

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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local and international writings on the Middle East**

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

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Those who propagate isolating and boycotting Israel don't know what they're talking about. Or perhaps they see the pursuit of conflict as their real objective. Anyone interested in conflict resolution works to bring the sides together, people-to-people, not just leadership teams negotiating. Nurturing business between the sides is making peace in the most real, tangible sense

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2013 may be the year, theoretically, for the US to pivot to Asia and the Pacific, but it is likely that this strategic pivot may have to be delayed, in part because the Middle East has a way of nipping at America's heels. The crises in Iran and Syria may demand Obama's attention this year. No one really knows, or so it seems, but Iran may be on the edge finally of developing a nuclear bomb.

4. ***Dr Paul Roberts,*** America shamed again: Are US lawmakers "owned" by the Israeli lobby?
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To every American's shame, the Republicans demonstrated for all the world to see that they are wholly owned subsidiaries of the Israel Lobby. (The Israel Lobby is not their only master. They are also owned by other powerful interest groups, such as Wall Street and the Military/Security Complex.)

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New Republic, 19 February 2013

A decisive turning point in the recent political history of Palestine came in June 2007, when Hamas defeated Fatah's security forces in Gaza and took over uncontested administration of the strip. This was the moment that Palestine became divided in two with rival governments in charge - Hamas in Gaza and Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority in West Bank - which meant the end of a single, coherent Palestinian leadership that could negotiate with the Israelis.

6. Ben Levitas, Why Jews should stand against Christian oppression
Jerusalem Post, 18 February 2013

In almost all Islamic countries, missionary activity and the distribution of Christian material, even the Bible, is illegal. Muslims who convert to Christianity risk honor killings, and accusations of blasphemy are an ever-present reality, punishable in many cases by mob violence.

7. Lori Lowenthal Marcus, Jews of Brooklyn, take your place!
Jewish Press, 7 February 2013

Chloe Simone Valdary, a young African-American, started the group Allies for Israel at the University of New Orleans, where she is a sophomore. Although not Jewish, she became alarmed while researching a paper she chose to write about the Arab-Israeli conflict during her freshman year, and she resolved to do what she could to fight Jew-hatred. When Valdary found out about the BDS that was to take place at Brooklyn College, its goal being to portray Israel as an "Apartheid State," and an "evil occupier," she wrote the article.

Why does the world target Israel?

Khaled Abu Toameh, YNet News, 20 February 2013

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4347381,00.html>

Genocide, ethnic cleansing, apartheid; if you've ever had the pleasure of speaking with some of the more zealous haters of Israel you'll hear these phrases at some point, normally yelled at you by a delightful middle class keffiyeh-wearing student.

I guess to some extent, sadly, we have become slightly accustomed to these libels. The hypocrisy of those claiming to be pro-Palestinian and champions of human rights and their obsessive hatred of Israel has led to the abandonment of those who suffer true apartheid, genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Detractors will undoubtedly be quick to ask why supporters of Israel point to other regimes to exonerate Israel. But this is not really what I'm doing. Israel needs no exoneration as, fortunately, Israelis are able to protest, challenge and choose their governments. That's democracy folks. But, just for the sake of argument, let us say all the malicious lies have some truth to them. Still the question remains: Why is Israel singled out for protests and global marches lauded by the 'enlightened' regimes in Tehran and

Damascus, yet some of the world's human rights catastrophes carry on daily, completely ignored, by the same holier than thou activists?

For me, a particular source of pain and anger is the situation of minorities and women in my parents' homeland. In Pakistan, not a week goes by without a story of rape, murder, humiliation and torture. In this Islamic country, terms such as Jesus Christ are banned in text messages and a young girl is shot for demanding basic education. Yet apart from the attempted murder of Malala Yusufzai, these stories rarely make it to the press. The brutally oppressed Christian minority suffers at the hands of an archaic blasphemy law, yet, apart from small-scale protests held by Pakistani Christian groups, there were no calls to boycott Pakistan and no flotillas were planned. I guess murdered Pakistani Christians maybe not a trendy enough cause. I wonder if a British newspaper would publish a cartoon of a Pakistani mullah murdering minorities to pave the way for a Sharia state. Our journalists love freedom and liberty, but the love their lives a little bit more.

Obsessed with destruction of Israel

The House of Saud promotes religious apartheid, destroys history and spreads wahhabism, yet the world remains silent. Maybe the cause isn't cool enough. Or maybe we should just allow people to suffer and dismiss it as a cultural phenomenon; maybe we should say this is how things are in that part of the world and focus on the need to stop 'apartheid Israel,' which just elected another Knesset member of Ethiopian descent.

Remember when a handful of Darfur nationals and real human rights activists protested outside the UN Human Rights Commission against the atrocities in the region? Well, the instigator of the ethnic cleansing, Sudan, sat on the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

Once again, so many of our activists remained silent because Israel was not involved. It is interesting to note that some of Israel's fiercest enemies like Syria, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain dismissed the UN report on Darfur, penned by Nobel laureate Jody Wolfe, and acted to protect Sudan at the UN.

Why are the self-appointed defenders of Palestinian rights silent while Palestinians are being massacred in Syria by Assad's regime? And why do they remain silent when a Palestinian girl is murdered in the name of honor? Where were they when Hamas fired rockets from inside a school in Gaza? Oh, I forgot, they were outside the nearest Israeli embassy chanting slogans in support of Hamas.

I know there are many people who genuinely care about Palestinians and want to see them live in peace with their neighbors, but there are too many modern-day Jean-Paul Marats who are full of fiery rhetoric and demand blood. People have become obsessed with the destruction of Israel. These people should be ashamed of themselves, emulating the Nazis by urging boycotts of Jewish businesses while murder, rape and humiliation are rampant in so many nations. Real apartheid, genocide and ethnic cleansing are occurring on our watch, yet these people have become so obsessed with the end of Zionism that the suffering of others had become a side show.

Protest the oppression of women in Saudi Arabia and you'll have my respect. Protesting against an Israeli theater group is pathetic.

Numerous Middle East countries consistently violate human rights, yet the UN vilifies Israel. Is it just me or is something deeply wrong with our moral compass?

Doing business – tangible peacemaking

Paul Hirschson, Jerusalem Post, 20 February 2013

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=303976>

The anti-Israel crowd is all gung-ho on assaulting Israel's legitimacy. They propose advancing this through imposing sanctions, calling for divestment and implementing boycotts. Indicting Israelis for all sorts of supposed wrongs would be the ultimate thrill, turning the individual Israeli into all of Israel, facilitating the next round of assault. Isolation achieved, the undermining of the very legitimacy of Israel, they argue, is feasible.

The Arab world should consider what, if any, is the dilemma in engaging Israeli companies in business. In the telecommunications sector, for example, where Israel is a significant player, were the Arab world to encourage Israeli companies to bid on tenders they would get better pricing and service from Israel's competitors across the globe. In the meantime they're getting milked.

Around eight percent of the cost of every product can be attributed to the freight forwarding component. Across the Arab world they import, from far-away places, products which Israel can ship overnight by truck. Israel could reduce their cost by a number of percentage points. The same is true in the opposite direction.

I first visited Kuwait in 1995 and have traveled and worked fairly extensively in the Arab world, including living in it for a few years. The first real money I made was in business there on behalf of Israeli companies.

Arabs profited as well: clients' owners, managers and technicians; partners, agents, distributors, others. That's the way of business.

Business travel includes spending time at restaurants, coffee shops, shisha bars and night life. Conversation inevitably diverges from the business deal at hand, wandering off into politics, family, literature and, of course, sport. We came to know and understand, to befriend each other beyond business relationships.

THOSE WHO propagate isolating and boycotting Israel don't know what they're talking about. Or perhaps they see the pursuit of conflict as their real objective.

Anyone interested in conflict resolution works to bring the sides together, people-to-people, not just leadership teams negotiating. Nurturing business between the sides is making peace in the most real, tangible sense.

It's time to stop playing sport (as an analogy for a less savory activity?) and start doing business.

In sport one side has to lose while in business, when done correctly, all parties win. Where better a place to found a relationship than in an activity in which everyone wins? For those of us interested in conflict resolution, we should aspire to a situation where enough people on both sides of the Arab-Israel conflict are heavily enough invested in business together such that the process of understanding, which leads to reconciliation, becomes irreversible.

For those interested in burning bridges, rather than building them, the route of boycotts is attractive. The Arab world and Palestinians in particular should understand that these people will never forgive them when we do reconcile, which we will.

A rational approach leads to a simple conclusion: There is no dilemma. Nurturing business between Israel and the Arab world is real peacemaking.

Back to the Beginning in the Middle East

Marvin Kalb, Brookings Institute, 19 February 2013

http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/02/19-middle-east-kalb?rssid=LatestFromBrookings&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+BrookingsRSS%2Ftopfeeds%2FLatestFromBrookings+%28Latest+From+Brookings%29

Let us, for a moment, imagine what it might have been like in mid-February, 2009, if Barack Obama, then a new president, perhaps a transformational president (he was, after all, the first African-American elected to the job), decided that, in foreign policy, he would focus on the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian negotiation and, miracle of miracles, produce a breakthrough. Miracles have been known to happen in that part of the world.

Instead of opening his Mid-East diplomacy with a cutting critique of Israel's cantankerous settlements policy, often considered the third rail of Israeli politics, instead of traveling first to Egypt, where he delivered a warm speech, opening his arms to the Arab and Muslim worlds, but ignoring Israel, which proved to be a stunning blunder, instead of allowing, even encouraging, a discomfiting coolness in Israeli-American relations, instead of monopolizing America's foreign policy rather than leaving some of the legwork to his secretary of state—instead of all this, if Obama did then what he appears to be doing now, four wasted years later, the Israelis and the Palestinians might be engaging in serious, face-to-face negotiations on a peace treaty by this time. Who knows?

Now, Obama appears to be allowing his new Secretary of State, John Kerry, to play a major role in the sensitive Palestinian-Israeli negotiation, a subject in which the former Senator has a passionate interest. He never allowed his first Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, once his principal opponent in the Democratic race to the White House, to lead an American initiative in this area, to engage in the sort of "shuttle diplomacy" that brought not only results but fame to another Secretary of State, named Henry Kissinger. On his first weekend as the nation's top diplomat, Kerry made news by telephoning Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, informing both that he intended to visit the Middle East very soon, his way of signaling a new American activism in the region, particularly in the dormant negotiation between these two old antagonists.

Soon thereafter, apparently not by coincidence, the White House announced that the president himself will visit the Middle East on March 20—in other words, to do now what he should have done in 2009, namely, visit Israel, the Palestinian West Bank and, then as a gesture to a tottering ally, Jordan. On this trip, he will not visit Egypt, perhaps because an unstable Egypt may be too dangerous a destination.

According to American experts, Obama wants to focus on two main subjects in his talks with Netanyahu--Iran's nuclear program and Syria's convulsing civil war. But Netanyahu, having already talked to Kerry, expects the president to raise another hot topic—namely, the Israeli-

Palestinian deadlock. Netanyahu told his Cabinet last Sunday that this subject is very much on the president's mind. "There is no doubt," Netanyahu is quoted as saying, "this matter will be part of the work of the next government." The prime minister is in the process of forming a new, broad-based government in Israel, one result of a political shake-up after the recent election that weakened his own base of political support and strengthened new and moderate forces more eager than he to resume negotiations with the Palestinians.

If Obama is, in fact, intent on launching a new American initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation, he knows, or should know, that this effort requires a great deal of advance preparation, and little has been done. Realistically, Obama can do little more on this visit to the Middle East than set the stage for the negotiation and then leave it to his secretary of state to do the daunting, detailed legwork, starting with reopening the stalled dialogue between Netanyahu and Abbas. Then the serious work begins. Fortunately, for Kerry, he would have to shuttle only a short distance between Jerusalem and Ramallah, the interim Palestinian capital.

2013 may be the year, theoretically, for the US to pivot to Asia and the Pacific, but it is likely that this strategic pivot may have to be delayed, in part because the Middle East has a way of nipping at America's heels. The crises in Iran and Syria may demand Obama's attention this year. No one really knows, or so it seems, but Iran may be on the edge finally of developing a nuclear bomb. Is she six months away, or a year? And what does Obama do? He is on the record as saying the US will stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, even using its military power to do so. Syria is absorbed in a civil war of increasing intensity and danger. The US may be changing its policy about providing lethal weapons to the anti-Assad opposition, but everyone asks, who is the opposition? Can it be trusted? Or is it a new incarnation of al-Qaeda?

And then there is the Palestinian-Israeli negotiation, for which guarantees of success can only be described as being in short supply. If even modest success were possible, it would clearly make it easier for the US and Israel to coordinate their strategies on the Iranian nuclear threat and on the unpredictable but deadly civil war in Syria.

Every president seems to harbor a secret dream to bring peace to the holy land. This is now Obama's turn. In 2009, he started out with such high hopes and expectations and then quickly stumbled. Maybe now, four years later, he will do better. Maybe this is his time. Let's wish him well.

America shamed again: Are US lawmakers "owned" by the Israeli lobby?

Dr Paul Roberts, Global Research, 19 February 2013

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/america-shamed-again-are-us-lawmakers-owned-by-the-israel-lobby/5323415>

Americans have been shamed many times by their elected representatives who cravenly bow to vested interests and betray the American people. But no previous disgraceful behavior can match the public shame brought to Americans by the behavior of the Senate Republicans in the confirmation hearing of Senator Chuck Hagel as Secretary of Defense.

Forty Senate Republicans made it clear that not only do they refuse to put their service to America ahead of their service to Israel, but also that they will not even put their service to America on a par with their service to Israel. To every American's shame, the Republicans demonstrated for all the world to see that

they are wholly owned subsidiaries of the Israel Lobby. (The Israel Lobby is not their only master. They are also owned by other powerful interest groups, such as Wall Street and the Military/Security Complex.)

The most embarrassing behavior of all came from the craven Lindsay Graham, who, while in the act of demonstrating his complete subservience by crawling on his belly before the Israel Lobby, dared Hagel to name one single person in the US Congress who is afraid of the Israel Lobby.

If I had been Hagel, I would have written off the nomination and answered: "You, Senator Graham, and your 40 craven colleagues."

Indeed, Hagel could have answered: The entire US Congress, including Rand Paul who pretends to be different but isn't.

The real question is: Who in the Congress is not afraid of the Israel Lobby?

The hatchet job on Hagel is driven by fear of the Israel Lobby.

Perhaps the worst affront Israel's American representatives ever inflicted on the US military was the coverup of the Israeli air and torpedo boat attack on the USS Liberty in 1967. The Israeli attack failed to sink the Liberty but killed and wounded most of the crew. The survivors were ordered to silence, and it was 12 years before one of them spoke up and revealed what had happened (James Ennes, *Assault On The Liberty*). Not even Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chief of Naval Operations and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff could get Washington to own up to the facts.

The facts are now well known, but as far as Washington is concerned they are dead letter facts. The entire event has been moved to some parallel universe.

Why are the Senate Republicans out to destroy Hagel for Israel?

The answer is, first, back when Hagel was a US Senator he refused to be intimidated by the Israel Lobby and declared, "I am a US Senator, not an Israeli Senator." In other words, Hagel did the impermissible. He said he represented US interests, not Israel's interests. Hagel's position implies that the interests of the two countries are not identical, which is a heresy.

The second part of the answer is that Hagel doesn't think that it is a good idea for the US to start a war with Iran or for the US to permit Israel to do so.

But a US war with Iran is what the Israeli government and its neoconservative agents have been trying to impose on the Obama regime. Israel wants to get rid of Iran, because Iran supports Hizbollah in Southern Lebanon, thus preventing Israel from annexing that territory and its water resources, and because Iran supports Hamas, the only Palestinian organization that tries to oppose Israel's total theft of Palestine, although Iran has never supplied Hamas with effective weapons.

The two organizations that oppose Israel's territorial expansion, Hizbollah and Hamas, represent large numbers of Arab peoples. Nevertheless, both are declared, on Israel's orders, to be "terrorist organizations" by the servile US Department of State, which in all reality should be called the Israeli Department of State, as it never puts US interests before Israel's.

In other words, Hagel did not grovel. He did not say how much he loved Israel and how it would be his great honor to sacrifice all other interests to Israel's, how he has waited his entire life for the chance to serve Israel as the US Secretary of Defense.

Hagel is not an opponent of Israel. He merely said, "First, I am an American." His lack of craven subservience is unacceptable to the Israel Lobby, which has branded him an "anti-semitic."

Lindsay Graham, in contrast, has what it takes to be Israel's perfect choice for US Secretary of Defense.

Graham will go out of his way to please the Israel Lobby. He will pull out all stops and behave with maximum servility to a foreign power in his effort to embarrass the President of the United States and his nominee, a war veteran and former US Senator who simply thinks that the US Congress and the executive branch should put American interests first.

Senate Majority Leader Reid has used Senate rules to keep Hagel's nomination alive. If Lindsay Graham succeeds in doing the Israel Lobby's dirty work, he will have handed a defeat of the US President to the Israeli Prime Minister, who has demeaned the President of the United States for not doing Israel's bidding and attacking Iran.

Americans are a colonized people. Their government represents the colonizing powers: Wall Street, the Israel Lobby, the Military/Security Complex, Agribusiness, Pharmaceuticals, Energy, Mining, and Timber interests.

Two elected representatives who tried to represent the American people—Ron Paul and Dennis Kucinich—found representative government to be an inhospitable place for those few who attempt to represent the interests of the American people.

Like Ron Paul, Dennis Kucinich, and Gerald Celente, I stand with our Founding Fathers who opposed America's entanglement in foreign wars. In an effort to prevent entanglements, the Founding Fathers gave the power to declare war to Congress.

Over the years Congress has gradually ceded this power to the President to the extent that it no longer exists as a power of Congress. The President can start a war anywhere at any time simply by declaring that the war is not a war but a "time-limited, scope-limited, kinetic military action." Or he can use some other nonsensical collection of words.

In the first few years of the 21st century, the executive branch has invaded two countries, violated the sovereignty of five others with military operations, and has established military bases in Africa in order to counteract China's economic penetration of the continent and to secure the resources for US and European corporations, thus enlarging the prospects for future wars. If the Republicans succeed in blocking Hagel's confirmation, the prospect of war with Iran will be boosted.

By abdicating its war power, Congress lost its control of the purse. As the executive branch withholds more and more information from Congressional oversight committees, Congress is becoming increasingly powerless. As Washington's war debts mount, Washington's attack on the social safety net will become more intense. Governmental institutions that provide services to Americans will wither as more tax revenues are directed to the coffers of special interests and foreign entanglements.

The tenuous connection between the US government and the interests of citizens is on its way to being severed entirely.

Clueless in Gaza

John Judis, New Republic, 19 February 2013

<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112456/george-w-bushs-secret-war-against-hamas>

A decisive turning point in the recent political history of Palestine came in June 2007, when Hamas defeated Fatah's security forces in Gaza and took over uncontested administration of the strip. This was the moment that Palestine became divided in two with rival governments in charge—Hamas in Gaza and Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority in West

Bank—which meant the end of a single, coherent Palestinian leadership that could negotiate with the Israelis. Afterwards, former Mossad chief Efraim Halevy, who has favored a two-state solution, wrote of the efforts to negotiate with Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas, “The notion that the Palestinian rump authority ... can be a credible partner in negotiation defies logic.”

But if the political effects of Hamas' ousting of Fatah are clear enough, Washington's prevailing narrative about it has mostly been self-serving. In a new book, *Tested by Zion*, Elliott Abrams, who supervised American policy in the Middle East for George W. Bush's National Security Council, offers the standard line, charging that Hamas staged a “coup” in Gaza because it feared that “time might bring greater strength for what Hamas saw as Fatah and we saw as the legitimate PA national security forces.” Abrams acknowledges that Hamas leaders might have believed there was “a conspiracy to crush it,” but dismisses the possibility that there actually was one, and that the United States might have played any role in it.

This account is in marked contrast with the testimony put forth independently by two journalists, Paul McGeough and David Rose, by a former British intelligence official, Alistair Crooke, who had served as a special advisor on the Middle East to the European Union, and by UN Under-Secretary General Alvaro de Soto. Key parts of this alternative narrative have been confirmed by leaked government documents and contemporary newspaper accounts and by David Wurmser, who was Middle East advisor at the time to Vice President Dick Cheney.

This version of events is considerably more damning about Washington's role in the events leading up to the Hamas “coup”. According to the alternative narrative, the Bush administration blundered at every turn in its dealings with the Palestinians. It encouraged an election on the assumption that Abbas and Fatah would win. When Hamas was victorious, it sought to nullify the results and to block a unity government between Fatah and Hamas, even though such a government might have actually become a credible partner in peace negotiations. And the Bush administration helped arm Fatah's security forces against Hamas, which stoked the civil war and led to Hamas taking over Gaza. According to this narrative, Hamas was basically right about American intentions.

I am not absolutely certain which version of events is right. Too much of what happened is still shrouded in secrecy. Abrams' reputation is tarred by his admission that he withheld documents from Congress during the Iran-Contra investigation. On the other side, Rose published credulous accounts in 2001 linking Saddam Hussein to al-Qaeda. But I believe that the alternative narrative fits the outward events much better than what Abrams recounts in his book. And if this narrative is a better representation of what actually happened, it holds important lessons for American diplomacy today. While the Obama administration has generally taken a different tack in foreign policy than the Bush administration, it has not done so in its relations with Fatah, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority—and it may be tempting the same kind of trouble that Abrams and the Bush administration got themselves into.

The story begins in June 2002, when Bush in a White House speech pressed for the Palestinians to “to elect new leaders” and “build a practicing democracy.” Bush was initially determined to promote an alternative to Yasir Arafat, but after Arafat died, he continued to urge elections as part of the administration's plan to build Arab democracies. In February 2005, Mahmoud Abbas won an election to succeed Arafat as president of the Palestinian Authority, and at Bush's urging, agreed to hold elections for a legislative council, which were scheduled for August and then postponed until January 2006. Israel was worried about Hamas's participation, but in a meeting with Abbas in Washington in October, Bush, who was confident that Fatah would win the elections, did not raise the possibility of banning Hamas candidates.

Hamas, of course, won 74 out of 132 seats. Fatah candidates won a majority of the vote, but lost seats because the party could not agree on a single candidate and split their own vote. Earlier, to sideline Arafat, the American government had pressured the Palestinian Authority to shift power

from the president's office to the prime minister's, and now Hamas was entitled to the prime ministership and to control of the country's finances and security. In effect, the election result had sidelined Abbas and Fatah and put Hamas in charge of the country.

According to a mission report from de Soto, who was the U.N. representative to the Middle East Quartet, Abbas and the Hamas officials wanted to create a unity government of the two parties. Abbas was convinced that Hamas, which had not campaigned against a two-state solution, would allow him to pursue negotiations with Israel. And de Soto and the UN wanted the Quartet wanted to open a "channel of dialogue" with Hamas. Like Abbas, they believed that Hamas's decision to participate in elections indicated a willingness to lay aside their opposition to the peace process.

But despite having pushed for the election, Washington would not legitimate its results. In the wake of the election, the United States, together with Israel, pressed for the international community, including the U.N., to cut off aid to a Hamas government unless it agreed to recognize Israel, abide by previous treaties and renounce violence and terror. The Bush administration couldn't get the U.N. to cut funding, but they did eventually convince the Quartet to cut aid to the Palestinian Authority. The U.S. also approved Israel's decision to deny the Palestinians the tax revenues (through a VAT on their imports and exports) that they collected on their behalf. (Israel was now levying a tax on Palestinians for participating in the election.) And the U.S. repeatedly urged Abbas not to conciliate Hamas. Abbas didn't dissolve the government, as the U.S. wished, but he restored the Arafat-era power of the Presidency over security, finance, and patronage. Abbas's moves may have pleased Washington, but they were predictably provocative to Hamas and helped fuel armed clashes in Gaza.

Israel and the United States believed that by depriving the PA of the funds it needed to pay workers and dispense welfare, it could bring down the government. Abbas would call new elections and this time Fatah would win. But Israel and America's strategy backfired. By denying the PA funds, it initially crippled Abbas and Fatah's patronage base and security force. Hamas, meanwhile, whose sources of funding in the United States were drying up because of federal prosecution, turned to Iran for support, and Iran's funding allowed Hamas to pay its fighters and to maintain its own system of clinics and schools. Hamas retained its political support, while Fatah continued to lose ground.

In November 2006, with civil war already breaking out in Gaza between Hamas and Fatah, Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, whom Bush had appointed the U.S. security coordinator for the Palestinians, met with Muhammed Dahlan, a Gazan who was Fatah's security chieftain. According to Rose's account in *Vanity Fair*, which draws upon notes taken during the meetings, Dayton urged Dahlan to "build up your forces in order to take on Hamas," and promised \$86.4 million in aid. Two months later, an administration spokesman reported, Bush instructed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to transfer "about \$86.4 million in aid to help Palestinian security forces under President Mahmoud Abbas's direct control ... to help provide law and order in Gaza and the West Bank, fight terror, and to facilities movement and access especially in Gaza." That announcement, combined with an announcement from Fatah that Dahlan would be financing a "security and protection force" in Gaza, further enflamed the conflict between Hamas and Fatah.

Congress balked at the \$86.4 million grant—in part because some members didn't want to send any military aid to the Palestinian Authority and in part because some thought the aid would end up in Hamas's hands. Congress finally agreed to \$59 million in non-lethal aid, but the Bush administration tried to get around Congress by seeking lethal aid from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. In December, Egypt had already begun sending military aid to Fatah in Gaza. That effort sparked a fierce debate among neo-conservatives, some of whom, like Wurmser, believed that the United States would end up provoking a Hamas takeover. Wurmser told me that he opposed the plan to arm Fatah in order to defeat Hamas. The

administration, Wurmser said, “was engaged in an effort to help Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas]—a corrupt dictator—to stay in power.”

Abbas, alarmed by the growing violence in Gaza, had periodically urged a unity government. So did de Soto in Quartet meetings, but de Soto got no support from the United States. According to de Soto, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch, who, along with Abrams, were the point men for the U.S. policy, told him in January 2007, “I like this violence. It means that other Palestinians are resisting Hamas.” But in February, the Saudis surprised the Quartet members by bringing Hamas and Fatah leaders to Mecca for unity talks that resulted in an agreement between the two sides establishing a new government. The government included prominent Fatah and Hamas officials as well as several academics and policy experts, including Salam Fayyad, who were not at that point aligned with either faction. The two sides agreed that Hamas would handle domestic matters and Fatah and the independent experts international affairs, including negotiations with Israel.

Abrams makes no mention of these concessions in his book, but they were widely reported at the time. As recounted in award-winning Australian journalist Paul McGeough’s history of Hamas, Hamas leader Khalid Mishal, who led the negotiations, reasserted Hamas’s opposition to the state of Israel, but agreed to abide by past treaties between the PLO and Israel, including the Oslo accords, and to support negotiations for a two-state solution. “Hamas is adopting a new political language,” he said afterwards. “The Mecca agreement is a new political language .. and honoring the agreements is a new language, because there is a national need and we must speak a language appropriate to the time.”

The U.S. and Israel, however, refused to deal with the new government, and according to Rose and McGeough, pressed ahead with its plans to force Hamas out of the government. Abbas was convinced to name Dahlan, whom Hamas saw as its enemy, as the new security chief in the cabinet. And the United States sought to develop a new “action plan” with Abbas and Fatah that would lead by the year’s end to Hamas’s removal. In the months after the Mecca agreement, fighting had abated in Gaza, but on April 30, the Jordanian newspaper *Al-Mayd* published a leaked 16-page draft of the action plan, which did not emphasize military means, but did include the need for a military buildup. The Jordanian government confiscated the issues before they got on the streets, but the text remained on *Al-Mayd*’s website, and was widely disseminated.

Hamas interpreted the plan accurately as a conspiracy to block the Mecca agreement and to remove it from power. Then two weeks after the plan surfaced, new Egyptian trained and armed Fatah forces arrived in Gaza with Israel’s approval. The fighting in Gaza resumed. Then on June 7, *Ha’aretz* reported that Fatah officials in Gaza had “asked Israel to allow them to receive large shipments of arms and ammunition from Arab countries, including Egypt.” *Ha’aretz* also reported that Dahlan was organizing another paramilitary force in Gaza to fight Hamas. At this point, Hamas, who had already lost 250 fighters that year, took the final step and drove the Fatah forces out of Gaza and took control of its government. Wurmser told Rose, “It looks to me that what happened wasn’t so much a coup by Hamas but an attempted coup by Fatah that was pre-empted before it could happen.” Wurmser, who left the Bush administration a month later, told me he still stands by this judgment.

On June 13, two days before Hamas took over, American Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones sent a cable recounting conversations he had at the time with Israeli Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin and Military-Intelligence Chief Amos Yadlin. The cable, which *Wikileaks* released in 2010, confirms parts of the alternative narrative. Diskin told Jones that he opposed American proposals to supply weapons and ammunition to Fatah, because he feared that Hamas would get their hands on them. He also told Jones of Fatah’s request that Israel attack Hamas. “They are approaching a zero-sum situation, and yet they ask us to attack Hamas,” Diskin told Jones. “This is a new development. We have never seen this before. They are desperate.”

On the same day, Jones sent another cable describing a conversation he had the previous day with Military-Intelligence Chief Amos Yadlin. The Israeli Defense Forces had earlier been eager to help Fatah against Hamas, but when Jones spoke to Yadlin on the eve of Hamas's takeover, Yadlin said he was actually "happy" with the prospect that Hamas would gain control of Gaza. He thought that Israel could then treat Gaza as a "hostile territory." And several weeks after Hamas's takeover in Gaza and Abbas's ouster of Hamas officials from the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, Israel's cabinet did declare Gaza a "hostile territory." And in a 2010 article, *Ha'aretz* revealed that during Operation Cast Lead in December 2008, Israel's Defense Minister asked Fatah's leadership whether it wanted to take back control of Gaza after Israel had ousted Hamas. That operation ended badly, of course, for Israel and its government.

If the alternative narrative to Abrams' is plausible, and I believe it is, what are the lessons to be drawn? The first, and most obvious, is that the Bush administration was utterly incompetent at foreign policy. That clearly goes for Bush's second as well as his first term. And in the case of its policy toward Israel and the Palestinians, it is not just Abrams and the White House that is to blame, but the State Department under Condoleezza Rice. Nothing they did—from urging elections on the Palestinian Authority to attempting to oust Hamas from the PA—achieved what they hoped. They were constantly being upended by events that they had not foreseen—from Hamas's victory in January 2006 to the Saudi's Mecca agreement in February 2007 to the Hamas takeover in June 2007.

The second, having to do with American policy toward Hamas, is more complicated and controversial. In the 1990s, the Clinton administration had good reason to try to isolate and sanction Hamas, which was using suicide bombers to undermine the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO. But by 2006, the situation had changed. Oslo was, to all intents and purposes, dead. Fatah and Abbas were unpopular, and in participating in the 2006 elections, and in occasional statements, Hamas had shown some willingness to let the PLO negotiate with the Israelis and to a long-term "hudna" or ceasefire with Israel. The Bush administration had at its disposal all kinds of circuitous means of dealing with Hamas without directly recognizing an organization that the State Department had designated as "terrorist." For one thing, as de Soto suggested, it could have acted through the Quartet.

Instead, the administration joined the Israelis in doing everything it could not only to isolate but to defeat and destroy Hamas, even though Hamas had won elections that the Bush administration had urged. At this point, the administration's strategy recalled earlier failed attempts of American administration to deny the existence of regimes and movements of which it did not approve. By refusing to deal with, or attempting to destroy, movements or governments that have genuine popular support, and that were not at war with the United States, the United States has almost invariably strengthened those movements and governments, and in some cases, removed the possibility that they could have been brought around. There is no question that the American and Israeli strategy against Hamas strengthened that movement, deepened its support, and also hardened its ties to a country, Iran, that both the US and Israel see as hostile.

American or Israeli politicians who back the idea of a "greater Israel" that incorporates lands that the Jews inhabited several millennia ago might agree with Yadlin's judgment that Hamas's takeover in Gaza boded well for Israel. But it would be hard for anyone who backs a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to agree. Hamas remains a force in the West Bank as well as Gaza, and as Halevy and other prominent officials have contended, would eventually have to be brought into any viable peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. That should have been clear during Bush's misadventure in his second term, but the lesson seems not to have been learned.

While Obama sought initially to press Israel to conclude an agreement with the Palestinians, he continued to harbor the illusion that it could be done while pretending that Hamas does not exist. Obama also followed the Bush administration in rejecting the idea of a unity government between

Hamas and Fatah when the two parties again agreed to reconcile early last year. The agreement fell apart—and not least because of an absence of American support. Will Obama change course in his second term and attempt to deal with Hamas and Fatah? In Obama's State of the Union address, he managed to mention Israel's security, but not the peace process or the Palestinians. Evidently, the administration is now denying the existence not only of Hamas, but of Abbas and the Palestinian Authority. That suggests that the lessons of Bush's disaster in Gaza have still not sunk in.

Why Jews should stand against Christian oppression

Ben Levitas, Jerusalem Post, 18 February 2013

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=303677>

At a recent conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, I was shocked to hear a Nigerian church leader declare that Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world today. On my way home afterwards, the deaths of 12 Christians, attacked in their church in Nigeria, was announced on the radio.

A quick Google search revealed the true scale of this onslaught against Christians, so it didn't take me long to find further confirmation of this assertion. In November 2012, none other than German Chancellor Angela Merkel made the same claim, in very nearly the same words.

The Open Doors website lists the countries responsible for persecuting Christians, with the worst perpetrators in sequence being: North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Maldives, Mali, Iran, Yemen, Eritrea, Syria, Sudan and Nigeria.

"For the eleventh year running, North Korea is the most difficult place on earth to be a Christian. One of the remaining Communist states, it is vehemently opposed to religion of any kind. Christians are classified as hostile and face arrest, detention, torture, even public execution."

Shared in common by the next 12 states that practice "extreme persecution" is a majority Muslim population. In some, like Saudi Arabia, there is no provision for religious freedom in the constitution, which stipulates that "all citizens must adhere to Islam and conversion to another religion is punishable by death.

Public Christian worship is forbidden; worshipers risk imprisonment, lashing, deportation and torture."

In almost all Islamic countries, missionary activity and the distribution of Christian material, even the Bible, is illegal. Muslims who convert to Christianity risk honor killings, and accusations of blasphemy are an ever-present reality, punishable in many cases by mob violence.

Civitas, The Institute for the study of Civil Society, published a review of Rupert Short's recent book *Christianophobia: A Faith Under Attack*, which confirms the Nigerian preacher's claim that Christianity is in peril like no other religion: "Christians are targeted more than any other body of believers" and "200 million Christians [10 percent of the global total] are socially disadvantaged, harassed or actively oppressed for their beliefs."

Rupert Short highlights the fact that Christianity is facing elimination in its biblical homeland. Between a half and two-thirds of Christians in the Middle East have emigrated or been killed over the past century. Over 600,000 Copts have fled Egypt since 1980, as a result constant intimidation, including the the burning of churches.

In Egypt on February 7, 2013, Coptic Christian Pope Tawadros II, who became pope in November 2012, spoke against the nation's Islamist leadership and the growing Islamist power in Egypt. He criticized the Muslim Brotherhood and President Mohamed Morsi's constitution, which is based upon sharia law.

In the West Bank, which has been under the administration of the Palestinian Authority since 1995, there are about 50,000 Christians; less than 3% of the Palestinian population.

Bethlehem's 22,000 Christians make up only a third of its residents, down from 75% a few decades ago.

The exact number of Christians remaining in Iraq is not known, but it has fallen sharply from as many as 1.4 million before the US-led invasion nearly a decade ago to about 500,000 today. After a brutal attack on Baghdad's Our Lady of Salvation Church in October 2010, that killed more than 50 worshipers, and after several other attacks, Iraqi Christians have been forced to take extreme security measures at all communal gatherings.

In Syria, where Christians previously enjoyed a respected status, this 2,000-year-old community, which at over 2 million adherents was the largest church in the Middle East after Egypt's Copts, now faces extinction. During the chaos of the civil war, the Christians, lacking militias of their own, are easy prey for Islamists and criminals alike. Archdeacon Emanuel Youkhana of the Assyrian Church of the East wrote: "We are witnessing another Arab country losing its Christian Assyrian minority. When it happened in Iraq nobody believed Syria's turn would come. Christian Assyrians are fleeing [en masse] from threats, kidnappings, rapes and murders. Behind the daily reporting about bombs there is an ethno-religious cleansing taking place, and soon Syria [could] be emptied of its Christians."

Rupert Short attributes the intolerance and violence toward Christians, ignored or even sanctioned by governments, to the rising Islamification of Middle Eastern countries.

The Christian response has been muted and restrained as one would expect from a religion which propounds "turning the other cheek."

Speaking during his traditional Christmas message from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Benedict XVI called for an "end to the bloodshed" in Syria and denounced the "savage acts of terrorism [which] continue to reap victims, particularly among Christians."

He was referring specifically to Africa, even as gunmen on Christmas attacked a church in the northern Nigerian state of Yobe, killing six people, including the pastor, before setting the building ablaze.

So why should I as a Jew care about the fate of Christians? Firstly, having been victims for thousands of years it is our obligation to care and reach out to victims of discrimination, religious intolerance and extremism. Secondly, it is our responsibility to stand up for religious freedom and specially for those moderate and tolerant values promoted by most of these Christian minority groups. Moreover, Christians are rediscovering their Hebraic roots and are strong supporters of Israel, as they see its rebirth as the actualization of the biblical prophecies and of their divine mission to assist with the return of Jews to their promised land.

It is incumbent on my people to ensure that at least in the area where there is Jewish suzerainty, discrimination against Christians does not occur, and I have satisfied myself that of all the countries in the Middle East, only in Israel is the Christian population growing and flourishing.

Jews of Brooklyn, take your place!

Lori Lowenthal Marcus, Jewish Press, 7 February 2013

<http://www.jewishpress.com/news/jews-of-brooklyn-take-your-place/2013/02/07/>

Letter to the Jews of Brooklyn:

I can neither scream nor shout through the ink that flows on this page. You can not see the expression on my face as I write this nor feel the intensity, the rate at which I type. But I pray that these words be made manifest through the actions you take. I pray that the absence of noise on this hollow page be consumed by the shouts you take to the streets of New York. Jews of Brooklyn, take your place. It is not time for timid cowardice, for paralyzing fear that too often stops those who would otherwise speak from doing so. It is time for the trumpet blast. It is time for the shofar. It is time to cry aloud and spare not. It is time to lift up your voices like instruments of sounding brass. It is time to speak.

You who have risen up out of the ashes of Auschwitz and Dachau, take your place. You bear the weight of six million souls whose memories you carry, who must never be forgotten. The legacy of centuries of pogroms and expulsions displays its ugly head before you. Take your place. Oh that the victims of that Crystal Night could see you now! That they could take solace in knowing that their sons and daughters rose and made known through thunderous noise their protest against those who would destroy them! Take your place!

Do not fear the dissenting naysayer who does not believe in your existence, let alone your right to speak. Nor be faint of heart for time is running out. Do not fear the bombastic speeches of the evil anti-Semites, for though they stand as giants before you, their voices will soon fade and you will triumph just as the young boy with the slingshot did in times past. 'Who are you that you should be afraid of a man that will die, or of the son of man that will be made as grass?' Fear not the tiny voice nagging at you, whispering that you will fail. Fear not your own power. It is tremendous. Embrace it and you will change the world. Remember that G-d is the judge of all and your cause is just. Take your place.

Be not only for yourselves, but take your place for the Miriam Monsenegos. Take your place for the Aryeh and Gavriel Slanders. Take your place for the Josef Blosche's, the Fogel families, the dolphinariums blown to bits, the Sbarro Pizza shops dismantled. Take your place for the busses in Bulgaria filled with lives gone before their time. Take your place for the Israeli reservists lynched in Ramallah. Take your place for the children tortured by the terror ridden ground in Sderot and the children who must live under the reign of murderers in Gaza. For the lives gone and for the families who remain and wake with that empty space inside them. For the Jew that determines to live in his sacred land, who chooses life, who chooses to be free, take your place.

For the moment is now and it will never come again.

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

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