



Published on *The American Task Force on Palestine* (<http://www.americantaskforce.org>)

[Home](#) > [Printer-friendly PDF](#) > [Printer-friendly PDF](#)

Madam Secretary?s Middle East

Richard Cohen

The New York Times (Opinion)

November 15, 2010 - 12:00am

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/opinion/16iht-edcohen.html?_r=2&ref=opinion [1]

November 16, 2010

Article Author(s): Richard Cohen

Media Outlet: The New York Times

Article Type: Opinion

Date: November 15, 2010

Source Link(s): http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/opinion/16iht-edcohen.html?_r=2&ref=opinion [2]

LONDON ? I like the look of President Barack Obama?s new Middle East envoy, a person with broad experience, the trust of Israelis, growing support among West Bank Palestinians and a fierce personal conviction that a peace accord is essential not only for the parties but for United States national security.

Damon Winter/The New York Times

Roger Cohen

[Go to Columnist Page »](#)

[Related](#)

Times Topic: Hillary Rodham Clinton

[Readers' Comments](#)

[Share your thoughts.](#)

[Post a Comment »](#)

[Read All Comments \(17\) »](#)

The surprise appointment reflects the need to bring maximum heft to U.S. mediation efforts at a time when Obama himself, major international powers and the Palestinian government led by Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad have all set a target of achieving Palestinian statehood by the second half of 2011.

You missed the announcement? Well it was made so quietly, more through osmosis than anything, that overlooking the change was easy. So here?s the administration?s Middle East shift: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has taken charge.

Oh, I know, George Mitchell, the special envoy who has labored since early 2009, endures.

But the heavy lifting is now in Clinton's hands. Officials in Washington, Jerusalem and Ramallah tell me that the secretary of state will lead what her husband recently called the attempt to "finish Rabin's work."

"She's not insecure about Israel, she will call the shots as she sees them," a senior U.S. official said. "And she would not be engaged if she did not feel there was a way to get there."

Clinton's new role was evident last week. During a video conference with Fayyad, she announced \$150 million in direct U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority (and said America was "deeply disappointed" by "counterproductive" Israeli housing plans in East Jerusalem). The next day she went into nearly eight hours of talk with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that opened the negotiations door a crack.

Before I get to that, some background. The Clinton of today is not the Clinton of a decade ago. Compare that sharp criticism of Israel's East Jerusalem building with her 1999 position that Jerusalem is "the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel." Somewhere in the past decade her conviction hardened that the state of Palestine is achievable, inevitable and compatible with Israeli security.

"A bit of an epiphany," in the words of one aide, came in March 2009 on the road to Ramallah. "We drove in a motorcade and you could see the settlements high up, and the brutality of it was so stark," this aide said. "Everyone got quite silent and as we approached Ramallah there were these troops in berets. They were so professional, we thought at first they were Israel Defense Forces. But, no, they were Palestinians, this completely professional outfit, and it was clear this was something new."

That "something" is fundamental: the transition from a self-pitying, self-dramatizing Palestinian psyche, with all the cloying accoutrements of victimhood, to a self-affirming culture of pragmatism and institution-building. The shift is incomplete. But it has won Clinton over. And it's powerful enough to pose a whole new set of challenges to Israel: Palestine is serious now.

Another moment came in September 2010 when Clinton held a meeting with Fayyad that threw her schedule off because it ran so long. Fayyad is Mr. Self-Empowerment, the Palestinian who, at last, has put facts before "narrative," growth before grumbling, roads before ranting, and security before everything. Clinton, I was told, has "strong views" on Fayyad. She said last week she had "great confidence" in him.

Clinton has been a darling of Israelis since her early days as a senator for New York. That distinguishes her from Obama, who is mistrusted in Israel, and it gives her leverage. Her Palestinian convictions are more recent but intense. She gets how negotiations must move in tandem with Palestinian change on the ground.

If anyone can persuade Israel that its self-interest involves self-criticism, that occupation is corrosive, that its long-term security demands compromise, and that a new Palestine is emerging, it's Clinton. If anyone can persuade Palestinians that self-pitying unilateralism ("Help us! Recognize an occupied state!") is the way of the past and a road to nowhere, it's Clinton.

I haven't talked about the 90-day extension of Israel's moratorium on settlement building that Clinton seems to have engineered. It's positive but a detail. Some looming big issues are

obvious: borders, Jerusalem, refugees. Others are less predictable but potentially explosive.

First: The latest Fatah-Hamas reconciliation efforts in Damascus have failed, defeated by differences on security. Fatah itself is beset by sharp divisions ? over President Mahmoud Abbas?s leadership and the peace effort. Can Palestinians keep their eye on the prize this time?

Second: New U.S. security guarantees provided to Israel include 20 fighter jets. But what of Iran? Netanyahu wants Obama to build a credible military threat. Ascendant Republicans bay for war. Clinton has to persuade Israel the best way to disarm Iran is by removing the core of Tehran?s propaganda ? the plight of stateless Palestinians.

Third: Netanyahu is tight with the Republicans who now control the House. He feels stronger vis-à-vis Obama. His temptation to play for time will grow as 2012 draws closer.

But time is not in Israel?s favor: Just look what happened to Hillary Clinton over the past decade and extrapolate from that.

TAGS: [East Jerusalem](#) ^[3][Diplomacy](#) ^[4][Peace Negotiations](#) ^[5][Settlements](#) ^[6][U.S.-Israel Relations](#) ^[7]

[Events](#) | [Daily News](#) | [About Us](#) | [Resources](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Donate](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

[!\[\]\(e474458956c9a37fbf9586ddb60a7fa1_img.jpg\) Front Page Features](#) [!\[\]\(4d1d3f2547aeece54bb6babd23f4121b_img.jpg\) World Press Roundup](#) [!\[\]\(ec45aa71601db5755c5e2662ad427708_img.jpg\) ATFP in the News](#) [!\[\]\(8f6ad92394b094baf6a51f98af6c5abc_img.jpg\) Policy and Analysis](#)
[!\[\]\(f9f9ea03f3583772c68aa68b93940c29_img.jpg\) Briefing Summaries](#)

Source URL (retrieved on Dec 15 2019 - 7:22pm):

http://www.americantaskforce.org/daily_news_article/2010/11/15/1289797200_9

Links:

[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/opinion/16iht-edcohen.html?_r=2&ref=opinion

[2] http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/opinion/16iht-edcohen.html?_r=2&ref=opinion

[3] http://www.americantaskforce.org/east_jerusalem_0

[4] <http://www.americantaskforce.org/diplomacy>

[5] http://www.americantaskforce.org/peace_negotiations

[6] <http://www.americantaskforce.org/settlements>

[7] http://www.americantaskforce.org/usisrael_relations