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News Blurb: ATFP provides two original translations, first Mohammad Daraghmeh's piece on Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Palestinian diplomacy (1), and second, Hassan Khader's article on the Palestinian Left (2). An agreement on a proposed Israeli settlement freeze remains elusive (8) (15) (16). A report issued yesterday by Amnesty International finds that Israel inflicted 'wanton destruction' on Gaza during the war in January (5) (7). Veteran peace negotiator Dennis Ross is appointed to the U.S. National Security Council (4). German Chancellor Angela Merkel demands Israel cease settlement construction in the West Bank (11). Tensions increase between Fatah and Hamas in the West Bank after President Abbas' allegation of an assassination plot by Hamas militants (12).

ATFP Translation: The Palestinian Obama

Article Author(s): Mohammed Daraghmeh

Media Outlet: Al-Quds

Article Type: Opinion

Date: July 1, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.americantaskforce.org> ^[1]

Over the last few weeks, we witnessed three speeches by three leaders at three universities: United States President Barack Obama and his speech at Cairo University, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his speech at Bar Ilan University, and Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and his speech at al-Quds University.

In their three speeches, the three leaders had three elements in common. All three are highly educated leaders who follow modern trends in fields of knowledge. They are aware that modern achievements are built on science, knowledge and technology, and have therefore chosen to deliver their speeches at institutions of knowledge.

All three leaders presented new and revolutionary approaches to ancient and intractable problems: President Obama presented the idea of changing the relation based on a legacy of conflict between Islam and the West. Netanyahu presented the idea of a demilitarized Palestinian state to resolve the historic conflict between the two peoples. Fayyad presented the idea of building the institutions of the state before the state itself.

The three leaders are skilled in public relations and influencing the public through launching creative, visionary ideas and projects. They know how to engage and ignite political debate and how to channel public opinion in the direction they desire. After all, the ability to engage and define the debate in the

media, and among the political elite and public opinion at large is one of the challenges that determine the success of the any leader or institution.

Realizing such ideas ? many of which are meta-projects ? requires an abundance of power, resources, supporting factors and mechanisms.

President Obama's idea needs a new environment that can only come through a fundamental change in US policy and diplomacy ? a change that goes to some of its historic pillars. At the forefront of such changes would be to indicate the willingness to actually pressure Israel to end its occupation of Arab lands, or at least those lands considered by US diplomacy as occupied.

Netanyahu's ideas require a change in ideology not only on the part of the Prime Minister himself and the right wing, but also the Israeli political community at large, which is yet to reach consensus around the fundamentals of the political solution with the Palestinians.

Much could be said about the hidden objectives behind Netanyahu's ideas, not the least of which is the desire to abort US pressure, and to render a state meaningless through excluding Jerusalem and refugees from negotiations. Many of these analyses are correct, yet much can be built on the mere fact that he recognized the right of Palestinians to a state. This requires other elements to change, whether domestically in the area of Jewish national consensus or externally in the field of US diplomacy.

Salam Fayyad's idea needs new Palestinian political thinking ? one that can rise from the debris of the old experience that led the Palestinians to a division that has made them ? even in their own eyes ? unworthy of an independent state. A division that, as the saying goes, has made "wolves show more mercy than brothers", and which has created two authorities whose daily human rights violations pose a substantial new challenge to all who seek a healthy civil and political life in our country.

Fayyad's idea lifts the institutions of the Palestinian Authority (PA), and subsequently the state, into the superstructure of society, above the factional fights over power. It shifts the PA from an authority that is defined by factions into one that revolves around institutions, service provision and accessibility to all. It transforms the institutions of the PA into modern state institutions that render the Palestinian in the eyes of the world, and indeed in their own eyes, worthy of an independent state.

The international dimension is important in the creation of modern political entities. It was important in the creation of Israel, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and elsewhere. It will be crucial in Palestine. No-one, not even the factions competing for power, imagines that a Palestinian state can be created absent international will.

The international factor is important in the Palestinian case, first in order to create pressure on Israel, and second to provide financial support for the creation of the institutions and infrastructure of a state.

Some might look at international financial support as a sedative. A quick glance at the current financial crisis facing the PA as a result of many donors, particularly in Arab countries, stopping their contributions shows the extent to which such aid is needed. Let us imagine for a moment what would happen if the government stops paying 240 million dollars worth of monthly salaries, not to mention other current and development expenditures.

In order for it to succeed, Fayyad's idea about the state needs mechanisms capable of mobilizing the street in its direction, away from many factions that only see our country in terms of the interests and privileges they can gain from the PA.

Fayyad's idea is a challenge to the awareness and sensibility of Palestinians to the higher national interest, above factional interests and visions.

No-one can forget the Israeli obstacle ? the obstacle of occupation and settlements. But the Palestinians' worthiness of ending the occupation and mobilizing international support for the realization of this goal will be subject to their ability to unite themselves around the idea of a state. Such a state must encompass everyone from Rafah to Jenin, and should accommodate the whole political spectrum from al-Tahrir party that seeks to re-establish the Caliphate to the leftist factions that are seeking a new, viable left along the Latin American model.

In the world of business, it is said that an idea is worth a million dollars. In the world of politics, ideas such as Obama's vision of a new world, or Salam Fayyad's idea of establishing the institutions of a state that transcends all other considerations, are worth much more than money.

Salam Fayyad did not come from within the factional elite. The Palestinian streets acceptance of his ideas will be analogous to the American street's endorsement of Barack Obama, who himself did not emerge from the white elite.

ATFP Translation: What does it mean to be a Palestinian leftist?

Article Author(s): Hassan Khader

Media Outlet: Al-Ayyam

Article Type: Opinion

Date: June 30, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.americantaskforce.org/> ^[2]

I have been reading newspaper accounts over the past few days about a conference in Ramallah entitled "Experiences of unifying and activating the left in Palestine and the world." I recall the memory of a young woman from the cold and distant north who asked me during the Beirut civil war thirty years ago what was preventing the unification of two large leftist organizations. I instantly responded: stupidity.

Fortunately, my unguarded outburst contained much of the truth, perhaps among the best and the fullest in a history of slips of the tongue, characterizing the ?petit bourgeoisie? with an accuracy that has not expired. And today, without relying on unlikely contingencies, what held true in the past will most likely continue to be so in the present time. However, given that there is always a certain degree of uncertainty, it is important to address some of the confusion that naturally arises in such cases.

Before talking about its unification and empowerment, we must first consider the very definition of the Left. More specifically, what does it mean to be Palestinian leftist in 2009, what ideas and principles need to be promoted, and what goals must be achieved?

If we look at the rhetoric coming out of the conference I cited above (and here I am relying on press accounts), it emphasized ending the political marginalization of the Left, defending the people and the cause, ending the Left's division and fragmentation, and serving the citizenry. This, of course, was in addition to all the discussion about local and global experiences and how to make good use of them, etc.

This language of generalities does not serve any purpose, does not help the Left emerge from the

Palestinian fringes, and does not serve the citizenry, but actually reinforces the Left's own marginalization. What is needed instead is a careful re-examination of the definition of terms, such as: what is the meaning of the Left (i.e., what distinguishes it from other political orientations); what is the meaning of defense and service of the people (i.e., specific ideas to help the general public and the means to accomplish them); and what precisely constitutes "the people" and "the cause" to be served ("the people" are in fact peoples, and "the cause" in fact causes, and "the interest" in fact interests -- if this were not so, then the national movement could not have become fragmented, and the Palestinians would not have become divided).

Therefore, instead of preaching about generalities, it is important to think critically and plan carefully, without, of course, challenging the sincerity of the people who participate in such conferences, who are mostly individuals who grew out of the armed Palestinian Left of the late sixties, and have subsequently transformed into independents and activists in non-governmental organizations that are concerned with civil society and human rights.

I do not think that under these circumstances the leftist organizations in Palestine will be able to unify their ranks or emerge from the margins. Such organizations could well remain on the sidelines for many years to come, and could continue to subsist on the memories of past achievements accumulated in an earlier era. Indeed, some of them are being turned into puppets of Hamas, under the pretext that we are going through a phase of national liberation that requires postponing all significant social issues, and giving the confrontation with the occupation more weight than supposedly marginal differences between national partners, and all the other empty talk with which we are all too familiar.

Equally, the ambition of independents and former members of leftist groups to form a united leftist front is not achievable without a careful re-examination of the concepts of primary and secondary contradictions, the idea of the primacy of the phase of national liberation, and similar notions. In Gaza and Ramallah, there is political authority that enacts laws and makes decisions that affect the lives and fates of millions of Palestinians, which means that social issues, even though the occupation still continues, must be given their due consideration and importance.

I do not think that there is a relationship between the occupation and issues such as personal status laws, the complete equality between the sexes, and co-education in schools and universities. There are countless such vital issues that cannot be dismissed as secondary or irrelevant. And these issues have the ability to uplift those currently consigned to humiliating social marginalization.

And what exactly is the relationship between the right-wing fundamentalism in Palestine and the occupation? The truth is that the emergence of right-wing fundamentalism has weakened the Palestinian national movement, prolonged the life of the occupation, and postponed the realization of the dream of independence and statehood for an unknown and indefinite period. And if challenging the right-wing fundamentalism is not a responsibility and task of the left, then how can it be worthy of that name?

Moreover, we must ask, what is the relationship between the occupation and the development in the Palestinian system, after its establishment in the mid-nineties, of a populist politics and culture that emulates the models of the Arab political systems that have become blatant dictatorships ruled by a big daddy, an inspiring overlord to whom the public sings praises of genius?

There is no relationship between any of this and the occupation. And there is no contradiction in combining resistance to the occupation with the resistance to the emergence of these internal phenomena. What is the difference, then, between the Left and the others if the Left allows others to kidnap the national cause, and allows itself to become trapped into serving as a puppet of those who are better equipped and more conniving in return for a couple of minutes on Al-Jazeera?

The Palestinian Left has suffered from a stroke since the mid-nineties, and I do not think that it has yet recovered in an ethical, cultural, and political sense. In any case, if secularism and the issues of poverty, corruption, and civil rights, and especially and above all the issue of women's rights, are not central concerns of the Left, then what exactly are its issues?

If this effort at ending the state of division and fragmentation is intended to unite the leftist organizations, then it would be better to coordinate their positions on issues defining parliamentary, union, and student council elections. But if it is intended to end the rift between Fatah and Hamas, then the Egyptian Intelligence Minister Omar Suleiman is executing that role more effectively, and has more persuasive tools than appeals and invitations to brotherhood. It would be quite surreal if trying to play such a role turns into one of the main concerns of the Left in Palestine. Therefore, I reiterate previous words from a distant city, as old habits die hard.

Growing Gulf Between U.S. And Israeli Jews on Obama

Article Author(s): Nathan Jeffay

Media Outlet: The Jewish Daily Forward

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://forward.com/articles/108796/> ^[3]

He swept to power with the support of 78% of American Jews. But has Barack Obama become the bane of Israeli Jews?

A gulf between American and Israeli Jews was evident even before Obama moved into the White House. Just a third of Israelis would have endorsed him had they been allowed to vote, polling indicated, while almost half would have chosen John McCain.

In recent weeks, several public opinion surveys have suggested that Obama's popularity has dropped far below this already low point. A Jerusalem Post-commissioned poll released on June 19 reported that only 6% of Jewish Israelis consider his views pro-Israel.

To Rafi Smith, head of the polling firm that conducted the survey, it is clear what is happening. Israelis, he said, see Obama as the opposite of George Bush, who was perceived as the biggest friend of Israel. Obama is seen as a 180-degree turn.

In a separate poll his Smith Research Institute conducted in May, when asked to assess George W. Bush on the same criteria of whether he was "pro-Israel," some 88% of respondents said he was.

That May poll also suggests that Israelis have cooled significantly toward Obama since his Washington meeting that same month with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Before that meeting, 31% of Israeli Jews viewed Obama as pro-Israel, according to the poll, which was conducted before the summit. The phrasing of the question on Obama in the May and June polls was identical.

Smith's recent figures are stark, but there is evidence to suggest they are not freak results.

A Tel Aviv University poll conducted just before Obama's high-profile June 4 address in Cairo to the Muslim world found that when it comes to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, only 5% said he favors the

Israeli side. Both polls put the percentage viewing Obama as pro-Palestinian in the 50s and the percentage viewing him as neutral in the 30s.

There has been no polling on support for Obama among American Jews since he met with Netanyahu, but a Gallup tracking poll, released May 1, put the figure at 79%, and experts believe it has not changed significantly since.

According to some, the Israeli polling leaves no room for doubt: American and Israeli Jews never have been so at odds over a president. "Israelis are dismayed by what they perceive as the generally hostile approach he has adopted in dealing with the Jewish state," wrote Caroline Glick, one of Israel's best-known hawkish journalists, in the June 24 edition of *The Jerusalem Post*.

Steven Spiegel, professor of political science at University of California, Los Angeles, also detects an ideological clash. "American Jews are more to the left on issues, and Israeli Jews, especially after the election, are more to the right," he told *The Forward*, referring to the February election that brought Netanyahu to power.

In both Spiegel's and Glick's analysis, settlements are a real point of departure between American and Israeli Jews. Glick wrote that Israeli Jews take exception to Obama's pressuring on settlements. Unlike American Jews, they view that pressure as "inherently hostile."

Glick suggested that Obama's Cairo speech was a key moment affecting Israeli public opinion "a supposition that agreement between the Tel Aviv University and Smith Research Institute polls seems to contradict" and claimed that Israelis were deeply offended by the "inference that Israel owes its existence to the Holocaust," which was given in the Cairo address.

As for the divergence between American and Israeli Jewry, each of the two analysts sees it as a symptom of the other's community failure to comprehend the reality of the situation.

According to Spiegel, "Israeli Jews don't know Obama that well" and also have their opinion tainted by the fact they are "on the rebound from a love affair with Bush, so any president would have difficulties."

In Glick's view, the gulf in attitudes is "simply a consequence of a lack of American Jewish awareness of the significance of Obama's positions and policies for Israel."

But there is a different reading of the polls that challenges the notion of a major ideological clash between American and Israeli Jews. Advocates of this alternative reading point to the lack of enthusiasm in mainstream Israel for building in the West Bank "the major bone of contention between Jerusalem and Washington. Despite Israel's shift to the right in its recent election, many experts believe that sympathy for settlers and the settlements is currently at an all-time low.

"Opinion here on the settlements is perhaps even more dovish than American Jewish opinion," said Bar-Ilan University political scientist Jonathan Rynhold, who has just written a paper on American Jews and the peace process. "The difference is that here, you can get a missile landing on your head."

He said that, broadly speaking, Israelis are not disturbed by Obama's tough stance on settlements. Rather, they harbor a fear that the president may be unreceptive to Netanyahu's concerns in general, including on defense. "The thought goes: 'It starts with pressure on this, where will it end? It may begin with this issue on which I don't have a problem, but could it end up with some threat to Israel?'"

Alon Pinkas, a former consul general of Israel in New York who now heads the U.S.-Israel Institute at the

Yitzhak Rabin Center, voiced a similar view, saying it is wrong to interpret the polls as pointing to dislike for Obama. Rather, they point to ?anxiety.?

Pinkas said: ?People feel uneasy about where this relationship could be going. Although they may agree with what Obama is saying at the moment, they like to know that the occupant of the White House is a firm friend of Israel, and they are unsure.?

Meanwhile, Netanyahu seems to be riding high in the polls, a rebuke to the conventional Israeli political wisdom that when the leader in Washington clashes with the leader in Jerusalem, it?s the guy in Jerusalem whom Israelis hold responsible for failing to protect the country?s most important international relationship. A Haaretz poll published shortly after Netanyahu?s mid-June address, in which he gave his conditional support for a two-state solution to Israel?s conflict with the Palestinians, found that 71% of citizens supported the speech.

Still, if the relationship is headed for more bumpy ground, many analysts suggest that it ultimately could affect Netanyahu negatively. The same Haaretz poll found that 52% expected the Netanyahu speech to improve the state?s diplomatic and international standing. Pinkas, among others, predicted that if it does not, and Netanyahu?s relationship with Obama worsens, the former?s popularity will plummet.

It remains to be seen which way the relationship will go. In a June 30 meeting between Defense Minister Ehud Barak and America?s special envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell, Barak proposed the idea of a temporary freeze on Jewish settlements in the West Bank in exchange for greater Arab support for the peace process and acceptance of Israel. The Americans offered no immediate reaction, but Mitchell is now committed to meeting in Netanyahu for further discussions on his next trip to the region.

In the meantime, some hope that American Jews will temper their enthusiasm for Obama based on doubts voiced about him in Israel. Glick said that an ?awareness campaign? by Israel advocacy organizations could raise concerns about Obama ?with Israel?s core American Jewish supporters? and ?would no doubt go a long way in energizing them to challenge the administration on its positions vis-à-vis Israel.?

But according to Spiegel, any such effort would prove fruitless. ?His popularity among Israelis does not matter to Americans, who simply think they know him better.??

A similar [response is heard among activists and lobbyists who are putting their hopes in Obama to advance the peace process. M.J. Rosenberg, director of policy analysis for Israel Policy Forum, said: ?American Jews care as little about what Israelis think of our leaders as Israeli Jews care about what American Jews think of their leaders.?

Some See Extended Olive Branch For Israel In Ross Appointment to NSC

Article Author(s): Nathan Guttman

Media Outlet: The Jewish Daily Forward

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://forward.com/articles/108792/> ^[4]

The promotion of Middle East adviser Dennis Ross to a senior White House position may open the door to

a more positive tone by the United States toward the Israeli government, experts believe.

Ross, a veteran peace negotiator known for his strong ties with Israel and his past work with a Jewish think tank, will be special assistant to the president and senior director of the Central Region at the National Security Council. The post will include responsibility for Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as the Middle East. The announcement of Ross's appointment came June 25 after a week of speculation in Washington.

In his previous post as a senior aide to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Ross's responsibilities were limited to the Southwest Asia region with a focus on Iran. His new NSC post gives him a say over a much broader area. Ross also will oversee Iraq policy in the run-up to United States troop withdrawal. In addition, he will advise on the Pakistan-Afghanistan region.

The Obama administration and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government in Jerusalem are looking for ways to reach an understanding on Israel's expansion of Jewish settlements on the West Bank after weeks of locking horns over the issue. The administration in Washington has called for a full freeze on settlements, a demand Israel has so far rejected.

It's clear that if Obama wants to advance something on Iran, and on the Israeli-Palestinian front, he will need to reach a modus vivendi with Israel, and that will require someone who knows the Israelis well," said Aaron David Miller, a former peace negotiator who has written extensively on attempts by the United States to promote Middle East peace. Miller called Ross's appointment "smart policy and smart politics," and noted it would "put someone who understands Israel in a position close to the president."

Ross does not support expanding settlements or allowing Israel to build freely within settlement blocks in the West Bank. In his previous positions as chief peace negotiator under Presidents Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush, Ross spoke with Israelis about the need to freeze settlement activity in order to avoid prejudging the final borders of the two states and to demonstrate good will.

But Ross may be more in tune with those calling on the Obama administration to ease pressure on Israel. In a June 29 opinion article in The Washington Post headlined "End the Spat With Israel," columnist Jackson Diehl called the administration's insistence on a full settlement freeze "a loser" and argued that the United States should seize the opportunity created by the upheaval in Iran to "creep away from the corner into which it has painted itself in the Arab-Israeli peace process."

Some members of Congress hold similar stances. Many Jewish leaders also believe that Netanyahu's June 14 speech, in which he accepted a two-state solution to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians as his ultimate "vision," should be welcomed by the administration as an Israeli attempt to end the crisis.

But others, such as M.J. Rosenberg, director of policy analysis for the dovish Israel Policy Forum, say the pressure from the United States may, in fact, be working.

Signs of Israeli willingness to compromise on settlements became apparent after the June 30 meeting in New York between Israel's defense minister, Ehud Barak, and the administration's special envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell. At the meeting, Barak spoke, for the first time, of Israel's readiness to temporarily halt building in settlements on the condition that Arab countries become more involved in the peace process. Mitchell gave no indication of American reaction to the Israeli proposal in the meeting's immediate aftermath. But after four hours of discussion, Mitchell agreed to continue talks with Netanyahu when he visits the Middle East.

Israeli officials who recently met with Ross focused their conversations with him on issues relating to

Iran's nuclear program because of Ross's portfolio in his previous position as special adviser to Clinton. But an Israeli official who had negotiated with Ross on the Palestinian-Israeli peace process said he believed that Ross saw the settlement issue as "part of a package" and was always open to "practical solutions."

Ross has refrained thus far from communicating with the organized Jewish community as a whole. While Mitchell has been speaking routinely with Jewish groups, Ross was taking a more behind-the-scenes role. Still, he is a well-known figure in the Jewish community and is widely appreciated for his pragmatic approach to peacemaking.

"The most commendable thing about Dennis Ross is that, unlike some other alumni of the Clinton era, Ross is not locked into outdated views which are a function of ideology. He consistently allows reality to affect and shape his analysis," said Nathan Diament, director of the Institute for Public Affairs of the Orthodox Union, a group that is ideologically close to the settler movement.

Analysts and commentators speculated that Ross's broader responsibilities in his new White House post reflect in part Obama's dissatisfaction with National Security Adviser James Jones, and Obama's wish to have a designated senior adviser who will be in charge of long-term planning and of the strategic view of the region.

According to press reports, Ross was eager to leave the State Department since he could not find his place between the existing bureaucracy and teams of special envoys engaged in on-the-ground negotiations.

In entering an already staffed NSC, Ross is bound to step on some toes not only of Jones, but also of current directors, including Douglas Lute, who was in charge of Iraq policy and will now focus on Afghanistan; Daniel Shapiro, senior director for Near East and North Africa, who was in charge of Obama's outreach to the Jewish community during the presidential campaign, and Mitchell.

"I don't think that anybody should, though, believe that this will conflict or supersede the important work that special envoys are doing on the ground in many of these places," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs told reporters following the appointment.

Based on their previous work and statements, Ross and Mitchell represent different approaches to the conflict: Mitchell has a strong belief that an agreement is possible, based on his successful experience in Northern Ireland, while Ross brings a more skeptical approach based on three decades of fruitless negotiations in the Middle East.

Amnesty details violations in Gaza assault

Article Author(s): Vita Bekker

Media Outlet: The Financial Times

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4dd41d0a-6670-11de-a034-00144feabdc0.html?nclick_check...

[5]

Amnesty International on Thursday accused Israel and Hamas of having committed "serious and

extensive? violations during Israel?s assault in the Gaza Strip and urged the international community to boost its support for a United Nations inquiry into the alleged war crimes.

In its 119-page report, the London-based human rights group also called on Israel and Hamas, the Islamist group that controls Gaza, to fully co-operate with the UN probe headed by Richard Goldstone, an ex-chief prosecutor at the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Mr Goldstone?s team, which is aiming to publish its report in September, held public hearings in Gaza City on Sunday and Monday to broadcast live witness accounts from Palestinians as part of the investigation. It plans another round of hearings in Geneva next week, for which some Israeli witnesses may be flown in.

Israel has refused to co-operate with the probe, claiming it was biased against the Jewish state, and has deprived the team access to military sources and victims of Hamas rockets. While Hamas has said it would help the mission, the fact that its officials have often accompanied the investigators in Gaza has drawn scepticism about the ability of witnesses to freely describe the militant group?s actions.

Gaza health officials and local rights activists have said that some 1,400 Palestinians were killed during the 22-day attacks launched by Israel in December in the country?s bid to curtail rocket fire on its southern communities by Gaza militants. Thirteen Israelis were also killed during the onslaught.

Israel has rejected charges that it had committed war crimes and has cast doubt on such allegations by claiming that they relied on questionable sources that sided with Hamas. On Tuesday, Human Rights Watch accused Israel in a separate report of unlawfully killing at least 29 Palestinian civilians, including eight children, with missile-firing drones during the military operation.

In its report, Amnesty criticised Israel for failing to launch an independent probe into the conduct of its forces and pressed the country to ?provide full reparations for the consequences of its unlawful acts and omissions.? The group also insisted that its own delegates were allowed to carry out their inquiries in Gaza unhindered by Hamas officials and often heard criticism of Hamas?s conduct from Gazans.

According to Amnesty, hundreds of Palestinians had been killed during the conflict as a result of Israeli forces being reckless or deliberately targeting civilians by shooting at close range at those fleeing their homes in search of shelter, firing tank shells into civilian homes or dropping aircraft bombs on residential buildings. The group added that in all the cases that it investigated, it found no evidence that the victims posed a threat to the Israeli soldiers or were caught in an area of combat between the soldiers and Palestinian militants.

Amnesty said it also discovered no evidence of Israeli allegations that Hamas or any other Palestinian factions had used civilians as human shields, including by forcing them to stay in or around buildings used by gunmen. The group, however, said it found that Israeli soldiers themselves used civilian homes as bases and sniper positions while forcing families to stay in a ground-floor room, or ordered males to walk in front of them on streets or check for booby traps or militants inside buildings.

Amnesty?s report added that Israel?s blockade on the impoverished territory of 1.5m Palestinians is hampering any reconstruction efforts following the attacks, which destroyed or damaged many houses, businesses, public buildings and farms.

Israeli troops wound four Palestinians in West Bank

Media Outlet: Reuters

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.reuters.com/article/featuredCrisis/idUSL1335862> [6]

Israeli soldiers shot and wounded four Palestinian youths on Wednesday while firing at protesters throwing stones at Israeli civilian vehicles, an Israeli military spokesman and medics said.

Two of the wounded were in serious condition in an Israeli hospital, and two others were listed as moderate in a Palestinian hospital in the West Bank city of Nablus, an Israeli military source and Palestinian medical officials said.

A Palestinian official said all those who were shot were boys younger than 16. The Israeli spokesman had no details on their identities.

The Israeli spokesman said soldiers opened fire with live ammunition at Palestinians who threw stones at Israeli civilian vehicles on a road near Nablus. Three Israelis were injured in a similar stoning assault earlier in the day, the spokesman said.

Confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians occur frequently in the West Bank, land Israel captured in a 1967 war and which Palestinians seek for a state.

Amnesty says Israel ?wantonly? destroyed Gaza

Media Outlet: The National

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090702/FOREIGN/707029998/1002> [7]

Amnesty International said today that Israel inflicted ?wanton destruction? in the Gaza Strip in attacks that often targeted Palestinian civilians during an offensive in December and January in the Hamas-run enclave.

The London-based rights group, in a 117-page report on the 22 days of fighting, also criticised movement Hamas for rocket attacks on Israel, which it called ?war crimes?.

Among other conclusions, Amnesty said it found no evidence to support Israeli claims that Gaza guerrillas deliberately used civilians as ?human shields?, but it did, however, cite evidence that Israeli troops put children and other civilians in harm?s way by forcing them to remain in homes taken over by soldiers.

Amnesty International said some 1,400 Palestinians were killed in Israel?s Operation Cast Lead, including 300 children and hundreds of innocent civilians, a figure broadly in line with those from the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza and the independent Palestinian Centre for Human Rights.

The Israeli military put the Palestinian death toll at 1,166 of whom 295 were civilians. Thirteen Israelis were killed, including three civilians, during the offensive Israel launched with the declared aim of curtailing cross-border rocket attacks.

Accusing Israel of ?breaching laws of war?, Amnesty said: ?Much of the destruction was wanton and deliberate, and was carried out in a manner and circumstances which indicated that it could not be justified on grounds of military necessity.?

Israel and Hamas have both rejected accusations of war crimes. An Israeli military inquiry found no evidence of crimes. Israel has refused to co-operate with a United Nations inquiry that is now gathering evidence. The investigators were prejudiced against Israel from the outset, the government said.

Amnesty said although that rockets fired by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip rarely cause casualties but often sow fear and panic, their use was 'indiscriminate and hence unlawful under international law'.

It also accused Hamas and other armed groups of endangering the lives of the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza by firing rockets and locating military equipment near homes.

The report however dismissed Israeli claims that Hamas had used Palestinian civilians as 'human shields'.

Amnesty said it found no evidence that 'Hamas or other armed groups forced residents to stay in or around buildings used by fighters, or that fighters prevented residents from leaving buildings or areas which had been commandeered by militants'.

But the report said in several cases Israeli soldiers used Palestinian civilians, including children, as 'human shields, endangering their lives by forcing them to remain in or near houses which they took over and used as military positions'.

Fayyad meets Washington officials in push for settlement halt

Media Outlet: Ma'an News Agency

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.maannews.net/en/index.php?opr=ShowDetails&ID=38976> ^[8]

Bethlehem - Ma'an - Palestinian caretaker Prime Minister Salam Fayyad was in Washington this week meeting with high-level officials in an effort to push the American administration to act on its request that Israel halt settlement construction.

Fayyad met with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner, Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, National Security Advisor General James Jones, as well as Congressional leaders.

His meeting with Clinton focused on the 'importance of insisting that Israel implement its obligations, specifically a complete halt to settlement activity and incursions, as outlined in the Road Map,' the Prime Minister's office in Ramallah said in a statement.

Throughout his meetings Fayyad is said to have maintained his position that the halt to settlement construction is a 'prelude to a serious and balanced political process which should lead to the end of the Israeli occupation.'

'U.S. can't get Arabs to commit to normal Israel ties'

Article Author(s): Matthew Lee

Article Author(s): Cnaan Liphshiz

Media Outlet: Haaretz

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1097224.html> ^[9]

The U.S. administration has not been successful in securing commitments from Arab countries to take steps toward normalizing relations with Israel, a senior source in Jerusalem said Wednesday.

The source said U.S. President Barack Obama's recent meeting with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia did not produce a commitment to encourage the other Arab states to begin normalization.

"In such a situation, the Americans can't continue demanding gestures only from Israel, such as the demand that Israel freeze settlement construction," the source said.

In response, a senior White House source said talks with the Arab states are continuing with the aim of obtaining a commitment to make gestures toward Israel, and there is still hope for progress.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak returned to Israel on Wednesday from a meeting with U.S. Mideast envoy George Mitchell. A senior White House official confirmed reports that progress was made on the issue of settlements, though no agreement had been reached. He added that similar progress had been made in contacts with Arab countries.

Haaretz has learned that the talks with Mitchell included discussions of a package deal to include a curb on settlement construction. Barak reportedly argued that any steps taken by Israel would have to be accompanied by assurances that the Arab states would also move forward. This would lay the groundwork for resumed talks on a final regional peace agreement.

Within the next two weeks or so, Mitchell is expected to visit Israel to continue talks.

A senior diplomatic source said that even if a meeting between Mitchell and the prime minister doesn't resolve the settlement issue, it will narrow the gap, and the prime minister may request a meeting with Obama in Washington in the coming months to seal an agreement.

Barak noted that if a package deal is reached, Israel might agree to a temporary construction freeze in the settlements, but this would not apply to more than 2,000 housing units already being built.

Also yesterday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke at the traditional Independence Day reception at the residence of the American ambassador, James Cunningham. Netanyahu spoke of shared values with the United States but did not address the settlement issue. Although many senior Israeli politicians attended the event, turnout was lighter than usual.

By attending, Knesset members ignored the call by Likud MK Danny Danon, who wrote a letter to his parliamentary colleagues this week urging them to boycott the event. He said America "was trying to call into question the State of Israel's independence" by pressuring it to halt construction in the West Bank and agree to territorial concessions to the Palestinians.

A senior diplomat said he was puzzled by the logic behind Danon's proposal. He said that despite any disagreements, the event was meant to honor the American people, not any administration.

In his address, Netanyahu highlighted the democratic traditions of Israel and the United States, which he

said united them in the face of tyranny. Referring to Obama's recent speech in Cairo, he noted the president's reference to the unbreakable bond between Israel and the United States.

Without any tricks

Article Author(s): Shaul Arieli

Media Outlet: Haaretz

Article Type: Opinion

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1097241.html> ^[10]

The repeated demands by Barack Obama and the Europeans for a freeze on settlement construction reveals that Benjamin Netanyahu's promise - that Israel will neither build new settlements nor expropriate land for the benefit of the settlements - is nothing more than an effort to throw sand in the public's eyes.

Customary international law gives occupied nations an absolute right to the ownership of their land, so land cannot be expropriated. Israel's practice of expropriating land in accordance with Jordanian law is permissible only if the land is taken for a purpose that serves the public. Only once has Israel expropriated land for the sake of establishing a settlement - 30,000 dunams (some 7,500 acres) for Ma'aleh Adumim. But after applying Israeli law to East Jerusalem, Israel expropriated one-third of the 70,000 dunams it annexed for the sake of building new Jewish neighborhoods.

An occupying power is entitled to seize land temporarily for defined security needs, after paying compensation to the owners, but this does not give it any property rights to the land. Once the security need has passed, the land must be returned to its owners.

Israel made use of this loophole between 1967 and 1979, issuing "military seizure orders" for some 50,000 dunams for "security needs." It then established settlements on this land, such as Kiryat Arba and Beit El. But the High Court of Justice's ruling in the Elon Moreh case, which overturned a military seizure order and ordered 5,000 dunams returned to the village of Rujib, closed this loophole.

In part, this was thanks to the testimony of Menachem Felix, one of the leaders of the Gush Emunim settlement movement: "Basing the seizure order on security grounds ... can have only one interpretation: making the settlement temporary and fleeting. We utterly reject this frightening conclusion We all see Elon Moreh as a permanent community, no less so than Degania or Tel Aviv." After that, Menachem Begin's government decided that settlements would henceforth be built only on "state lands."

Israel's initial land reserve, through 1979, stemmed from its declaration as state lands- in an order issued immediately after the Six-Day War - of some 700,000 dunams that had been registered as belonging to the government of Jordan. Between 1980 and 1984, Israel declared another 800,000 dunams as state lands, bringing the total amount of land at its disposal to about 25 percent of the West Bank. Most of the settlements were established on these lands.

Thus Israel does not need any further expropriations or declarations of state land. The built-up area of all the settlements combined, with their 294,000 inhabitants, does not exceed 60,000 dunams, or 1 percent of the West Bank. There are hundreds of empty apartments in these settlements. And the settlements still have another 350,000 dunams available for building, based on their master plans and their municipal

boundaries, which encompass 550,000 dunams in total.

Netanyahu also does not really need to establish new settlements; he only needs to finish "laundering" the outposts established before March 2001, when Ariel Sharon became prime minister. Israel only promised to evacuate 24 outposts that were established after that date, out of a total of about 100. And Netanyahu could not launder the remaining outposts in any case, because most of them were built wholly or partially on private Palestinian land.

In negotiations on a final-status agreement, it would be possible to reach understandings with the United States and the Palestinians on the completion of projects that are almost finished - for instance, in Ma'aleh Adumim - and new construction within the built-up areas of certain settlements, mainly Modi'in Ilit and Betar Ilit, which abut the Green Line. But to demand more than that in exchange for Netanyahu's speech at Bar-Ilan University - for instance, the trick of relocating Migron settlers to Adam or "high-rise construction" - looks like an attempt to put one over on the Americans. And the Americans are quite familiar with the Sasson and Spiegel reports on the settlements and outposts.

The writer is a member of the board of the Council for Peace and Security and one of the founders of the Geneva Initiative.

Merkel: Settlements endanger two-state deal

Media Outlet: Reuters

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3740370,00.html> ^[11]

German Chancellor Angela Merkel demanded on Thursday that Israeli settlement building in the West Bank stop, saying it endangered efforts to achieve a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

"I think it is now important to get commitments from all sides and that includes the issue of settlement building," Merkel said in a speech to the Bundestag lower house of parliament.

"I am convinced that there must be a stop to this. Otherwise we will not come to the two-state solution that is urgently needed."

Merkel's remarks are in line with the positions of the EU and the US, but were unusually clear-cut for the German leader, who regularly cites her country's special obligation to Israel because of the Nazi Holocaust, in which six million Jews perished.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has said US-backed peace talks with Israel cannot resume until all settlement activity has ceased on occupied land the Palestinians want for a state.

Washington has also called for a total halt to settlement building in the West Bank, a demand that has opened the most serious rift in US-Israeli relations in a decade.

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said on Wednesday that Israel would consider a limited moratorium on new settlement construction, but said it should be part of a broader deal bringing Arab states into the peace process.

'Send strong message to Iran'

In her speech, Merkel also addressed Iran, saying she wanted next week's G8 summit to send a strong signal to the Islamic Republic, but also stressed it was important to keep open the possibility of talks on its nuclear program.

Group of Eight (G8) leaders will meet in L'Aquila, Italy on July 8-10, a month after hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected in a vote the opposition has denounced as a fraud. Tehran has cracked down on protesters, jailing many and accusing the West of fomenting unrest.

"I hope the meeting sends a strong message of unity, a united message that the right to demonstrate and human rights cannot be separated and that they apply to Iran," Merkel said.

"I strongly support President (Barack) Obama's offer to Iran of direct talks. We will accompany this in a united way. We cannot drop the issue of a nuclear-armed Iran just because of the current situation. That would be completely wrong."

The West accuses Iran of using a nuclear research program as a cover for developing nuclear weapons. Iran denies the accusation and says the work is intended for peaceful generation of electrical energy.

"The leadership in Iran must know that if they choose a path of reason, then we want Iran to develop prosperously," Merkel said.

"But if this is not the case, we will not shy away from stating our opinions and showing solidarity with those, including members of the British embassy, that have been put under pressure."

Abbas: Hamas hoarding weapons in plot to assassinate PA officials

Article Author(s): Ali Waked

Media Outlet: Ynetnews

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3740121,00.html> ^[12]

The Palestinian Authority has intelligence indicating Hamas is planning to attack its officials, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Wednesday. Abbas' statement follows the announcement made earlier this week by the PA, in which it confirmed that members of a Hamas cell were arrested, and later confessed to plotting to carry out attacks against Palestinian Authority officials and institutions before July 7th ? the date Fatah and Hamas are expected to sign a reconciliation agreement.

In an interview with Russian television, Abbas said: "The Palestinian Authority is closely monitoring the situation, and when the time is right we will expose those involved in this affair. For now we must wait. We have verified information that Hamas is hoarding weapons and explosives. The Authority has found two tons of explosives belonging to Hamas."

The Palestinian president said that Hamas was also amassing light, medium and heavy arms, machine guns, RPG launchers, and presidential guard uniforms. "We are monitoring the situation, we know there is

a cell seeking to carry out assassinations of senior PA officials."

Abbas stressed that the PA was not carrying out politically-motivated arrests of Hamas men, but just detaining those seeking to harm its security. He implied he was pessimistic that the reconciliation talks with Hamas would succeed.

As for the peace process with Israel, Abbas said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu must honor the commitments made by previous governments. According to Abbas, the conditions Netanyahu laid out in his Bar Ilan University speech for the creation of a Palestinian state would hollow the essence of that state.

Abbas also said he was awaiting a date for the planned peace summit in Moscow. "We are not interested in new venues, we only want the Israeli side to commit to what the international community is committed to," he said.

The one-state solution

Article Author(s): Yigal Sarna

Media Outlet: Ynetnews

Article Type: Opinion

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3739891,00.html> ^[13]

One of these days, an American president will tell us: One state. After three more premiership terms, during which Netanyahu will return to power time and again in the wake of resounding failures, President Eduardo S. Gonzales will arrive here from Washington. The son of Cuban immigrants, Gonzales will stand up on top of the Masada, and with Elie Wiesel and China's president by his side declare his unequivocal support for one state. Yet Bibi, boasting great experience and shaking because of his age, concerns, and anxiety, will insist: Only two states.

However, President Gonzales will be fed up with promises and deception by then. Before his arrival, he would go through the White House library and look into the many variations of the two-state vision and the attempts to implement and thwart it ever since the 1947 partition decision, and the Arab liberation army, and Ben Gurion. He will look into the Israeli objections, violated agreements, the settlers, the long forgotten Oslo Accords, and the historical West Bank wall whose remnants can still be seen on some hills in the wake the great earthquake.

And President Gonzales will then say: One state for all. If my Cuban parents managed to get along, in Florida Beach, with your retired grandparents and with Seinfeld's annoying father, there is no reason why the hell Israelis and Palestinians cannot get along here, after spilling each other's blood for 100 years.

One state. Lieberman's daughter will be the education minister while Abbas' son will be the national infrastructure minister. One Hebrew-Arabic speaking state, with a rotation at the Defense Ministry and two presidents ? Barghouti and Peres.

Yet Bibi will again declare: Only two states. He will then recall the many tricks and shticks and lies that we perfected over a period of 100 years, as masters of survival. How to say ?yes? but not do it. How to remove a roadblock and set up two instead. How to thwart any attempt for two states and live as if we are

alone, with four million transparent Palestinians, in a state we established from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River with the help of the various settlers.

What are we going to do with all this accumulation of slyness premised on not trusting anyone and living without security among watch towers and barbed wire, interrogation cells and walls of separation? And now all of a sudden we need to accept one state?

Shared memory of trauma

It won't happen, Bibi will vow. Only two states. I don't have the political power to pass a dramatic decision such as the one-state solution.

But everything is ready, President Gonzales will say. You've been living together since 1967. You insisted. You clung on. You built the roads. You removed the old fences. You returned to the gravesites of your forefathers. There are no greater experts than you when it comes to the Palestinians, their way of life, and their family ties.

All that's left is the issue of equal rights and a bit more coordination and integration in respect to your security forces. Major Generals Jibril and Kochavi will work it out.

You have a wonderful basis for a shared life, Gonzales will say. Each side is intimately familiar with the other side's lies. Your zealots are similar; the ones at the mosques and the ones at the synagogues. You have a Loyalty Law that would prevent foreigners from infiltrating your joint state.

You also share the memory of the trauma and the bad times you went through during the conflict, which we shall refer to as your 100-year civil war; you both possess deep understanding of the march of folly that took place here.

At the end of his speech, the American president will quote a line from a poem by David Avidan and another one from a poem by Mahmoud Darwish. He will then present a two-year framework for dismantling the old structures and establishing one state: Israpalestine.

Agreements must be honored

Article Author(s): Dov Weissglass

Media Outlet: Ynetnews

Date: July 2, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3740136,00.html> ^[14]

On May 1 and 16, 2003, during discussions of Israel's reservations in respect to the Road Map initiative, it was agreed that there will be no construction at Jewish communities in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, with the exception of existing communities. These words were uttered, agreed upon, and documented in the records of the talks kept at the Prime Minister's Office. I'm sure that an efficient search will reveal the parallel American records.

This is how most day-to-day diplomatic activity takes place: Talks between the authorized representatives of states, followed by a verbal agreement recorded in real-time by one or several of those present, and the documentation that reflects the agreements.

Regular diplomatic contacts and the understandings reached through them only rarely result in a detailed contract that includes an introduction as well as numbered clauses and paragraphs. And this is precisely how the above-mentioned agreement was secured, as an exception to the general construction freeze decree in the Road Map.

The agreement was brought to the public's attention in Israel and abroad on December 18, 2003. In the Herzliya speech, which for the first time presented the Gaza disengagement plan, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon detailed the substance of the agreement that is now shrouded in controversy. This is what he said at the time: "Israel will deliver on all its obligations, including on the matter of settlement construction. There will be no construction beyond the existing construction lines. There will be no land confiscations meant for construction, no special economic incentives, and there is no construction of special settlements."

The text of the speech was read, analyzed, and carefully studied everywhere, and especially in the United States. Yet nobody, either here or there, stood up or protested: "What construction? What agreement?" The speech was met with loud applause, among others by the US ambassador to Israel at the time who was among the guests of honor at the Herzliya Conference, and who recently made a point of denying the existence of the agreement in an article he wrote.

Embarrassing position

The US Administration's current position on the matter is embarrassing, to say the least. Talk such as "there was never such agreement," "these were only verbal understandings," or "if there was an agreement, it was violated by Israel, and in any case it should be annulled given the changing circumstances" is reminiscent of a person who at court claims that he never signed a promissory note, while at the same time arguing that he already paid it in full a long time ago.

The current secretary of state went as far as declaring that no mention of the agreement can be found in the Administration's records. A former senior White House official, Elliot Abrams, wrote recently that Clinton is wrong, and that an agreement was reached. "I was there," he noted in a Wall Street Journal article last week.

Indeed, there was an agreement, which was documented (at least in Israeli records) and publically announced. We should also keep in mind that a verbal agreement is one that must be honored, as long as there is substantial evidence of such agreement's existence. Moreover, nothing fundamental has changed in the past six years that justifies the annulment of the agreement.

The Administration's denials are not only unfair and unjust; they are also unwise. The Arab-Israeli conflict is replete with suspicions. Once final-status peace treaties are secured, they will require many American guarantees and obligations, especially in respect to long-term security arrangements. Without these, it is doubtful whether an agreement can be reached.

Yet if decision-makers in Israel (or elsewhere) discover, heaven forbid, that an American pledge is only valid as long as the president in question is in office, nobody will want such pledges. The ancient rule whereby "agreements must be honored" is the basis for the existence of the social and political order in the world.

For that reason, we must note the following: Israel's right for limited construction in Judea and Samaria communities, within existing construction lines, was agreed upon as an exception to the construction freeze clause in the Road Map. And as agreements must be honored, Israel too must remove any doubt

regarding its adherence to the Road Map. The obligation to honor agreements applies to Israel as well

Wexler: Israel will freeze settlements

Article Author(s): Herb Keinon

Media Outlet: The Jerusalem Post

Date: July 1, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1246443695869&pagename=JPost%2FJPAr...>

[15]

Israel would lose nothing, and potentially gain everything, by agreeing to a temporary moratorium on construction in the settlements for a short period of time, Congressman Robert Wexler, a close political ally of US President Barack Obama and a stalwart Israel supporter, told The Jerusalem Post on Wednesday.

Wexler, on his third visit to Israel since December, met with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on Wednesday, a day after Defense Minister Ehud Barak and US Middle East envoy George Mitchell met in New York and decided that the discussion over settlement construction would continue.

"A request for a moratorium or freeze in settlement activity that can be mutually agreed upon by the US and Israel in the next several weeks is a tiny, tiny gesture and down payment to make when you look at potentially what is on the other side of the equation," said Wexler.

On other side of the equation, he said, were 22 Arab countries being urged by the US to take significant steps now towards normalization with Israel.

"I want to call their bluff," Wexler said. "I want to see, if Israel makes substantial movement toward a credible peace process, whether they are willing to do it. And if they are not, better that we should find out five or six months into the process, before Israel is actually asked to compromise any significant position."

Asked what would happen if Israel were to say no to the moratorium request, Wexler said, "I don't think Israel will say no. I don't see an equation where it is in Israel's interest to say no, so I believe Israel will say yes, under a certain set of qualifications that Israel will agree to. This is one hundred percent in Israel's national security interest."

Regarding the types of "qualifications," Wexler said that that was up to the Israeli prime minister to decide.

"Any process of discussion requires compromise, particularly amongst friends and allies if they are coming from different points," he said, adding that every reasonable actor in the process understands that in a political dynamic there must be give and take.

Wexler bewailed that while the US demands on Israel were highlighted in the Israeli press, Washington's demands on the Arab world were not gaining similar attention.

According to Wexler, the Obama administration was making "equal, if not greater, demands on the Arab world in the context of starting the process and negotiations."

Wexler said that the demands on the Arab world - Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and the North African Arab states - were quite substantial in terms of steps of normalization. He said what was being discussed were

trade offices, direct economic links, cultural and educational exchanges and over-fly rights for Israeli air carriers.

Moreover, he said the US was "open to suggestions from the Israeli side as to all the different indicators of normalization that would be important for Israel and that would create credibility among the Israeli public."

An Israeli settlement moratorium could go a long way toward moving that normalization process ahead, he said.

When asked why the Arab world couldn't first show signs of a willingness to normalize before Israel declares a moratorium, Wexler characterized such a demand as "childish."

Wexler, a liberal Democratic congressman from South Florida who was the first high-profile Jewish politician outside of Illinois to endorse Obama's presidential candidacy in 2007, said Obama was asking Israel for a moratorium on settlements, and a relaxing of conditions in the West Bank consistent with Israel's security requirements, in exchange for the Palestinians' adhering to their security conditions and responsibilities, and the Arab world being given a set of responsibilities that has not been given in the past.

"And if the Arab world fails to deliver," Wexler said, "you can rightly say that all bets are off."

Wexler dismissed concerns that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas was waiting for Obama to "deliver" Israel while the PA made no conciliatory steps, saying that if he did believe that, he was disabused of the notion by Obama's positive response to Netanyahu's speech last month at Bar-Ilan University.

"If in fact the Palestinians believed that the American posture was that they didn't have to do anything, and the Americans would take care of this, then I think they learned the hard way," he said.

Wexler was also dismissive of the notion that the US was pushing Israel hard on the settlement issue as a way of bringing down the Netanyahu government.

"The president of the US does not have a view, or an opinion, or either a tactical or strategic posture on the government of Israel," he said. "The idea that the president, or anyone in any position of responsibility in Washington, is designing a process to undermine the policy or position or standing of the government of Israel is absurd."

Channel 1 reported last night that according to an Israeli source, Obama would be announcing his Mideast peace plan within a month.

Netanyahu on Wednesday night called Israel's bond with the United States "unbreakable."

"We have a brave relationship with the United States, a bond that President Obama himself defined as unbreakable; Indeed, our bond with the US is unbreakable," Netanyahu said, speaking at the US Independence Day reception at the American ambassador's residence in Herzliya.

Netanyahu went on to praise the US, calling the country a model for freedom and values.

In an allusion to the Iranian nuclear program, Netanyahu said freedom has usually triumphed over repressive regimes, but warned that the world order could break down if tyrannical regimes obtain weapons of mass destruction.

"The greatest danger facing our world today is that this historical consistency of the triumph and spread of

democracy could change if the world's worst regimes acquire the world's most dangerous weapons," he said.

Netanyahu did not mention Iran, but he has often warned against allowing Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Iran has denied it is pursuing nuclear weapons.

The prime minister went on to stress that the State of Israel and its citizens deeply appreciate the US, noting that several of Jerusalem's streets are named after former US presidents.

US Ambassador to Israel James Cunningham also mentioned the strong bond to Israel, and said the US is committed to the security of Israel and to the security of Israel's citizens.

Settlers hope PM won't yield to US

Article Author(s): Tovah Lazaroff

Media Outlet: The Jerusalem Post

Date: July 1, 2009

Source Link(s): <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1246443696726&pagename=JPost%2FJPAr...>

[16]

Settlers leaders on Wednesday promised to lobby against any concessions that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu might consider making to the Americans on the issue of settlement construction, when he meets with US Mideast envoy George Mitchell in the next few weeks.

"We have two weeks to work with," said Dani Dayan, who heads the Council of Jewish Communities of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. He added that the council was seeking a meeting with Netanyahu.

He warned that by formally imposing a construction freeze on any Jewish area of the West Bank, Israel would be making a statement regarding the tenuous status of that area.

"If every part of Judea and Samaria was frozen, it would mean that in a final status [agreement] it would not be part of Israel. [In effect], Israel would have created a Palestinian state even before the negotiations have started," Dayan said.

Gush Etzion Regional Council head Shaul Goldstein, a member of the Likud, said that if Netanyahu did not start supporting settlement construction by approving new building permits, something that has not happened since November, he would find opposition within his own party. In the Knesset plenum, he said, MKs would form voting blocs against Netanyahu.

Likud MK Danny Dannon said there was a lot of pressure on the prime minister, both from within his own party and in the wider coalition, including Israel Beiteinu and Shas, to authorize building permits in the settlements.

"In the next two weeks Netanyahu has to decide what path he wants to take," Dannon said.

He warned that if the prime minister stopped construction and continued to freeze permits, he would find himself in hot water within his own coalition.

They spoke with The Jerusalem Post as Defense Minister Ehud Barak traveled back to Israel from New

York, where he met with Mitchell to discuss the peace process and the American demand that Israel freeze all settlement activity as part of that process.

As he traveled, Israel Radio broadcast an interview with Barak in which he said, "It is true that there has been an expectation created that everything will stop, on the other hand, Netanyahu is not far from that."

"The prime minister said specifically in his speech [at Bar-Ilan University on June 14] that we are not going to create new settlements, we will not begin new projects such as a new neighborhood," nor will Israel expropriate land for new construction, Barak said.

"What is left here is the question of what to do with the buildings that are under construction," he said.

He said Israel was close to an understanding with the US on settlements that he stressed was part of a regional comprehensive peace effort.

"We focused mainly on the need for a comprehensive regional agreement," Barak told Israel Radio. "That includes other Arab states which have something to give to Israel, not just to take."

The comprehensive effort would also include strengthening Palestinian institutions, and the settlement issue, while being "very important," had to be "taken into proportion," he said.

So much focus was being drawn to the issue of settlements that they were gaining a symbolic significance, Barak said.

In some portions of the interview he struck a more conciliatory tone toward the settlers.

America, he said, understood that it could not stop Israel from building a kindergarten in an area where one was needed.

Most of the construction within settlements in Judea and Samaria was happening in the larger cities of Modi'in Illit, Betar Illit and Ma'aleh Adumim, which offered people affordable housing, he said.

Rebel lawmakers in Barak's Labor Party attacked him for going too far to the Right in his meeting with Mitchell.

MK Eitan Cabel, who opposed Labor joining Netanyahu's government, said there unfortunately was no difference in ideology between Barak and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman of Israel Beiteinu.

Cabel said he was leaning toward forcing a meeting of Labor's executive committee to protest his party chairman's behavior. In a strongly-worded letter to Barak, Cabel accused him of defending the settlers in New York and said this was not the job of the leader of the Labor Party.

"I was shocked to see in the newspapers that a man who has a job previously occupied by leaders of the peace camp has become the national whitewasher of the settlements that we in Labor have always considered an obstacle to peace," Cabel wrote. "You have become the representative of the government's rejectionist policies to the nations of the world and the most enthusiastic PR flack of the settlers."

Cabel also slammed Barak for not dismantling outposts, for building homes in settlements for residents of outposts, and for trying to trick the international community into sanctioning West Bank building under the guise of natural growth.

"Is this what you meant when you said you wanted Labor to have influence from inside the government?"

Cabel asked Barak in the letter. "Each day I am more convinced that the Labor convention's decision to join Netanyahu and Lieberman's right-wing, extremist government was one of Labor's darkest hours. A party that lacks ideology and that implements policies foreign to it may have no right to exist."

But Samaria Regional Council head Gershon Mesika had no problem placing Barak on the left.

He said Barak spoke as if the right wing had not won the election, and he called on Netanyahu to "put him in his place."

Goldstein added, "It is strange what is happening here. Netanyahu is throwing the ball to Barak and Barak is throwing it to Netanyahu."

This is the only place in the world where people talk freely about freezing development, Mesika said. "We have to remind ourselves that settlers also have human rights."

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