

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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<http://www.sazionfed.co.za>

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Processing Delay

Elliott Abrams, Foreign Policy, 8 June 2012

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/08/processing_delay?page=full

Summer 2012. Israel's elections have been delayed until late next year by the formation of a new coalition government. The "Arab Spring" is producing Muslim Brotherhood victories, Salafi gains, chaos in Syria, disorder in Egypt, tremors in Jordan. Iran's nuclear program moves steadily forward despite tougher sanctions and ongoing negotiations between Iran and the world's major powers. In the United States, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney begin to face off in the upcoming presidential election.

Amid these developments, the so-called "peace process" will enter its 46th year on June 10. For it was on that day in 1967 that a cease-fire in the Six-Day War was declared, leaving Israel in possession of the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai, the Golan Heights, and Jerusalem but divided over what to do with its newfound gains.

Israel withdrew from the Sinai in 1982 and from Gaza in 2007, and no one is discussing the Golan these days due to Syria's internal crisis. But the future of Jerusalem and the West Bank remains a matter of intense international -- including American -- diplomatic effort. While professional peacemakers may want to get negotiations going again, the inconvenient truth is that none of the parties to this conflict have adequate incentives to take serious political risks right now. Forget about reaching a final settlement for the next year and likely far longer -- neither the situation on the ground nor the politics in Israel and among the Palestinians makes it at all likely.

In the fall of 2003, Israel took the first steps to withdraw its forces and settlers from Palestinian territories. Despairing of any possibility for productive negotiations while Yasir Arafat led the PLO, but under heavy pressure to make some move, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon turned to Gaza, which the old general viewed as a military burden rather than as an Israeli asset. After a grueling political battle that extended through 2004 and half of 2005, a resolute Sharon carried out his plan to remove Israeli settlements and military bases from Gaza in August 2005, breaking up his own Likud party over it.

This political move, which resulted in the creation of the Kadima party, would hardly have made sense had Gaza been Sharon's final plan. By late fall of 2005, Sharon had already fought and won in Likud for the Gaza disengagement. But he wanted, his closest collaborators believe, to go further -- to set Israel's borders in the West Bank more or less along the current fence line, taking in roughly 12 percent of the territory and protecting all the large settlements. In his view, that 12 percent would shrink in some future final status agreement with the Palestinians, but an interim move in the West Bank would provide defensible lines until then. It would also serve as the basis for a Palestinian state in the West Bank, thereby finally separating Israel from the Palestinians. It would allow Israel to act, not wait decade after decade hoping for the day when Palestinian moderation allowed the PLO's leadership to sign a deal.

Sharon's stroke in early 2006 did not kill that plan, and indeed, Ehud Olmert ran and won on something like it when he succeeded Sharon as leader of Kadima. Olmert called it *hitkansut* -- translated as convergence, gathering, or rallying together. The idea was the same: pull back from isolated settlements and set Israel's final borders.

Under pressure from U.S. President George W. Bush, Olmert agreed to wait and try to negotiate a deal with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. In Bush's view, a negotiated deal would bring Israel the Palestinian commitments it needed, and bring Abbas the legitimacy he needed. Olmert, believing he had a full term of office before him, thought he could comply with Bush's wish and move unilaterally later if no breakthrough was forthcoming. He never had the chance, however, falling victim to a combination of personal scandal and Israel's disappointment with the outcome of the 2006 Lebanon war. Moreover, the June 2007 Hamas coup in Gaza left the Palestinian populace and leadership split, and it suggested to Israelis that withdrawal of any sort from the West Bank might permit the same sort of terrorist takeover that withdrawal had allowed in Gaza and in south Lebanon.

Now that former Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz -- who had previously presented a peace plan that would result in the creation of a Palestinian state in 60 percent of the West Bank's land -- has won control of Kadima and joined the government, there has been some speculation about whether the "peace process" will soon be revived. It will not. There have been no negotiations for three and a half years, the result mostly of foolish and inept diplomacy by the Obama administration. By declaring that a freeze on construction in settlements and in Jerusalem was a prerequisite for negotiations, Obama and his envoys (led by George Mitchell) cornered Abbas -- how could he appear less "Palestinian" than the Americans?

But the breakdown of negotiations presented Abbas with another problem. His greatest asset in his rivalry with Hamas was the claim that he could produce a state while Hamas could produce only violence. No negotiations, no state -- so Abbas has been forced to look elsewhere for validation during the Obama years.

In the absence of negotiations, Abbas has grasped for a unity government with Hamas. Despite previous failed agreements, notably a pact mediated by the Saudi king in February 2007, Abbas is now trying this route again. Talks beginning on May 27 were to select a new cabinet within 10 days, and though they have been delayed, they may succeed by the end of June. The plan is for that new government to rule for six months and then hold elections, but neither Hamas nor Fatah wants to subject itself to the unpredictability of the polls. For Abbas, elections might end his years of happy globe-trotting. He claims that retirement is his fondest wish, but if the Palestinian population will put up with him for a few more years, he will put up with them.

Elections aren't even the toughest challenge such a coalition would face. Security tops the list. Who would lead the Palestinian Authority's various forces? Who can expect Hamas to disarm when it has never been defeated by Fatah, either in combat or at the ballot box?

Because "national unity" is widely popular among Palestinians, Abbas and Hamas will keep at it and may even briefly achieve a "unity government" -- but it won't last.

Even a short-lived unity government with Hamas would doom any chance of a negotiation with Israel, but that doesn't bother Abbas. He can't see a way to climb down from his demand for a construction freeze, and he doesn't have high hopes for negotiations in the first place. Negotiations demand compromises, and he knows that any he makes will immediately be denounced by Hamas as treason. Meanwhile, he's not in a good position for serious talks with Israel anyway. His minister for negotiations, Saeb Erekat, had a heart attack this spring, and the other old negotiating hands -- former Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei and PLO Secretary-General Yasser Abed Rabbo -- are out of favor.

All this leaves Abbas simply muddling through, declaring that he will go back to the United Nations, hold elections, or insist on a new government. But he's shuffling those claims like cards in a deck -- now one on top, now another. The shuffling will continue until the United States has a new president and Abbas can decipher what, if anything, the new administration will demand of him and of Israel. The most likely outcome for Abbas is more years that look like the last three: lots of travel, occasional efforts at the United Nations, and discussions of elections and unity governments that never get beyond the talking stage.

Don't expect any initiatives out of the United States until after the presidential election either. If Romney is elected, he and his new team will need time to get settled and will likely see Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as a bottomless pit for diplomatic energy rather than as a priority. If Obama is reelected, he will have no Middle East hands to whom he can turn. Mideast advisor Dennis Ross has left; Jeffrey Feltman, assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, departed for a post at the United Nations; and Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns will in all likelihood leave when a new secretary of state is appointed or a few months later.

In January 2009, Obama appointed Mitchell as special Middle East envoy on his second day in office. That kind of priority will not be assigned to the "peace process" in January 2013 -- no matter who wins.

The new Israeli coalition has some room to maneuver, but don't expect it to make diplomacy with the Palestinians a priority. It will want to make decisions on Iran first and see who will be the U.S. president for the next four years. An Israel that is worried about stability in Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon and facing a growing Iranian nuclear weapons program is unlikely to take many risks in the West Bank.

That's not to say the new government can afford to ignore the Palestinian issue. Polls show that Israelis do want peace and do want separation from the Palestinians, but have little faith that much can be achieved. If Iran's nuclear program is halted, through either a bombing campaign or a negotiated deal, and Iran's ally, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, falls, attention may turn back to the West Bank. An Israel that has defied the

counsels of restraint from the United States, Russia, China, and all of Europe by bombing Iran may well seek to patch things up by appearing in a more "moderate" and cooperative light on the Palestinian issue.

Such peace talks, however, would likely fail. If the Palestinian president could not agree to the startlingly generous offer a falling Olmert made in late 2008, nothing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu can offer will elicit a yes. This would leave Netanyahu facing two alternatives: continue economic and institutional development in the West Bank without talks, or undertake a Sharon/Olmert/Mofaz move in the West Bank.

Netanyahu's government could adopt some combination of consolidating (perhaps even annexing) the major settlement blocs while unilaterally pulling settlements back to the security fence. This would allow the Palestinians more political and security sway in large areas of the West Bank, while also compensating settlers who move "back" -- mostly to other, larger settlements, not behind the Green Line.

The problem with unilateral steps is that they go unrequited. Sharon, contemplating disengagement from Gaza, said this straightforwardly to Bush. In the absence of concessions from the Palestinians, he sought and received political and ideological compensation from the United States. This came in the form of Bush's April 14, 2004, letter to Sharon, wherein the United States said that there was no "right of return" and that the Palestinian refugee problem had to be solved in Palestine "rather than in Israel." It also affirmed that "it is realistic to expect" Israel would keep the major settlement blocs, which were "new realities on the ground."

Both houses of U.S. Congress endorsed these views soon after Bush articulated them, but the Obama administration foolishly devalued this compensation for Israel in 2009, treating the letter as a sort of private missive to Sharon that does not affect U.S. policy now that Bush is no longer president. They have thus made Obama's own words cheap and not acceptable as compensation for taking political and security risks.

Nothing this year or even next, when Netanyahu faces an election in the fall, would lead the prime minister to act unilaterally. Sooner or later, however, he may discover what Sharon did in 2003: Nature abhors a vacuum, and so do the European Union and many Israelis. The same may hold true for a reelected Obama administration. Attention is now on Iran, Syria, and Egypt, but in another couple of years attention could shift back to demands to "end the occupation," featuring a variety of proposals -- many of them foolish and dangerous -- for how to do so. At one point in 2003, Sharon caustically joked to me, "There is a boom in plans," referring to the various innovative proposals whose common denominator was that Israel should give up assets it held.

Pressures on Israel will mount. Take, for example, the "Quartet Principles," which require that Hamas recognize Israel, renounce violence, and adhere to all previous diplomatic agreements before joining any Palestinian government that the United States would recognize and assist. Remarkably, these principles have been supported by other members of the Quartet: the United Nations, Russia, and the European Union. That

support, however, was less a matter of principle than the product of the absolute bloody-mindedness of Hamas. The Palestinian Islamist movement would not move an inch and would not give eager Russian and European diplomats even the slightest hint of compromise -- through ambiguous formulations of what "recognition of Israel" meant or how "adherence to" or "respect for" previous diplomatic agreements might be interpreted.

But that could change. Now, six years later, with its own popularity in Gaza at a low-water mark and its former ally in Damascus on the ropes, Hamas may decide to encourage those diplomats who are determined to be encouraged. That wouldn't take much of an ideological shift on their part. After all, not only European but American diplomats are happily engaging the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt without imposing demands on it to change positions on women, Copts, or sharia, much less Israel.

The damage of an EU decision to deal with Hamas would be unavoidable. First, Israelis would be further confirmed in their belief that the Europeans could not be trusted, diminishing even further the European Union's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Second, such a move could only undermine Fatah and the Palestinian Authority, which view Hamas as an enemy to be defeated rather than as a genuine partner. Third, peace talks would themselves be impossible if Hamas were part of the Palestinian government or, worse yet, of the PLO, which is the formal negotiating body for the Palestinians.

So why would the Europeans be tempted to do it? Frustration, for one thing. Nothing is moving, so let's shake things up, the argument would be. Such wishful thinking would then produce learned arguments about how Hamas is changing, how the "military wing" is declining in power while the "moderates" are rising, and how no peace is possible without Hamas's buy-in.

But these arguments, honest or disingenuous, are only part of the picture. The truth is that domestic politics push European leaders to take such stances and condemn Israel. This is one of the few genuinely new developments since the "peace process" began. In many constituencies across the continent, Muslims now comprise a significant minority of voters. France's recent presidential election is instructive. One poll found that a remarkable 93 percent of Muslim voters went for François Hollande, while 7 percent voted for Nicolas Sarkozy; another leading poll found that Hollande got 85 percent. The usual estimate is that there are 2 million Muslim voters in France; if 85 percent of them supported Hollande, that translates to 1.7 million votes. As Hollande's margin of victory over Sarkozy was 1.1 million votes, the impact of the Muslim voters was clear.

This is a point well worth remembering when Europeans condescendingly point to U.S. politics as the source of America's support for Israel -- as if their own policies emerged from some Platonic ideal of a foreign ministry or think tank. It is difficult to believe there will ever again be a constellation of European leaders as sympathetic to the Jewish state as figures like British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, Sarkozy, and -- the lone survivor among them today -- German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The prevalence of anti-Israel views among the European left also helps explain why EU governments are increasingly critical of Israel. This is a dangerous development for Israel, but one over which it has little control. The Israelis cannot ignore Europe because of its economic importance to them: 30 percent of Israeli exports go to the European Union. So they are condemned to fighting efforts at boycotts and divestment year after year, country by country, battle by battle, and one need only chat with any Israeli ambassador in Europe to discover how difficult, and how tinged with anti-Semitism, those battles now are.

Combine all these factors, and it becomes clear that there are few reasons for Netanyahu or Abbas to take risks to revive the "peace process." If not dead, it is dormant, quiescent, moribund -- choose your synonym. Any remotely likely change will leave Abbas worse off than he is today. Whatever action Netanyahu might take would bring enormous political problems in Israel and few gains outside it. Sooner or later Israelis will have to once again make decisions about their relations with the Palestinians, but not while the outcomes of the "Arab Spring," the Iranian nuclear program, and the U.S. presidential election remain unclear.

As Israeli and Arab journalists, diplomats, and political leaders pass through Washington, I sit down with them on occasion for an hour. I watch the clock, and when the hour is up I find I can say, in meeting after meeting, "We've been talking about the Middle East for an hour, and neither of us has said the word 'Palestinian.'" That's an issue for next year, or the year after that.

Can Israel defy the world?

Ted Belman, American Thinker, 12 June 2012

http://www.americanthinker.com/2012/06/can_israel_defy_the_world.html

When it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the political right accuses the left of pursuing a fantasy -- namely, that peace is possible. At the same time, however, the right suffers from what many consider its own fantasy: that Israel can defy the world, and particularly the U.S.

In addressing the right's "fantasy," the fact is that you can count the instances where Israeli prime ministers have defied the U.S. on the fingers of one hand.

Ben Gurion's declaration of statehood is one such example, as was his refusal to withdraw in the '48 war to the Partition line. He insisted instead on the Armistice lines. In part for his intransigence, he was punished with the creation of UNRWA.

Other instances of Israel bucking the United States include, perhaps, Eshkol's decision to pre-empt the Six-Day War and Begin's courageous decisions to bomb Iraq's nuclear reactor at Osirak, and to push on to Beirut in the first Lebanese War.

Begin, uncharacteristically, gave up every inch of the Sinai, after much pressure and prodding. He even came to the conclusion that doing it was a good thing. The most important reason was because Egypt, then Israel's biggest Arab enemy, was prepared to break the Arab rejectionist front by making peace with Israel. This was considered a very big deal at the time.

Shamir was forced to participate in the Madrid Conference in 1991 and to negotiate indirectly with the PLO. He was also forced to put Jerusalem on the table. He may have given in since he desperately needed a U.S. loan guarantee on a \$10-billion line of credit in order to finance the aliya of close to one million Jews, or nearly Jews, from Russia.

There may have been pressures applied to him as well, as he was dealing with James Baker, who had no love for Jews.

Thanks to the pressure and threats that Shamir and therefore Israel were subject to, Rabin, when he became prime minister, opted to bypass the pressure and to secretly negotiate a deal directly with Arafat, the head of the PLO. What resulted was the Declaration of Principles in 1993 and the Interim Agreement in 1995, together known as the Oslo Accords. These agreements were favorable to Israel, as the U.S. was not in a position to support the Palestinian position. That is not to say that it wasn't a huge mistake to invite Arafat back into Judea and Samaria. It was.

After Rabin's assassination, Benjamin Netanyahu, in 1996, narrowly defeated Shimon Peres for the job of prime minister. He based his campaign on his rejection of the Oslo Accords or on his demand for reciprocity before Israel would act on them. Within two years, though, he betrayed his longstanding positions and signed the Wye Agreement, in which let the PA control 40% of the territories, as required by Oslo, without demanding reciprocity. Douglas Feith explains the significance of the agreement in "Wye and the Road to War," at *Commentary*.

It was a known fact that Pres. Clinton had promised to release Jonathan Pollard, but I doubt that this was why Netanyahu signed the agreement. He may have thought he had no choice but to continue the Oslo process, even in the face of Arafat's non-compliance.

In any event, it contributed to his defeat at the hands of Ehud Barak in the elections one year later.

Because of a wave of devastating suicide bombings, Barak resigned in 2001, and Ariel Sharon, the noted war hero, replaced him as prime minister. For all his toughness and his defense of the settlement enterprise, expectations were that he would not succumb to pressure. His first task was to put an end to the killings, and accordingly, he announced:

All of our efforts to attain a cease-fire have been torpedoed by the Palestinians. The fire did not cease, even for one day. The Cabinet has therefore instructed our security forces to take all necessary measures to bring full security to the citizens of Israel. We can rely only on ourselves. [The following sentence, significantly, was said in Hebrew only.] And from this day forward, we will rely only on ourselves.

But the thrust of Sharon's remarks (here translated from Hebrew) was directed westward:

We are currently in the midst of a complex and difficult diplomatic campaign. I turn to the western democracies, first and foremost the leader of the free world, the United States. Do not repeat the dreadful mistake of 1938, when the enlightened democracies of Europe decided to sacrifice Czechoslovakia for the sake of a temporary, convenient solution. Don't try to appease the Arabs at our expense. We will not accept this. *Israel will not be Czechoslovakia.*

Some in Israel thought Sharon's remarks were over the top, but I for one (and I was not alone) was thrilled to read them. Reuven Koret wrote about the statement and what may have caused it:

Israeli officials were uncharacteristically reticent to comment on Sharon's remarks. Army Radio reported in the morning that they were unable to extract any quote from any government minister with whom they spoke.

Part of the reason for the barely-veiled hostility the Prime Minister expressed with regard to the United States is evidently a less than understanding response of the Bush Administration to his request to include Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah to the "A-list" of terror groups, especially after each of the groups launched attacks on Israel in recent days, with little or no action by the Palestinian Authority.

Another explanation is believed to be the new Middle East "initiative" reportedly being introduced by the Bush Administration to gain support from reluctant Arab would-be coalition partners [for the invasion of Iraq].

The U.S. initiative reportedly calls for an independent Palestinian state, division of Jerusalem (Jewish areas to Israel and Arab areas to Palestine, including the Temple Mount), and the halt of all Israeli construction in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Sharon never once reiterated these sentiments, and a year and a half later, he was forced to accept (albeit grudgingly) this American initiative, then called the Roadmap. He did so with fourteen reservations which were never given more than a glance, even though the U.S. agreed to "seriously consider them."

This Roadmap, by including the Saudi Plan, drastically changed the terms of the Oslo Accords and put Israel into a straitjacket. Oslo had made no mention of Res. 194, which is the basis for the "right of return," nor did it put a limitation on Israeli settlement construction. Thus, the U.S. was back in the game. The U.S. forced Israel to agree, because that was the price Saudi Arabia was demanding in exchange for her agreeing to the invasion of Iraq by the U.S.

Once again, as with Rabin, the pressure that Sharon was subject to resulted in him proposing to unilaterally disengage from Gaza on his terms. Such a proposal flew in the face of everything Sharon had stood for. To make the disengagement more palatable to

Israelis, he negotiated with the George Bush administration for a letter which ostensibly allowed Israel the right to keep the settlement blocks and to reject the so-called right of return. (Pres. Obama made short shrift of that letter, declaring the U.S. not bound by it.)

Sharon originally intended to remain in control of the border between Gaza and Egypt in order to prevent smuggling. Condi Rice forced Sharon to accept the Rafah Agreement, which provided for the monitoring to be done by the EU with Israel video access, albeit a day later. In time, the EU abandoned its post, leaving no monitors in place -- we all know with what results.

Similarly, Rice spearheaded the formulation of U.N. Res. 1701, intended to end the second Lebanon war in 2006, at the request of PM Livni. That too proved worthless. Thank you, Condi.

In fact, every time Israel went to war, she was on a very tight leash. The UNSC always passed a Chapter VII ceasefire resolution sooner or later, depending on the U.S. position, and Israel never violated such resolutions, except perhaps for a few hours. This was so even when it was in Israel's best interest to finish the job.

In 2009, Netanyahu once again became prime minister. Within a few months of taking office, he gave a speech at BESA in which he accepted the two-state solution, contrary to the Likud platform and his own previous pronouncements. In the fall of that year, he announced a ten-month settlement freeze in Judea and Samaria, seemingly as a gesture. No reason was given, no reciprocity demanded. Netanyahu proudly made the point that the freeze didn't apply to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, for all intents and purposes, he imposed a de facto freeze when the actual freeze expired, which applied to both the territories and Jerusalem. He merely allows the odd building project to go ahead in order to pacify his right wing. So how can anyone have any confidence in his declarations that Jerusalem will remain the undivided capital of Israel?

Don't ever underestimate the ruthless pressure Israel is subjected to. Last September, MK Aryeh Eldad said he had reliable information that Obama put a "gun" to Bibi's head to prevent Israel from annexing Area C in response to the unilateral move by the PA for recognition at the U.N. The "gun" was Obama's threat not to veto the UNSC resolution recognizing Palestine.

When Netanyahu was invited to form the government based on the support he received from parties on the right, he began immediately to water down the influence of the right by forming a coalition with Labor, headed by Barak. He also appointed establishment lawyer Yehuda Weinstein as attorney general. In this position, Weinstein is the legal adviser to the government and is responsible for protecting the rule of law. Prior to the elections, Netanyahu also engineered that Moshe Feiglin would be low on the list, so as to exclude him from the Knesset, and invited Dan Meridor to join Likud. Meridor was subsequently given a senior cabinet post.

And now Netanyahu has added Kadima to the coalition. He is no longer threatened by the right, as he was first time around. With Kadima, Labor, and Likud in the coalition, Netanyahu can comfortably rule from the center.

A series of laws have been proposed by Netanyahu's colleagues on the right in order to make Israel more democratic and to handcuff the radical NGOs supported by the EU and the NIF. In almost all cases, Netanyahu has opposed the legislation -- either because he didn't want to alienate the left or because he didn't want to alienate the EU.

Besides that, he has followed the dictate of the international community not to do anything that would imperil the two-state solution. Obviously, the freeze and the opposition to the legislation are part of that, but something else is going on. In the last three years, the EU has encouraged and financed the Palestinians' efforts to take over "Area C" by planting or building. According to Regavim, this program has resulted in the loss of thousands of acres, and the rate of loss is growing exponentially. Not only is Netanyahu's government not doing anything to stop them, but it is aiding and abetting them. A recent example of that is Barak's decision to uproot olive trees planted by Jews while permitting the Arabs to plant. The Arabs acquire title to the lands by doing so. Meanwhile, the GOI required the Jews to waive their right to acquire title by planting, which they did. They said their sole purpose was, and is, to stop the Arabs from acquiring title. Still, Barak wants to uproot the trees which the Jews have planted.

Another example is the government's policy to demolish homes built by Jews on "private Palestinian land," though no one is claiming ownership to such lands, and though well-accepted law in the West and even in Israel allows for compensation when the homes have been built in good faith. The government policy is to direct the Court to issue demolition orders rather than to allow the residents the right to argue that they built their property in good faith.

Furthermore, Netanyahu has opposed recent bills that would legalize houses built on "private Palestinian Land." He threatened to fire any minister who voted in favor of the bills, resulting in their defeat. He didn't even wait for the report of the Levy Commission appointed by him to recommend solutions. My guess is that Netanyahu was aware that the report would support the settlers.

Pres. Obama has taken position that a solution to the conflict can be arrived at only through direct negotiations. He established such a position to prevent the PA from circumventing negotiations by going to the UNGA or to the UNSC for recognition. He also reiterated this position recently, when Barak threatened to unilaterally withdraw.

But the problem with negotiations is that the U.N., the U.S., and the EU meddle in them on the side of the PA. And now the PA, with the support of the EU and the U.S., is putting facts on the ground which essentially pre-determine the outcome. At the same time, they prevent Israel from putting facts on the ground.

Inherent in the idea that one can negotiate is the right to say "no" -- to not offer what one doesn't want to offer or to reject what one wishes not to accept. Thus, negotiations,

whether to buy a house or to arrive at a peace agreement, don't necessarily result in a deal. So negotiations are not the answer, and Obama knows it. Putting facts on the ground is.

Israel must find the resolve to end the peace process and take the heat. Otherwise, she is doomed to subservience. She must put the right's "fantasy" to the test.

Why doesn't the media get Israeli politics?

Seth Mandel, Commentary, 7 June 2012

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2012/06/07/why-doesnt-the-media-get-israeli-politics-netanyahu/>

Lee Smith has an interesting take on one aspect of the administration's calculated cyberleaks, produced obediently by the *New York Times*, detailing the cooperation between the U.S. and Israel in conducting cyberwarfare against the Iranian nuclear program. It's true, Smith writes, that in one sense these articles are meant to make Obama seem tough, but they are also to pass the buck if and when things go wrong. Smith writes:

The nature of the story is given away in a quote from Vice President Joe Biden, exasperated after Stuxnet mistakenly appeared on the Web in the summer of 2010, exposing the code. Biden laid the blame at the feet of the administration's ostensible partner. "It's got to be the Israelis," said Biden, according to an unnamed source. "They went too far." In other words, the Obama White House wants it both ways—to claim credit for the successes of the cyberwarfare campaign and to shift blame on the Israelis in the event that things go wrong.

It's telling that the administration thinks blaming Israel is a good election strategy, and Smith's piece is worth reading in full. But a couple quotes from Israeli sources stood out to me. First Yossi Melman, the Israeli journalist, tells Smith: "Israeli officials know that it's an election year... Israeli officials are not going to rock the boat and ruin the party." Later in the story, an Israeli intelligence source tells Smith: "No Israeli government is going to be criticized for releasing a virus. We know we are at war, and America does not know it's at war."

I'm not so sure that's the case, but it does reveal something else about the two countries: Israelis understand American politics well, and American officials and journalists don't seem to understand Israeli politics at all.

The Israelis are at peace with Obama's strategy, because they get it. It's an election year. It's just business. This knowledge gap partially explained Jodi Rudoren's clumsy transition to the *New York Times*'s Jerusalem bureau. She made a number of missteps, and explained that she didn't really know exactly what she was doing yet, and to give her some time to adjust. Fair enough I suppose, but it was telling.

And a perfect example comes from Vanity Fair, which dispatched David Margolick to write a long profile on Benjamin Netanyahu for the magazine's July issue. It's now online, and it is truly something to behold. Margolick writes that most of Netanyahu's decisions can be attributed to the inordinate influence the following people have on his opinions: his wife, Sara; his late father, Benzion; his late brother, Yoni; Ehud Barak; and the last person Netanyahu has spoken to, regardless of who it was.

There may be more in the article, but I stopped reading two pages in when Margolick explicitly compared Bibi to a warmongering Soviet dictator with a split personality. Margolick wasn't writing that all those people have some influence on Netanyahu; he was making the case that each one has unique control over him. In other words, the article constantly contradicts its own thesis. It is essentially a cry for help. But why? What makes Israeli politics so incomprehensible to the press?

I'm not sure what the answer is, but there are a few possibilities. One is that the left doesn't understand coalition politics as well as the right, which has to deal with making peace among its various factions. Another is that the liberal media's echo chamber keeps them in a pack mentality, following the biases of papers like the *New York Times*. There is of course the left's anti-Russian-immigrant hysteria, which they direct at Avigdor Lieberman even though he agrees with many of their priorities. It's also hard to miss the media's noxious treatment of Orthodox Jews who, much to the left's eternal chagrin, also participate in Israel's democratic process.

Maybe it's something as simple as the media's deeply personal antipathy toward Netanyahu. Whatever it is, they should figure it out—and soon. These articles portraying Israel's democratically elected, rational premier as a schizophrenic dictator are getting embarrassing.

Iran on verge of disaster

Guy Bechor, 7 June 2012, YNet News

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4239696,00.html>

Never withdraw into a fortress, Machiavelli warned. Those who do so are trapped within their own walls and have nowhere to run. They are surrounded, thereby becoming an easy target for their enemies. Yet Iran is doing the exact opposite of this advice. It withdraws into itself, thereby turning into an isolated pariah state that experiences the kind of economic blows no country has experienced since World War II.

It is true that Ahmadinejad and his colleagues are fooling the West in the nuclear talks, yet the Iranians know well how dangerous their situation is, on the eve of a decision of historical significance. They are aware of the dangers, yet nonetheless continue to withdraw.

On July 1st, the European Union's full oil embargo on Iran will go into effect, and from that moment on Tehran shall lose one quarter of its sales revenues. At this time already,

the Iranians have no customers for their oil, and tankers carrying some 30,000 barrels without a buyer are docked in the Persian Gulf.

Iran can store up to 80,000 oil barrels in its 39 tankers before it needs to shut down oil wells. Such move would be destructive, as paralyzed oil wells sustain grave damage that prevents them from returning to full capacity later on. At this time the West presses states like China, India, South Korea and South Africa, and they too are minimizing oil acquisitions from Iran.

Yet this is not the only blow to be sustained by Iran that day. In early July, the large insurance companies will stop insuring Iranian tankers and any vessel carrying Iranian oil. In light of this, South Korea, Japan and other states have announced that they will be forced to halt their Iranian oil purchases. Iran has no ability to insure the tankers itself. China may insure some of them, but the costs in such case would be huge.

Iran's economic future never looked grimmer. It currently suffers from a huge deficit, wide-ranging unemployment, a worthless currency, reckless inflation, and young people who only want to flee the isolated state. Many of them have succeeded in doing so.

On top of this, grave sanctions have already been imposed against Iran, such as disconnecting it from the global clearinghouse system and the boycott on companies that maintain ties with Iran's central bank or its oil industry.

Beware Soviet lesson

Yet there is another immense force currently being utilized against Iran: The policy of Saudi Arabia, which boosted its oil output to a 30-year high, thereby causing a deliberate decline in oil prices. Only months ago, commentators warned that oil prices will rise to \$150 or \$200 per barrel, but now the price has dropped below the \$90 mark.

China's and the West's oil consumption is declining in any case as result of the economic recession, and the growing Saudi output produced a situation whereby supply is higher than demand, prices are dropping, and Iran's customers are switching to Saudi Arabia. The Kurds in northern Iraq are doing the same and have also boosted their oil production.

The Saudis are doing it on purpose. They are highly interested in drying up Iran, among other things against the backdrop of Tehran's support for Syrian President Assad. Saudi Arabia can allow prices to drop to \$80 a barrel before being hurt, and such prices are indeed drying Iran up and causing huge damage. After all, some 80% of Iran's revenues come from oil.

Western intentions are clear: Bringing about Iran's economic collapse, in the hopes that this will prompt the fall of the Ayatollah regime. An experiment of such scope had not been undertaken in the modern era, even not against the former Soviet Union.

Yet instead of securing a compromise before its economy collapses, and before the many minorities and dissidents hit the streets, Iran continues to fortify itself and pretend that everything is fine. How long can it persist? Is the Soviet Union's fate waiting for Iran around the corner?

This week, Turkey went a long way toward becoming an Islamic Republic

Barry Rubin, PJ Media, 7 June 2012

<http://pjmedia.com/barryrubin/2012/06/07/this-week-turkey-went-a-long-way-toward-becoming-an-islamic-republic/>

“My people are going to learn the principles of democracy, the dictates of truth, and the teachings of science. Superstition must go. Let them worship as they will, every man can follow his own conscience provided it does not interfere with sane reason or bid him act against the liberty of his fellow men.” — Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

Hardly surprising, deeply upsetting, and geostrategically catastrophic, it’s official. Turkey has now passed over towards being an Islamist state. That turning point is marked by a tiny event of gigantic importance.

Fazil Say is an internationally acclaimed Turkish classical pianist. He has performed with prestigious symphony orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic, Berlin, Israel Philharmonic, France, and Tokyo, and is a European Union cultural ambassador. The Turkish state is now going to put him on trial, as an Istanbul court has accepted the prosecutor’s charge, which amounts to heresy. Specifically: he is accused of insulting Islam because of tweets he sent.

Say suggested that since the Koran says there are rivers of drinks in heaven, that makes it sound like a pub, while the beautiful women available there make it sound like a brothel. A number of his tweets are quoted here. That’s his crime — writing a couple of sentences to describe his thoughts.

We are not talking of someone criticizing Say or disagreeing with him. We are talking about the power of the Turkish state being used to charge a man with a crime and to send him to prison for exercising free speech. True, they are only asking for a sentence of eighteen months in prison, but once the precedent is set their ambitions will expand.

There are already hundreds of political prisoners in Turkey today who have been in prison for over three years without any trial. Now, if criticizing Islam in Turkey is a crime, Turkey is not a secular state. And with all of those innocent people already thrown in jail by the regime on trumped-up charges of treason and terrorism, Turkey is no longer a democratic state, either. (For a study of the conspiracy charges — actually a wave of repression and intimidation seeking to quell opposition to Turkey’s fundamental transformation — see this detailed article by Gareth Jenkins in *MERIA Journal*.)

This is the country that the Obama administration views as a role model for other Muslim-majority countries. In fact, though, Turkey is going down the same road of repression. In Saudi Arabia, a young man was recently indicted, extradited back from Malaysia, and put on trial for a similar offense. But we know where Saudi Arabia stands. Islamists in Egypt wanted to do the same to a leading Christian businessman for posting a picture of Mickey and Minnie Mouse in “Islamic” garb.

They acted too soon, while the military is still in power. Let them try it again in a few months.

In Kuwait, Hamad al-Naqi received a 10-year sentence, the maximum, for allegedly insulting Muhammad, his wife, and their friends. Al-Naqi claimed his Twitter account was hacked and someone else sent the messages. If true, that would be a very deadly way of getting someone else into trouble, right? Elsewhere, on the “Arab Spring” front, the Tunisian minister of religious affairs has sought indictment on blasphemy charges of Jelil Brick, a longtime dissident fighter against the former dictatorship who lives in Paris and makes YouTube videos. Brick previously survived an Islamist assassination attempt.

But unlike those Arab countries, Turkey has been a secular republic for decades. Its “progress” toward Islamization could not have been more obvious for the last few years, but the Western mass media generally ignores the evidence. The only thing that would save Turkey is if the current regime gets voted out of office before things go beyond a point of no return, and such an electoral defeat is not on the horizon.

I’d address this issue in my regular column in a Turkish newspaper — but I can’t since that was cancelled within a few minutes of my sending in an article (not published) that criticized the government.

I’d have a correspondent in Turkey write about this for you, but my Turkish friends — even ones who have historically been courageous — are now all too afraid to do so. I could possibly publish something about it in the journal I edit, *Turkish Studies*, but only because a Turkish government-inspired effort to get me removed as editor failed miserably.

Meanwhile, the court system in Turkey is — as you can see, above — being undermined. Tens of thousands of graduates of Islamic madrassas are now recognized as holding the equivalent of a college degree so they can be put into high civil service posts from which they will administer the state with as much Shariah as they dare implement this week.

For a decade now the Justice and Development Party has been in power, marching toward Islamism with far greater patience than the Muslim Brotherhood could ever muster. It has now crossed the point of no return. I could provide scores of other examples. Here’s one: a liberal Turk who was extolling the ruling party not long ago explained that his family’s babysitter wears “Islamic” garb, even though she isn’t a believer. Why? Because if she didn’t wear those clothes in her Istanbul neighborhood when she’s walking to work at his house, she’d be beaten.

Ponder on what Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish republic, warned:

Those who use religion for their own benefit are detestable. We are against such a situation and will not allow it. Those who use religion in such a manner have fooled our people; it is against just such people that we have fought and will continue to fight.

But now in Turkey that fight is a distinctly uphill one.

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF

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