington - though it is true that not since President Eisenhower demanded that the IDF retreat from Sinai and Gaza after the Suez Campaign, 50 years ago, have these differences been taken so public by the U.S. president. We obviously prefer to be in total agreement with our ally across the sea, but we know that is not always possible. We also prefer to handle the differences of opinion between us with discretion.

But in either case, we know that we can ride out the disagreements. Israel's alliance with the United States is based not only on common ideals and values, but also on mutual interests, and even a recognition of mutual benefits, despite the vast asymmetry in size between the two countries. When it comes to our most basic rights - the right of Jews to live in the Land of Israel - the United States will defer to Israel. That is, if we stand up for our rights. (Haaretz Sep 15)

How to Perpetuate The Conflict In One Easy Move By Evelyn Gordon

As of this writing, Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas is still refusing to meet Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. And given recent media reports about the Obama administration's planned peace initiative, one can understand why: If they are true, he has no reason to bother negotiating with Netanyahu. All he has to do is sit and wait, and in two years, the international community will give him everything he wants on a silver platter.

The plan in question was first broached publicly by the European Union's foreign policy czar, Javier Solana, at a speech in London in July. The international community should set a deadline for negotiations, Solana said, and if no agreement is reached by this deadline, the world should immediately recognize a Palestinian state, admit it to the UN and announce its own solution to all outstanding issues (borders, refugees, Jerusalem, security arrangements), along with a binding timetable for implementation.

Washington never publicly endorsed this idea. But this week, it was reported that Solana floated his trial balloon with backing from "the highest levels of the US administration," and that the US indeed plans to adopt it - with some twists that make it even worse.

Specifically, Washington will announce a two-year deadline for talks that will focus mainly on borders. If no agreement is reached by then, the US and EU - and presumably the rest of the world, too - will recognize a Palestinian state with borders "based on" the June 4, 1967 lines.

In other words, Abbas will receive international recognition of the borders he has consistently demanded, the 1967 lines - and by implication, also east Jerusalem, which was not Israeli pre-1967. The announcement will say the parties "may" alter the border via territorial exchanges, but that is up to them: The world will not insist.

And in exchange, he will have to concede absolutely nothing - not the settlement blocs, not Jewish neighborhoods of east Jerusalem, not the Western Wall, not security arrangements, not the "right of return," not recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. Some of these will be awarded him outright; others, like the refugees and recognition, will be left to future negotiations. But he would obviously have no incentive to compromise in these future negotiations, since the only thing Israel has to trade is land, and the international community will already have awarded him every inch of that.

In contrast, even an EU diktat would have mandated Palestinian concessions on some issues, like the "right of return." Moreover, Solana's original plan stipulated that implementation of the international diktat would constitute a definitive, internationally recognized end to all Palestinian claims. This version does nothing of the sort, since it leaves major issues like the refugees up in the air.

Thus from Abbas's perspective, this is a dream come true: He receives international recognition of a state in his preferred borders without having to make any concessions in exchange. Even Hamas could this embrace this deal. They could simply pocket their gains and move on to their next demands.

But if merely doing nothing for two years would produce such a bonanza, why would any sane Palestinian leader bother negotiating? Granted, the fact that this plan was reported in the media does not mean it is true. First, journalists' sources always have their own agendas, and the European sources behind this report could easily have presented an idea that is merely being considered as settled policy - either with Washington's

consent, as a trial balloon, or without such consent, in an effort to pressure the US to adopt it. Second, even if Obama does favor this plan, wiser heads within his administration might yet prevail.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to fear it might be true. First, Washington has not denied it. Second, it accords with Obama's known desire to create a Palestinian state within two years, thus assuring him of one foreign policy success in what otherwise looks likely to be an unbroken string of failures. Third, it would appease his left-wing base, which is currently furious at him over issues ranging from the "surge" in Afghanistan to his apparent willingness to make concessions to moderates on health care reform. Fourth, it would please the EU and the Muslim world, and Obama has made better relations with both a major goal of his foreign policy.

Finally, he has even found a way to avoid alienating his big-ticket Jewish donors: The media reports market the plan as being based, inter alia, on ideas presented by Israel's very own president, Shimon Peres. What Jewish donor could possibly object to that? That Peres's proposal actually called for a Palestinian state in temporary borders - which, until a deal was finalized, would comprise only part of the West Bank and would exclude east Jerusalem - is a mere bagatelle.

Indeed, the plan has only one drawback: Far from bringing peace, it would perpetuate the conflict for all eternity. If 16 years of deadly terror combined with refusing to budge an inch on any of their demands could produce such stellar results, why would any Palestinian want to abandon these successful tactics?

Thus they will continue the terror, and Israel will continue its counterterrorism operations. They will continue refusing to make concessions on the settlement blocs, Jerusalem and the refugees, and Israel will continue refusing to evacuate tens of thousands of settlers with no quid pro quo. They will continue teaching their children that the Jewish state has no right to exist, and Israeli attitudes toward the Palestinians and the "peace process" will continue to harden.

It would require massive self-centeredness, and massive short-sightedness, to sacrifice any chance of lasting peace for the sake of a momentary foreign policy "achievement." But that is exactly what this plan would do. (Jerusalem Post Sep 16)

Stop Netanyahu Now By Hagai Segal

An odd sense of joy overwhelmed Likud ministers last week. They enthusiastically endorsed the prime minister's construction freeze plan. The 500 apartments which Netanyahu and Barak gave to the settlers, in the wake of a long drought, were presented as an immense settlement achievement. Very quickly it turned out that we are dealing with construction adjacently to the security fence, right by the Green Line, yet the wave of excitement at Likud headquarters continued.

Ever since the Jabotinsky era, we have seen the embarrassing tradition of admiring chairmen to the point of adulation. Even Likud Knesset members whose body language conveyed a deep sense of gloom attempted to sound triumphant. Everyone said that it's important to endorse Netanyahu.

Yet what's there to endorse? In ideological terms, if we can even talk about Netanyahu and ideology in the same sentence, the man is already beyond the point of no return. A complete collapse. Any connection between his past principles and his current actions is completely coincidental.

The notion of reciprocity for example; that same old catchy and sanctified notion from the previous decade. What has remained of it? Mahmoud Abbas gave Netanyahu a big fat nothing for the past six months, and in exchange got a pledge for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Throughout the summer, the Palestinian leader did not bother to meet with our PM, yet he was still granted a deep construction freeze.

Netanyahu finds it difficult to stay committed even to his up-to-date principles as presented in the Bar-Ilan speech. He pledged to allow natural growth in Judea and Samaria, yet now he coordinates the construction of every new balcony with US special envoy Mitchell. Even in the most difficult days of the Ottoman Empire we did not see such scandalous conduct.

Our founding fathers built this country in the face of much graver geopolitical realities and were not scared off by demographic problems. At the time, there was an overwhelming Muslim majority between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea, as we recall.

The Netanyahu fan club explains that the freeze is a logical compromise by a responsible leader. This fan club has also been repeating the worn cliché whereby we must not be the side that refuses, and it's better that the Arabs be the ones to refuse. The problem is that so far we always say "Yes," the Arabs always say "No," and our situation has only deteriorated.

Sweden and Norway have become more anti-Semitic since the Bar-Ilan speech. Rahm Emanuel has become as hungry and demanding as he was before the speech. His boss and he are already preparing for the next pressure campaign. They estimate that Netanyahu will not reject them, and they are apparently getting it right.

So complacent Likud members, please make a note of the following: Netanyahu is mentally capable of bringing you back to the 1967 borders. Yes, in Jerusalem as well. Three months ago he sang the "two-state vision" tune in line with Obama's flute, and now he is even freezing construction in Ma'aleh Adumim. Tomorrow he'll give up all the rest.

If you don't tell him "No" as early as possible, he will continue to only say "Yes." (Ynet Sep 15)

Protecting The Quarterback In The White House

By Lenny Ben-David

J Street seems to pop up in all the right places lately, buoyed and immunized by indulgent, adoring and uncritical journalists. The upstart lobby was invited to join other Jewish organizations in a July meeting with US President Barack Obama; a month later it attended a meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Yesterday's New York Times magazine published the latest paean to J Street, portraying it as brash and brave, representative of 92 percent of American Jewry, and a young and open organization willing to take on a monolithic and paleolithic AIPAC and other veteran American Jewish organizations.

Frankly, the Times article is missing so many components and questions about the "pro-Israel" organization that it cannot be viewed as anything other than J Street puffery.

For instance, the writer, James Traub, devotes considerable effort to show how J Street is in touch with American Jewish opinion on issues such as Israeli settlements and American engagement in the peace process. J Street commissioned "an extensive poll of Jewish opinion on Middle East issues," Traub wrote.

But Traub failed to report the recent and shocking exposé, written in Commentary by Noah Pollak, that J Street's poll was conducted by J Street's own former vice president, Jim Gerstein. "J Street not only commissions polls," Pollak wrote, "it writes the questions, conducts them, analyzes the results and then carries out promotional campaigns with the findings. If you were wondering how it was possible that J Street could repeatedly produce 'polling data' that almost perfectly complements the group's political agenda, now we have one important clue."

(Challenged on this and other issues, J Street felt compelled last week to post a "Myths and Facts about J Street" on its Web site. As a founder of the original Myths & Facts, a Factbook on the Arab-Israeli Conflict, published by AIPAC's Near East Report, I am reminded how some critics referred to it as "Myths & More Myths," a title much more appropriate to J Street's new attempt at defending itself.)

The Times's Traub failed to report on the identity of J Street's broader leadership and decision-makers. To whom does director Jeremy Ben-Ami answer or consult? Who sits on the organization's board of directors? Who are the organization's funders? Traub reports on the 50-member finance committee, the existence of which was revealed in a Jerusalem Post article last month. The Post revealed names of some of the members: "The finance committee with a \$10,000 contribution threshold," the Post wrote, "includes Lebanese-American businessman Richard Abdo, a current board member of Amideast and a former board member of the Arab American Institute (AAI), and Genevieve Lynch, who is also a member of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) board."

J Street's Web site presents its distinguished 170-member "advisory council," a display case of wealthy progressive Jews and former US diplomats to the Middle East, including several who became foreign agents working the halls of Washington for Arab countries. Perhaps J Street's ultimate leaders are among these advisers, but there's no way of knowing who they are.

The Post article revealed that J Street's PAC was the recipient of donations from Arab-, Islamic- and Iranian-Americans, but Traub doesn't mention that controversial fact. The existence of these donations is understandably played down by Ben-Ami, but that information certainly should have been made available to the Times's readers.

J Street's finance committee list only reflects contributors to the PAC as they appear in public records of the Federal Elections Commission. The list of donors to J Street's main organization is secret.

Traub should have asked what role George Soros plays in the organization. A National Journal article written in April 2008 prior to J Street's launch reported that "billionaire and controversial activist George Soros, a party to the early talks about forming a new group, is reportedly no longer involved, in part, sources say, because concerns that his participation might be a lightning rod for critics."

J Street's disturbing alliance with the Iranian lobbying group, the National Iranian American Council, is also ignored by the Times's tribute. J Street and NIAC directors coauthored a Huffington Post article earlier this year arguing against new sanctions on Iran.

When Congress was considering anti-Iranian legislation a year ago, J Street went into action. In the words of one anti-Israel blogger at the time, "J Street played a key role in dealing that astonishing defeat to AIPAC in Congress - in which a coalition of peace groups and religious groups spearheaded by the National Iranian American Council lobbied effectively against a belligerent resolution."

One fact the Times magazine seems to get right: "J Street shares the Obama administration's agenda." But the Times should have gone on to ask the nature of J Street's relationship with senior officials in the Obama administration. The National Review article on organizational meetings prior to J Street's launch - and at the height of the Democratic primaries - listed advisers including "several activists with ties to Democratic contender Barack Obama of Illinois." At the height of Israel's Gaza operation in December 2008, J Street's evenhanded statement on the fighting was very similar to that of David Axelrod, Obama's senior adviser, who, speaking on NBC's Meet the Press, avoided endorsing Israel's military action.

J Street just launched an initiative to "bust" anti-Obama smears within the pro-Israel community. Volunteers to the "Obama Smear Busters" must take a pledge that approaches a vassal-like fealty: "Pledge right now to reply-all [sic] to every smear e-mail you receive about President Obama, Jews and Israel with the truth by filling out the form below."

The New York Times article avoided asking the hard questions and failed to examine who was funding, directing and supporting J Street. I have spoken to several senior reporters in Washington who admitted that they wanted to avoid writing J Street exposés. Can it be that news agencies fear that taking on J Street would be viewed as an attack on Obama? Ben-Ami himself, admitted to the Times, "Our No. 1 agenda item is to do whatever we can in Congress to act as the president's blocking back."

(Jerusalem Post Sep. 13)

The writer served as a senior diplomat in Israel's embassy in Washington.

The UN Has Outdone Itself This Time By Michael Freund

Even for a body with a steady and dependable record of demonizing Israel, the UN has truly outdone itself this time. Mustering all the righteous indignation at its disposal, the world organization has deemed itself morally fit to accuse the Jewish state of "actions amounting to war crimes, possibly crimes against humanity" during last winter's conflict in Gaza. These were among the unsavory findings of the 575-page report released on Tuesday by the Goldstone Commission, under the authority of the UN Human Rights Council to investigate the fighting between Israel and Hamas.

The harshness of the report is simply breathtaking. It lambastes Israel for using "collective punishment" and asserts that the IDF's military operations "were carefully planned in all their phases as a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population."

Israel's assault, the report concludes, "was directed at the people of Gaza as a whole," which is about as close as you can come to depicting a country's actions as Nazi-like without actually using the "N" word.

The panel, headed by South African Jewish jurist Richard Goldstone, also recommended that Israel be given three months to launch its own investigations "in conformity with international standards" or face possible

referral by the UN Security Council to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

Yes, you read that correctly. The Jewish state and its wartime leaders now face the prospect of being hauled before the very same tribunal that is pursuing the perpetrators of genocide in Darfur and the murder and conscription of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Sure, the report also accused the Palestinians of similar violations of international law, but we all know perfectly well just how this is going to play around the world.

In short, the Goldstone report is nothing less than a political pogrom, one which reeks of anti-Semitism, moral relativism and bias. It has nothing to do with justice and everything to do with a political agenda which seeks to isolate the Jewish state, besmirch its good name and pressure it into making concessions to its enemies.

More than 60 years may have passed since the State of Israel was founded, but clearly much of the world still seems incapable of forgiving us for having the gall to defend ourselves.

Various legal experts have already weighed in, asserting that Israel has little to fear from the report in the form of practical consequences because of jurisdictional and other issues. They point to the fact that its recommendations are not binding, and that in any event Israel is not a party to the treaty which established the court at The Hague.

All that may be true, but regardless of the legal ramifications, this is a body-blow in political and diplomatic terms. It reinforces all the hostile propaganda that has been hurled in Israel's direction over the years by the Palestinians and their supporters, and enshrines Israel alongside thugs such as Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic and Liberia's Charles Taylor as modern-day war criminals. Worse yet, the fact that the report bears the imprimatur of a panel headed by a prominent international Jewish jurist will make it that much more difficult to counter the slanders it contains, as people will naturally assume that the ethnic identity of its author shields against any possible underlying anti-Israel partiality.

Whether Goldstone consciously sought to lay this outrageous document at Israel's doorstep just days before Rosh Hashana is debatable, and we may never truly know. But in a sense that he surely never intended, its timing could not possibly have been more fortuitous.

Starting with Rosh Hashana, Israel is entering a period of judgment, an annual rite of passage when the creator of the world assesses us both individually and collectively and determines our fates for the coming year.

In contrast to Goldstone and his ilk, this is one tribunal where we can and will get a fair hearing, from a judge who truly has our best interests at heart and wishes to dispense justice tempered with mercy.

The slap in the face that the UN has given Israel is a timely reminder that we cannot place our trust in man, or rely on him to adjudicate on our behalf. It is a sharp and unpleasant signal that Israel remains very much alone among the nations, maligned and misunderstood.

Surely, we must criticize and condemn the Goldstone report with every ounce of our being, and redouble our efforts to explain Israel and its cause. But the onset of the High Holy Days presents us with a unique and far more powerful opportunity.

"Everything that happens on a day-to-day basis has already been decreed on the previous Rosh Hashana and will be reevaluated and judged on the upcoming Rosh Hashana," writes Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, chief rabbi of the Old City of Jerusalem, in his brilliant work *Thoughts for the Month of Elul*. "All the headlines of the upcoming year, may they be for the good, will be written in Heaven on Rosh Hashana and will only be published later, when the events themselves transpire."

Each of us, then, now has an opportunity in the coming days to literally write the future. Through our prayers and our actions, we can influence events and sway the heavenly verdict in Israel's favor. We can write the coming year's headlines through the power of our pleas and the resonance of our repentance. If you believe, as I do, that there is a God who actively intervenes and guides the course of history while granting us free will, then by necessity the course of the future has yet to be finalized.

So this Rosh Hashana, let's strike a blow at all the Goldstones and Israel-bashers out there, and channel our passions in the direction of prayer. Let's show the UN what we think of its courts and their rulings, by going over their heads and appealing to a much higher authority. For in doing so we can be assured that justice will, for once, finally be served. (Jerusalem Post Sep 16)
