

A Requiem for Peoplehood

By Daniel Gordis The Jerusalem Post November 27, 2009

"It never even occurred to me that the Jews were a people." I had just finished speaking on Shabbat morning at a traditional shul on Long Island. The talk had been about the nation-state and its roots in the Book of Genesis. Along the way, I'd made some comments about the changing nature of American Jewish life today, and the much-reduced role that peoplehood now plays in American Jews' sense of self.

After services, someone told me that members of the liberal synagogue across the street had come to hear the talk. Ouch. I'd been rather direct about the dangers of liberal American Judaism's diminishing the role of peoplehood in Jewish life, and worried that I might have offended the visitors. But it turns out that they were more intrigued than anything else.

One woman said that the idea that the Jews were a people had never occurred to her. Another person remarked that peoplehood was an interesting idea, but warned that if Jews are a people, "... you're going to cut 40% of my congregation out of the picture."

Almost without our noticing, American Jewish life is being dramatically redefined. Especially among the young and the liberal, American Judaism is being recreated in the model of American Protestantism.

Christianity is not about peoplehood. "The Christian People" is a meaningless phrase. Judaism, like Protestantism, has become a faith system, a purely personal - and highly individual - means of constructing meaning in our world.

Judaism as a faith system, of course, is nothing new. But from time immemorial, we have also seen ourselves as a people. From the moment that Pharaoh refers to the Jews as "the people, the Children of Israel" (Exodus 1:9), it is clear even to our enemies that Abraham's clan has morphed into a nation. For millennia, rank-and-file Jews understood this. We cultivated bonds of mutual obligation, even when we profoundly disagreed, even when our faith wore thin. Kol Yisrael areivim zeh la-zeh, all Jews are responsible one for another, the tradition has long insisted.

And it actually worked. It was peoplehood that got American college students to wage a relentless battle to free Soviet Jews, with whom they had virtually nothing obvious in common.

It was due to peoplehood that IAF pilots flew converted cargo planes into an Ethiopian civil war in

order to save people of a different race, a radically different faith system and virtually no shared history, bringing them to Israel in Operation Solomon.

And it is peoplehood that has continually led American Jews - despite their absolute disinterest in making aliya and their profound differences with Israel about conversion policy and the peace process - to support Israel both financially and politically.

This move away from peoplehood will continue as intermarriage becomes more common. Flourishing marriages, after all, are possible even when spouses disagree about important issues. And therefore, in the logic of young American Jews, there's nothing terribly illogical about my choosing to spend my life with someone who's not Jewish.

After all, on a host of issues, I have my opinions and she has hers. So, too, in religious life. I have my synagogue and she has hers. I believe my beliefs, and she has hers. But peoplehood? If I'm a member of a people, then there's actually a yawning chasm between us. And since she has no interest in becoming Jewish, it's Judaism - and not she - that must change. Consciously or not, I sense that Judaism must be redefined - as a faith system, a personal odyssey, as "my Judaism," to use a problematic phrase now popular among American Jews.

As anything but a people. Yet without peoplehood at the core of American Jewish life, devotion to Israel becomes a choice, not an instinct, as it used to be. Young American Jews look with horror at the suffering of Palestinians, and decide that this conflict is simply not theirs.

One of the founders of Fast for Gaza (www.fastforgaza.net) wrote recently that "unlike previous generations, [today's young American Jews] don't necessarily understand their Judaism in traditionally tribal terms anymore. ... Rather, they are increasingly viewing their Jewishness against a larger, more universal global reality. In short, to be a Jew and a global citizen is what gives them 'goose bumps.'"

This writer himself admits - the new, personal, less "tribal" (i.e., less peoplehood-oriented) Judaism is more animated by global citizenship than by a sense of Jewish responsibility. (That's why they fast for Gazans, and not for Israelis under Gaza rocket fire or for Gilad Schalit, I assume.) From afar, it would seem that there is little that Israel and Israelis can do to influence this seismic shift. But the

dangers to Israel's security as a result of this change are obvious.

Something must be done. One idea for starters: Recent studies show that a quick trip on Birthright has lasting implications for Jewish identification, and dramatically lowers intermarriage rates, for example. It's because in Israel, Jews encounter peoplehood, with all its problems, but also with its triumphs.

It's time to take the Birthright concept and expand it. Two-thirds of Canadian Jews and 75 percent of Australian and French Jews have been to Israel, but about two-thirds of American Jews have never even visited. That has to change. Even in this economy, there is more than enough American Jewish money to get the vast majority of American Jews to Israel, to witness first-hand the power of peoplehood and, perhaps, to transform the dangerous, emerging American Jewish sense that attachment to other Jews and their state is a relic of the past.

We know what's at stake. Those people who never even imagined that Jews are a people are the men and women who in a generation will be running the federations, many of America's synagogues and national organizations. They will be setting communal agendas and disbursing American Jews' money. Either they will argue our case on Capitol Hill, or no one will.

We would be fools to imagine that we do not need those American Jews at our side. But we'd be equally foolish to believe that they'll care one whit about us, unless we can restore peoplehood to the central value it used to be.

Saving Israel: How the Jewish People Can Win a War That May Never End addresses in much greater detail the issue of creating an ongoing Zionist conversation in the Jewish State and among the Jewish people.

For One Man, Israel's Big Gas Find Is Bittersweet Victory

By Charles Levinson The Wall Street Journal November 30, 2009

Two natural-gas fields in Israel's Mediterranean waters were found in January to contain enough resources to meet Israel's energy needs for 20 years - a huge find after more than half a century of lackluster carbon exploration here.

Founder of Zion Oil John Brown is a true believer. So much so that he has moved his oil rig to Israel to dig for oil where he says Biblical prophecy tells him to and is hoping to hit it big for himself and his investors.

But for Yossi Langotsky, who for 10 years has been the driving force behind the project, the gusher was a bittersweet victory. He has been drilling holes in the Promised Land for nearly four decades, in a mostly futile search for energy. A month before drilling started on what would become the largest find in Israeli history, his financial backer pulled out. That forced him to relinquish his stake -- today valued at an estimated \$350 million.

"After 60 years of no success in oil exploration here in Israel, a miracle took place, and I lost out 30 days before it happened," says Mr. Langotsky, 75 years old. The pivotal role played by Mr. Langotsky in the historic discovery is undisputed. The two fields are named for his daughter, Dalit, and granddaughter, Tamar.

The fields, which won't start producing gas until 2014, are relatively modest by Mideast standards. But they have already triggered a frenzy in the country's quiet energy industry.

Since January, Israeli oil companies' stocks have soared, some rising as much as tenfold. In 2009, oil companies have invested between five and 10 times as much in Israel exploration as at any point in the

country's history, says Yaakov Mimron, head of Israel's Petroleum Commission.

In recent weeks, two international companies, including Houston-based Noble Energy Inc., which led the team that made the gas find in January, separately began extensive and costly 3D seismic surveys of more offshore prospects. A Noble spokesman said they expect to drill new wells next year.

In the past 60 years, oil companies have drilled about 450 wells, but choked out just 20 million barrels of oil, less than Saudi Arabia churns out in three days. Israel's dearth of oil in a region awash in it became a national joke. "My closest friends laughed at me," says Mr. Langotsky.

Many Israeli oil geologists quit the profession. Many of those who stayed are a touch unconventional by industry standards. The two exploration companies currently drilling for oil onshore in Israel are both run by pious prospectors, one an Orthodox Israeli Jew and the other a born-again evangelical Christian from Texas. They both use a combination of biblical prophecy and sound geological data to decide where to drill.

Mr. Langotsky began his oil career as a graduate student in the late 1950s, studying oil prospects along the Dead Sea. He left the profession when he was called on to serve in the army. He played a prominent role commanding an elite reconnaissance unit that helped capture Jerusalem from the Jordanians in the 1967 war.

After leaving the army in 1979, Mr. Langotsky returned to the oil business. For most of the next two decades he roamed Israel, drilling as many as 60 wells.

In the 1990s, Mr. Langotsky and a handful of others began looking offshore. Israel's fortunes started to turn with a series of moderate-size gas finds in waters off the coast of southern Israel and Gaza. It was then that Mr. Langotsky first turned his attention to a vast tract of territory deep underwater in the Mediterranean Sea, farther offshore than others were looking.

He pitched the prospect to about 100 top international oil firms, he says. They all turned him down, except for Britain's BG Group PLC, which agreed to form a partnership with Israeli companies to study the site. The site was set to drill in 2002, but then the project snagged.

Drilling costs in such deep waters nearly 60 miles offshore would likely reach hundreds of millions of dollars, and the partner firms started squabbling about who would shoulder what percentage of the risk. There were also technical problems. Many international oil companies were wary of working in Israel, for fear of alienating oil-rich Arab governments.

Companies started dropping out, including, in 2005, BG itself. The company said the project wasn't one of its drilling priorities at the time. Eleven different companies were in and out of the project at various times in the nine years it took to start drilling. At last, in 2007, Noble, a midsize Texan oil company, agreed to buy a 35% stake and take over operations.

Since the project's conception in 1999, Mr. Langotsky remained its public face. He convinced new firms and investors to join whenever one dropped out, and lobbied the Israeli government.

"If Yossi had not been there, then things would be looking quite different today," says Charlie Druckman, Israel's petroleum commissioner until 2004.

Early in the project, BG offered Mr. Langotsky the chance to buy a 5% stake. Unable to finance the stake himself, he brought in Israeli billionaire diamond and real-estate magnate Benny Steinmetz, who agreed in 1999 to buy the stake and give Mr. Langotsky one-fifth of his share, Mr. Langotsky said.

But in the summer of 2008, amid the global financial crisis, another infusion of cash was needed to start drilling, and Mr. Steinmetz balked, according to Mr. Langotsky. He said he would no longer invest in the project, relinquishing his 5% stake -- including the share pledged to Mr. Langotsky, according to Mr. Langotsky. Other investors in the project took over the stake.

Mr. Langotsky still had the option to buy a 5% stake, but couldn't find an investor to back him. Soon after, Noble announced the big find at Tamar, followed by the smaller Dalit field -- finds amounting to nearly 1.2 billion barrels of oil equivalent. Mr. Langotsky was left with nothing but bragging rights.

Mr. Langotsky has captured some sympathy from industry colleagues and in the Israeli media. In the Israeli media's portrayal of the situation, Mr. Steinmetz has been vilified. In September, Israel's leading economic newspaper named him most in need of forgiveness for Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of atonement, for leaving Mr. Langotsky in the cold.

Supporters of Mr. Steinmetz say it didn't make sense to continue with a risky, capital-intensive oil venture at a time of global economic uncertainty.

Mr. Langotsky remains defiantly upbeat. The son of early Zionist pioneers who valued duty to country over self, he insists his passionate search for oil was never about the money. "I'm very proud; I feel great," he says. "I am totally disappointed that I failed to keep my rights, but this discovery is one of the greatest achievements of my life."

Please Join the Baltimore Hebrew Institute at Towson University in welcoming Dr. Lawrence H. Schiffman, chair of Judaic Studies at New York University for the Rabbi Dr. Joseph Baumgarten Memorial Lecture. The topic is Decoding Early Judaism. To be held on Sunday December 6 at 4:00 pm at the New Liberal Arts building, Room 4110. RSVP to Michelle Taylor at (410) 704-7118 or mtaylor@towson.edu.

Next, Locusts? The abject failure of the Obama Middle East policy

By Elliott Abrams The Weekly Standard November 16, 2009

Can anything else possibly go wrong for the Obama administration's Middle East policy? In the past ten days, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has twice reversed herself publicly on her attitude toward the Israeli settlements. Palestinians have refused her direct request to rejoin peace talks with Israel, and Palestinian Authority president Abbas has said he will not run for reelection. U.S.-Israel relations are in a state of frozen mistrust. The New York Times and Washington Post, among others, are calling Obama's policy a complete failure--in news stories as well as

editorials. The only thing missing is a plague of locusts.

The policy is indeed a complete failure. In ten months the administration has managed to offend and demoralize Israelis and Palestinians, lose the support of Arab governments, and reduce previously excellent relations with the government of Israel to levels unmatched since the James Baker days. Meanwhile, George Mitchell's trips to the region are increasingly reminiscent of the Colin Powell visits in 2002 and 2003--producing little but embarrassment.

The Israeli "100 percent settlement freeze" and the Arab outreach to Israel, early goals of the Obama team, are now forgotten, as is an early resumption of serious Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

These disasters are mostly the product of an ignorant and belligerent attitude toward Israel and especially its prime minister. The ignorance was most evident in the administration's view that a total construction freeze could be imposed not only in every settlement but in Jerusalem itself. But the U.S. policy was worse: We demanded a freeze that would apply to construction by Jews, but not by Arabs; could any Israeli leader be expected to support such a position? One does not need to be a member of the Knesset to understand that such a freeze was impossible for Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition as it would have been for any Israeli prime minister--but apparently this fact was beyond the understanding of Mitchell, Rahm Emanuel, and all the other "experts" on the Obama team.

The belligerence toward Netanyahu has been evident all along, but is best shown by the refusal to tell Israel's prime minister whether or not the president will see him this coming week when Netanyahu (like the president) addresses the United Jewish Communities annual general assembly in Washington. The Israelis gave the White House weeks of notice that Netanyahu had agreed to speak, would be in town, and hoped to see Obama. The White House reaction has been to keep him twisting in the wind, with news stories several days before his arrival saying the president had not decided yet whether to see Netanyahu.

Think of it: Our closest ally in the region, critical issues at stake (from Iran's nuclear program and the recent Israeli seizure of an Iranian arms shipment meant for Hezbollah to Abbas's announcement), yet the Israelis get no answer. Obama and his "experts" may think they are reminding Netanyahu who is boss, but they are in fact reminding all of us why Israelis no longer trust Obama--and making closer cooperation between the two governments that much harder.

The problems Netanyahu has with Obama pale in comparison with those of the Palestinians, and Abbas's announcement reflects their frustrations. The best example: Obama and Clinton lured Abbas out on the settlements-freeze limb and then sawed it off. When they said a total freeze including Jerusalem was necessary, he of course happily agreed. But when they abandoned that doomed policy and instead began talking of "restraint," he could not climb down.

Abbas has threatened to leave many times before, and it's worth noting that he did not resign. He said he would not seek reelection next year, in elections scheduled for January 24 but highly unlikely to take place then--if ever. So he will be

around for months more, in fact indefinitely if elections keep getting postponed. His statement must be regarded, then, not as a Shermanesque personal denial but as a protest against an American policy that has weakened him and left him high and dry.

Israelis and Palestinians when I visited in October had two main questions: Who is making this Middle East policy, and do they not realize by now that it is a disaster? At least in this, one can say the administration has produced Israeli-Palestinian unity. They are also united in watching warily as the president seems unable to make a decision about Afghanistan. For the Palestinians, this suggests he'll never really take on the Israelis for them, as they thought he might back in January. For the Israelis, it means he'll never take on Iran, and that they may in the end face the Iranian nuclear threat on their own.

They all wonder whether to blame Mitchell or Clinton or Dennis Ross or National Security Adviser Jim Jones or the State Department's Near East bureau, and each individual Israeli and Palestinian has a favorite target. But the answers to their questions seem obvious: It is the president's policy, and no, he does not seem to be aware that it has already failed. While he has backed off from the early targets, he has not changed his attitude toward Israel's government, nor altered his basic approach: to push for negotiations over "core issues" as soon as possible.

And this is the fundamental problem with Obama's policy: Like too many of his predecessors he believes that a solution is at hand if only he can force the parties to the table. There, presumably under American tutelage, they will reach American-style compromises (pragmatic, sensible, realistic) and resolve the dispute, with Nobel Peace Prizes for all. The only question is where the table is: Camp David, Taba, Annapolis, Oslo, perhaps this time Chicago.

This approach undermines the one real hope in the region, which is the practical advances being made in the West Bank. There, the economy is improving, law and order are maintained, the Palestinian Authority is fighting Hamas, Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation is growing, and mobility for the population is increasing. In recent months Israel removed more checkpoints and expanded the hours of the Allenby Bridge to Jordan. It isn't paradise, but it isn't Gaza either, and life is better each year. It could be far better if the Obama administration would abandon its doomed efforts to force an Israeli construction freeze in Jerusalem and an Arab embrace of Israel, and instead ask them all to think of real-world ways to keep improving life in the West Bank. There are many ways this could be done, from further steps to remove Israeli barriers to movement, to reliable and generous Arab financial support.

The way forward does not lie through fancy international conferences, and one idea still mentioned as an Obama option--proposing a final status plan--would be disastrous and unsuccessful. The way for the Palestinians to get a state is to go ahead and build it. If and when the institutions are there and functioning, from police and courts to a parliament, negotiations will reflect that fact. But the argument that settling the borders and removing the Israeli troops must come first is a path to failure. For one thing, Israel will not and should not leave until it is clear that the West Bank can be policed by Palestinians and that the region will not be a source of terrorism against Israel, as Gaza and South Lebanon became when Israel left there. No conference and no treaty can provide such a guarantee; only functioning Palestinian police forces that are already fighting and defeating terror can do so.

Such a practical approach would bring other benefits. It would enhance the status and power of Palestinian moderates who are working to improve life in the West Bank, rather than enhancing the status and power of old PLO officials who thrive on endless, useless negotiating sessions. It would put a premium on practical Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, rather than elevating precisely the final status questions (like Jerusalem or Palestinian refugees) that most bitterly divide them. It would increase the gap between the West Bank and Gaza, thereby showing Palestinians that Hamas rule brings only despair and poverty. It would press the Arab states to help real live Palestinians in the West Bank, rather than the

imaginary Palestinians--all either bold jihadists or desperate widows and orphans--whom they see on Al Jazeera. In fact, except for occasional visits by Jordanians and Egyptians (who have peace treaties with Israel already), top Arab officials haven't a clue what's going on in the West Bank, for they've never been there. Not one head of state or government or foreign minister, not once. If George Mitchell wants to do something useful, he could organize a tour; take a few princes and foreign ministers to Ramallah and Jericho and Jenin, where they would find that they are neither in Somalia nor some heroic battle scene against Zionist oppressors.

But thus far, the anniversary of Obama's election appears to have passed with no rethinking of policy. Instead the administration slogs forward, judging itself by its elevated intentions rather than its performance. Clinton's pronouncements--demand a total construction freeze one day, accept Netanyahu's more modest offer the next, then back to the wider demands two days later in Morocco--are increasingly reminiscent of World War I trench warfare: gain a few yards, lose a few more, while the casualties pile up. There will be no progress this way, and the practical efforts that should be at the heart of U.S. policy will instead be undermined as we poison Israeli-Palestinian relations and degrade the trust both parties have in us.

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Israel: Don't call Jerusalem Palestinian capital

By Herb Keinon The Jerusalem Post December 2, 2009

The Foreign Ministry is actively lobbying against an EU draft resolution on the Middle East put forward by Sweden that, in the words of a senior Israeli diplomat, wholly adopts the Palestinian narrative without even a wink toward Israel's concerns.

The resolution, which for the first time refers to "Palestine," calls for a resumption of negotiations that would lead to a Palestinian state with "East Jerusalem" as its capital. According to the official, should the resolution pass it would be the first time the EU has formally called for recognition of east Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

The Swedish proposal, first reported Monday in Ha'aretz, is backed by Britain. But since a number of countries - including Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic, Romania, Poland and Slovenia - do not back the wording, it is likely to go through a number of revisions before being discussed at a monthly meeting of EU foreign ministers on December 7.

Both Israeli and EU officials expect the language of the resolution to be changed.

The proposal, coming just days after Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu announced an unprecedented moratorium on housing starts in the West Bank, gives short shrift to that move, saying only that the EU "takes note" of the decision and "expresses the hope that it will become a step towards resuming meaningful negotiations."

"This resolution shows that what Israel does is never enough, and the onus is only on us," the senior Israeli diplomat said. "It shows that the Palestinians want to get an agreement without having to go through negotiations."

The official said the draft conclusion represented a near-full acceptance of the Palestinian narrative, including the Palestinian stand on east Jerusalem, their demand for a return to the 1967 lines and the call to remove the security barrier. The draft does not, he said, take into consideration Israel's concerns such as security, the demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state or the insistence that Palestinian refugees be repatriated to a future Palestinian state, and not to Israel.

"They don't mention our issues, and when we bring them up, they say only that these will be dealt with during the negotiations," the diplomat said. "However, the Palestinian issues they put in the conclusions - those issues don't have to be negotiated."

An EU official said that the proposal was an attempt to encourage the Palestinians back to the negotiation table, signaling that if they do return to the talks - despite Netanyahu's declarations that Israel will continue to build in Jerusalem - the EU would side with the PA on key issues.

The official dismissed as a "reflexive response" a Foreign Ministry statement saying that such a resolution would disqualify the EU from playing a mediating role in the conflict. The EU never had any illusions about mediating between Israel and the Palestinians, the official said, saying everyone realized that the Americans filled that role.

Israel's anger was directed principally at Sweden, which holds the rotating presidency of the EU until January 1, and which - according to Israeli officials - was interested in leaving behind a resolution that would be remembered as a "turning point" in the Middle East.

Israeli officials dismissed as nonsense European claims that the resolution would strengthen Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, saying all it would do was strengthen his belief that there was no need to negotiate, and that if he just waited long enough the international community would deliver Israel.

What is infuriating, the official said, was that Netanyahu "went the extra mile" in declaring the moratorium, and that instead of getting praise, the Europeans put all the pressure on Israel.

"One of Netanyahu's critics is going to come out tomorrow and point to this and say, 'See, the moratorium is worthless, look what the Europeans are doing,'" he said.

Indeed, Likud MK Danny Danon issued a statement Tuesday saying that "anyone who thought

that freezing construction would remove the international pressure from Israel was mistaken. Only standing up firmly for our rights will remove the international pressure.

In addition to calling for a Palestinian state with "East Jerusalem" as its capital, the draft said the EU "stands ready to further develop its bilateral relations with Palestine as far as formally possible" and would, "at the appropriate time," recognize a Palestinian state.

One Foreign Ministry source said that another infuriating aspect of the draft conclusions was that its call for east Jerusalem to be the capital of an independent Palestinian state was not coupled with a call to recognize west Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

"This disrupts the balance," the official said, adding that the resolution was pushed forward by the Swedes without any prior coordination with Israel.

The official pointed out that since taking over the presidency in July, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt has not visited the country once. He was scheduled to come in September, but his visit was cancelled following angry Israeli reactions to the Aftonbladet newspaper article that accused Israeli soldiers of harvesting Palestinian organs.

One of the indirect outcomes of the flap has been a rare meeting of minds between Kadima head Tzipi Livni and the government. Livni, who rarely finds common cause with the government, backed the Foreign Ministry's position and sent a letter to Bildt on Tuesday saying the draft conclusions appeared to be "an attempt to prejudge the outcome of issues reserved for permanent status negotiations."

She urged the EU to refrain from adopting any position on Jerusalem.

Whatever the intention of the draft conclusions, Livni wrote, "I believe that any attempt to dictate for either party the nature of the outcome on the status of Jerusalem is not helpful and wrong."

The Arabs Have Stopped Applauding Obama

By Fouad Ajami The Wall Street Journal November 29, 2009

A foreign policy of penance has won America no friends. "He talks too much," a Saudi academic in Jeddah, who had once been smitten with Barack Obama, recently observed to me of America's 44th president. He has wearied of Mr. Obama and now does not bother with the Obama oratory.

He is hardly alone, this academic. In the endless chatter of this region, and in the commentaries offered by the press, the theme is one of disappointment. In the Arab-Islamic world, Barack Obama has come down to earth.

He has not made the world anew, history did not bend to his will, the Indians and Pakistanis have

been told that the matter of Kashmir is theirs to resolve, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the same intractable clash of two irreconcilable nationalisms, and the theocrats in Iran have not "unclenched their fist," nor have they abandoned their nuclear quest.

There is little Mr. Obama can do about this disenchantment. He can't journey to Turkey to tell its Islamist leaders and political class that a decade of anti-American scapegoating is all forgiven and was the product of American policies—he has already done that. He can't journey to Cairo to tell the fabled "Arab street" that the Iraq war was a wasted war of choice, and that America earned the malice that

came its way from Arab lands—he has already done that as well. He can't tell Muslims that America is not at war with Islam—he, like his predecessor, has said that time and again.

It was the norm for American liberalism during the Bush years to brandish the Pew Global Attitudes survey that told of America's decline in the eyes of foreign nations. Foreigners were saying what the liberals wanted said.

Now those surveys of 2009 bring findings from the world of Islam that confirm that the animus toward America has not been radically changed by the ascendancy of Mr. Obama. In the Palestinian territories, 15% have a favorable view of the U.S. while 82% have an unfavorable view. The Obama speech in Ankara didn't seem to help in Turkey, where the favorables are 14% and those unreconciled, 69%. In Egypt, a country that's reaped nearly 40 years of American aid, things stayed roughly the same: 27% have a favorable view of the U.S. while 70% do not. In Pakistan, a place of great consequence for American power, our standing has deteriorated: The unfavorables rose from 63% in 2008 to 68% this year.

Mr. Obama's election has not drained the swamps of anti-Americanism. That anti-Americanism is endemic to this region, an alibi and a scapegoat for nations, and their rulers, unwilling to break out of the grip of political autocracy and economic failure. It predated the presidency of George W. Bush and rages on during the Obama presidency.

We had once taken to the foreign world that quintessential American difference—the belief in liberty, a needed innocence to play off against the settled and complacent ways of older nations. The Obama approach is different.

Steeped in an overarching idea of American guilt, Mr. Obama and his lieutenants offered nothing less than a doctrine, and a policy, of American penance. No one told Mr. Obama that the Islamic world, where American power is engaged and so dangerously exposed, it is considered bad form, nay a great moral lapse, to speak ill of one's own tribe when in the midst, and in the lands, of others.

The crowd may have applauded the cavalier way the new steward of American power referred to his predecessor, but in the privacy of their own language they doubtless wondered about his character and his fidelity. "My brother and I against my cousin, my cousin and I against the stranger," goes one of the Arab world's most honored maxims. The stranger who came into their midst and spoke badly of his own was destined to become an object of suspicion.

Mr. Obama could not make up his mind: He was at one with "the people" and with the rulers who held them in subjugation. The people of Iran who took to the streets this past summer were betrayed by this hapless diplomacy—Mr. Obama

was out to "engage" the terrible rulers that millions of Iranians were determined to be rid of.

On Nov. 4, on the 30th anniversary of the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran, the embattled reformers, again in the streets, posed an embarrassing dilemma for American diplomacy: "Obama, Obama, you are either with us or with them," they chanted. By not responding to these cries and continuing to "engage" Tehran's murderous regime, his choice was made clear. It wasn't one of American diplomacy's finest moments.

Mr. Obama has himself to blame for the disarray of his foreign policy. American arms had won a decent outcome in Iraq, but Mr. Obama would not claim it—it was his predecessor's war. Vigilance had kept the American homeland safe from terrorist attacks for seven long years under his predecessors, but he could never grant Bush policies the honor and credit they deserved. He had declared Afghanistan a war of necessity, but he seems to have his eye on the road out even as he is set to announce a troop increase in an address to be delivered tomorrow. He was quick to assert, in the course of his exuberant campaign for president last year, that his diplomacy in South Asia would start with the standoff in Kashmir. In truth India had no interest in an international adjudication of Kashmir. What was settled during the partition in 1947 was there to stay. In recent days, Mr. Obama walked away from earlier ambitions. "Obviously, there are historic conflicts between India and Pakistan," he said. "It's not the place of the United States to try to, from the outside, resolve those conflicts."

Nor was he swayed by the fate of so many "peace plans" that have been floated over so many decades to resolve the fight between Arab and Jew over the land between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean. Where George W. Bush offered the Palestinians the gift of clarity—statehood but only after the renunciation of terror and the break with maximalism—Mr. Obama signaled a return to the dead ways of the past: a peace process where America itself is broker and arbiter.

The Obama diplomacy had made a settlement freeze its starting point, when this was precisely the wrong place to begin. Israel has given up settlements before at the altar of peace—recall the historical accommodation with Egypt a quarter century ago. The right course would have set the question of settlements aside as it took up the broader challenge of radicalism in the region—the menace and swagger of Iran, the arsenal of Hamas and Hezbollah, the refusal of the Arab order of power to embrace in broad daylight the cause of peace with Israel.

The laws of gravity, the weight of history and of precedent, have caught up with the Obama presidency. We are beyond stirring speeches. The novelty of the Obama approach, and the Obama persona, has worn off. There is a whole American

diplomatic tradition to draw upon—engagements made, wisdom acquired in the course of decades, and, yes, accounts to be settled with rogues and tyrannies. They might yet help this administration find its way out of a labyrinth of its own making.

Palestinians need clarity, not charades

By Rami G. Khouri The Daily Star (Beirut, Lebanon) November 14, 2009

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has reverted to an old political trick by saying he will resign and not run for re-election when the next presidential elections are held in early 2010 – and then immediately arranging a series of staged “rallies” in which ordinary people appear to cheer him and demand that he remain in office. The spectacle is as disheartening as it is old and empty, and it is an insult to the dignity and needs of the Palestinian people.

Three separate issues converge here: the person of Abbas and his own achievements, the nature and quality of Palestinian leadership, and the current priorities of the Palestinian people. On all three counts, Abbas should cut short his silly little melodrama, resign as he said he would, and pave the way for a needed revival of effective Palestinian national leadership.

At the personal level, Abbas is widely respected as a sincere man who has devoted his entire life to the Palestinian cause. But this is not a popularity contest, a character test, or one man’s emotional counseling session; this is about the fate of an entire people whose lives are in distress. Abbas worked closely with Yasser Arafat for four decades and has little to show for it. The most useful thing he could do now is to take advantage of his many years of experience by withdrawing from politics as planned, retreating to a quiet university in Palestine, and painstakingly writing down and analyzing every single major episode in which the Palestinians attempted to negotiate a comprehensive peace agreement with Israel, but always failed.

This is important because Palestinians face a crisis of political leadership. The unified Palestinian leadership that came into its own under Arafat in the late 1960s under the umbrella of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) succeeded in important ways. It asserted Palestinian independent action and minimized Arab interference, brought many different ideological groups under the single PLO umbrella, and it forged a realistic national program that sought to create a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

All three of those assets that Arafat and his colleagues like Abbas generated have frayed or been abandoned completely. The epic, tragic high note of Abbas’ incompetence and failure as a leader at both the personal and policy levels was his move last month to bow to American and Israeli pressure and delay the UN’s consideration of the Goldstone

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Report on the Gaza war atrocities. He reversed course quickly, but only after revealing his monumental incompetence to engage with instruments of international law, legitimacy, and accountability, and his insensitivity to the plight of his own people who thirsted for precisely such an impartial call to end the savagery and impunity of Israeli arms.

A new Palestinian leadership needs to be elected in order to regain legitimacy that has been steadily squandered in recent years by Abbas and, before him, Arafat in his waning years. This highlights the third issue at stake, and the single most important national priority for the Palestinian people today: to reconstitute a credible national leadership whose first task always has been and remains to speak for all Palestinians in a single voice, in pursuit of realistic political goals.

At one of his orchestrated “rallies” a few days ago, Abbas said the Palestinians remained strong because of their steadfastness and the justice of their cause. Those are admirable qualities, but they are far from sufficient to achieve Palestinian national rights and statehood, and end their refugeehood. A new Palestinian leadership is required to revive the ability to speak in a single voice for all Palestinians, based on mechanisms that allow all Palestinians – especially the refugee camp dwellers in Arab states – to contribute to the formulation of national policies.

Abbas only accentuates his own weaknesses and the dysfunctions of the Palestinian national institutions he heads when he engages in silly charades like his current tour of Palestinian towns and villages where the multitudes demand that he remain in power. He demeans himself and his people by reverting to such transparent shallowness and emptiness. The last thing the Palestinians need now is to be reminded that they are on track to become yet another Arab security state with a leader for life who basks in hero worship and personality cults and faces no serious forms of accountability.

He would do much better to go to Burj al-Barajneh, Yarmouk or Jabal Hussein refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan to consult with his fellow refugees, and forge a consensus policy on making peace with Israel, or resisting its occupation and colonization policies if peace is not a possibility today. The Palestinians need honesty, humility, consensus-building and clarity from their leaders, and Abbas gives them none of these.

Israel's just fears of a Palestinian state

By Carlo Strenger The Guardian (UK) December 2, 2009

There are indications that the EU foreign ministers will formally recognise East Jerusalem as the future capital of the Palestinian state. This is a reaction to the idea repeatedly floated by Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders and to seek international recognition for this state de jure, even though it would only function on about two-thirds of the West Bank de facto until final details are arranged.

I have fought for the two-state solution for many years and am in favour of East Jerusalem being the Palestinian capital. While it would be preferable to reach these goals through negotiation, the process has been stuck for too long. The EU's recognition of the Palestinian state and capital might reignite the peace process.

Moreover, this would force Palestinian extremists, who continue to be committed to the destruction of Israel, and Israeli extremists, who continue to dream of the Greater Israel, closer to realising that history has moved on. The question is how such a move by the EU could be made without Israelis feeling that they are being pushed into an ever-growing isolation.

Israel's current government has been catastrophically bad at generating understanding for Israel's justified concerns. This has given ammunition to many leftwing critics of Israel in Europe and the US who make life easy for themselves by arguing that Israel's fears are nothing but a fig leaf for its colonial plans to annex the West Bank.

It is therefore of importance to formulate these concerns to make clear that they are shared even by unequivocal, long-term Israeli proponents of the two-state solution who have condemned Israeli settlement policies for years. Hence I want to spell out Israel's justified fears of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders.

The first is about security. Israel's citizens are traumatised by years of rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip, which only intensified once Israel withdrew from there. The international community has shown somewhat limited understanding for Israel's concerns, because these attacks have not cost many lives. While I think that the incursion in Gaza was conducted with excessive force, Israel had no choice but to do something to stop the attacks – and was severely condemned for this.

What would Israel's situation be after withdrawing from the West Bank to the 1967 borders? All major population centres of Israel would be in range of Katyushas. These rockets were sufficiently destructive to bring life in northern Israel

to a complete standstill when Hezbollah fired large numbers of them into Israel during the second Lebanon war in 2006. If Israel is attacked from the West Bank, the impact will be devastating, and Israel will have no choice but to react forcefully – and as a result will, once again, be the target of international condemnation.

Hence Israelis say "we are damned if we do and damned if we don't" – if Israel continues the occupation of large parts of the West Bank, it is under constant international criticism but at least it is relatively safe. If Israel withdraws from the West Bank, it will open itself to attacks from there, and any retaliation will lead to massive international condemnation. Ergo, many Israelis think, it is preferable to maintain the status quo, unpalatable as it is.

The second issue is the lack of clarity as to whether Fayyad and the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, represent all Palestinians: there are currently two governments, with Hamas ruling Gaza. Hence Israelis ask whether anything signed by the Palestinian Authority that is de facto Fatah will in any way bind Hamas, which has already rejected previous agreements with Israel.

Israelis justifiably ask: what if Hamas wins the general election again? Israel will be open to attacks from the West Bank by a government whose charter includes rabid antisemitic rants from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and which is currently armed and influenced by Iran, whose president keeps reiterating that Israel needs to be wiped off the map of the Middle East.

Deeper involvement of the EU is to be welcomed. But if it is to be constructive, it needs to take all these concerns into account in future steps. Recognition of the Palestinian state must be accompanied by more than abstract commitment to Israel's safety, but by very concrete proposals. This would, for example, include committing international forces to safeguard a perimeter of about 20km along the 1967 borders for a number of years to make sure that most of Israel was not in the reach of Katyusha rockets. It would also include a provision that the international community would not accept any Palestinian government as legitimate that reneged on the two-state solution and called for Israel's destruction.

But none of this will convince Israelis that they can take the risk to peace, if they are not sure that the final agreement prevents any further demands that endanger Israel. Israel's concern has always been that Palestinians will demand the right to return for their refugees as part of the final peace agreement –

which means the end of Israel as the Jewish homeland, and will lead to a nightmare.

Hence the international community must actively address this thorny issue. It needs to call

upon Arab states to guarantee that, as part of such a settlement, they would make every effort to end the refugee status of Palestinians and to allow them citizenship and integration into their countries.

Stalled talks may kill Israel's Labor Party

By Joshua Mitnick The Washington Times November 11, 2009

The Israeli Labor Party, which led the Jewish state for its first 30 years, is in danger of unraveling amid frustration over the lack of progress in peace talks with the Palestinians, party members and political analysts say. Labor's former parliamentary whip, Daniel Ben Simon, suggested Sunday that he would support a breakaway group if efforts to restart peace talks remain deadlocked for the next few months. Israeli media outlets have reported that two Labor ministers may join the rebels.

"We have to make a serious decision about how long we want to stay in the government and under what circumstances," said Colette Avital, a former Labor Party parliament member and former consul general in New York. The threat to Labor comes as the Palestinian Authority appears in increasing disarray, with President Mahmoud Abbas vowing not to seek re-election next year.

A Labor split could undermine the stability of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and shift its policies further to the right, deepening the impasse with the Palestinians and dashing U.S. hopes to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

A splinter party "would shock the coalition of Benjamin Netanyahu in one way or another," wrote Shalom Yerushalmi, a political commentator for the Maariv newspaper. The Labor Party leader, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, "doesn't have a party," Mr. Yerushalmi wrote. Labor has been a counterweight in Mr. Netanyahu's center-right government. The defense minister is credited with helping to persuade Mr. Netanyahu to support a Palestinian state and smoothing rocky ties with the Obama administration.

But the decision to join a government led by Mr. Netanyahu stirred bitter opposition within Labor. If negotiations with the Palestinians remain frozen, rebels are likely to persuade other Labor members to bolt the governing coalition. "Barak believes he is doing a good job at moderating the position of the government," Ms. Avital told The Washington Times. "But, I don't think that this is the way that we are going to win elections."

Mr. Barak has enjoyed an unexpectedly strong collaboration with Mr. Netanyahu, who was unseated as prime minister by Mr. Barak in elections 10 years ago. As defense minister, Mr. Barak is a prominent figure in the government, but his popularity is weak.

Under Mr. Barak's leadership, Labor lost six seats in parliament in the last election and currently has 13 seats, a historic low for a party that ruled

Israel from its founding in 1948 until 1977, and twice subsequently. It also led Israel through four wars against Arab neighbors.

Splits in major Israeli parties are not new. Kadima, currently the largest party in parliament, was founded in 2005 as a breakaway from Mr. Netanyahu's Likud. But many say that a new fissure in Labor could mark the historic party's final demise.

Ms. Avital noted that Labor has been in turmoil since Mr. Barak lost the prime minister job to Ariel Sharon in 2001. Labor has gone through five leaders and run up a debt of \$40 million.

If Mr. Barak is willing to give up the defense ministry and pull Labor out of the governing coalition, Mr. Netanyahu could remain in power. But far-right and religious parties would be in a better position to threaten to topple the government if Mr. Netanyahu is seen as opposing their views.

"Before, no one party could threaten to bring down the coalition. Netanyahu had a wider coalition," said Gideon Doron, a professor of political science at Tel Aviv University. But if Labor pulls out, "he will have a smaller cushion."

That would leave Mr. Netanyahu much less room to offer the "great concessions" that he promised, without elaborating, in a speech Monday at the annual convention of the Jewish Federations of North America. The prime minister added that he doesn't want open-ended talks.

At the moment, there's no near-term prospect of any talks because of a dispute over the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Frustrated by the impasse, Mr. Abbas made his threat last week not to seek re-election. He has threatened before to step down; still, aides are trying to counter skeptics who say the latest announcement was a tactical move to pressure the United States and Israel on settlements.

In remarks to the New York Times, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat warned that an Abbas departure could leave a vacuum that could bring down the entire Palestinian Authority. Ghassan Khatib, another government spokesman, said the Palestinian Authority would not fall if Mr. Abbas resigned but acknowledged that the Palestinian government, which lost Gaza to Hamas in 2007, has been weakened by the lack of progress in peace talks. "The factors leading to the collapse of the authority are the reason for the resignation of Abbas rather [than] vice versa," he said. "I don't see it collapsing."