



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*

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themselves up, or anti-Semitic diatribes - here's what Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas leader, said:

"Our ties with Iran are like those with other Muslim states. Does a besieged people that is waiting breathlessly for a ship to come from the sea want to throw the Jews into the ocean? Our conflict is not with the Jews, our problem is with the occupation."

Events...

Motzei Shabbat, November 22, 8:30PM

*Famed Jerusalem educator and Shabbat host **Rabbi Mordechai Machlis** will speak at the Sephardic Kehila Centre.*

Wednesday, November 26, 12:00 noon

*The Speakers Action Group and the Canadian Jewish Civil Rights Association present **Yoram Ettinger**, who will present an Israeli perspective on the recent US elections at Cassels Brock, Scotia Plaza, 40 King Street West, 21st Floor. To reserve, email projectmanager@speakersaction.com or call 416 966 0722.*

Monday, December 1, 8:30pm

*Aish Hatorah's Israel @ 60 Event "The State of our Future" featuring **Caroline Glick**, Nobel Laureate Professor **Robert Aumann** and **Jonathan Medved**, at **Shaarei Shomayim**. For info and tickets, call 905-964-9340.*

Commentary...

Radical Regimes Rethink Obama By Barry Rubin

Everybody in the Middle East faces the challenge of how to deal with President Barack Obama, a decision with huge implications for the next four years.

The radicals praised Obama during the campaign and some even tried to help him. On the eve of the vote, however, they reconsidered their enthusiasm for three reasons:

First, the radical regimes and revolutionary movements need anti-Americanism to maintain their popular support and distract from their failures.

Second, they are starting to distrust Obama. The closer he comes to the White House, the more he dons the institutional mantle of America rather than the personal clothes of an individual. Won't he, then, be like all the rest? Pushed by criticism, Obama took a stance more favorable to Israel, tougher against America's enemies and stronger for the preservation of US interests. His sincerity is irrelevant; what's important is whether he and his team calculate such positions are vital now to avoid political problems, embarrassing mistakes, and/or a reelection defeat.

Third, the radicals believe that Obama is weak - which may well be true - and aggressiveness for them is a no-lose policy. They can both advance their interests and get more American concessions - simultaneously. Indeed, the nastier they sound, the more Obama will be scared.

The alternative is to welcome Obama, negotiate with him, and get concessions from an American president eager to please. Getting others to like us is important, Obama said. Fine, they will now present their bill for smiling at America.

This technique of pretending to be conciliatory and moaning, "I'm a poor misunderstood moderate" was developed brilliantly by Yasser Arafat. Indeed, if he had not received the Nobel Prize for Peace, Arafat should have received one for acting.

Even Hamas is catching on, though its performance is probably too little, too late. When nine European members of parliament sailed into Gaza to express their opposition to anti-Hamas sanctions - as opposed to any opposition to Hamas terrorism, rockets, teaching little children to blow

As President Abraham Lincoln famously remarked, you can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but not all of the people all of the time. Fortunately, Western gullibility does have its limits, and besides, perhaps more important, misplaced humanitarian impulses can be directed at Hamas opponents Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA) it runs on the West Bank. At any rate, given its own ideology and internal politics, Hamas will take the tough route, not giving much opening for Obama.

THE IRANIAN government now seems to have decided on an anti-Obama line. It really does believe most of its own rhetoric. Teheran could have insisted that it was eager for conciliation. Of course, this would have been hypocritical, a strategy to lure Obama into massive concessions. But if Obama is going to withdraw from Iraq any way and will be less tough than his predecessor regarding Iran's nuclear program, why give up anything?

In contrast, Syria has a different approach, though one not jeopardizing its close alliance with Iran. It offers a deal: we will restrain Hizbullah and "allow" America to withdraw from Iraq if you grant us hegemony over Lebanon (as US governments did in the past), stop the sanctions, and give Damascus various economic goodies. Peace with Israel? Well, no, not interested. But if you really want - and are willing to pay us for it - we will talk indirectly with Israel and pretend to be seeking a deal.

WHAT OF the PA? The first thing it needs, and will get, is US support for "President" Mahmoud Abbas unilaterally extending his own term in office. (If Hamas names its own "president" that gives the West another incentive to sustain sanctions against it.) The PA is also doing a better job of policing - though not governing - the West Bank which ensures continued Israeli support and the flow of Western aid money.

With an administration in Washington more eager for a successful peace process than the PA itself, Abbas should have an easy time getting along with Obama. To what extent he can get Obama to pressure Israel for more concessions, in response to which he would supposedly make peace but never will, is an open question. He probably won't get too much. But hotels in the Holy Land should start raising their rates because large numbers of American envoys will be arriving on futile missions.

The biggest dilemma is faced by the more moderate Arab states which will have the horrible experience of getting what they said they wanted. Or, to paraphrase William Shakespeare's great opening speech for Richard III - you won and now's the time to be discontented.

Unhappy with the American presence in Iraq? "Good news," the Americans are leaving. Publicly proclaiming you don't see Iran's nuclear weapons drive as a threat? No worries, the United States will ease up. Angry at the previous president's "saber-rattling"? Great, Obama doesn't want ever to use force, even to protect you.

Oh, it is all going to be very interesting. One can only hope that it isn't going to be very bloody. (Jerusalem Post Nov 17)

Our Sons are Fighting in Gaza - Still ! By Yehudit Tayar

Our sons are fighting in Gaza. Our sons - the sons of our families who were brutally uprooted from their homes, jobs, communities, synagogues and cemeteries are fighting in Gaza.

Under the missiles, under the fire of the same terrorists who have been strengthened by the destruction of Gush Katif, our sons are fighting. Yes, they are fighting - can anyone out there explain why they are endangering

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themselves now?

Back when we had a flourishing group of communities and our sons fought there, it was justifiable - then we were living there and to fight for your home, your family and your country is understandable. But now there are no families of ours left, there are no homes left, and the country..what exactly does this country want us there for anyway?

While missiles from Gaza fall on Israeli cities and communities, Israel continues to supply fuel and "humanitarian aid" to the residents of Gaza, yet Israel does not supply any security solution for the citizens of Israel who live around Gaza and repeatedly are attacked. Just as no solution was provided for our families who were uprooted from Gush Katif and who languish still with no permanent homes or communities and, for many, no jobs and no solution is resolved for the residents of what is termed "around Gaza".

Those same residents around Gaza were out on the road supporting the destruction of Gush Katif especially on Fridays, while we, in Gush Katif, faced both physical attacks from the terrorist enemies (no they are not partners) and psychological attacks. While the government of Israel planned the ruthless destruction of that Garden of Eden, Gush Katif, which had turned empty sand dunes into beautiful communities and successful agricultural development, those residents of the communities around Gaza demonstrated supporting the plan to throw us out and destroy all that we had done there.

They had no feelings for either the people living there, nor for the reality of the situation and what would happen in this region after the destruction of Gush Katif. There were many who called out to stop sacrificing our soldiers for the few families living there, to stop our sons from fighting in Gaza.

What do these same blind people say now? What do they say now that our sons are back inside standing on the beloved sands of our homes there, over the desecration of our communities, synagogues and again fighting the same terrorists? Or perhaps not the same terrorists actually, for today's terrorists have witnessed the decisions of a Jewish government to destroy Jewish towns, while trying to run away from the terror in Gaza.

These murderous terrorists have every reason to believe that Israel will not stop running away from the terror, but rather, they think if they continue to attack other areas such as Sderot, Ashkelon, Netiv Ha'asara, Sa'ad, Alumim, Or Haner and other Jewish communities around Gaza than Israel will run away from them also.

And our sons are fighting in Gaza - these brave young lions who lived in Gush Katif and witnessed the destruction of their families' homes and communities, who at the time wept as they were confronted by soldiers wearing the same uniform that they wear today, and saw soldiers of the same army who instead of fighting the terrorists were dragging them away from their memories, from their friends, schools, and homes.

Our sons are fighting in Gaza because the government of Israel has decided not to resolve the terror and to teach the terrorists - whether you call them Hamas, PLO or any other name - that Jews do not run away from terror. The policy of the governments of Israel should be that we Jews destroy both the reasons that the terrorists are attacking, and first and foremost protect the lives of the citizens and soldiers of Israel and teach the terrorists that Jewish blood is not expendable.

Our sons are fighting in Gaza and it is accepted as normal for them today to endanger their lives - it is taken for granted that they should be fighting there to protect Israel - but why now and not when we were living there?

For those immoral politicians who care more about world opinion and ratings by the media than for the precious lives of the citizens and soldiers of Israel - hang your heads in shame - and stop sacrificing our lives and future. If our sons have to fight in Gaza, in Lebanon or any other place that endangers us, then give us a justified reason - stop negotiating with those who wish to destroy us, and stand firm on Jewish rights.

Our sons are fighting in Gaza and our son Gilad Shalit is still held there - while the government of Israel is criminally responsible for both and it is also morally responsible for both, and should be taking action to resolve this. (IsraelNationalNews.com Nov 14)

The Tragedy of Gilad Shalit By Isi Leibler

Observing the response of our dysfunctional leaders since Gilad Shalit was kidnapped in June of 2006, we become increasingly frustrated and infuriated. We cringe as we recollect the repeated empty threats and promises expressed by Prime Minister Olmert and Defense Ministers Peretz and Barak, all of whom vowed never to capitulate to hostage blackmail. Their blunders, lack of resolve and failure to formulate any strategy in this heartbreaking imbroglio amounts to monumental incompetence.

The Second Lebanon War erupted over the abduction of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. Yet shamefully, after bloody battles and tragic loss of life, we accepted a flawed truce with Hizbullah in which the fate of the abducted remained unresolved.

But worse, two years later, despite being aware that both soldiers were dead, our leaders fell to a new level of capitulation to emotional blackmail by trading Samir Kuntar, the most vicious killer in captivity, in return for two corpses. Besides providing an extraordinary victory for the Jihadists, the release of this monster in exchange for bodies may encourage terrorists to conclude that there is little merit in keeping Israeli hostages alive when their objectives can be achieved with corpses.

THESE BLUNDERS were compounded by the decision to unconditionally enter into a truce with Hamas despite GSS warnings that their objective was merely to regroup and obtain more sophisticated weapons from Iran. In this context, the betrayal of the vow not to reach any accommodation with Hamas without the release of Shalit was utterly incomprehensible.

This act of folly has already exacted a bitter price. It squandered whatever leverage we had with Hamas and whetted its appetite for extorting yet more exorbitant ransoms. Hamas upped its initial demands for the release of 450 terrorists to 1400 and, exploiting the precedent of Kuntar, insisted that terrorists with blood on their hands - hitherto excluded - also be released. If these demands are granted, aside from providing an enormous psychological boost for Hamas, we will be enabling the most seasoned and bloody minded murderers to resume their killing sprees.

PRIOR TO the Oslo Accords, with few exceptions, Israel prided itself on refusing to negotiate with terrorists. In contrast, today it is hard to visualize any country displaying such weakness in the face of terrorist blackmail. Over the past few months the Olmert government even went to the bizarre length of unilaterally freeing imprisoned terrorists. Today as Acting Prime Minister, Olmert has taken it upon himself to release another 250 Palestinian prisoners as a "goodwill gesture," knowing full well that such action merely encourages Hamas to make greater demands for the release of Shalit.

Our irresponsible media has a major responsibility for creating a climate of surrender to the most insane terrorist demands by indulging in emotional demagoguery and calling on the government to do "anything" to achieve the release of hostages. They are backed by public demonstrations and interventions by left-wing intellectual elites who also encourage capitulation at any price. In turn, this inspires terrorists to raise their extortions yet higher. None of our leaders, especially now prior to elections, have the backbone to resist this emotional onslaught and warn the people that irresponsible concessions to terrorists will inevitably result in greater disasters.

What can be done?

If the situation remains unresolved until the elections, the new government should immediately proclaim that unless Hamas reaches a "sensible" agreement to release Shalit in return for an exchange of prisoners "without blood on their hands," the policy of capitulating to terrorist extortion is over and tough measures will be implemented against a neighboring rogue entity engaged in kidnapping our citizens.

In the absence of real progress, the government should impose a cordon sanitaire on the entire Gaza strip. No funds whatsoever should be transferred for any purpose. Communications should be cut off. Supplies of electricity and fuel would also be denied entry through Israeli ports.

The IDF should seek out and apprehend additional senior Hamas officials and incarcerate them until such time as Shalit is released. The families of Hamas prisoners should be denied all contact or access to those currently in Israeli prisons until such time as Hamas provides the International Red Cross and the Shalit family access to Gilad.

Inevitably there will be a vast global outcry that we are breaching international law and inflicting inhumane collective punishment on innocent people. We should stand firm and remind everyone that today Hamas, the kidnapper of Shalit, is not a terrorist group but was chosen by the citizens of Gaza in a democratic election and exercises total authority in the area under its jurisdiction.

We should tell critics to spare us hypocritical preaching and ask whether they would contemplate releasing 1400 killers to redeem one of their citizens kidnapped by a neighboring terrorist state. They should be urged to direct their humanitarian concerns to Hamas who, by releasing Shalit, would immediately ease the suffering of their people.

Is this being too tough? Hardly. We live in one of the cruelest environments in the world and must defend ourselves. No other self respecting nation would stand by and carry on business as usual with a

terrorist neighbor abducting its citizens. Anyone who accepts the premise that the prime requirement of a government is to provide security for its citizens, cannot challenge our right to defend ourselves and deter future kidnappings.

SHOULD HAMAS not respond to these pressures, I predict that instead of Israelis holding public rallies calling on the government to make further concessions to obtain Schalit's release, the shoe will soon be on the other foot. Palestinians in Gaza will be demonstrating and demanding that Hamas take steps to make their lives more bearable by releasing a solitary Israeli hostage. And if Hamas is aware that this will be our standard response, it may well deter them from future kidnappings.

There are obvious risks in such a course of action, such as Hamas retaliating by further punishing Schalit himself. But just as the lives of IDF combatants are at risk, we cannot enable our enemies to exploit hostages to the point of undermining our basic security. We should emphasize that any harm to Schalit will result in instantaneous IDF targeting of Hamas leaders.

If we continue capitulating to ever-growing terrorist blackmail we will be sinking into a bottomless pit. We will experience more kidnappings, more Israelis will be murdered and maimed and terrorists will continue to wear down the morale of the nation.

Our incoming leadership must make it clear that they are determined to bring an end to a situation in which our neighbors take for granted that kidnapping Israelis will benefit them. They must understand that committing such acts will only inflict suffering on their own people. Our new leaders must act swiftly so as to ensure that the new US Administration does not begin to take the Schalit status quo for granted. (Jerusalem Post Nov 19)

When All Is Forbidden, All Is Permitted By Nadav Shragai

It is hard to remember when Defense Minister Ehud Barak last visited the settlements, when he last sat face to face with a teacher, nursery school teacher, parent or child, and not with the head of a council or settlement. Or when he last honestly and truly asked to learn about what is going on there.

If Barak were to trouble himself and visit those areas, where about 300,000 Israelis now live, he would find hundreds of nursery schools, day care centers and schools filled to capacity along with thousands of young people and hundreds of young couples who want to build their homes next to their parents. But they are being forced to leave the settlements due to a lack of housing.

There has never been anything like it in Judea and Samaria. The freeze is almost total. To enclose a porch, a family has to jump through five hoops, the last of which is the defense minister's signature.

The authorities are tightfisted even when a health clinic, school, youth center or public toilet is involved. Barak may have recently eased up slightly, mostly in the case of "settlement blocs" that according to the plan will remain under Israeli sovereignty after a permanent agreement.

He was even generous enough to approve a cemetery near Ma'aleh Adumim, but this more resembles a joke on the living.

When everything is forbidden, everything is permitted, a wise man once said. In other words: When it is impossible to transport even a trailer to be used as a school bathroom without the Central Command head's approval, or when the legal authorities rush to destroy every improvised little petting zoo set up by children to stop the serious threat to the rule of law from chickens or sheep, no one takes those authorities seriously anymore, and everything concerning construction is wide-open and allowed.

This is how an industry of small mobile homes has developed. You build the walls in the backyard, and they turn into an illegal home.

This is how entire neighborhoods have been built without permits, and why government representatives are met there with fury bordering on hatred, just as they are greeted in the Arab and Bedouin communities.

After all, everything is forbidden there, too, so everything is permitted.

It is crowded in the settlements. Annual growth is impressive, a bit more than 5 percent a year, more than twice the rest of the country.

Two-thirds are the result of births, but even the formula of "natural growth" that was meant to allow those born in the settlements to continue living there - the policy Ariel Sharon's government stuck to at the beginning - has disappeared as if it never existed.

When the Israeli government institutes a "white paper" policy in Judea and Samaria, it has implications well beyond the question of whether Israel is meeting the absurd international commitments it took on itself. A growing public, in particular the younger generation, is being forced to leave the settlements. This is a form of quiet population transfer. They would remain if they had the choice. The bitterness and insult will show one day: if not today

then tomorrow.

Many of them are joining the Israel Defense Forces in droves and even volunteering for the most elite units, while others are serving in places like Yeruham, Sderot, Ramle and Lod. They are also contributing in groups that work in social or religious education in these towns.

All of them are getting married and starting families, and have nowhere to return home to. They are not the hilltop youth withdrawing from the Israeli state, or the expellees from Gush Katif. But anyone who thinks that this forced exile - the result of decrees of freezing and hanging the settlements out to dry - does not leave its traces on them is wrong.

The state is driving away another segment of the public, whose natural inclination is to tie its fate to the State of Israel and contribute all it can.

That is why it is so hard to decide whether to laugh or cry over the excitement taking hold of the left and its spokesmen as a result of what is called "Barak's settlement document." Barak, heaven forbid, approved 400 houses in the settlements.

If there is a real reason to become excited, it lies in the little amount of construction that was unfrozen, at a time when thousands of young people are leaving Judea and Samaria every year as part of the big freeze.

After all, who needs an evacuation if it is possible to simply drain the water from the aquarium? (Haaretz Nov 17)

Gaza Exploding By P. David Hornik

Under heavy international pressure, Israel allowed food and medicine but not fuel supplies into Gaza on Monday. Amnesty International had called on Israel to "stop its policy of collective punishment." European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner had declared herself "profoundly concerned about the consequences for the Gazan population of the complete closure of all Gaza crossings for deliveries of fuel and basic humanitarian assistance." UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon had demanded that Israel immediately end "measures which increase the hardship and suffering of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip."

Also on Monday the Al-Quds Brigades—the military wing of Islamic Jihad—fired eight rockets from Gaza into the western Negev, damaging several houses. A little later in the morning another volley landed south of the much-besieged town of Sderot, damaging houses in a kibbutz.

Though the current "ceasefire" with Hamas is not supposed to be over until December 19, the shelling has been going on for almost two weeks. Just on Friday, for instance, Sderot was hit by eleven Qassam rockets and Ashkelon—a city of 120,000 to the north of Gaza—by six Grad rockets (larger and longer-range than Qassams). An 82-year-old Sderot woman was wounded by shrapnel and 22 shock victims were taken to hospital. Air raid sirens rang out in Ashkelon all day and the city opened its public bomb shelters. Children on the lunch break got caught in rocket fire and had to scamper back into their schools.

Ashdod, a city of 200,000 north of Ashkelon and Israel's second most important port after Haifa, was also ordered to get its bomb shelters ready since it too is within Grad range.

As of now, 250,000 Israeli men, women, and children in the Gaza vicinity are under bombardment with the attendant toll in anxiety, traumatization, and disruption of life—not to mention those unlucky enough to have had rockets hit their persons, dwellings, or property. It goes without saying that Amnesty, Ferrero-Waldner, Ban et al. do not perceive a humanitarian crisis here and are not going to perceive one even if the situation gets much worse. The notion of Jews as victims is now confined to the Holocaust and for most of the world is categorically precluded for the Jews of Israel.

Also on Friday the Jerusalem Post's Khaled Abu Toameh reported that: "Sixteen months after assuming full control over the Gaza Strip, Hamas appears to be stronger than ever—largely thanks to the growing number of tunnels that are used to smuggle goods and weapons under the border with Egypt.

"...the tunnels have now become a vital tool in circumventing the Israeli commercial blockade [and] are no longer a secret, and foreign journalists are...invited to visit them and interview their owners.... large supplies of food and medicine are being brought through them into Gaza on a daily basis....

"When Israel decided earlier this year to temporarily suspend fuel supplies to...Gaza...in response to the rocket attacks on Israeli towns and cities, the smugglers installed underground pipes that continue to pump gasoline into the Gaza Strip. As a result, motorists there pay nearly half the price they were paying several months ago to fill their cars.

“... a veteran Palestinian journalist [said,] “Today people want to eat and buy cheap goods from Egypt. That’s why they are smuggling everything, including sheep, calves, lions, cigarettes, perfume, electrical appliances, food and even tens of thousands of Viagra pills.”

“Both Israel and Egypt seem to have wearied of battling the underground tunnel trade.... Seventeen Palestinian diggers and smugglers who were killed when their tunnels collapsed in the past few months have been declared shahids (martyrs) by Hamas and their families.

“This makes the Egyptians reluctant to take tough measures against the smugglers, fearing they will be accused by the Arab world of complicity in the “siege” against Gaza’s 1.5 million Palestinians.

And what does Israel’s defense minister, Ehud Barak, have to say about the situation? In a speech on Saturday he warned against getting “carried away,” stating: “The time may come when there will be a need for a broad operation, because we cannot accept the ongoing violation of the truce. But getting carried away is not a policy.”

Adding that he was “the minister of defense, not the minister of war,” he continued: “If the need will arise, the IDF and the security forces are ready for a powerful operation that will be painful for the other side. But security is not a matter of pride. Two years ago, we saw what an overly-rushed decision can do to Israeli security.”

He was referring, of course, to the bungled war that Israel launched against Hezbollah in the summer of 2006. The defense minister’s message, then, was threefold: (1) agreements with Israel mean nothing; (2) Israeli citizens can be attacked with impunity; and (3) the precedent of the Second Lebanon War proves that Israel is too incompetent to use military force anyway.

On Monday Barak visited Sderot with British foreign secretary David Miliband, who said the attacks from Gaza were “intolerable” and “that Israel must continue to pursue talks with the Palestinian Authority.” Barak—still seeming to be using some of his script from Saturday, and expressing an exquisite sense of “ripening”—said he had “made it clear to [Miliband] that...no country can tolerate a constant bombardment of its citizens from a foreign entity...and Israel will not accept it. We will act when the conditions ripen and there will be need for such action, and we will act with force.”

DEBKAFfile claimed that: “Hamas is not scared by the prospect of the Olmert government being driven to a major military operation in Gaza. Its leaders calculate that it will be so costly in casualties for the Palestinian population and Israeli troops alike that an international outcry will force the IDF to cut the campaign short without achieving its goals.”

In other words, the consequences of Israel’s 2005 “disengagement” from Gaza seemed as dire as possible, with Israel (1) under bombardment from Gaza, (2) seen as responsible for Gaza’s welfare, and (3) expected to allow the bombardment to continue.

There is a strong chance that a new Israeli government will be elected in February that, unlike the current government, will be considered “hard-line.” Its work will be cut out for it.

As for the current government, also on Monday it announced to Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas that in December it would free a further 250 Fatah security prisoners in honor of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. At a memorial rally for Yasser Arafat last Tuesday, Abbas had proclaimed: “The Palestinian leadership will continue to follow...Arafat’s path.... The path of the shahids—Arafat, George Habash and Sheikh Ahmed Yassin—is the path that we cherish....” (FrontPageMagazine.com Nov 18)

The writer is a freelance writer and translator living in Tel Aviv.

Gulling Americans into Making Terror Legit? By Diana West

How dumb does President-elect Barack Obama think we are?

Let me rephrase the question: Are we as dumb as Obama thinks?

Before answering, let me lay out the background that prompts the question. Last spring, back when Hamas, the Muslim-Brotherhood-linked terror group dedicated to the annihilation of Israel through jihad, endorsed the Obama's candidacy, the young Democratic candidate was still assumed to falter when it came to support for Israel, the United States' greatest and most beleaguered ally in the Middle East. Obama may well have rejected Hamas's support, but those were still the days when the Rev. Jeremiah Wright and sidekick Lewis Farrakhan were making at least some news for both their anti-Semitic, anti-white views and their support for Obama. Those were also still the days before Hillary Clinton's ship of state completely foundered and sunk.

Obama did a few things to pivot off the Hamas endorsement and his alliance with the Farrakhan-connected Wright, whose church newsletter, don't forget, actually made room for terrorist propaganda by Hamas chieftain Mousa

Abu Marzook. Obama spoke of his "unshakeable commitment" to Israel, and when John McCain noted that Obama was Hamas' choice for president, Obama called that fact a "smear" and said McCain had "lost his bearings." Obama also publicly criticized former President Jimmy Carter for meeting, also last spring, with leaders of Hamas, a rancid charade complete with hugs for living terrorists, and red roses for dead ones (at Arafat's grave). Obama declared, "I have a fundamental difference with President Carter and disagree with his decision to meet with Hamas. We must not negotiate with a terrorist group intent on Israel's destruction. We should only sit down with Hamas if they renounce terrorism, recognize Israel's right to exist and abide by past agreements."

Well, Hamas hasn't renounced terrorism, recognized Israel's right to exist or abided by past agreements - the three conditions for parleying with Hamas as enumerated by the "international community." This week, however, top Hamas adviser Ahmed Yousef - the same Hamas official who endorsed Obama last spring - revealed to an Arabic newspaper that during the presidential campaign, aides to Obama were already, as Obama might say, "sitting down" with members of the terrorist organization.

"We were in contact with a number of Obama's aides through the Internet, and later met with some of them in Gaza, but they advised us not to come out with any statements, as they may have a negative effect on his election campaign," Yousef told the London-based Al-Hayat. According to Yousef, Al-Hayat reported, Hamas's contact with Obama's advisers was "ongoing, adding that he was still on good terms with some of the aides he had befriended while residing in the U.S."

How interesting. "While residing in the U.S." - that is, before fleeing the country to avoid arrest on terror-related charges in 2005 - Yousef worked for the United Association for Studies and Research (UASR), a Muslim-Brotherhood-affiliated organization founded by Hamas chieftain Mousa Abu Marzook (the same Marzook whose propaganda appeared in Wright's church newsletter) that served as the political command of Hamas in the United States. Along with an interlocking network of Islamic organizations, the UASR has since been designated by the U.S. government as an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation terror-financing trial.

This raises a fascinating question. Which aides to the next president of the United States might Yousef have "befriended" while "residing in the U.S." - in other words, while Yousef was serving Hamas?

One possibility is Robert Malley, the pro-Hamas, Arafat-revering on-again/off-again Obama adviser who heads the Middle East program at the George Soros-funded International Crisis Group (ICG). Last spring, Malley "severed his ties to the Obama campaign," as The New York Times put it, after learning that "the Times of London was preparing to publish an article disclosing direct contacts he had with Hamas." At that time, Tommy Vietor, a spokesman for the Obama campaign, said: "He has no formal role in the campaign and will not play one in the future."

Really? Last month, Forbes.com reported on Malley's October meeting with Syrian strongman Bashar Al-Assad, noting that Syrian government-controlled media - which, in one case referred to Malley as "a senior adviser to Barack Obama" - reported that discussions included Malley's explanation of "the role ICG would have in briefing the new U.S. administration about Syria's important role in the region." ICG, not incidentally, is home to assorted luminaries of the notably anti-Israel persuasion, including Zbigniew Brzezinski, retired Gen. Wesley Clark (who called U.S. support for Israel's 2006 war against Hezbollah a "serious mistake"), and another on-off Obama adviser, Samantha Powers.

Naturally, there's more. This week, Middle East Newline reported that President-elect Obama recently sent "senior foreign policy adviser" Malley to Egypt and Syria where he "relayed a pledge from Obama that the United States would seek to enhance relations with Cairo as well as reconcile with Damascus." According to an unnamed aide, "The tenor of the messages was that the Obama administration would take into greater account Egyptian and Syrian interests."

No denial so far from the Obama administration-in-waiting on this report, which is beginning to bounce around Israeli media. As for the Hamas story about secret contact with Obama aides, an Obama spokesman recently told The Jerusalem Post, "This assertion is just plain false."

Time will tell, of course. There is no doubletalk fancy enough to disguise a new era of accommodation of jihad terrorists bent on Israel's - and the West's - destruction, if that is the era we are heading into.

Or is there? This takes me back to my original question: Are we as dumb as Obama thinks we are?

I'm afraid - really afraid - we are. (Jewish World Review Nov 17)