



OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 47: 27 November 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) The UN and Israel: A history of discrimination

Joshua Muravchik, World Affairs Journal, November/December 2013

While it is true that most UN bodies are devoid of practical power and cannot enforce their resolutions, this endless drumbeat, from one body to the next, from one corner of the world to another, singling out Israel as the pariah among nations, shapes the political environment in which Israel must live, trade, defend itself, and pursue peace with its neighbours.

http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/un-and-israel-history-discrimination?utm_source=World+Affairs+Newsletter&utm_campaign=48af80b594-November+21+2013+muravchik&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f83b38c5c7-48af80b594-294565225

(2) Obama needs to take on the Israel lobby over Iran

Gideon Rachman, Financial Times, 25 November 2013

The outcome of a looming showdown between two leaders who loathe one another will be critical.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/df0d49e8-55dd-11e3-96f5-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2lkVCtotZ>

(3) Iran hit pause: we need it to rewind

Dr Toby Greene, Left Foot Forward, 25 November 2013

The good news is that the sight of Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Zarif shaking hands on a deal with the P5+1 states, including the US, is truly extraordinary. For all the flaws in the deal, this should not be overlooked. It is in the interests of the whole world that Iran change the way it relates to the West, and the US in particular.

<http://www.leftfootforward.org/2013/11/iran-hit-pause-we-need-it-to-rewind/>

(4) Let's not celebrate this Iran deal Yet

Aaron David Miller, Politico Magazine, 23 November 2013

This is big - a potentially historic step in relations between the US and Iran, two adversaries whose bitter rivalry has loomed over the Middle East for a generation. If this interim deal leads to a final accord that mothballs Tehran's nuclear-weapons program and keeps it that way, it will be worth the heartburn it's causing Israel, Saudi Arabia and the US Congress,

too.

http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2013/11/lets-not-celebrate-this-iran-deal-yet-100292.html?hp=t3_3

(5) Why Christian Zionism grows despite critics

Sean Savage, Charisma, 23 November 2013

Despite CUFI's growth (Christians United for Israel) - it calls itself America's largest pro-Israel group – Christian Zionists today still face significant threats from anti-Zionist Christians, who use their faith to accost Israel over its policies towards the Palestinians.
<http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/41802-why-christian-zionism-grows-despite-critics>

(6) Why Netanyahu won't yield

Michael Oren, LA Times, 21 November 2013

The prime minister's hard line on Iran reflects his deep sense of duty to defend the Jewish state against an existential threat.

<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/commentary/la-oe-1121-oren-netanyahu-iran-20131121,0,613873.story#axzz2lackepQb>

(7) What Americans don't know about Palestinian culture

Jonathan Tobin, Commentary Magazine, 20 November 2013

If more American academics got their heads out of the sand and realized the cancer of hate that is still the dominating feature of Palestinian political culture, the assumption that Israel is the villain of the Middle East conflict might be challenged more often.

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2013/11/20/what-americans-dont-know-about-palestine-terror-brandeis-al-quds/>

(8) Russia cannot replace America in the Middle East

David Gardner, Financial Times, 20 November 2013

America wants to move out and Russia wants to move in but the region has ideas of its own.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/8d4e7e10-5074-11e3-befe-00144feabdc0.html?siteedition=uk&siteedition=intl#axzz2IHRR6k00>

(9) Why Saudi Arabia hates the Iran deal

David Kenner, Foreign Policy, 14 November 2013

As President Barack Obama pursues a historic deal with Iran over its nuclear program, he has already made history -- though perhaps not in the way he intended. For the first time since the US emerged as a major power in the Middle East, all of its key allies -- Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia -- are in open revolt against its policies

http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/11/14/why_saudi_arabia_hates_the_iran_deal_0

Three Israeli films were recently screened in South Africa.

Monessa Shapiro of Media Team Israel has written an excellent article about them, which appears as a blog in The Times of Israel - <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/an-israeli-truth-fact-or-fiction/>

(1) The UN and Israel: A history of discrimination

“Unfortunately . . . Israel [has] suffered from bias - and sometimes even discrimination” at the United Nations, said none other than the UN’s highest official, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, speaking in Jerusalem in August. Back at headquarters a week later, Ban withdrew the substance of the comment without denying he had made it. The retraction was less surprising than the original assertion, which was remarkable because of the identity of the speaker, not for what was said, the reality of which is about as well concealed as the sun on a cloudless noon.

Israel’s status as a pariah state at the United Nations reflected a change in the world body dating from the 1970s. In its early decades, the UN was dominated by the Cold War competition between East and West, but between 1952 and 1968 these two blocs became outnumbered by a third, as the UN’s rolls increased from eighty-two to one hundred and twenty-six member states. Most of the new members were former colonies that had recently won their independence, and they formed what became the leading bloc at the UN, the Non-Aligned Movement.

The dearest cause of the NAM was anti-colonialism, which put the West in the dock. Thus, the new bloc was non-aligned far more emphatically with the West than with the Communist world. Indeed, while the Soviet Union was held at arm’s length by the NAM, other Communist states, some of them Soviet-allied, such as Cuba and Vietnam, played leading roles in the organization.

The new anti-Western, anti-American zeitgeist of the UN, and the dominance of the NAM, with President Nasser of Egypt among its leaders and many Arab and other Muslim states among its members, reshaped the body’s stance toward the Middle East and its central “conflict.” It became the principal instrument for advancing Arab claims and actions against Israel, including even legitimating Palestinian terrorism.

Thus, in October 1974, fourteen years before the Palestine Liberation Organization even nominally forswore terrorism, the General Assembly voted to invite the organization to send a spokesman to take part in its deliberations. No one who was not a representative of a government - except the pope, and even he was the head of a quasi-state - had ever before been granted such a privilege, but the vote was overwhelming, one hundred and five to four, with only the United States, Israel, and two Latin American governments opposed.

Not a single European or other major industrial state joined America in resisting this extraordinary move. Most of them abstained, although a handful voted with the majority, largely because the PLO had proved so adept at playing on European fears. Harris Schoenberg, an author who represented the NGO B’nai B’rith at the UN, interviewed various European delegates who told him that “PLO spokesmen had undertaken to halt and actively seek to prevent further Arab aerial piracy and terrorist attacks in countries other than Israel if permitted to participate in the General Assembly debate.”

The assembled delegates heard Yasir Arafat proclaim the necessity of getting at the “historical roots” of the issue, namely, “the Jewish invasion of Palestine [that] began in 1881,” and addressing it with a

“radical . . . antidote,” rather than “a slavish obeisance to the present.” The “present” from which Arafat wished to banish “obeisance” was the very existence of Israel. He pledged his “resolve to build a new world . . . a world free of colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, and racism in each of its instances, including Zionism.”

This harangue was received with a standing ovation unique in its intensity. An alliance of Communist and third-world states was after the scalps of its chosen enemies. The United States, in the throes of losing its agonizing war in Vietnam, resisted with diminished strength, often unable to rally even its Western allies.

Besides Taiwan, which had been replaced by Beijing as the Chinese representative at the world body in 1971, the most vulnerable of these enemies was South Africa. To the black-majority states of Africa, South Africa’s formal system of racial hierarchy and oppression was an insufferable insult. In 1974, South Africa’s credentials were rejected by the General Assembly, which meant that the country “was effectively expelled,” wrote America’s then ambassador to the UN, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in *A Dangerous Place*. This violated the UN Charter, which left decisions about membership to the Security Council, but few were willing to speak up for due process lest they appear equivocal about South Africa’s repugnant racial system.

The next year, the foreign ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference determined to have Israel expelled in the same way. The PLO lined up support for this move at a meeting of the African states, while training its sights on a ministerial meeting of the NAM scheduled a month later, August 1975, in Lima, Peru.

Washington pulled out all the stops. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger delivered a major speech on the subject, with a thinly veiled warning that the United States might turn its back on the UN. In addition to Washington’s hard line, the drive to expel Israel was also slowed by disarray within the ranks. At the Lima conference, allies of Moscow and Beijing turned on each other, as did oil producers and consumers, and these stumbles were capped off by a Peruvian coup that overthrew the host government in the midst of the conference. The most decisive factor disrupting the expulsion manoeuvre was the surprising position of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who announced his opposition on the grounds that “Israel must be present at the United Nations if it is expected to comply with its resolutions.”

But sighs of relief in Jerusalem at the collapse of this effort to anathematize Israel proved premature. Its enemies soon ginned up an alternative measure that did Israel almost as much damage: a resolution of the General Assembly, echoing Arafat and Soviet propagandists, declaring Zionism to be “a form of racism.” As Moynihan pointed out, the UN was predicated on the equal legitimacy of all political systems, however odious. It mattered not a whit how repressive a regime was or whether it starved or slaughtered its own subjects. Only one thing was declared unacceptable: racism. To label Zionism a form of racism was to declare Israel inherently illegitimate, regardless of its borders or behaviour.

Moynihan later mused that “our principal tactical mistake was not to understand the willingness of the Arabs simply to buy themselves a majority.” But on this point he is not convincing. The Arabs certainly had used their oil wealth to buy political influence, and indeed do it to this day. But the margin for the Zionism-is-racism resolution was decisive: seventy-two to thirty-five, with thirty-two abstentions. More than bribery, it reflected what the Soviets used to like to call the “correlation of forces.” In the UN at that time, the weight of the Arabs, the Islamic Conference states, the NAM, and the Soviet bloc easily surpassed that of Israel and the West. Even without oil or what one delegate

called "blandishment," a euphemism for payoffs to delegates, the forces arrayed in implacable opposition to Israel were overwhelming.

In the ensuing years, the Arab states, confident of commanding overwhelming majorities in the General Assembly, reiterated this resolution and added new ones. In 1982, the body declared that Israel "is not a peace-loving member state and that it has not carried out its obligations under the Charter." Since the Charter itself specifies that "membership . . . is open to all . . . peace-loving states which accept the obligations contained in the . . . Charter," this kept alive the threat to expel Israel. Moreover, it called for an international campaign against that country, exhorting "all member states to cease forthwith . . . all dealings with Israel in order totally to isolate it in all fields." It even called upon "all states to put an end to the flow to Israel of human resources," thereby stamping the UN's imprimatur on the practice of the Soviet Union and other European Communist regimes of denying freedom of emigration.

This language was adopted again and again throughout the 1980s, although the fever cooled a little with the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet Union, which also led to the rescinding of the resolution equating Zionism with racism in 1991. Nonetheless, every year the General Assembly votes on anywhere from seventy to one hundred or so resolutions, apart from meaningless consensus resolutions on administrative matters and the like. Between fifteen and twenty of these votes pertain to Israel, all in a pejorative way. Very few of the world's most repressive or blood-soaked regimes have received even a single rebuke from this august chamber. Of all General Assembly resolutions that criticize a particular country, three-quarters apply to Israel.

The European view that these resolutions amount only to empty rhetoric is true insofar as there are no enforcement mechanisms attached to these words. But this ignores the fact that third-world countries, lacking the military, economic, and political power of the large industrial states, attach great importance to the UN and are thus likely to be influenced by its declarations. It ignores, too, that the relentless recitation of UN declarations impedes compromise and peace by reinforcing the conviction in the Arab world that all right lies on the Arab side and that Israel is irredeemably evil.

The General Assembly's positions also sanctify violence and even terrorism - so long as it is carried out in the name of an approved cause. This stance, which contradicts the UN Charter, originated in the struggles for African independence and then was carried over to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the 1960s, the General Assembly passed several resolutions regarding Portugal's colonies and the white-ruled states of southern Africa, affirming "the legitimacy of the struggle of the colonial peoples to exercise their right to self-determination and independence" (e.g., Resolution 2548). In 1970, an important modification was added in the phrase "by all the necessary means at their disposal" (Resolution 2708).

The PLO, backed by the Arab states and the Islamic Conference, was to cite this language as sanctioning its deliberate attacks on civilians. In his famous speech to the General Assembly, Arafat claimed that "the difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights. Whoever stands by a just cause . . . cannot possibly be called [a] terrorist."

Just a week after Arafat's appearance, the General Assembly affirmed "the right of the Palestinian people to regain its rights by all means" (Resolution 3236). Any ambiguity in this phrase was wiped away in a 1982 resolution that lumped the Palestinian case together with lingering cases of white rule in southern Africa and affirmed "the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples against foreign occupation by all available means, including armed struggle" (Resolution 37/43). Since the Palestinians were engaged neither in conventional nor even, for the most part, guerrilla war with

Israel, but rather a campaign of bombings and murders aimed at civilian targets, this is what was meant by “armed struggle.”

This endorsement was repeated and invoked in various other UN resolutions over the ensuing decades until the September 11th attacks brought new urgency to the issue of terrorism. Then Secretary General Kofi Annan urged the adoption of a general treaty against terrorism, but the Islamic Conference would have none of it, insisting, as the *Washington Post* reported at the time, “that anti-Israeli militants be exempted.” As the Pakistani ambassador put it three years later, when the watered-down resolution finally passed: “We ought not, in our desire to confront terrorism, erode the principle of the legitimacy of national resistance that we have upheld for fifty years.” Thus Annan’s efforts were thwarted, and on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, his successor, Ban Ki-moon, lamented that the UN still had not been able to adopt a treaty against terrorism.

As if the General Assembly’s topsy-turvy stance on terrorism were not enough, the UN Commission on Human Rights went even further, affirming that Palestinian terrorism (i.e., “resist[ing] Israeli occupation” by “all available means, including armed struggle”) was not only “legitimate” but even a means of “fulfilling . . . one of the goals and purposes of the United Nations.”

This was only a particularly tangy example of the commission’s well-articulated system of double standards where the Jewish state was involved. The governments that most egregiously abused or repressed their citizens escaped year after year without a word of censure. Indeed many of them - the People’s Republic of China, the Soviet Union, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Syria, and others of their ilk - were members of the commission. Occasionally, a dictatorship that had become politically isolated, such as, say, Burma’s, would suffer the indignity of a single diplomatically worded resolution chiding it for misdeeds. Meanwhile, at every session some five to eight separate resolutions would excoriate Israel.

This bias also infused other UN activities conducted in the name of human rights. The UN’s 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban was so extreme in its anti-Israel focus and tone that Secretary of State Colin Powell ordered the US delegation to leave. Israel was front and centre; the actions of Hutus toward Tutsis or Turks toward Kurds or Russians toward Chechens or Serbs toward Albanians or scores of other cases of inter-group conflict that might also have been on the agenda were not mentioned. When a resolution decrying bigotry was adopted, a proposal to include anti-Semitism on the list of proscribed prejudices almost was turned aside.

Eventually, the hypocrisy that had become the hallmark of the Commission on Human Rights so alarmed Kofi Annan that he said it cast “a shadow on the reputation of the United Nations system as a whole.” At Annan’s initiative, the commission was replaced in 2006 by the Human Rights Council, which was designed with somewhat different rules of selection and procedure intended to make the body more faithful to its mission than its predecessor. But these hopes were to be disappointed badly on all counts. Most of the world’s worst human-rights abusers never have suffered even mild rebuke, while Israel continues to be chastised as often as all of the rest of the countries combined and in terms more condemnatory.

The new council, like the commission before it, includes the “Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories” as a separate agenda item at every meeting, while no other country or situation is treated in this way. Indeed, all of the other countries of the world together constitute a single other point on the agenda, as do various thematic and administrative issues, such as “racism” and periodic reports from the high commissioner for human rights. In 2007, the council mandated a follow-up conference to the 2001 Durban confab against racism, selecting Muammar el-Qaddafi’s government in Libya to chair the preparatory committee.

The council's special rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler, a Swiss sociologist and activist, concentrated primarily on castigating Israel for allegedly depriving the people of Gaza of nourishment, although he also found time to denounce the "imperialist dictatorship" that rules the United States for "genocide" of Cubans by means of its embargo.

While it is true that most UN bodies are devoid of practical power and cannot enforce their resolutions, this endless drumbeat, from one body to the next, from one corner of the world to another, singling out Israel as the pariah among nations, shapes the political environment in which Israel must live, trade, defend itself, and pursue peace with its neighbours. Moreover, to dismiss the UN as a feckless "talk shop" is to overlook those of its actions that do indeed have practical consequences. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories has produced little. But two other bodies, also dedicated entirely to the question of Israel and Palestine (and also having no analog regarding any other countries), have had a major impact.

The first, created in 1975, is the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Whereas the "special committee" is only a whip to lacerate Israel, this one has the broader, more affirmative mandate of helping the Palestinians to achieve their larger goals. That goal, for some Palestinians, may be a state alongside Israel. But for many it remains what it was at the outset of this committee's work - a state *in place of* Israel.

Of the twenty member states appointed to this body, eighteen had voted in favour of the resolution equating Zionism and racism, and sixteen refused to have diplomatic relations with Israel. The PLO, which was of course not a member of the UN and was still associated with terrorism, was nonetheless appointed a member of the drafting committee that wrote the larger committee's first report.

This report emphasized that all Palestinian refugees from 1948 and after had an "absolute" and "inalienable right to return to their homes." It made clear that the importance of this right was not humanitarian but political - a condition "*sine qua non* for the exercise by this people of its rights to self-determination, national independence, and sovereignty." The language was a little dense, but its implications were clear. A people can exercise "self-determination" and "sovereignty" within a given territory only by ruling that territory. The point in this case was that all "Palestine," apparently including Israel, belonged by right to the Palestinian Arabs. Not a word was to be found in the twenty-three-page document of any right possessed by Israelis or Jews.

This report, issued in May 1976, was only a starting point. Unlike most UN committees, this one was given a staff, which grew by 1979 into a special division within the UN Secretariat, the Division for Palestinian Rights. With some two dozen employees and a budget of millions, this office has functioned for more than three decades as a permanent, round-the-clock boiler room for anti-Israel propaganda and organizing.

Among its other projects, this division sponsors an annual day of "solidarity with the Palestinian people," observed at UN offices worldwide on the anniversary of the UN's 1947 resolution proposing to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, an idea rejected by the Arabs at that time. The spirit of the occasion was expressed, for example, in the highlight of the 2011 commemoration at the UN's New York headquarters (others were held in Geneva and Vienna), a screening of the film *La Terre Parle Arabe*. According to its publicity materials, this documentary reveals that "well before the Balfour Declaration . . . Zionist leaders" plotted to "transfer . . . the Palestinians out of their land [by] all possible means."

In May each year, the committee joins in yet another ritual lamentation of Israel's existence, the annual observance of Nakba Day, the anniversary of Israel's statehood, which is commemorated as a "catastrophe" (*nakba*) by the Palestinians.

Perhaps more important than these observances are the committee's quarterly conferences, each one in a different city, bringing together as many as four to five hundred participants (at UN expense). Each year, one of the meetings focuses on civil society, and in 2004 it endorsed a boycott of Israeli goods. The 2005 gathering went further, concluding with a ringing "Call to Action" that endorsed a "global campaign of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) to pressure Israel to end the occupation and fully comply with international law and all relevant United Nations resolutions." This appeal was reiterated in subsequent years, thus putting the prestige of the UN, as well as millions of dollars in resources, behind the global campaign to ostracize and materially damage Israel.

But the largest material impact that the UN has on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and other Arabs is through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. When UNRWA was created in 1949, its original purpose, as seen by the Americans who conceived it, was to provide temporary succour to those who were uprooted by the war that marked Israel's birth. At almost the same time, another UN agency was created, the High Commissioner for Refugees, designed to assist persons who remained displaced from World War II. Although both UNRWA and the High Commissioner were created as short-term projects, both have endured in perpetuity.

There is, however, a critical difference. Over the decades, the High Commissioner has moved on from one group of refugees to another, helping them to rebuild their lives, either through repatriation or resettlement. After dealing successfully with the refugees from World War II, the UNHCR's next concern was Hungarians fleeing the Soviet invasion of their country in 1956. Then came the spill-over from Algeria's war of independence, and then other crises in Asia, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and eventually even Europe again, with the Balkan crisis of the 1990s.

But while the UNHCR has a staff of under eight thousand, serving nearly thirty-four million "people of concern," the UNRWA reports it has a staff of thirty thousand, serving five million - in other words, four times as many staff for one-seventh as many beneficiaries. The essential reason for these differences is that according to its statute, "the work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social." But the work of UNRWA is wholly political, and only incidentally humanitarian.

The General Assembly resolution creating the UNHCR called on all states to "promot[e] the assimilation of refugees, especially by facilitating their naturalization." The Arab states, except for Jordan, ignored this injunction precisely because they wished Israel to disappear and therefore insisted that all Arabs who had fled or been expelled must be repatriated. They insistently pointed to a 1948 General Assembly decision, Resolution 194, which specified that "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date."

Not only did the Arab states thus wish to pick and choose among General Assembly resolutions, but their insistence that Resolution 194 conferred a "right of return" ignored its qualifying phrase "wishing to . . . live at peace with their neighbours." There was of course no "practicable" way that Israel or anyone else could sort individuals by this criterion in the absence of an overall reconciliation between Jews and Arabs. In any event, the Arabs themselves insisted that the refugees be treated not as individuals but "as a group," and that group was not prepared to make peace with Israel, thus rendering Resolution 194 moot in this case.

The Arabs' view that the refugee question was political rather than humanitarian prevented UNRWA from concentrating resources on those most in need. Such efforts met objections from the Arab host countries and Palestinian leaders. They insisted that the refugees were entitled to the benefits offered by UNRWA regardless of individual circumstance.

James G. Lindsay, the former general counsel of UNRWA, notes that "it was clear from the beginning that rations were not desperately needed by all UNRWA beneficiaries - some refugees, for example, sold or 'rented' their ration cards to merchants, who . . . resold them on the open market." Yet when donors pressed for a more focused use of their largesse, "the refugees, including UNRWA local staff, insisted that general distribution of rations continue, viewing the program as a guarantor of recipients' well-being, as 'an acquired right,' and as a reflection of the international community's political commitment to them."

The same point is underscored by the living arrangements of the Palestinians served by UNRWA. In the early years, these were camps, mostly of tents. Later the "camps" became small shantytowns or poor neighbourhoods. But according to UNRWA, by 2011 only 1.4 million of the five million Palestinians registered with the agency lived in these "camps." The rest - nearly three-fourths - live in and around the cities and towns of the host countries, and in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip." Nonetheless, they receive rations, medical care, education, and other services from the UN.

So the question arises: By what token are these five million, perhaps five percent of whom were alive in 1948, refugees? The answer is that UNRWA deems as "refugees" not only those who fled but their descendants, now comprising three or even four additional generations. Nowhere else in the world are refugees counted in this manner. The sole reason why these five million - or ninety-five percent of them - are treated as "refugees" is to keep alive the Palestinian "right of return," which amounts to the end of Israel. Were it not for this, the Palestinian case would have been among the easiest to solve of the world's many refugee problems, since the surrounding countries share language, faith, and culture with the Palestinians. Resettlement would have been far easier, for example, than Israel's integration of an equal or larger number of Jews fleeing or expelled from the Arab countries at the same time, whose language was not Hebrew but Arabic.

In sum, Ban Ki-moon's extraordinary confession last August afforded a fleeting glance into a sordid picture. By its countless one-sided resolutions and numerous "investigations" of Israel with predetermined results; by providing a global infrastructure for the movement to boycott, divest from, and sanction Israel; and by UNRWA, which sustains the idea of the "right of return," the UN has served systematically to challenge Israel's legitimacy and weaken its global position - a damaging and malign role entirely at odds with the UN's founding purposes.

(2) Obama needs to take on the Israel lobby over Iran

For Barack Obama, striking a nuclear deal with Iran may turn out to be the easy part. The president's biggest struggle now is facing down Israel and its supporters in the US as they attempt to rally opposition to the deal. The administration knows this and it is quietly confident that it can take on the Israel lobby in Congress – and win.

Beneath all the arcane details about centrifuges and breakout times, the Israeli-American dispute over Iran is quite simple. The Israelis want the complete dismantlement of the Iranian nuclear programme. The Americans and their negotiating partners want to freeze it in the first instance – and also recognise that any final deal will have to leave Iran with some nuclear capacity.

The real alternative to the Geneva process, argue the Americans, is not the better deal of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's dreams. It is a breakdown in negotiations followed by an accelerated nuclear programme in Iran – leading either to an Iranian bomb or to war. The Obama administration believes that, by making this case, it can face down Israel's formidable phalanx of supporters in Congress, traditionally marshalled by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.(AIPAC)

The debate in Congress is likely to focus on whether the legislature will agree to a relaxation in sanctions – or whether, on the contrary, congressional leaders press for toughened sanctions that would undercut Pres. Obama's negotiating stance. While the president can relax some sanctions by executive order of the White House, sooner or later he is going to need Congress to go along with an Iran deal.

The administration's confidence that it can win the argument over Iran is bolstered by an opinion poll, taken before the Geneva agreement was nailed down, which showed the American public was in favour of a nuclear deal with Iran by 56% to 39%. The administration's calculation is that the strong public desire to avoid further wars in the Middle East will override the public's traditional sympathy with Israel and antipathy towards Iran.

Aipac is a formidable lobbying organisation. But the recent fiasco over Pres. Obama's request to Congress to approve missile strikes on Syria following the use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Assad's regime showed that the Israel lobby cannot always deliver victory on Capitol Hill. Aipac lobbied hard in favour of strikes on Syria. But deep public opposition to military action weighed more heavily with Congress.

However, the analogies may not be as reassuring as the administration hopes. The route from a Syria vote to military action was clear and direct. By contrast, rejection of an Iran deal is not explicitly a vote for war. What is more, the fiasco over Pres. Obama's healthcare reforms has driven the president's approval ratings to new lows and weakened him.

If the Obama administration's domestic political strategy over Iran is to work, therefore, its arguments in favour of the nuclear deal will have to be able to withstand the fierce scrutiny that the Israelis and others will subject them to. So do the arguments stack up?

Broadly speaking, they do. Important weaknesses in the earlier draft of the agreement, a fortnight ago, have been addressed. In particular, development of Iran's heavy water plant at Arak, southwest of Tehran, which potentially opened an alternative route to a plutonium bomb, is now to stop. Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched to 20%, which is dangerously close to weapons-grade, will be diluted. Iran has agreed to an intrusive regime of inspections, which will make it much harder for it to violate a nuclear deal, as North Korea once did.

Iranian relief at this interim deal is palpable – and alarming to Israel and Saudi Arabia. But the reality is that Iranians have not yet got very much by way of sanctions relief. The biggest measures agreed are one-off releases of frozen assets. The main financial sanctions remain in place and continue to cost Iran dearly. The Obama administration has retained considerable leverage as the two sides move to negotiate a full deal over the next six months.

The Israelis point out that they are not the only US ally in the region that is deeply wary of this deal. Saudi Arabia is also clearly angry. But Saudi concern is only partly to do with the prospect of an Iranian bomb. More broadly, the Saudis are engaged in a struggle for regional and theological supremacy with Iran – which has led them to undermine peace efforts in

Syria. While both Israel and Saudi Arabia are close American allies, their interests are not identical to those of the US.

As the Iran debate moves forward in America, so it will take on a personal aspect. Pres. Obama and PM Netanyahu detest each other. Now they are about to stage a very public showdown. It would be a humiliation for the US president if his Iran policy is pulled apart in Congress at the behest of the Israelis. But the stakes are very high for PM Netanyahu and Israel, too – and victory could be as dangerous as defeat. If a diplomatic solution to the Iran nuclear issue is blocked and war follows, Israel will be accused of dragging America into a conflict. But if PM Netanyahu confronts the Obama administration through the US Congress – and loses – the fabled power of the Israel lobby may never be quite the same again.

(3) Iran hit pause: we need it to rewind

First the good news, then the reality check.

The good news is that the sight of Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Zarif shaking hands on a deal with the P5+1 states, including the US, is truly extraordinary. For all the flaws in the deal, this should not be overlooked. It is in the interests of the whole world that Iran change the way it relates to the West, and the US in particular.

The spectacle of Iran making a deal with ‘the great Satan’ may be uncomfortable for some in the US and Israel, but it will be even more uncomfortable for Iranian hardliners.

Such moments have the potential to change perceptions and open minds on all sides, and that is to be welcomed.

The other bit of good news is that thanks to French objections two weeks ago, this deal is not quite as weak as it might have been.

Now the reality check. Iran is not our friend, however smiley and polished their foreign minister is, and this deal has not solved any of the problems over Iran’s nuclear programme, much less over its regional agenda.

Iran’s policies remain diametrically opposed to Western interests: opposing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process; backing the Assad regime in Syria; backing armed extremists like Hezbollah and Hamas; the list runs on and on.

Nor can we forget that that Zarif and Rouhani answer to the Supreme Leader, and the clue is in the job title. In a televised speech last week Ayatollah Khamenei said Israel’s leaders “cannot be called humans” and that Israel is, “doomed to failure and annihilation,” whilst the crowd chanted “death to Israel” and “death to America”.

If we don’t like Iran without a nuclear weapon, we’ll like it much less with one. So what about that deal?

Iran has signed up because it needs to ease the sanctions hurting its economy. In return for the partial easing of sanctions agreed this week, Iran will hit the pause button on its nuclear programme for six months.

Contrary to claims, it has not rolled its programme back. True, its stock of 20% enriched uranium will be diluted or converted to less immediately dangerous oxide form. But advances in Iran’s

enrichment capacity mean it could convert its 3.5 per cent uranium into weapons grade within two months, making this concession much less relevant.

Now put the six months in context. Iran is playing a long game. Having pursued the capacity for nuclear weapons since the 1980s, they are almost there. They have a stock of 3.5 per cent enriched uranium for several bombs. They have the capacity to enrich it to weapons grade quickly in hardened facilities. They have missiles that can carry the bomb. They have a heavy water reactor capable of producing weapons grade plutonium within 12 months of activation. They have done research on weaponisation.

In effect, they have hit the pause button in the eighty-fifth minute.

Those advocating this deal argue that it keeps Iran from advancing for six months, that it will empower pragmatic elements in Iran to make a comprehensive deal, and that the sanctions relief is limited and reversible. Opponents say the sanctions are like the walls of a dam that have been breached, in return for which Iran is giving next to nothing. The test of this argument will come in six months. But what is conspicuously absent in the interim deal is any clear idea of what the end game will look like.

Iran is a country that signed the NPT, then violated all its rules by building a huge, underground, secret programme designed to give it nuclear weapons (keep this legacy of deceit in mind when Zarif talks about 'respect' and 'trust').

Despite getting caught, Iran has kept on going. Now it is in touching distance of a bomb. Pausing the programme as an interim arrangement is one thing, but the goal has to be for Iran to rewind, and undo the dangerous capacities it developed illegally.

Iran should be years away from having the fissile material for a nuclear bomb, not weeks away as it is now. That means any uranium enrichment capacity must be minimal and closely monitored, and that any potential for the reactor at Arak to produce plutonium must be curtailed.

Iran has paid a very heavy price for its illicit nuclear project and will not unravel it unless compelled to do so. The prospect of renewed and increased sanctions, and the possibility of military action against Iran's nuclear facilities, are the leverage the US and its allies have in this process. Both must be in place to create the best possible chance for a deal that truly puts nuclear weapons beyond Iran's reach.

(4) Let's not celebrate this Iran deal ... yet

We have a deal.

After years of false starts, mutual recriminations and steadily escalating pressure, Iran has finally agreed to accept real limits on its nuclear program. In his recent statement announcing the agreement, US President Barack Obama called it an "important first step" and declared that diplomacy had "opened up a new path toward a world that is more secure."

This is big - a potentially historic step in relations between the US and Iran, two adversaries whose bitter rivalry has loomed over the Middle East for a generation. If this interim deal leads to a final accord that mothballs Tehran's nuclear-weapons program and keeps it that way, it will be worth the heartburn it's causing Israel, Saudi Arabia and the US Congress, too.

But we're still a very long way from Tipperary on this one. And we should be careful about putting on the party hats and breaking out the champagne - at least for now, anyway. And here are five reasons why.

1. A Loss of Urgency

If there's an Obama Doctrine, it's this: Get America out of costly wars, not into new ones, and make diplomacy the default setting, not military force.

Barack Obama is a very risk-averse president, particularly when it comes to situations where he has publicly set red lines and where force is implicitly or explicitly threatened. In these situations, he seems determined to go to considerable lengths to avoid having to make good on his own warnings. This was the case with the use of Syria's chemical weapons and in Iran too.

Nobody really wants a war with Iran - not even Israel. And certainly not Obama. The president has three preferred nos when it comes to Iran: no Israeli military strike, no US strike, and no Iranian nuke on his watch.

This trio can only be accomplished through creating a process of negotiation that prevents Israel from striking and makes it unnecessary for Washington to do so. Iran and the US share the first two goals, and the president is determined to ensure they remain on the same pages on number three, too.

And that's the rub. Presidents think in four- and eight-year increments; Iranians and Israelis for that matter think in longer terms. Iran should be happy that the threat of military force is receding; Israel is unhappy for the same reason. If Iran plays its cards smartly and doesn't stick the nuclear issue in Obama's face, Tehran hopes, the international community's urgency in pressing ahead on sanctions will fade. Congress might hold the line, but the Russians, Chinese and many others won't. And over time, the sanctions will diminish in effectiveness. But Iran, having mastered the process of how to make nukes, will always have this capacity and can move to operationalize it if chooses to do so.

2. Angry Allies (and Congress Too)

Where you stand in life has a great deal to do with where you sit. Israel is a small power in a dangerous neighbourhood; the US is a behemoth with non-predatory neighbours to its north and south and fish to its east and west. And while it might have been too much to expect complete unanimity in the US and Israeli positions on Iran, what you have now is the making of a diplomatic train-wreck, with the US pressing ahead with diplomacy while the Israelis snipe from the sidelines.

Unlike Lehman Brothers, the US-Israeli relationship is too big to fail; but until it's clear where this interim agreement is headed, this relationship will be rocky. The Israelis will be challenging the accord and pushing on an already open door with an equally suspicious Congress - Republicans and Democrats alike - eager to heap additional sanctions and pressure on Iran. Hope for significant progress on the Palestinian issue will fade. And the Saudis, already stewing about US policies from Egypt to Syria, will likewise wonder whether the US, distant and detached from their concerns about Iran, really understands their neighbourhood.

Allies can disagree. But when America's two longest and closest friends in the Middle East seem to have more in common with one another than with the US, on a fundamental issue that frankly affects their security more than America's, that's a serious problem.

3. Iran Is Iran

The only problem with dancing with a bear, an old saying goes, is that you can never let go. Iran is a very problematic partner for the United States and is likely to remain so for a long time to come. The nuclear issue can't be easily compartmentalized: From its support for terrorist groups abroad to its abysmal human rights record at home to its support for Syria's blood-soaked dictator Bashar Assad, Iran is locked into a set of policies that - to put it mildly - simply don't sell well on Capitol Hill. Even if Iran is serious on the nuclear issue, its conduct on so many other issues is so diametrically opposed to US interests that its newfound cooperativeness will raise suspicions. And because there will be a need to pacify Iran's own hardliners, nasty anti-Israeli statements of the kind the supreme leader made last week, when he described Israel as a "rabid dog," are likely to continue. Congressional efforts to impose additional sanctions will only push the mullahs to new heights of rhetorical extremism.

4. The Tyranny of Process

No matter how imperfect, negotiators and US officials get very attached to their negotiations and agreements. Those who laboured to produce this interim agreement will become very invested in their handiwork and move to vigorously defend it. I've seen this movie and succumbed to these same sentiments several times over the years. The process - with all its historic resonance - will acquire a legitimacy and authority that will steel the administration against arguments that point out its deficiencies. Part of this flows from the conviction of those inside who know how hard it is to get anything done in negotiations; and part from the logic that you need to compare the accord not to the perfect but to the alternative: Iran's continued effort to acquire a breakout capacity. That the four other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany blessed the agreement will give it further legitimacy and authority. All of this will give the United States a major stake in keeping the process going, even beyond the six-month deadline for reaching a comprehensive agreement. And even if Iran fudges some aspects of the deal, there will be great pressure and temptation to try to work things out even at the risk of not strictly enforcing the agreement.

5. The Problem With Interim Agreements

And that brings us to perhaps the most serious challenge of all. The recently concluded interim agreement may be problematic because it doesn't put a brake on some of the most troubling aspects on Iran's nuclear program, particularly limiting centrifuges and seeking ironclad assurances that Iran can't reconvert its enriched uranium stockpile into useable material.

But what if the six-month period ends without a comprehensive accord? The logic behind a comprehensive deal is that Iran will get hooked on a reinvigorated economy - popular pressures will grow as jobs are created, goods become available and the leadership sees the advantage of more and more sanctions relief. But reaching a sweeping agreement with Iran that puts to rest any prospect of the reconstitution of its nuclear program in exchange for removal of the toughest sanctions, on banking and oil, seems right now a fantastical proposition. There's just too much suspicion and mistrust between the US and Iran, not to mention Israeli and Saudi anxieties, congressional pressure, Iran's regional policies, and its own desire to preserve as much of its costly nuclear infrastructure as possible.

A more limited transaction - say, another interim agreement to ensure the negotiating process continues - is perhaps a more realistic alternative. What negotiation ever produced a perfect agreement? Even if the negotiators saw a comprehensive accord as a desired end state, can Washington and Tehran deliver an end game where Iran gives up all of its nuclear infrastructure and the US lifts all sanctions? More likely, the supreme leader's goal is to get as much sanctions relief as he can while keeping as much of his nuclear program as he can,

too. And given Iran's regional policies and human rights abuses, Congress will likely not want to relax non-nuclear related sanctions.

In the end, whatever develops, we need to be honest with ourselves about what's achievable. We need to stop deluding ourselves that negotiations will produce a final agreement that will end Iran's aspirations for a nuclear weapons capacity. Iran has come too far in its nuclear program for the US and Israel ever to have that kind of certainty or finality. The advocates of cutting a deal with Iran, including smart and cool heads in Israel, are right that the best you might be able to do is to put more time back on the Iranian nuclear program's clock so that the world will have enough warning to detect and deal with an effort to break out and weaponize.

That's not terribly comforting. But that's what happens when the mullahs play three-dimensional chess and we play checkers.

This accord is less worrisome than Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu believes, but not as compelling and reassuring as US officials maintain. Using it to our advantage depends on keeping sanctions tight, monitoring intrusive and a credible military option on the table. Finally trying to figure out exactly what we do six months from now if no comprehensive deal materializes? That would help too.

(5) Why Christian Zionism grows despite critics

With more than 1.6 million members, pastor John Hagee's **Christians United for Israel** (CUFI) has become a powerful force in pro-Israel advocacy in US politics. Additionally, his humanitarian work - including the donation of more than \$80 million to Israeli charities - has earned him growing praise from the Jewish community.

But despite the efforts of Hagee, who is arguably the face of Christian Zionism today, many Jews remain skeptical of evangelical support for Israel. That phenomenon can be understood against the backdrop of Christian Zionism's history of embracing competing theological and political ideologies, a trend persisting today. Deeply rooted in the Christian faith, especially Protestantism, Christian Zionism emerged in the U.S. and Great Britain in the 19th century, when leaders such as Lord Shaftesbury and William Eugene Blackstone helped shape the movement's policies in their respective countries. More modern Christian leaders, like Winston Churchill and Harry Truman, working with Jewish friends, set the course for their governments' support for and recognition of the modern state of Israel. Hagee seeks to continue that legacy.

"Before CUFI, there was nothing to give American evangelicals a national voice for Israel," Hagee told *JNS.org* in an exclusive sit-down interview on the eve of a major dinner with Jewish leaders in his honour on 7 November in New York.

While Hagee has been a staunch supporter of Israel since the early 1980s, when he first organized the now famous "**Night to Honor Israel**" at his Cornerstone megachurch in San Antonio, CUFI - founded in 2006 - has arguably become his most powerful tool in support of Israel.

"Our main and initial objective was to get thousands of leaders to go each year to Washington, D.C., to engage every senator and congressperson as to why we as evangelicals support Israel," Hagee says.

It wasn't always easy to garner Christian support for Israel. For most of Christian history, the teaching of replacement theology - which argues that the Christian church has replaced Israel and the Jewish people regarding the plan, purpose and promises of God - has been a dominant teaching.

Hagee initially faced pushback from other Christians regarding his ministry's support for Israel. His Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, as well as his family, was threatened by violence that included bomb threats and smashed windows.

"Israel has always had its enemies," he says. "When I first started supporting Israel over 30 years ago, I was using the TV platform to preach against the doctrine of replacement theology, which was all the rage then."

Despite CUFI's growth - it calls itself America's largest pro-Israel group - Christian Zionists today still face significant threats from anti-Zionist Christians, who use their faith to accost Israel over its policies towards the Palestinians. The anti-Zionist movement is based in the Bethlehem Bible Church, an evangelical church in the West Bank, which hosts the "Christ at Checkpoint" conference, gathering evangelical leaders to criticize Israel and promote boycott, divestment and sanctions against the Jewish state.

Hagee sees no difference between these modern Christian anti-Zionists and traditional Christian anti-Semites.

"From time to time, groups organize for purposes that are anti-Semitic and anti-Israel. You can't divorce the two. You can call it your theology, but it's anti-Semitism within a theological umbrella. I place all these people in the category of anti-Semites with a new flag to fly," he says.

Christian Zionism has also faced resistance in its efforts to be accepted by the Jewish community. Hagee admits that it is only natural for some Jews to be skeptical of Christians due to the long history of Christian anti-Semitism, as evidenced during the Crusades, Inquisition and Holocaust.

"I think there are Jewish people who have what my rabbi friend Rabbi Aryeh Scheinberg [an Orthodox rabbi in San Antonio] says is a '2000-year knee flinch' of their skepticism of the Christian agenda," Hagee says. "The Jewish people are very aware of history, and it will take just more than a few Christians singing *kumbaya* to change their mind."

Aside from history, there are significant political, geographical and cultural differences between evangelicals and Jews that bolster Jewish suspicions of evangelicals. According to the Pew Research Center, evangelical and born-again Christians voted overwhelmingly - 79 percent - for Republican candidate Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential election, while Jews voted overwhelmingly in the other direction - 69 percent - for President Barack Obama. Additionally, Pew says most Jews tend to live in heavily urbanized regions in the Northeast, like New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts, while evangelicals are most heavily concentrated in southern states, like Tennessee, Texas and Oklahoma.

Former White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, however, breaks the mould of Jewish Americans. He was born and raised in New York and is a conservative who has worked in the south for many years for and with evangelical Christians, including former President George W. Bush.

Fleischer, a close friend of Hagee who was master of ceremonies at the November dinner, told *JNS.org* that his Jewish friends constantly express their skepticism of evangelicals.

"Just like any bigotry, if you don't know somebody, you are inclined to stereotype them," Fleischer said. "As soon as you get to know them, it starts to break down. This is true in both directions; I've seen conservatives make false judgments [about people] who they may not know, just like liberals, Jews and anybody else who are not aware of the evangelical community."

"All the years I've spent with evangelicals, I never once had anybody trying to convince me of anything or make me think differently about my beliefs."

Fleischer added, "When they [evangelicals] say they are praying for you, it doesn't mean they are praying for you to convert. It is a heartfelt gesture that truly shows how deeply they care about your well-being."

Hagee understands Jewish skepticism of evangelicals but hopes Jews can also be open-minded.

"They have a historical right to be skeptical, [but] all I ask for is the opportunity to present my message," he says.

Regardless of any Jewish debates over Christian Zionism, it was clear at the dinner in Hagee's honour that the pastor and CUFI are well respected in the eyes of prominent mainstream Jewish leaders.

"I've had a long relationship with [Hagee], and I participated in his Washington conferences and his 'Night to Honor Israel,'" says Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, who presented Hagee with a lifetime achievement award at the dinner. "It is a remarkable experience that everybody should have. He cares deeply about Israel. And his audiences are very passionate and committed. I deeply respect Pastor Hagee. He does not have alternative agendas and is very committed to Israel's vitality and survival."

Hoenlein gave his take on Jewish skepticism of evangelicals in a recent interview.

"First of all, you evaluate each partner on an individual basis, and there are certainly some with legitimate suspicions. However, that is not true with Pastor Hagee and CUFI. While he does have his religious beliefs, he does not impose them on you, and he is very respectful of your faith," he said.

"We need the evangelical community," he added. "I would ask people to embrace their true friends and, as to those who engage in questionable practices, we should isolate them."

Michael Kassen, president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, echoes Hoenlein's sentiment on Hagee.

"We're thrilled that he's been a real pro-Israel leader for decades," said Kassen. "Our belief is that it is very important that support for Israel, which is already strong among Jewish Americans, also extend beyond the Jewish people to include Christians and many others."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, addressing the dinner in a video message, spoke about his long friendship with Hagee. Nobel laureate and noted Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, sitting next to Hagee, lamented that if there were more Gentiles like him, history might have turned out differently. In a video message, News Corporation CEO and Chairman Rupert Murdoch praised Hagee for standing up for democracy and freedom.

Hagee said he has enjoyed a warm relationship with many Jewish leaders over the years, including every single Israeli prime minister since Menachem Begin.

"Begin was a great biblical scholar and held Bible teaching every Friday night, which he invited me to," Hagee said. "Each time I met with him, it was a very enjoyable opportunity as friends to share common principles of faith that bound us together. That has never really changed, from when I met Begin to Netanyahu today."

Hagee is hopeful that his church and CUFI will continue to flourish.

"I hope that the next generation [of CUFI advocates] will rise up to be aggressive and intelligent leaders that will continue its work until all the enemies of Israel are defeated," he says.

(6) Why Netanyahu won't yield

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been labelled a warmonger, a wolf-crier and an opponent of peace at any price because of his policies on Iran.

Here's what Netanyahu's critics say: His warnings of a bad deal are designed to undermine measures to slow Iran's nuclear program and test its openness to long-term solutions. His insistence on strengthening, rather than easing, sanctions will weaken Iranian moderates and drive them from the negotiating table - precisely what Netanyahu allegedly wants. Similarly, his demands for dismantling Iran's uranium enrichment facilities and removing its nuclear stockpile are intended to replace diplomatic options with military ones.

The critics claim that he is again playing the doomsayer, the spoiler of efforts to avoid conflict and restore Iran to the community of nations.

Why would any leader subject himself to such obloquy? Why would he risk international isolation and friction with crucial allies? And why, as some commentators assert, would Netanyahu jeopardize a peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear threat and drag his country - and perhaps not only his - into war?

The answers to these questions are simple.

Netanyahu is acting out of a deep sense of duty to defend Israel against an existential threat. Such dangers are rare in most countries' experience but are traumatically common in Israel's, and they render the price of ridicule irrelevant.

Moreover, when formulating policies vital to Israel's survival, the prime minister consults with Israel's renowned intelligence community, a robust national security council and highly specialized units of the IDF. Netanyahu may at times appear to stand alone on Iran, but he is backed by a world-class body of experts.

In 2011, these same analysts predicted that the Arab Spring, which was widely hailed as the dawn of Middle Eastern democracy, would be hijacked by Islamic radicals. They foresaw years of brutal civil strife. Netanyahu publicly expressed these conclusions and was denounced as a naysayer by many of the same columnists who are now lambasting him on Iran.

Yet it is precisely on Iran that Israeli specialists have proved most prescient. They were the first, more than 20 years ago, to reveal Iran's clandestine nuclear activities. They continued to scrutinize the program, emphasizing its military goals, even after 2003, when weaponisation was purportedly halted.

Throughout several attempts at diplomacy, these experts have disclosed the ways that Iran systematically obstructed United Nations observers, lied to world leaders and hid nuclear facilities, such as the one at Fordow, which can have no peaceful purpose. Israeli intelligence has accurately tracked Iran's support for terrorist organizations, its role in the massacre of thousands of Syrians and its responsibility for attacks against civilians in dozens of cities around the world.

This does not mean that Israeli estimates are infallible. Since the failure to foresee the 1973 Yom Kippur War, intelligence officials are wary of long-standing conceptions and rigorously question them. Nevertheless, Israeli experts agree that for hegemonic purposes and internal security, the Iranian regime wants and needs the bomb.

Consequently, it will employ any ruse to preserve the ability to produce a weapon in a matter of weeks while obtaining some relief from sanctions.

Iranian leaders know - and Israel's analysts agree - that lessening the economic pressure on Iran will send an incontrovertible message to foreign companies, many of which are already seeking contracts with Tehran, that the sanctions that took years to build are ending. Iran could drag out any confidence-building period indefinitely while producing fissile material for multiple bombs.

Top-flight intelligence helped Israel grapple with the challenges posed by the Arab Spring, but the stakes regarding Iran - the lives of 8 million Israelis - are vastly greater. Pundits may posit that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is a moderate, but Israelis cannot indulge in speculation. Our margin for error is nil.

Knowing that, Netanyahu is duty-bound to warn of Iranian subterfuge, to insist that Iran cede its centrifuges, cease enrichment, close its heavy-water plant and transfer its nuclear stockpiles abroad.

He has a responsibility to explain that although Israel has the most to gain from diplomacy, it also has the most to lose from its failure. He is obliged to stress that the choice is not between sanctions and war but between a bad deal and stronger sanctions. And as the prime minister of the Jewish state, Netanyahu must assert Israel's right to defend itself against any existential threat.

Critics can call him militant or intransigent, but Netanyahu is merely doing his job. Any Israeli leader who did less would be strategically and morally negligent.

(7) What Americans don't know about Palestinian culture

Some Jewish liberals got a terrible shock last week when British journalist Tom Gross broke a story about a fascist-style military rally held on the campus of Al Quds University. Al Quds is a Palestinian college located in Jerusalem and has had an academic partnership with both Brandeis University and Bard College in the United States. The rally was organized by the Al Quds branch of the Islamic Jihad group (though it was joined by much of the rest of the student body that joined the jihadi storm troopers in marching on an Israeli flag) and followed two other demonstrations sponsored by Hamas to honor suicide bombers at the school.

The story about the event, illustrated by a much-circulated picture of the Islamic Jihad group in black uniforms and masks giving a Nazi-style salute, posed a dilemma for Brandeis. While no one in charge at Bard seemed particularly exercised about the fact that their partner held pep rallies for terrorism the way a typical American school does for football or basketball, Brandeis is an avowedly Jewish institution and when the Washington Free Beacon posed a question about what it was doing in a relationship with such a place, the university was initially flummoxed and hunkered down, offering no comment about the story even as many of their students and faculty expressed outrage. It took more than a week, but yesterday Brandeis extracted its head from the sand and President Frederick Lawrence announced that it was reevaluating its relationship with Al Quds. Lawrence's move came after he called on Al Quds President Sari Nusseibeh to condemn the rally in Arabic and English. Instead, the renowned Palestine "moderate" rationalized the rally, defending the students, and blamed the controversy on "vilification campaigns by Jewish extremists" leaving Brandeis no choice but to back out of their relationship.

But there's more to this story than just this distressing exchange. The problem here is not just that terror groups are as accepted at Palestinian universities—even those that are generally respected abroad as Al Quds is—as sports teams are at their American counterparts. It's that most Americans, including American Jews like those who run Brandeis, haven't a clue about why this is so or how pervasive this trend is in Palestinian society.

If much of the discussion about the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians on college campuses and throughout the rest of the American liberal world seem so skewed it is not just because Israel is often unfairly smeared as an "apartheid state." It is also because many Americans simply don't know the first thing about contemporary Palestinian culture. Websites like Palestine Media Watch and Memri, which provide constant updates about what is broadcast and printed by Palestinian sources, could give them a quick lesson about how deeply hatred of Israel and the Jews is embedded in popular Palestinian culture as well as its politics. But those who bring up these unhappy facts are more often dismissed as biased extremists who don't understand the Palestinians.

But the point about campus activities at Al Quds is that there is nothing exceptional about large groups of students demonstrating their hate for Israel and their devotion not to Palestinian nationalism but its extreme Islamist adherents such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad that call for the death of Jews. Such groups are not just welcome at Palestinian schools but an essential part of the fabric of student life as well as the general culture.

Thus, the shock here is not that Brandeis (if not Bard) has been alerted to the true nature of their partner and even a respected front man like Nusseibeh. Rather, it's that it never occurred to anyone in authority at Brandeis that this was the inevitable result of any cooperation with Al Quds. If it had or if more American academics got their heads out of the sand and realized the cancer of hate that is still the dominating feature of Palestinian political culture, the assumption that Israel is the villain of the Middle East conflict might be challenged more often.

(8) Russia cannot replace America in the Middle East

The hardening conviction among America's Arab and Israeli allies that the US is no longer a reliable partner in the sinuous intrigues and vicious rivalries of the Middle East is prompting speculation about a Russian comeback there. Last week's trumpeted visit to Cairo of Russia's foreign and

defence ministers - 41 years after President Anwar Sadat kicked 20,000 Soviet military advisers out of Egypt – is seen by some as a turning point. If so, it is far from clear in what direction Egypt, as well as other disenchanted American allies such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel, can turn.

The gripes about the US of these regional powers vary, and they do not necessarily all gang up around the same issue. The anger of all Arab countries, as well as Turkey and Iran, about Washington's all but unconditional support for Israel is an important exception. But Barack Obama has added other reasons, too.

The current, army-backed government in Egypt, and its main ally, Saudi Arabia, feel a palpable sense of betrayal: first, that the Obama White House did nothing to prevent the 2011 toppling of President Hosni Mubarak, a loyal US client; and, second, that after the army overthrew President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in June, Washington withheld part of the normally sacrosanct annual \$1.3bn in US military aid, an integral part of Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel. Israel itself – a status quo power that reserves the right to change the regional status quo – was also unhappy: to see the end of tyrants that had held back popular antipathy towards Israeli policy. As a top Israeli strategist put it just after Mr Mubarak fell: "Our whole structure of analysis just collapsed."

On Syria, it is Turkey and Saudi Arabia that are most aggrieved, by the odd mixture of hesitancy and adventurism through which Pres. Obama has willed the end of the Assad regime without giving mainstream rebels the means to effect this, instead leaving the field more and more to jihadi extremists. As Cairo flirts with Moscow, so Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's increasingly wilful prime minister, has started a dalliance with Beijing, pledging to buy a Chinese missile defence system even though it would not be interoperable with Ankara's Nato allies. The Saudis, for their part, speak huffily of a "major shift" away from their 70-year alliance with the US.

But that brings us to the heart of the present unhappiness: the sudden possibility that the US may reach a rapprochement with Iran. The idea horrifies Israel and Saudi Arabia, which see the Shia Islamic Republic as menacing. They want nothing less than Iran's capitulation, ideally followed by regime change. It is hard to discern what Vladimir Putin's Russia has to offer in these two overarching regional conflicts: the contest within Islam between Sunni and Shia; and the stand-off between Israel and Iran, now a regional power and a threat to Israeli hegemony.

Yet, dithering aside, Pres. Obama has sometimes upset US regional allies for the right reasons. He declined to back the despots challenged by the Arab Awakening, or the June coup in Egypt, and was prepared to give a hearing to Islamists – manufactured by the dictatorships the west previously backed. The president, moreover, clearly feels he was elected to take the US out of the region's wars, not into new ones. Fortunately for everyone, he is resisting the "march to war" with Iran urged by Israel and the Saudis.

But the problem of a vacuum is nonetheless there.

After the Iraq fiasco, there are real doubts about US ability to use its diplomatic clout and unique military power to shape, or even manage, the tumultuous events of the region. US and western mishandling of Syria could help turn the country into an Afghanistan on the Mediterranean. The barbarians are already at the gates. Russia, in these circumstances, is looking good. It stuck by the Assad regime, which after the US backed away from a missile strike to punish Damascus for gassing civilians in rebel areas, is on a military roll. Mr Putin has a simple strategy and sticks to it.

He is playing a bad hand well against a president who says America does not bluff. But his restive allies think Pres. Obama does bluff, and incompetently, for example over purported "red lines" on chemical weapons use that no one any longer believes.

The US moment in the Middle East may be ending, but it is hard to believe Russia can replace it. Even in the Soviet era, Russia never managed to be much more than a spoiler. Now, with its economy built on little more than oil and in the second division of technology, it is a subprime power. And nobody prefers Russian to US weapons systems.

The US, moreover, is finding it cannot just disengage. John Kerry, its top diplomat, does not get to pivot to Asia much these days. The Europeans are also going to have to raise their feeble game whether they like it or not. Syria is in their backyard and they are in the frontline of jihadi blowback. Bosnia pales by comparison.

(9) Why Saudi Arabia hates the Iran deal

As President Barack Obama pursues a historic deal with Iran over its nuclear program, he has already made history -- though perhaps not in the way he intended. For the first time since the USA emerged as a major power in the Middle East, all of its key allies -- Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia -- are in open revolt against its policies.

With U.S. and Iranian negotiators preparing for another round of negotiations, Washington's relationship with Riyadh may prove the hardest to patch up. While Israeli officials had signalled that a previous version of a nuclear deal was something they "didn't love but could live with," Saudi concerns about Iran relate to a whole range of actions that the kingdom views as a threat to their influence in the Arab world -- and even their grip on power at home. As a result, analysts and former U.S. officials say, Saudi Arabia sees any realistic deal as American acquiescence to Tehran's hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East.

"[Saudi officials] don't think this leads to a deal that leads to peace, they think this leads to Iranian domination of the Gulf," said Jon Alterman, the director of the Middle East program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "To their minds it doesn't do anything about Iranian ambitions, it just takes the United States out of the equation as a force that's helping box Iran in."

This is far from the first issue on which the Saudi royals have been at odds with the Obama administration. Top Saudi officials were angered by a previous U.S. decision to cancel a planned strike against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime, as well as what they perceived as Washington's hostile attitude toward the governments in Egypt and Bahrain. In response to these disagreements, Saudi Arabia has embarked on an independent effort to train Syrian rebels - even enlisting Pakistani trainers in its effort - while intelligence chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan announced that the kingdom would undertake a "major shift" away from Washington.

It may just be that Saudi Arabia and the United States have increasingly irreconcilable priorities when it comes to the Middle East. While the Obama administration's focus is clearly on Iran's nuclear program, Saudi royals see potential threats in a range of other Iranian activities, such as its support for the Assad regime, its patronage of the Lebanese paramilitary organization Hezbollah, and what they perceive as its intent to use Shia communities to stoke unrest in the Arab Gulf.

"They want to stop [Iran], to stop its ability to project influence in the region. And I think they've drawn the line in Syria," said Bernard Haykel, a professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton

University. "Sometimes they say, 'if we don't do it in Syria, the next time it will be on our own territory.'"

The threat of Iran destabilizing the governments of the Arab Gulf may not be the top concern of anyone in Washington, but analysts say that it's an issue officials in Riyadh takes seriously. It was only two years ago, after all that they spearheaded an intervention into Bahrain to put down what they viewed as a pro-Iranian uprising against the ruling Sunni regime.

"There is this idea that the Iranians are supporting fifth columns in the states of the region, which they will use to mount an unconventional attack," said Alterman. "That they have agents from within Shia communities and more broadly who [Saudi officials] believe will...carry out asymmetrical warfare against the Gulf states."

Chas Freeman -- a former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia who was tapped for a top intelligence post in the Obama administration before a controversy about his views on Israel caused him to withdraw his name -- believes the Saudis' concerns go beyond the fear that Washington will no longer help contain Iran, but may actually align itself with Tehran again. "[There are] probably recollections of the time, more than 30 years ago, when Iran was the regional gendarme of the USA," he said. "That would mean a long-term strategic erosion in their relative position in the region."

The idea that U.S.-Iranian relations could return to what they were under the Shah's time may seem outlandish to officials in Washington. But the royals in Riyadh perhaps have a deeper institutional memory than their American counterparts. Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal took office four years before the Iranian Revolution, while the current King Abdullah was already head of the Saudi Arabian National Guard and second in line for the throne.

While the USA and Iran have so far worked to keep negotiations focused on the nuclear issue, it may be difficult to keep broader concerns about Tehran's role in the Middle East from leaking into the conversation. Alterman believes a final agreement may have to address issues like Iran's support for the Assad regime and Hezbollah, without which it would be impossible to fully lift sanctions. "You could get to May, and have some very, very difficult political discussions in the US and Iran," he said.

Such a broadening of the issues on the table could give the Saudis a chance to make their voice heard -- but few expect them to change their tune. "When Kerry went to Saudi Arabia [earlier this month], they told him in no uncertain terms that they're against any deal being cut, any lifting of the sanctions," said Haykel. "They want Iran to be punished."

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