

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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**A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East**

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

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Won't a military attack spark a bloody regional conflict and an endless religious conflict? Standing at the last crossroad, the debate we conduct with ourselves has to be deep, wise, responsible, clear, and level-headed. And it's a matter of life and death.

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While on the surface it might appear that the U.S. and Israel finally view the Iranian nuclear threat through the same lens, the fact remains that they differ on their belief of what constitutes a red line—the point at which a military option against Iran must be exercised.

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Over the past few decades, no amount of apologies for alleged “insults” to Muslims has stopped Islamists from attacking the USA. Nor have the good deeds benefiting Muslims, from rescuing Bosnians from genocide to liberating Libyans from Khaddafi, stopped jihadists from wanting to kill Americans for an endless list of reasons.

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In our Palestinian culture, it is more important if one “graduates” from an Israeli prison than from the most prestigious university in the world.

An Iran attack is the toughest question Israel faced since 1948

Ari Shavit, Haaretz, 15 March 2012

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/an-iran-attack-is-the-toughest-question-israel-faced-since-1948-1.418747>

Those who support an attack on Iran must honestly address 10 decisive questions.

Have all the avenues been exhausted, to the point that there is no chance that the international community could still stop Iran's nuclear program through a diplomatic-economic siege? Is it absolutely clear that the Americans will not stop the Iranian nukes with an aerial bombardment in 2013? Will an Israeli attack indeed delay the Iranian nukes by at least five years? Won't a military attack spark a bloody regional conflict and an endless religious conflict?

Won't a counterattack by Iran and Hezbollah cause terrible mass killings that the Israeli home front won't be able to tolerate? Won't an attack that doesn't have U.S. support shatter our strategic alliance with the United States? Won't the global economic crisis that would result lead to a shock wave of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism that would threaten the Jewish state? Won't an attack on Natanz ultimately end up harming Dimona? Won't an attack dismantle the sanctions regime and thus give the Iranians both the justification and the ability to go nuclear even faster? Won't an attack on Iran leave Israel totally isolated?

Those who oppose an attack on Iran must honestly address 10 critical questions.

Can 21st century Israelis continue to live their lives with the shadow of a Shi'ite mushroom cloud hovering above their heads? Will Israel be able to withstand the endless conventional wars that will break out on its borders once Iran goes nuclear? Will Israel be able to handle a nuclear, wild and radical Middle East? Will Israel survive when the United States starts ignoring it because it will be forced into appeasing the rising nuclear power, Iran? Will Israel be able to survive the diplomatic isolation that will be its lot when a nuclear Iran takes control of the Persian Gulf and dictates the price of oil to the world? Will Dimona be enough to stand up to the ensuing nuclearization of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt? Will Dimona address the risk of nuclear terror? Will Israel be able to withstand a situation in which the Iranian nukes put an end to peace or the hope of peace? Will Israel be able to withstand a situation in which a nuclear Iran forces it to live by the sword, day in and day out, with a cruelty it has never known before? Are we prepared to take the one-in-a-hundred chance that a nuclear bomb will explode over Tel Aviv?

The picture looks gloomy indeed. Israel's policy of prevention has gained some time, but has failed. The international policy of appeasement created an illusion and collapsed. The sanctions imposed were too little, too late, and won't likely stop Iran in time.

Nor did the recent meetings in Washington go well. There is no strategic cooperation between Israel and the United States. There is no trust between U.S. President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The U.S. president did not give the Israeli prime minister any guarantees that immediately after the November elections he will stop Iran at any price.

In short, the world that was meant to save the Jewish state from the terrible dilemma it faces, failed to do so. It's true, there could still be a miracle. Maybe Iran will blink at the last minute. Maybe the United States will sober up at the edge of the abyss. But in March 2012 the feeling in Jerusalem is that Israel is utterly alone. And we are getting closer to the moment of truth.

We cannot err. We absolutely, positively cannot make a mistake. There are 10 questions on one side, and 10 questions on the other. The 21st question is: Attack, or don't attack?

When confronting this existential question, there is no right or left, no bad guys or good guys, and no warmongers or pacifists. When facing this existential question, we cannot be critical or sloppy and we cannot think dogmatically. Standing at the last crossroad, the debate we conduct with ourselves has to be deep, wise, responsible, clear, and level-headed.

Because the 21st question is the toughest one we've faced since May 1948. And it's a matter of life and death.

Keeping US and Israeli Red Lines pink on Iran

Matthew RJ Brodsky, The Algemeiner, 9 March 2012

<http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/2837/keeping-us-and-israeli-red-lines-pink-on-iran>

Iran's steady march towards building a nuclear weapon dominated the 2012 American Israel Public Affairs Committee's (AIPAC) policy convention in Washington, DC. It also was the focus of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's meeting with President Obama on Monday afternoon. A day earlier, Obama declared at the AIPAC conference that his administration was committed to a policy of prevention—stopping Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, rather than containment—preventing Iran from deploying nuclear weapons after acquired. In working to prevent Iran from passing the nuclear threshold, the president said, "I will take no option off the table," including military efforts.

While on the surface it might appear that the U.S. and Israel finally view the Iranian nuclear threat through the same lens, the fact remains that they differ on their belief of what constitutes a red line—the point at which a military option against Iran must be exercised. No doubt these red lines were the topic of conversation in the Oval Office meeting. After all, the points of departure are stark.

At AIPAC, Prime Minister Netanyahu made clear that Israel has little, if any, time left to act when it comes to Iran: "Israel has waited patiently for the international community to resolve this issue. We've waited for diplomacy to work. We've waited for sanctions to work. None of us can afford to wait much longer." For his part, President Obama's AIPAC speech made no mention of a timeframe or an Iranian action that would trigger an American military reaction. Rather, he stated that the window for diplomacy and sanctions to work remains open, so there's no need to specify any American red lines beyond "all options are on the table." Clearly, Israel's clock is ticking faster than the American clock.

The difference in perceived red lines lies in what Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak termed "the zone of immunity"—when Iran reaches a point of no return in its nuclear program. Iran's "zone of immunity" will arrive for Israel when the Jewish State is no longer within its military capability to significantly damage Iran's nuclear program; thus, Iran obtaining the *capability* to build a nuclear weapon is a potential red line for Israel. But the U.S. has far more robust military options in dealing with Iran and therefore has

more time available than Israel to decide when the right moment to act has arrived. Thus, Iran *acquiring* a nuclear weapon is a potential red line for Washington.

Given American actions in the Middle East, inconsistent messaging from the Obama administration, divergent views of what constitutes a red line, and a frosty three-year relationship between Obama and Netanyahu, it is difficult to see why the rulers in Tehran would either fear or anticipate American military action enough to change their behavior on the nuclear file. Indeed, with the torrent of mixed signals coming from inside the beltway, it is no wonder that those who are actually concerned are the Israelis.

The U.S. is in the midst of disengaging from the Middle East and pulling out of Iraq and Afghanistan. The low-hanging fruit of Syria—Iran's junior partner and only Arab ally—is still convulsing after a year of protests demanding regime change. President Obama's goal vis-à-vis Syria when he came to office was to flip Damascus out of Iran's orbit, thereby weakening Tehran. Yet, the White House remains on the sidelines. Washington's inability to assist the Syrian opposition against the Asad regime—whose security forces are bolstered, armed, and trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps—no doubt resonates in Tehran. It demonstrates that America lacks the will to use its military in both large and small theaters, even when U.S. interests are at stake.

Then there is the problem of messaging. For the threat of military force to be credible, it has to be believable. The Obama administration has frequently disparaged Israel's military capabilities when it comes to attacking Iran. In November 2011 before meeting with Ehud Barak, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta previewed his message in public, saying he would warn Barak against a military strike. While Panetta has stated numerous times that Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon would cross an American red line where Washington would "take whatever steps necessary to stop it," both he and his senior military advisor, Joint Chiefs Chairman General Martin Dempsey, continue to emphasize in public that such a military attack from either Israel or the U.S. would have unintended and undesirable consequences. Dempsey even went further on January 8 on *Face the Nation*, when he was asked if the U.S. possesses the military capability to take out Iran's nuclear program with conventional weapons. He replied, "I certainly want them [Iran] to believe that's the case." It undermines the U.S. and Israeli threat of force when the administration demonstrates doubt over both countries' military capabilities and undercuts the perception of American-Israeli unity on how to deal with Iran's nuclear threat.

The Obama administration has also given Israel mixed messages when it comes to red lines. On February 29, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton explained that U.S. policy "is to prevent Iran from having nuclear weapons capability." But on January 31, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told the Senate that "Iran has the scientific, technical, and industrial capacity to eventually produce nuclear weapons, making the central issue its political will to do so." In other words, Iran already has the capability.

In fact, the prospect of Iran achieving nuclear breakout capability is becoming a clear threat. Reports in February indicated that Iran has built the infrastructure required for operating more efficient and advanced centrifuges at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant. This allows the Iranian regime to dramatically shorten the time required to produce fuel for a nuclear weapon once the centrifuges are installed and begin operating. This means that Iran could rapidly produce 20 percent enriched uranium and then further reduce the

time necessary to create weapons grade uranium—enriched to 90 percent—to just a few months. During the course of the Obama administration, Iran accelerated its enrichment of uranium by every metric, installing more centrifuges, stockpiling more enriched uranium, and enriching uranium to higher levels. In the last three years Iran has now stockpiled over 3,000 kg of low enriched uranium, more than one-and-a-half times the amount necessary to produce the weapons-grade material needed in a nuclear bomb.

For President Obama, asking Israel to alter its "zone of immunity" timetable is like asking Israel to let Washington be responsible for Israel's security. That is quite a leap for Netanyahu, who after his meeting with Obama addressed both foreign and domestic audiences at AIPAC's conference and said, "I promise you that as Prime Minister, I will never gamble with the security of the State of Israel."

In fact, the Jewish State has never gambled with its security by putting all its faith in the United States to act in Israel's interest. It is Israel, not the United States, that has set the precedent for military action against nuclear facilities in the Middle East. The first was Iraq's Osirak reactor, destroyed by the Israeli air force in June 1981. The second was Syria's al-Kibar reactor, again destroyed by Israel's air force in September 2007. In both cases the U.S. was against the Israeli attack. And in both cases, Iraq and Syria did not reconstitute their nuclear program. Moreover, in both cases, Israel understood that the international community would not act in the face of these nuclear threats, thus it acted in its own security interests—something successive American presidents have demonstrated only a loose ability to understand, given their distance from the Middle East and different perceptions of how and when they could or should act.

In the wake of the Oval Office meeting, questions remain: Did Netanyahu and Obama come to an agreement on what constitutes a red line? What assurances did Obama give Israel if Jerusalem waits beyond its own capability to set back Iran's nuclear program? If Jerusalem acts alone, would the United States stand with Israel and ensure the mission's success if needed, or would the White House distance itself from Israel? Did Netanyahu promise to give Obama advanced warning if Israel decides to act, giving the president the ability to either green or red light an Israeli operation? And lastly, does Netanyahu believe the U.S. would act militarily at the end of the day?

Benjamin Netanyahu said at the beginning of his speech at AIPAC, "Every day, I open the newspapers and read about these red lines and these timelines. I read about what Israel has supposedly decided to do, or what Israel might do. Well, I'm not going to talk to you about what Israel will do or will not do, I never talk about that." It is likely that both Netanyahu and Obama are keeping their red lines pink in order to preserve room to maneuver. But at the same time, it would be foolhardy for Netanyahu to entrust the existence of the Jewish State to an American administration that has proven so inept at handling Middle East affairs, and to a president who continues to misread the region.

Why the West is ripe for jihadist's plucking

Bruce Thornton, TheJewishPress.com, 14 March 2012

<http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/opinions/why-the-west-is-ripe-for-jihadists-plucking/2012/03/14/>

The riots and violence in Afghanistan over some accidentally burned Korans followed a script that by now is all too drearily familiar. As we have seen over the years with the riots over the Muhammad cartoons, Pope Benedict's comments about violence in Islam, or false rumors of Korans flushed down toilets, violent Muslim overreactions to slights are immediately followed by anxious apologies from American leaders. Rather than defusing the anger, however, such groveling merely encourages more contempt and violence.

So too with these latest riots, which have killed more than 30 people, including several U.S. soldiers. This violence, moreover, has been encouraged by mullahs in mosques, teachers in madrassas, and members of parliament. Predictably, the Taliban – with whom our government is eager to talk peace – has encouraged people to “turn their guns on the foreign infidel invaders.”

President Obama responded to the incitement and violence by offering his personal “sincere apologies,” professing his “deep regret,” and vowing to hold those responsible accountable. Defense Secretary Panetta and NATO commander John Allen also apologized.

But no reciprocal apology was demanded from President Hamid Karzai for the incitement to violence on the part of government and religious leaders, or for the deaths of two of our troops at the hands of an Afghan soldier we trained and armed, and another two inside a government ministry.

The administration and the military, of course, rationalize their indulgence of this double standard as motivated by “the safety of American men and women in Afghanistan, of our military and civilian personnel there,” as Obama spokesman Jay Carney put it. But as one demonstrator in Kabul said, “We don't care about Obama's apology.... They are burning our Koran. An apology is not enough.”

Most Afghans obviously agree, since rioting and killing have intensified despite apologies from our highest government and military officials. Indeed, over the past few decades, no amount of apologies for alleged “insults” to Muslims has stopped Islamists from attacking us. Nor have the good deeds benefiting Muslims, from rescuing Bosnians from genocide to liberating Libyans from Khaddafi, stopped jihadists from wanting to kill Americans for an endless list of reasons.

The past decades of such incidents have shown instead that apologies are useless, and merely endorse the perverse logic that accidentally burning a book is worse than murdering our soldiers and citizens. Why else would we publicly flagellate ourselves over such “insults” even as we say nothing about the Muslim murders of Christians in Egypt and Nigeria, or the Muslim laws prescribing capital punishment for converts to Christianity, or the Muslim vandalizing and destruction of 300 churches in Cyprus, or the Muslim slow-motion extermination of Christians in countries where Christianity existed for centuries before Islam was born?

These double standards are counterproductive and have been proven over and over to make Muslims despise us rather than like us. What we refuse to accept is the intolerant

chauvinism inherent in Islam, the belief that Muslims are the “best of nations” and destined to rule the world. Accepting the double standard merely confirms their superiority and our inferiority. After all, to let someone behave according to one set of principles or standards while demanding that you be subjected to others is to validate a claim of superiority that justifies the disproportionate and unjust behavior. It’s acting like a battered wife who accepts a beat-down from her husband as justified punishment for burning his dinner.

In the West’s struggle with Islamic jihad, our doubts about the superiority of Western beliefs have coupled with this breakdown in ethical reasoning. The result is the appeasement of jihadist aggression and the confirmation of the jihadist estimation of the West’s weakness and corruption.

This appeasement has encouraged many Muslims to demand from Westerners a hypersensitivity to Islam, all the while that Christians and Jews in Muslim countries are subjected to harassment, assault, vicious insult, and murder. In the West, respect for Muslim holy books and practices is supposed to be granted as a self-evident right beyond argument or debate. Yet Western ideals and principles, such as tolerance for different creeds, are derided, disrespected, and rejected as self-evident evils. Worse yet, we pretend our appeasement of jihadist violence is an expression of tolerance, the liberal-democratic virtue that simply has little meaning in Islamic theology. We know why many of our leaders accept this double standard. They have bought into John Lennon’s juvenile utopia in which there is “nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too.” Shorn of their transcendent, non-negotiable foundations, all our beliefs are now contingent and negotiable, easily traded away for security or comfort. At the same time, multiculturalism bestows on the non-Western “other” a finely calibrated sensitivity to his culture and religion, no matter how dysfunctional or oppressive, all the while the West refuses to extend such consideration to its own.

Having culturally internalized this self-loathing and lack of conviction, we are vulnerable to those who are filled with passionate intensity about the rightness of their beliefs and the payback due to us for our alleged historical sins such as colonialism or imperialism or globalization. And then we wonder why the jihadist considers us ripe for conquest, and destined to be subjected to the superior values of Islam.

How to get elected in the Palestinian territories'

Ibrahim Sayyed, TheJewishPress.com, 15 March 2012

<http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/analysis/how-to-get-elected-in-the-palestinian-territories/2012/03/15/>

It is not clear at this stage when and if new presidential and parliamentary elections will ever be held in the Palestinian territories. The two major Palestinian parties, Fatah and Hamas, have yet to end their power struggle and agree on the formation of a Palestinian unity government that would pave the way for long-overdue elections.

But if anyone is hoping that the elections will see the rise of moderate and charismatic leaders to power, then he is living in an illusion. In our Palestinian culture, it is more

important if one “graduates” from an Israeli prison than from the most prestigious university in the world.

In our society, people like Prime Minister Salam Fayyad do not get many votes because they did not spend time in an Israeli prison. Fayyad’s chances of winning would be greater if he had killed a Jew or sent his son to carry out a suicide bombing in Israel.

The number of years one spends in Israeli prison can even be a major factor in getting a job or a military rank in the Palestinian Authority. Many of the Palestinian “colonels” and “generals” earned their ranks not by attending military academies, but by spending years in Israeli prison for their involvement in violence.

PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat would choose his security chiefs and top aide according to the number of years they had spent in prison or the number of Israelis they had killed. “You spent 20 years in prison? Then you get the rank of colonel!” Arafat would say. “You carried out an attack in which three Jews were killed? You are a general!”

Jibril Rajoub and Mohammed Dahlan, the two former security chiefs who served under Arafat, were appointed thanks to their having spent time in Israeli prison, not because of their qualifications; and this notion serves as the basis for Palestinian talk about jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti — who is serving five life sentences for his role in shooting attacks that killed a number of Israelis during the Second Intifada — as the leading candidate to succeed Mahmoud Abbas.

Marwan Barghouti is therefore widely respected by Palestinians because of his role in the “Revolution.”

A man like Fayyad, who studied in Texas and did not spend one day in an Israeli prison, stands *no* chance at the ballot box against people like Barghouti — the by-product of what happens when the Palestinian Authority leadership praises prisoners and terrorists as heroes.

The Palestinian prisoners who were released in the Gilad Schalit prisoner agreement last October have already been offered thousands of dollars as well as apartments by both Palestinian governments, in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.

And it should not come as a surprise if some of these ex-prisoners, many of whom have Jewish blood on their hands, will be enthusiastically elected in the next round of Palestinian elections.

The Palestinians have raised an entire generation on the glorification of suicide bombers and terrorists — the direct result of decades of incitement and indoctrination, to which Palestinians are exposed at a very early age.

Under such circumstances, is it even a good idea at all to hold new elections in the Palestinian territories?

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

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