



OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 37: 24 June 2013

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

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

**(1) Amir Taheri President-elect Rowhani faces inflated expectations
*Asharq Al-Awsat, 21 June 2013***

Those who have high hopes for Rouhani would do well to lower their expectations. After all, in the Khomeinist system, the final say goes to the Supreme Guide under Articles 110 and 176 of the constitution. In the past two years, Khamenei has reasserted his powers with greater vigor and is determined to be seen as the sole decision-maker in Iran.

**(2) PM Netanyahu's remarks at the Israeli Presidential Conference
*Transcript, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 20 June 2013***

In order for there to be "tomorrow" we must be strong in the present and in the future; and for there to be peace, we must be strong in the present and in the future. For peace to be maintained, we must be strong in the present and in the future. Because a peace accord that compromises our security will not endure, and I will never compromise the security of the State of Israel and its citizens.

**(3) Ron Proser The world's preferred refugees
*Jerusalem Post, 19 June 2013***

Unlike other refugees, the Palestinians have their own set of rules, their own funding and even their own international agency, the UNRWA.

**(4) Brig. Gen. (ret.) Michael Herzog Israeli perspectives on Syria,
*BICOM, 19 June 2013***

The Syrian civil war got closer than ever to Israel's northern border recently with the border town of Quneitra on the Golan Heights falling briefly into the hands of rebel forces on 6 June. This followed other developments including tension over the Russian supply of anti-aircraft missiles to Syria, increasing participation of Hezbollah in the fighting, escalating rhetoric from Assad towards Israel, and threats to the

integrity of the UN observer mission which has been overseeing a ceasefire between Israel and Syria since 1974.

(5) Joel Leyden Address by President Shimon Peres on his 90th birthday, *Israel News Agency*, 18 June 2013

" I know you have come to Jerusalem from around the world and from across the country to pay tribute, with me, to our people, to the State of Israel, and to Tikun Olam."

**(6) Alan Baker Preconditions have no basis in law or fact
Jerusalem Post, 18 June 2013**

The sooner the Palestinians cease trying to unilaterally undermine, manipulate and bypass the negotiating process, and give up their preconditions, the sooner the issue of settlements will be settled and thereby removed from the agenda.

**(7) David Goldman Syria and Egypt can't be fixed
Middle East Forum, 17 June 2013**

Syria and Egypt are dying. They were dying before the Syrian civil war broke out and before the Muslim Brotherhood took power in Cairo. Syria has an insoluble civil war and Egypt has an insoluble crisis because they are dying. They are dying because they chose not to the better part of a billion people from rural backwardness to a modern urban economy within a generation.

(8) Evelyn Gordon Explanations of Islamic Jew-hatred reveal the media's own prejudices, *Commentary Magazine*, 29 April 2013

The Islamic world's rampant Jew-hatred is often simply ignored by the journalists and academics who should be bringing it to public attention. But no less troubling is the fact that on the rare occasions when they do report it, they frequently try to explain it away.

**(9) The Arab awakening and the "cascade" of failing states:
dealing with post-revolutionary stabilization challenges
Yoel Guzansky and Benedetta Berti, *Harvard Journal of Middle Eastern Politics*, Spring 2013**

The challenges of the post-revolutionary "Arab Awakening." period risk intensifying pre-existing sectarian, religious, and political cleavages. In turn, this means - at least in the short term - that it is fair to expect renewed internal turmoil as well as significant troubles in the establishment of central authority. As such, the short term may indeed be characterized by weaker or failing states, with strong regional implications at the humanitarian, political, and security levels.

<http://cdn.www.inss.org.il.reblazecdn.net/upload/%28FILE%291369281086.pdf>

President-elect Rowhani faces inflated expectations

Amir Taheri, Asharq Al-Awsat, 21 June 2013

<http://www.aawsat.net/2013/06/article55306658>

He is the “moderate reformist” that many have dreamt of. No, he is an apparatchik with little desire to seek significant change. Over the past week, these two contradictory analyses have dominated the debate regarding the election of Hassan Rouhani as the new president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Is another analysis possible?

To answer that question we must recall some key points.

To start with, Rouhani did not enter the election as the candidate of any faction. Even after the carnage conducted by the Council of Guardians at the start of the process, the four factions of the establishment still had their respective standard-bearers. Thus, Rouhani was able to cast himself as a trans-factional candidate.

At the same time, his record made him acceptable to all factions.

Among the candidates left in the field he was unique in a number of ways.

He is a mullah and thus acceptable to clerics although he has never worked as a cleric. Thanks to decades of close association with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), he is acceptable to the military that have emerged as a power behind the scenes in Iran. His position as a security official for years also makes him acceptable to the powerful intelligence services that helped wreck Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's second term. Rouhani is also acceptable to technocrats and managerial elites of the regime. He is a successful businessman and, for years, was chief executive of the IRGC's biggest conglomerate, granting thousands of lucrative contracts to the private sector.

But Rouhani is also a diplomat with many contacts abroad. Former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and former French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin claim him as friend.

Rouhani owes his election to no one but a combination of circumstances.

As far as Rouhani is concerned, all that is on the positive side.

However, his election also includes negative features. To start with, he has no constituency of his own. Many of those who voted for him did so simply because they did not like the candidates of rival factions. They saw Rouhani as the only alternative to Velayati, Jalili, and Qalibaf who were—perhaps wrongly—believed to be Khamenei's choices. The protest vote against the Supreme Guide went to Rouhani as the outsider.

To be sure, as president, Rouhani would be able to use the resources at his disposal to build a personal support base. But that takes time and, as Ahmadinejad's experience has shown, is no easy task.

Rouhani's election has another negative feature.

Of the seven presidents of the Khomeinist republic, Rouhani has been elected with the lowest share of votes, a whisker above 50 per cent. The average share of the votes for the six previous presidents stands at over 70%, while Khamenei was first elected president with 96% of the vote. Last Friday's election also showed the second lowest voter turnout in Iranian presidential election history. The turnout in the presidential election four years ago was almost 12% higher. More interestingly, the

turnout in major cities was at an all-time low. In Tehran, Rouhani collected 1.2 million votes out of 6.5 million eligible voters. Lack of support in major cities is important if one wishes to see Rouhani introducing a program of reforms desired by urban middle classes.

Rouhani faces another major problem. Because no one is quite sure who he is, many are likely to project their wishes and fantasies onto him and, if he cannot deliver, are likely to turn against him. This is what happened to Muhammad Khatami, a decent man but a poor politician who was swept into the presidency as the anti-establishment candidate before retiring as a vilified character eight years later. Iranians have already posted endless lists of desiderata on the Internet for Rouhani to deliver.

Many want him to release political prisoners on his first day. Others want him to stop the Iranian rial's rapid meltdown and rein in inflation that has topped 30%. Some think his election spells the end of sanctions imposed by the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union.

For their part, the major powers are also dreaming of Rouhani solving the nuclear file with a magic wand. Inflated expectations could derail Rouhani's presidency before it begins.

No one knows how Rouhani's presidency might turn out. We have to wait and see whether he can even form a cabinet of his own and ensure control of key ministries such as the Security and Intelligence, Foreign Affairs, Defense, Interior, and Oil ministries.

I am told that Rouhani is negotiating with Khamenei to begin his presidency with a major symbolic move such as ending the house arrest of former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi and former Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karroubi. On the international front, he is reportedly seeking permission to devote his first foreign visit to Saudi Arabia to ease tension in the region and find a common solution to the Syrian tragedy.

Those who have high hopes for Rouhani would do well to lower their expectations. After all, in the Khomeinist system, the final say goes to the Supreme Guide under Articles 110 and 176 of the constitution. In the past two years, Khamenei has reasserted his powers with greater vigor and is determined to be seen as the sole decision-maker in Iran.

Like all his predecessors as president, Rouhani is bound to clash with the Supreme Guide. What matters is the manner in which that clash takes place.

Fortunately for him, Rouhani has promised almost nothing. The symbol of his campaign—a silver key—was an apt choice. A key opens a door, but we don't always know what is behind the door it opens.

PM Netanyahu's remarks at the Israeli Presidential Conference *Transcript*, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 20 June 2013

<http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Speeches/Pages/speechtomo200613.aspx>

[Translation from Hebrew]

President of Israel, my friend Shimon Peres;
Chairman of the Jewish Agency Natan Sharansky;
President of the Hebrew University, Professor Menachem Ben-Sasson;
My friends,
Shimon – democracy at its best.

I wish to talk today about the tomorrow. As there are many guests from abroad, I will speak in English, but first – the essence in Hebrew.

But in order for there to be “tomorrow” we must be strong in the present and in the future; and for there to be peace, we must be strong in the present and in the future.

For peace to be maintained, we must be strong in the present and in the future. Because a peace accord that compromises our security will not endure, and I will never compromise the security of the State of Israel and its citizens.

Therefore, when we talk about “tomorrow” I talk about a tomorrow of peace, security and also prosperity.

I will begin with security.
[End of translation]

You're following this translation?

I want to talk about peace; I want to talk about a tomorrow of security, prosperity and peace.

So first: Security.

We face great challenges. From Morocco to Pakistan there is an earthquake. It's changing the face, not only of North Africa and the Middle East, it's changing the face of the world. It's unprecedented; it's turmoil; and it's unclear. There's a struggle in this vast region between medievalism and modernity. And it's not yet clear who will have the upper hand. The jury is still out.

Now, I'm convinced ultimately that the forces of modernity, of freedom, of information, of education – that these forces will ultimately win out. But ultimately is not good enough for the Jewish people. Ultimately the forces of light overcame the forces of darkness in the last century, but our people paid a terrible price in between. That will not happen again. I will not let it happen again.

So Israel must remain strong. And the greatest threat that we face is that the most dangerous weapons in the world fall into the hands of the most dangerous regimes in the world – especially one regime. We cannot allow Iran to achieve nuclear weapons.

Now, mind you, the people of Iran, they want a better tomorrow. The election results show that very clearly. But Iran's dictator denies them their rights and he prevents them from materializing that better future. The first thing the newly elected president said was that Iran must be guaranteed its rights. He didn't say: the Iranian people must be guaranteed their rights. He said: Iran must be guaranteed its rights. And the right that Iran stresses that it must have a guarantee on is to develop nuclear weapons.

This is what this regime is about. So we may be seeing a change in style, but not a change in substance. In fact, the President Elect is the author of a doctrine that I call "Talk and Enrich" (enrich nuclear material): You smile, you talk and you move forward towards the bomb. He takes great pride in the fact that when he was Iran's nuclear negotiator, that's exactly what he did for many years. He criticizes the past president for not engaging in this tactic to achieve the unchanging and fixed strategy of arming Iran with nuclear weapons.

We cannot allow the Iranian regime to play that game.

Now there's a critical test, and the test is not what they say, but what they do. And what they have to do is to abide by the international demands, stop all enrichment at all levels, remove the nuclear material that's already been enriched and shut down the illicit nuclear facilities.

I say to the international community: keep up the pressure, keep up the pressure and keep to those demands. This is fundamental for international security, and it's fundamental for our security.

Number two: Prosperity.

You know the old joke: How do you make a small fortune in Israel? Start with a big fortune.

No longer true. There are ways to make big fortunes – many ways. And in Israel, we've shot ahead. Ten years ago I was the finance minister. Our GDP per capita was about two thirds of the leading European countries. Today we've taken over; we've passed the Mediterranean tier of countries; we have \$32,000 per capita income, to low for me...

I said we'd get there and people said: no we couldn't, it's a fantasy. We grew at 5% a year because we instituted these reforms of a market economy and competition and enterprise and innovation. Those are abundantly available in our people. And what began in the 1980s with reforms to import into our markets continued – and many other reforms that made our per capita income shoot forward, and this gives us the money to improve our education and our health system and our roads and our railroads.

We once had the economy of a developing country, remember that? Just a few years ago, Israel as an emerging market. We've emerged. We're a developed country. We're one of the most advanced technological countries on earth.

So today we lead the OECD, the club of advanced economies, we lead the OECD in sustained economic growth, and we did this through the innovation of our people: by opening up our economy to competition, enterprise, to the genius of our people.

Now all this must continue. We have to sustain, in this decade, the same 4-5% growth rate that we just had in the last 10 years. How do you do that? It gets harder. As you get higher and higher in the income level it gets harder and harder to sustain such growth, but it is possible. And we're going to do it.

We're going to do it first by continuing domestic reforms. You're very lucky if you have an inefficient bureaucracy. You're surprised. You see, an inefficient bureaucracy is like a boot, a heavy boot and a coil spring. And when you take off that boot, that spring uncoils. That's growth. And so we're going to institute those remaining reforms we need to modernize the Israeli economy. And one of the things, the first thing we're going to do is to modernize our inefficient ports and open them up to competition. We're going to change that. And that change will affect the quality of life and the cost of living of all Israelis because just about everything you see: this lamp, this piece of wood, well, not everything... Just about everything you see goes through these ports. 90% of our GDP goes through these ports, either as imports or exports, and we will make it cheaper and more available.

Secondly, we're going to open up new markets. I was recently in China. We just need a tiny sliver of a huge market. And we're going to open markets in Asia and Latin America and elsewhere. When I was in China, what interested the leaders of China with whom I spoke were three things: Israeli technology, Israeli technology and Israeli technology. I was in Poland, and I spoke to their Prime Minister, and he was interested, amazingly, in three things: Israeli technology, Israeli technology, Israeli technology. And recently I met President Santos, the President of Colombia, and he was interested in three things, the same three things. What we need is to push forward into new markets. We can do it. We're in the process of doing it. Israeli exporters are very nimble, they're very fast, they're very agile, but we will help them reach those markets.

Third: Gas.

I just heard about gas. Well it turns out that Moses wasn't such a bad navigator after all. He came to the land of milk and honey and gas. Who would have believed that Israel would be an energy power? We're lucky enough not to have discovered gas in our first 65 years, or 60 years, because we could rely on our wits, on our ingenuity.

And yesterday we decided to open up our gas fields for developing an export. We're not going to make the mistake of those countries who said we shall not export, and the gas remained in the ground and in the sea. We're going to develop the gas for our internal market and we're going to fill up the coffers of the state with what we bring from exports for the benefit of all Israelis.

Forth: Infrastructure.

We're developing new fast roads, and rail-links to make our country smaller, well – faster, it's small enough. But it's about time that we did in Israel what the United States did in the 19th century, connect the two ends with one unified rail system and one unified road system. That the United States did in the 20th century. My goal and my dream is to eliminate this concept of a periphery. What does it mean to have a periphery in a country the size of New Jersey? We'll have a unified country, a connected country. And young people will be able afford housing because we'll open up the Galilee and the Negev, and you can drive for 45 minutes and get to any place of employment.

And fifth: Information technology.

Because what is important is not just the fact that we can drive on roads or go on rail – it's the information highway, and we have brilliant people. We're improving our education and our science and our technology. But I want every child in what we still call development towns – and they'll be developed just like the country developed – every child, every young boy, every young girl, every Arab kid in a village, everyone, to be connected to this information network of fast fiber. We're going to do it. We decided to do it and we're going to do it and it will change the face of Israeli society. It will give everyone an equal opportunity to partake in tomorrow today.

So prosperity is within our means. We've shown it. It's not an empty statement. It's real. We have a lot of things that we still have to accomplish. But when you look at what we've done in the last decade and before, we've out stepped so many of the developed countries and we're not stopping.

But there's a third goal, in addition to security, in addition to prosperity, we want to achieve peace. I want to achieve peace.

The only way to achieve peace, the only way to negotiate a peace and to end the negotiations for peace is to begin the negotiations for peace. We're ready to begin negotiations now, without preconditions. And I hope that

the Palestinian leadership is equally ready.

We're only 15 minutes apart. Well, with a police escort you could do it faster, but that's the distance from Ramallah to Jerusalem. There's no reason on earth we shouldn't negotiate. And we give Secretary Kerry all the support for his important effort, and I hope he succeeds, because we want to succeed.

But I'll say one thing about peace. I think the reason there is no peace has to be addressed. Not in opening the negotiations, because I put no conditions and no requirement on entering the negotiations. But in order to end the negotiations successfully we must address the question of why we've been unavailable, why we've been unsuccessful in getting peace. Why have successive governments, six prime ministers since Oslo, and before Oslo, have not been able to achieve peace with the Palestinians.

I think it must be understood that this conflict predates 1967 by almost half a century. It predates the settlements, although that's an issue that will have to be discussed and resolved. All these questions will be discussed.

But the question we have to ask is why did this conflict rage from 1920, when the first Palestinian Arab attacks on the Jewish immigration office in Jaffa began, till 1967? That's 47 years. What was that all about? I'll tell you what it was about. It was the fervent opposition to a Jewish state in any boundary. It didn't even exist, and once it existed, there was an attempt to put out the life, to extinguish the life of the embryonic Jewish state in the War of Independence and then in the years that followed. That was the reason.

And then we vacated settlements. We left Gaza and it still continued. And those who are firing rockets into our towns and to our villages, you ask them "Why are you doing this? We left every square inch of Gaza. Why are you doing this?" They say: "To liberate Palestine." And we say: "You mean Judea Samaria, the West Bank?" "No," they say, "Palestine. We mean Be'er Sheva, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Jaffa. You know, Palestine." That was and remains the basic problem.

Palestinian society is divided into two: those who openly call for our destruction and use terror for that effect, and those, the other half that refuses to confront the first half. And I say, if we're going to have peace, we're going to have Palestinian leadership that faces up to this and says: "We are willing to make peace with the Jewish state. We will accept the right of the Jewish people to have a nation state."

That was and remains the underlying problem that makes peace elusive.

I don't ask for these questions of recognition and security and the 19 other issues that will have to be negotiated. 21 – we counted... You don't want me to itemize all of them...

But they're all important. They'll all have to be negotiated. But ultimately it is the willingness of the Palestinians to accept a Jewish state, to accept the right of the Jews to live in their ancient homeland as a sovereign people, this is the most important thing that will determine the success of our efforts.

And sometimes, you know, there is a lot of discussion, a lot of debates that don't get to the heart of the matter. This is the heart of the matter: the heart of the matter is the willingness of our neighbors to accept us as we accept them.

We seek peace with all our neighbors. We seek a Middle East of peace, security, stability, prosperity. We will work to ensure it for our own state. We pray that we can achieve it with others. And I hope that they will pray that same prayer too.

That's the tomorrow I wish for. That's the tomorrow I know you wish for, everyone here, everyone, from Shimon Peres to the last guest here, and everyone who is listening to us out there, may we succeed.

Toda raba.

The world's preferred refugees
Ron Proser, Jerusalem Post, 19 June 2013

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/The-worlds-preferred-refugees-317119>

For millions of refugees, World Refugee Day is a day like any other. From Mali to South Sudan and from Myanmar to Haiti, countless men, women and children will once again awaken today to an uncertain future.

They are aided in their perilous journey by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which works with governments to advocate and seek asylum for all refugees. That is, all refugee groups but one.

Set apart by the shortsighted interests of the Arab states, Palestinian refugees are the world's only card-carrying, professional group of refugees.

Unlike other refugees, the Palestinians have their own set of rules, their own funding and even their own international agency, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency or UNRWA. To paraphrase George Orwell, all refugees are equal, but some refugees are more equal than others.

In 2012, the United Nations spent six times more on every Palestinian refugee as compared to all other refugees. Like a favored child, the Palestinians have been on the UN's permanent payroll for over 60 years and are entitled to every service from healthcare to housing and from food rations to education. When it comes to refugees from Syria or Somalia, responsibility falls to the host country to provide basic assistance.

While UNHCR's approach teaches independence, UNRWA's approach prepares the Palestinians to be lifelong dependents. Under UNRWA's framework, Palestinians can continue to be called refugees long after they acquire citizenship and find permanent housing.

UNRWA's humanitarian mission is undoubtedly important. However, it is being marred by its unspoken political motto of "once a refugee, always a refugee." By allowing refugee status to pass to Palestinian children and grandchildren, the number of Palestinian refugees has ballooned from a few hundred thousand in 1948 to over five million today. Left unchecked, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians will continue to be added to the UN's permanent payroll every year.

Instead of extending their hand in friendship, the Arab states employed the NIMBY strategy – Not In My Back Yard. Believing that the creation of UNRWA absolved them of any responsibility to their Palestinian brothers, the Arab states passed discriminatory laws. In Lebanon for example, Palestinian refugees are barred from working as doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers or accountants.

By making the Palestinians the poster children for international victimhood, the Arab states believe they hold a permanent trump card to defame and pressure Israel. While the Arab states are saturated in petrol dollars, the funds mysteriously dry up when it comes to assisting Palestinians and subsidizing UNRWA.

Scan the list of UNRWA's top contributors and you'll find it's exclusively North American and West European countries.

The Arabs' self-serving gesture comes at the expense of refugees in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Middle East. Every news story and donation directed to UNRWA and its "pref-ugees" is awareness and funding diverted from refugees in urgent need of protection and assistance.

On World Refugee Day, we are asked to ensure that all people displaced by conflict have the chance to build a better life. It's time to review the status quo and disrupt the senseless UNRWA cycle in which the money flows, the number grows, and absolutely anything goes.

Israeli perspectives on Syria

Brig. Gen. (ret.) Michael Herzog, BICOM, 19 June 2013

<http://www.bicom.org.uk/analysis-article/14915/>

The Syrian civil war got closer than ever to Israel's northern border late last week with the border town of Quneitra on the Golan Heights falling briefly into the hands of rebel forces on 6 June. This followed other developments including tension over the Russian supply of anti-aircraft missiles to Syria, increasing participation of Hezbollah in the fighting, escalating rhetoric from Assad towards Israel, and threats to the integrity of the UN observer mission which has been overseeing a ceasefire between Israel and Syria since 1974. In this Q and A, BICOM's Senior Research Fellow, Brig. Gen. (ret.) Michael Herzog assesses the challenges these developments pose for Israeli policy makers. The following is an edited transcript of the podcast.

With increasing instability in the Israeli-Syrian border area, what are Israeli policy makers' most immediate concerns?

Recent developments have confirmed the existing working assumption in Israel that nearly 40 years of quiet on the Syria border are about to end. If you go to the Israeli side of the border on the Golan Heights you can see the fighting inside Syria with your own eyes. The assumption is that the border will become a 'wild west' with government forces and insurgents currently fighting each other but at a certain point leading to a spill over into Israel.

Austria has announced that it will pull its contingent out of the UN separation force on the Golan (UNDOF), what would be the consequences for Israel of a disintegration of the UN force?

The establishment of the UN force in 1974 created a buffer zone between Israel and Syria. If UNDOF goes this buffer will disappear, contributing to a destabilising of the situation. This will enable any group to approach the border and provoke Israel with attacks, and will force Israel to advance forces to the border area, including heavy weapons like tanks. For these reasons Israel has asked the UN to find substitute forces for those that are leaving.

How big a threat to Israel is the S300 anti-aircraft missile system which Russia has said it will supply to the Assad regime?

The system is a real threat. The question is if and when it will arrive in Syria. Assad's claim that some parts of the system have already arrived have not been substantiated. It may take a long time for the Russians to provide the whole system, and even when it arrives it will take at least six months to become operational, so it seems we will not see it before 2014. But if it does arrive it will have a range of nearly 200km and could threaten freedom of flight over Israel itself. Whilst the Israeli Air Force will probably know how to cope with this threat, more complicated is the threat to Israeli civil aviation, including over Ben Gurion airport.

Israel has been trying to talk the Russians out of supplying this weapon. The Russians say they will provide the missile because it is a signed deal. In the meantime we still have some time to work out how to cope with this issue.

Would Israel hold back from targeting this system due to Russian involvement?

I would not bet on it. It is clear to the Russians, and this reportedly came up in a recent meeting between Netanyahu and Putin, that if the S300 arrives in Syria, and threatens Israel, then Israel may be forced to take action against it. Israel's National Security Advisor Yaakov Amidror has said that Israel will not allow this system to become operational. If the Russians get their money for the sale, maybe they will not care, but at the same time it's not good for the Russians if a strategic weapons system they supply is easily destroyed.

Are there any scenarios, with regard to developments on the Golan Heights, that could force Israel to intervene?

Israel has no interest in getting drawn into the quagmire in Syria for a variety of reasons. Israel does not believe it can shape the outcome, or if it can it will be too costly, and Israel has other things on its plate including the bigger challenge of Iran's nuclear programme. But Israel has acted and will act if it feels its national interests are directly threatened.

One scenario is jihadists establishing themselves in the Golan along the Israeli-Syrian border and trying to provoke Israel, as some have said they will try to do. In such a scenario, or if it is provoked by Syria, Israel will be compelled to respond. The other area where Israel has acted, and will act

again, is the transfer of strategic weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Aside from these scenarios I do not see Israel intervening in the war.

We have seen increasing threats from Assad towards Israel in recent weeks. Will this make Israel think twice about future actions inside Syria to prevent weapons transfers to Hezbollah?

This certainly complicates things. Initially the Syrian regime did not respond publicly. In certain cases they even ignored Israeli strikes or presented them as rebel operations. But with increasing media reports of Israeli interventions, they probably felt compelled to upscale their rhetoric and threaten revenge.

They threatened Israel with two types of response. First, Nasrallah said that Syria will continue to try and provide Hezbollah with strategic weapons. Second is a threat to open up the Golan Heights to armed operations against Israel. I think there is still some gap between rhetoric and action, but we cannot rule out that in a recurring scenario of Israeli strikes to prevent weapons transfer to Hezbollah, that the other side will ultimately do something in response, which could bring about escalation. I think Israeli policy makers are aware of this scenario and are considering it carefully.

What is the state of the debate in Israel about arming the rebels?

Israel has not taken an official position, not wanting to be seen to be interfering. The caution attributed to PM Netanyahu is about making sure that weapons provided to rebels do not fall into the wrong hands, and this is a concern shared by the US and major EU powers. I still believe that there are sufficient insurgent forces not connected to jihadists or Islamists, and that weapons should be provided to them. Every day that goes by with the West continuing to be passive helps radicalise the conflict. It empowers Islamists at the expense of non-Islamists, and it highlights the asymmetry between the active role being played by Russia, Hezbollah and Iran in support of Assad, and the passive role being played by the West in countering Assad. I am not advocating military intervention by the West but I would still support providing weapons to carefully vetted non-Islamist forces.

Where do Israeli policy makers stand on the question of whether Assad can be part of a diplomatic solution?

People in Israel are very sceptical about the prospects for a diplomatic solution. For one thing the opposition cannot get its act together and agree on a coherent course of action, and decided not to join the Geneva II diplomatic track. Another reason is that with Assad (who anyway does not wish to step down) scoring some tactical gains on the ground in recent weeks, especially in the area of Qusair, why would he be inclined to make any concessions? This factor also deterred some of the insurgency elements from coming to the table.

What is the impact of Hezbollah's participation in the conflict?

There are two sides to this coin. On one hand you see Shiite forces rushing to Syria to help Assad and save his regime; you see thousands of Hezbollah combatants fighting inside Syria. They are on the outskirts of Damascus and played a crucial role in deciding the outcome of the battle for Qusair. You also have Shiites from Iraq and Iranians helping the Assad regime, and the fact that they are actively supporting Assad may help him not only survive but re-establish his rule in Damascus, and the link to the coastal area and Lebanon.

On the other hand the fact that Hezbollah is so invested in the war in Syria has some advantages for Israel. Hezbollah is almost totally focussed on Syria rather than focussing on Israel, they are losing people there, and their involvement triggers a lot of criticism in the Sunni Arab Street and in Lebanon itself, where they are under a lot of pressure. Sheikh Qardawi, the spiritual leader of the Sunni world, recently attacked Hezbollah in a very vehement way, stating publicly that they are worse than Jews and Christians and altering their name from the 'Party of God' (Hezbollah) to the 'Part of Satan'. My own view is that overall the disadvantages for Hezbollah outweigh the advantages of the current situation.

Address by President Shimon Peres on his 90th birthday
Joel Leyden, Israel News Agency, 18 June 2013

<http://www.israelnewsagency.com/shimonperesbirthdayisraeljewishcelebrationpresident061813.html>

Jerusalem, Israel --- June 18, 2013 ... The following was communicated by the Israel President's Office to the *Israel News Agency*.

Address by President Shimon Peres on the occasion of his 90th birthday.

Dear and distinguished friends,

I am moved to see so many friends here tonight, many of which have stood by me, as I have stood by them. Together we made a long and thrilling journey.

I greatly appreciate that you have chosen to celebrate the birthday of a man whose only sin was to grow a year older. I know you have come to Jerusalem from around the world and from across the country to pay tribute, with me, to our people, to the State of Israel, and to Tikun Olam. Thank you all.

On this occasion, I feel grateful, because the chapters of my life are entwined with the story of the birth and the development of the State of Israel. Because I have been given the wonderful privilege to serve my country. To take part in the building of its strength. To pursue peace, our heart's truest desire. During my decades of experience as a public servant, I have learned one primary lesson:

To be a loyal servant of your people, you must follow your moral compass, whose values are clear cut. At dusk, take stock of the errors of the day. At dawn, do not forget the night's dreams. I have learned that a dream is only the beginning of a better tomorrow. And this is the spirit of the gathering which we open tonight. Making the dream of tomorrows – today's agenda.

From my mother Sarah, I learned the love of books. From my father Yitzhak, I learned to work hard. My parents believed that ignorance and laziness are sins. From Sonia, the love of my life, I learned the true meaning of love. In her eyes, deep love is selfless. Deep love is the total love of one's fellow. The love of one's life partner. One's parents, one's children. And to do good, as much as one can, while your good deeds remain nameless. I envied Sonia for the strength and the resilience of her modesty. Together, with great love, we built our common treasure: 3 children, 8 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren. They were lucky enough to inherit her genes for the most part.

My life's journey is a road that runs between Vishnieva, where I was born, to Israel, where I lived as a youngster, full of dreams. It is the road between my grandfather and David Ben Gurion, the two figures who have left the deepest imprint on my life to this very day. My revered grandfather, Rabbi Tzvi Melzer, a man of the Volozhin Talmudic Yeshiva. He was murdered at the hands of the Nazis. He taught me the Talmud during the day, and Tolstoy at night. He shaped my life as a child. And on the other hand, David Ben Gurion, the founder of the State of Israel, and the greatest Jew I have ever known. He taught me the importance of vision in the shaping of a desired reality. And that the moral call is the wisest of human judgments. He taught me that there is nothing more responsible than to take risks today for the sake of tomorrow's chance. His political wisdom, his bold determination, his ability to make difficult decisions and stand by them, strong as a rock; I believe it is these traits which enabled a seemingly impossible dream to become reality, and changed forever the destiny of our people's history.

Dear friends, when I was a child, Israel was a legend more than a reality. She emerged from a dream, and today she has surpassed that dream. From the depths of the Holocaust we rose to heights which reach far beyond the horizon of history. It did not happen overnight. It was a long journey which came at an unbearable price. We have known seven wars, we endured them all by virtue of our sons and daughters, by virtue of our soldiers, and by virtue of the parents who raised them. We gathered the exiles from the four corners of the earth, and became one people. We built a vibrant democracy and a diverse society. We made Israel a global hub for hi-tech, science and creativity. We turned a refusing land into an inspiring oasis.

The State of Israel is the living proof that the potential hidden within the human being is richer than the resources buried in the soil. I love this country. The scent of the figs ripening on the tree of my garden enchants me. So too the hum of the Jordan River and the silence of the Negev nights. At every encounter with citizens across the country, I am proud and moved at the sight of their valor and talent, their spirit, their faith, and their generosity. I am in love with my people who can be passionate and even short-tempered. Their language is sometimes less than diplomatic but at the same time their understanding, their creativity, their courage and the goodness of their heart, their generosity and the warmth which they exude – can melt hearts.

The same Israeli who will curse a driver who unfairly overtook him on the road will willingly give up his life on the battlefield for the sake of his country or to save the life of a brother.

Our work is not yet complete. We came to the promised land and now we must make it a land of promise. Into an exemplary country, Israel is small in territory but can be great in justice. We must make it into a country where no-one goes hungry. A country in which every child has access to quality education. From the day they are born and throughout their entire life. A nation in which the majority governs but the minority always enjoys full and equal rights.

A country which welcomes different opinions but rejects all forms of discrimination whether based on religion, nationality, ethnicity or gender. A society which respects the weak and is kind to the foreigner, which cares for the orphan and the widow, the old and the sick. A country of solidarity and tolerance. But a country with zero-tolerance for violence, corruption and bullying.

I am the son of an ancient people. A people which has known suffering and brutality. More than any other nation. We rebelled against idolatry. We preferred to pray to one Lord, the God of justice, truth, equality and freedom. I am proud to be a member of the dissatisfied nation. Dissatisfaction drives a commitment to progress. I look at where we started and where we are today. And I think to myself: to be an optimist is so logical. It is so practical. I believe that Israel can go higher and higher, if we make the necessary decisions. We genuinely and truly strive to be a nation among nations, a nation that gives. We long for peace with our neighbors. The yesterday between us and the Palestinians is full of sadness. I believe that the Israel of tomorrow and the Palestine of tomorrow can offer our children a ray of hope. The advancement of peace will complete the march of Israel towards the fulfillment of its founding vision. An exemplary and thriving country. A country living in peace and security in its homeland and among its neighbors.

Dear friends, sometimes as a child you hear a verse which stays in your heart for the rest of your life. As a child I asked my beloved grandfather, Rabbi Tzvi Meltzer, which verse one should carry in one's heart. He recited to me the 34th verse of the Book of Psalms;

"Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it."

Let us pray together for a tomorrow of peace. I thank you all from the depths of a loving and optimistic heart.

Preconditions have no basis in law or fact

Alan Baker, Jerusalem Post, 18 June 2013

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Preconditions-have-no-basis-in-law-or-fact-316983>

The recent statements by Nabil Shaath, senior member of the Palestinian Authority negotiating team, and others, promising a return to negotiations if Israel agrees to Palestinian preconditions and commits to "negotiate on the basis of the 1967 borders," and to freeze settlement-building, constitute a typical example of Palestinian political manipulation, duplicity and sheer falsehood.

Nowhere in the history of the peace process negotiations is there any commitment to the "1967

borders.”

The opposite is in fact the case. All the agreements between Israel and the PLO, as well as the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, base themselves in their preambular paragraphs on the call by the international community, in UN Security Council resolution 242 of 1967, for “secure and recognized boundaries.”

Together with Egypt and Jordan, in their respective peace treaties with Israel, the Palestinian leadership in all its agreements with Israel has repeatedly committed and agreed to this formula, which basically means that the pre-1967 military Armistice Demarcation Lines – never intended to become borders – as well as any other pre-1949 lines, would be replaced by agreed-upon borders answering the Security Council criteria of being secure and recognized.

The fact that Palestinian leaders such as Shaath, Saeb Erekat and Mahmoud Abbas are attempting to manipulate the legal and historic record by constantly repeating their demand that Israel commit, in advance, to the “1967 borders” should be firmly rejected by all those that were involved in the negotiations on the various agreements. The Palestinians know full well that borders are one of the issues still on the negotiating table. Such a demand has no basis whatsoever in law or in fact.

Abbas, Shaath and Erekat, as well as the US and EU leaders that counter- signed the Oslo accords as witnesses, in addition to Jordan and Egypt, all know full well that this Palestinian precondition is patently without any basis in law. The fact that they keep repeating it is nothing less than utter duplicity, lack of good faith and abuse of the good faith of the international community.

In a similar vein, the other Palestinian precondition, that Israel freeze settlement activity, also has no grounds or basis in the agreements between the PA and Israel.

Israel has never, in any of its agreements with the Palestinians, undertaken to freeze settlement activity in territory it continues to administer pursuant to the agreements with the Palestinians.

To the contrary, the Israel-Palestinian Interim Agreement (commonly termed Oslo II) specifically permits, in Civil Affairs Annex III, planning, zoning and construction by each respective side in the areas under its jurisdiction in Judea and Samaria – Palestinians in Areas A and B, and Israel in Area C.

The issue of settlements is one of the agreed-upon final-status negotiation issues, together with borders, refugees, water, Jerusalem and security.

The Palestinians have thus agreed and undertaken to negotiate this issue with Israel, and they cannot now unilaterally remove it from the negotiating table and turn it into a separate and independent precondition for further negotiation. In so doing they are undermining the agreements, and in trying to recruit the support of the international community, they are bypassing their commitment to negotiate the issue with Israel.

As such they are deliberately misleading and manipulating the international community.

Among its commitments pursuant to the Oslo accords, Israel is committed to negotiate the issue of settlements with the Palestinians. No precondition is needed to activate this commitment other than a return to bona fide negotiations.

Continued settlement activity pending the outcome of permanent status negotiation, whether politically prudent or not, is neither a violation of the Oslo accords nor in itself a violation of international law. It is a bilateral negotiating issue with the Palestinians, nothing more, nothing less.

The sooner the Palestinians cease trying to unilaterally undermine, manipulate and bypass the negotiating process, and give up their preconditions, the sooner the issue of settlements will be settled and thereby removed from the agenda.

It is high time that this be made clear to all.

The author, former legal adviser of the Foreign Ministry and ambassador to Canada, participated in the negotiation of the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians.

He is presently director of the Institute for Contemporary Affairs at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. He recently served as a member of the Edmond Levy Commission to examine the issue of construction in Judea and Samaria.

Syria and Egypt can't be fixed

David Goldman, Middle East Forum, 17 June 2013

<http://www.meforum.org/3535/syria-egypt-economy>

Syria and Egypt are dying. They were dying before the Syrian civil war broke out and before the Muslim Brotherhood took power in Cairo. Syria has an insoluble civil war and Egypt has an insoluble crisis because they are dying. They are dying because they chose not to do what China did: move the better part of a billion people from rural backwardness to a modern urban economy within a generation. Mexico would have died as well, without the option to send its rural poor - fully one-fifth of its population - to the United States.

It was obvious to anyone who troubled to examine the data that Egypt could not maintain a bottomless pit in its balance of payments, created by a 50% dependency on imported food, not to mention an energy bill fed by subsidies that consumed a quarter of the national budget. It was obvious to Israeli analysts that the Syrian regime's belated attempt to modernize its agricultural sector would create a crisis as hundreds of thousands of displaced farmers gathered in slums on the outskirts of its cities. These facts were in evidence early in 2011 when Hosni Mubarak fell and the Syrian rebellion broke out. Paul Rivlin of Israel's Moshe Dayan Center published a devastating profile of Syria's economic failure in April 2011.

Sometimes countries dig themselves into a hole from which they cannot extricate themselves. Third World dictators typically keep their rural population poor, isolated and illiterate, the better to maintain control. That was the policy of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party from the 1930s, which warehoused the rural poor in Stalin-modeled collective farms called *ejidos* occupying most of the national territory. That was also the intent of the Arab nationalist dictatorships in Egypt and Syria. The policy worked until it didn't. In Mexico, it stopped working during the debt crisis of the early 1980s, and Mexico's poor became America's problem. In Egypt and Syria, it stopped working in 2011. There is nowhere for Egyptians and Syrians to go.

It is cheap to assuage Western consciences by sending some surplus arms to the Syrian Sunnis. No one has proposed a way to find the more than US\$20 billion a year that Egypt requires to stay afloat. In June 2011, then French president Nicholas Sarkozy talked about a Group of Eight support program of that order of magnitude. No Western (or Gulf State) government, though, is willing to pour that sort of money down an Egyptian sinkhole.

Egypt remains a pre-modern society, with nearly 50% illiteracy, a 30% rate of consanguineal marriage, a 90% rate of female genital mutilation, and an un- or underemployment rate over 40%. Syria has neither enough oil nor water to maintain the bazaar economy dominated by the Assad family.

Both were disasters waiting to happen. Economics, to be sure, set the stage but did not give the cues: Syria's radical Sunnis revolted in part out of enthusiasm for the ascendancy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and partly in fear of Iran's ambition to foster Shi'ite ascendancy in the region.

It took nearly two years for the chattering classes to take stock of Egypt's economic disaster. The New York Times' Thomas Friedman, the benchmark for liberal opinion on foreign policy, gushed like an

adolescent about the tech-savvy activists of Tahrir Square in early 2011. Last week he visited a Cairo bakery and watched the Egyptian poor jostling for subsidized bread. Some left hungry. As malnutrition afflicts roughly a quarter of Egyptians in the World Health Organization's estimate, and the Muslim Brotherhood government waits for a bumper wheat crop that never will come, Egypt is slowly dying. Emergency loans from Qatar and Libya slowed the national necrosis but did not stop it.

This background lends an air of absurdity to the present debate over whether the West should arm Syria's Sunni rebels. American hawks like Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, to be sure, argue for sending arms to the Sunnis because they think it politically unwise to propose an attack on the Assad regime's master, namely Iran. The Obama administration has agreed to arm the Sunnis because it costs nothing to pre-empt Republican criticism. We have a repetition of the "dumb and dumber" consensus that prevailed during early 2011, when the Republican hawks called for intervention in Libya and the Obama administration obliged. Call it the foreign policy version of the sequel, "Dumb and Dumberer".

Even if the Sunnis could eject the Assad family from Damascus and establish a new government - which I doubt - the best case scenario would be another Egypt: a Muslim Brotherhood government presiding over a collapsed economy and sliding inevitably towards state failure. It is too late even for this kind of arrangement. Equalizing the military position of the two sides will merely increase the body count. The only humane thing to do is to partition the country on the Yugoslav model, but that does not appear to be on the agenda of any government.

Explanations of Islamic Jew-hatred reveal the media's own prejudices

Evelyn Gordon, Commentary Magazine, 29 April 2013

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2013/04/29/explanations-of-islamic-jew-hatred-reveal-medias-own-prejudices/>

The Islamic world's rampant Jew-hatred, as I noted last week, is often simply ignored by the journalists and academics who should be bringing it to public attention. But no less troubling is the fact that on the rare occasions when they do report it, they frequently try to explain it away. These "explanations" offer little insight into the actual sources of Muslim Jew-hatred. But they offer a very disturbing insight into opinion leaders' motives in concealing this hatred.

A good example is an article published by the *New York Times* in January that described two cases in which Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi made virulently anti-Semitic remarks. In one, he said Egyptians should "nurse our children and our grandchildren on hatred" for Jews and Zionists; in another, he described Zionists as "these bloodsuckers who attack the Palestinians, these warmongers, the descendants of apes and pigs."

Both of these statements, wrote reporter David Kirkpatrick, "date back to 2010, when anti-Israeli sentiment was running high after a three-week conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza the previous year."

The obvious implication for readers who don't have the dates of every Mideast war at their fingertips is that the conflict probably took place in late 2009, while Morsi's comments were made in early 2010; hence these were anguished outbursts made in the first raw throes of grief—a time when nobody should be judged too harshly for violent language. Kirkpatrick even strengthened that impression by erroneously dating both speeches to "early 2010," when in fact, as a subsequent correction noted, one was made in September of that year.

But even without this error, the implication is ridiculous, because the aforementioned conflict ended in January 2009—which Kirkpatrick, as the *Times's* Cairo bureau chief, should certainly have known. In other words, these speeches were made at least a full year after the war ended, and in one case, almost two years later. Thus, far from reflecting the first raw throes of grief, they were the deliberate product of more than a year's reflection. As such, either they genuinely represented the deepest beliefs of the man who is now Egypt's president, or they were cynically calculated to appeal to Morsi's audience—an equally disturbing possibility.

Far more disturbing than what this says about Egyptian prejudices, however, is what it says about those of Kirkpatrick and his editors at the *Times*—because neither he nor they evidently saw any problem in “explaining” Morsi’s vile anti-Semitism on the grounds that he was still overset by grief (“anti-Israel sentiment was running high”) over a war that ended more than a year earlier. In short, like too many other journalists, Kirkpatrick and his editors are convinced the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the root of all evil in the Middle East, and push that theory on their readers.

Unfortunately, this theory isn’t supported by the facts: As one Egyptian cleric helpfully explained, Jews “aren’t our enemies because they occupy Palestine; they would be our enemies even if they had not occupied anything.” And if readers were made aware of the true extent of Islamic Jew-hatred, they might well figure that out for themselves.

One can’t help suspecting that this is precisely why many journalists prefer to let this hatred go unreported: Facts that don’t fit their pet theory of Israel’s guilt are better left unmentioned.

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

South African Zionist Federation

Tel : (011) 645-2505

Fax: (011) 640-6758

E-mail: froma@beyachad.co.za

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

PBO NUMBER: 930014277