



## ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel  
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of  
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

Thomas Vietor said, "This decision reflects our confidence that through direct negotiations, we can help achieve a two-state solution with an independent and viable Palestine living side by side with Israel. We should begin preparing for that

outcome now, as we continue to work with the Palestinian people on behalf of a better future."

Like the decision itself, Vietor's explanation signals that the Obama administration has not embraced pragmatism over ideology. Vietor could never have made his statement if it had.

Any pragmatic analysis of the situation leads to the clear conclusion that there is little chance of the Palestinians agreeing to a settlement anytime soon. Just this past week Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas escalated still further his already unacceptable preconditions for direct negotiations.

Now in addition to his absurd demand that Israel agree ahead of time to withdraw to the indefensible 1949 armistice lines, Abbas is demanding that it also agree to withdraw all of its forces to those lines and accept the deployment of foreign forces along its borders with the Palestinian state.

These are demands that no government in its right mind would accept in direct negotiations, let alone as a precondition for them.

And any pragmatic US administration upon hearing these demands would recognize that there is no chance that the Palestinians will agree to any reasonable offer of a peace treaty in the foreseeable future.

Indeed, for any pragmatic US administration, the message to send at this time is that statehood can be achieved only by getting serious about negotiations. That means clarifying that statehood is not inevitable but, rather a potential result of Abbas deciding to abandon his preconditions and get serious about talks.

In line with this, if the US intends to recognize a Palestinian state formed in the framework of a negotiated peace settlement, then it is utterly ridiculous, in the face of Abbas' latest pronouncements, for it to upgrade the Palestinians' diplomatic status. The move makes sense only if the US is secretly preparing to help the Palestinians avoid negotiations and obtain a state that is not established in the framework of a peace treaty.

But then, an administration that is willing to recognize a Palestinian state outside the framework of a peace agreement is an administration that is motivated by ideology and not by pragmatism. Moreover, it is motivated by an ideology that is fundamentally opposed to a strong democratic Israel.

This is the case because there is no Palestinian leader – not the US favorites Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad and not their competitors in Hamas – who accepts the legitimacy of the Jewish state. And so any state formed outside the framework of a peace treaty will be in a de facto state of war with Israel. Indeed, its legitimacy with the Palestinian people and other Arabs will be defined by its commitment to the eventual destruction of the Jewish state. And now, by upgrading the PLO's mission, the Obama administration is actively encouraging just such an outcome.

Obama's decision shows that he has not allowed reality to interfere with his perception of the absence of a Palestinian state as the most urgent problem he faces in the Middle East. He has adopted other measures that indicate that he remains fundamentally unconcerned about the threat that Iran poses to both US national security and to regional security in the Middle East.

That threat has been spelled out clearly in recent weeks by top US officials. Last week the outgoing US commander in Iraq, Gen. Ray Odierno, told reporters that Iran fields three Shi'ite militias in Iraq whose forces are attempting to attack US troops as they withdraw from the country. Iran's goal is to present the image that the US is withdrawing in defeat.

As for Afghanistan, last March the Sunday Times reported that Iran is training Taliban fighters at camps inside Iran. Last Wednesday the deputy commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps threatened that US

## Commentary...

**The New, Improved Obama** By Caroline Glick

You have to hand it to US President Barack Obama. He is relentless. Just when you thought he was shifting gears – easing up on Israel and turning his attention to Iran's nuclear weapons program – he pulls out a zinger.

His recent courtship of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu led some Israelis and supporters of Israel in the US to believe the administration had seen the light. After 18 months, we were told Obama finally realized that contrary to what he had thought, Palestinian statehood is not the most urgent issue in the Middle East, Iran's nuclear weapons program is.

In the past week alone, two prominent commentators – Aluf Benn from Haaretz and Ehud Ya'ari from Channel 2 both wrote articles claiming that Obama's Middle East policy has undergone a transformation. As Benn put it, "President Barack Obama's campaign of wooing Israel reflects a fundamental about-face in US policy in the Middle East."

And in Ya'ari's words in an article in the Australian, "The foreign policy team of US President Barack Obama is undertaking a reassessment of its policy all over the Middle East, including Israel."

Both claimed the administration has resolved to cooperate with Israel as an ally rather than attack it as an obstacle to peace, and that Washington has recognized that Iran must be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The basic notion informing both of these nearly identical articles is that the Obama administration's foreign policy is fundamentally pragmatic rather than ideologically motivated. Both Ya'ari and Benn, like many of their fellow commentators on the Left, argue that Obama's decision to invite Netanyahu to Washington and treat him like an ally rather than an enemy is proof that when stripped to its essentials, his foreign policy is pragmatic.

After a year and half in office, Obama recognized that his previous view of the Middle East was wrong. And as a pragmatist, he has embarked on a new course.

Yet before the ink on their proclamations had a chance to dry, Obama demonstrated that their enthusiasm was misplaced. Late last week the administration decided – apropos of nothing – to upgrade the diplomatic status of the PLO mission in Washington.

From now on, the PLO will be allowed to fly its flag like a regular embassy.

Its representatives will enjoy diplomatic immunity just like diplomats from states.

Indeed the PLO delegate in Washington Maen Areikat claimed that the administration's move equates the PLO's diplomatic status in the US to that of Canada and states in Western Europe.

Some in the media have claimed that this is a symbolic act and essentially meaningless.

But this is not true. While this step does not constitute US recognition of a Palestinian state in the absence of a peace treaty between the Palestinians and Israel, it certainly sends a clear signal that this is the direction the US is heading. As such, it represents a dangerous step that will encourage continued Arab hostility.

To put this move in perspective, it is worth comparing the PLO's new status to that of the US's firm ally and fellow democracy – Taiwan, the Republic of China. Whereas the PLO now has a "delegation general" in Washington, Taiwan has the "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office."

When asked to comment on the move, White House spokesman

commander Gen. David Petraeus will be overwhelmed by terror in Afghanistan.

Brig.-Gen. Massoud Jazayeri told the Iranian media, "The presence of Petraeus in Afghanistan will increase terrorism and seal the expansion of American failures.

The US government has no chance of success as the igniting flames which will engulf America in Afghanistan are already visible."

Then there is Iran's nuclear weapons program.

As CIA Director Leon Panetta said last month, sanctions on Iran will "probably not" deter the regime from moving forward.

This understanding would be sufficient to convince a pragmatic administration that force must be used to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power. A pragmatic administration, after all, could be expected to understand what a nuclear armed Iran would mean for the US's strategic interests in the region.

If Iran becomes a nuclear power it will be able to wreak havoc on oil shipments from the Persian Gulf. So too, it will make it all but impossible for the US to safely project its military force in the region. The current threat that Iranian proxies will force US troops to flee Iraq and Afghanistan will likely be realized.

Furthermore, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar can be expected to expel US forces from their territory as the regimes cut deals with the new regional nuclear power.

Obama recently ended his public support for appeasing Iran and seemed to adopt a more confrontational approach as he moved to pass a new round of sanctions at the UN Security Council and when he signed congressional sanctions. But rhetoric aside, as Michael Ledeen reported at Pajamas Media Web site last week, his appeasement policy remains in force.

Since 1979 the Swiss Embassy in Teheran has represented US interests. According to Ledeen, last week the Swiss ambassador submitted a request from US congressmen to meet with their Iranian counterparts. The Iranians rejected their request out of hand.

What this means is that the Obama administration – now working through congressional proxies – is still trying to cut a deal with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ali Khamenei.

All of this makes clear the sort of leader Obama is. He is a pragmatic politician and a radical ideologue all rolled into one. The pragmatic politician understands that going into the congressional elections in November, he has to convince the US public that he is a reliable ally for Israel and that he is credible on Iran. So he invited Netanyahu to Washington for a public hug and he made angry declarations about Iran's nuclear program.

As an ideologue though, even in the midst of his charm offensive he couldn't resist the urge to attack the Jewish state, so he signaled that he will recognize a Palestinian state that does not recognize it. And as an ideologue, he can't stop begging the Iranians to love him.

The desire of commentators like Benn and Ya'ari to believe that the US government is behaving rationally is understandable.

But their wish is unsupported by facts. We can only hope that Netanyahu has not been similarly fooled. (Jerusalem Post Jul 26)

---

### **Why Arab Regimes Don't Do More** By Barry Rubin

Readers often ask why it is that threatened by Iran, Syria, terrorist violence and revolutionary Islamists, Arab regimes don't cooperate more with the West or actively seek to end the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Sure, they do some things – Jordan and Egypt made peace with Israel, there is some real work with the West, as in the rescue of Kuwait from Iraqi aggression in 1991. But why not much more, on the level that could achieve more stability in the region?

One reader wrote: These despots don't seem cunning to me at all.

But that's flat wrong. They are very cunning and if you understand how, you can begin to comprehend the Middle East.

These rulers' most important priority is regime survival. The people's well-being and country's interest is secondary at best. To stay in power, a dictatorship needs to generate foreign enemies, reduce freedom and monopolize economic wealth. This is, in many ways, the opposite of the Western democratic view that a government which provides freedom and material benefits for its citizens is the one most likely to stay in power.

To ensure regime survival, the dictatorship must protect its Muslim and Arab credentials. Using these two pillars in various combinations, rulers

mobilize the people. A key way to do this is anti-Western and anti-Israel demagoguery: The government portrays itself as a champion of Islam and Arabism against demonic foes.

What the West does in response is unimportant to a populace that already views it as an enemy and whose information about the outside world is filtered through regime and ideological propaganda.

Suppose the US distances itself from Israel. How do Arab populaces know or interpret this step? They are told nothing has happened, that it is a trick or far from sufficient. Rather than prove the West is "nice," these developments are interpreted as merely proving it is weak and frightened, or at best being won over to the Arab regimes' position. This leads to more demands, not more gratitude.

In these dictatorships, the army's main purpose is to support the regime rather than win wars. The main purpose of the educational system and media is to glorify the regime, not tell the truth and help fix its problems. The economy's main purpose is to provide the regime with assets for rewarding friends and punishing enemies, not to create prosperity or raise living standards.

This approach provides neither rapid progress nor better lives for the people. But if you start with the original premise – keeping the regime in power comes first – everything makes sense.

Now let's move to a more advanced stage. Here's a paraphrase of a letter from another reader which parallels the first one: "Given that Israel is not the only country in the Middle East that feels threatened by Iran's nuclear ambitions, and that Israel is likely to be the only country that has the political will to do anything about the situation, doesn't this give Israel a considerable strategic advantage? It strikes me that a number of demands could be made upon Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan in exchange for Israeli action against Iran."

This is a very good question. But the answer is no. Why? Because there is little or no give and take. If Arab regimes get something from Israel, they will not give anything in return (I'll qualify that point in a second). If they don't get anything from Israel, they will not give to get an advantage. They will let events go as they may.

The same point, by the way, applies to US-Arab state relations. Of course, the US saved Kuwait in 1991 and Kuwait likes having US military forces around. But there has been no effort to promote pro-US feeling or to help out much on such issues as the Arab-Israeli conflict or the efforts to stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons. Two years later when Washington begged for assistance in the Oslo process, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia did nothing.

Why? Are the regimes stupid or irrational? No, they are following their interests as they perceive them. True, one day they may pay a high cost for their policies, but so far they've survived pretty well. The exception is Saddam Hussein in Iraq, who miscalculated and just kept going too far.

Of course, they can hope that Israel or the US will attack Iran for their own reasons, or at least US policy will contain Teheran without their having to do much. They watch a West apparently desperate to resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict. If the West fails, the regimes win by complaining how much they are suffering and demand compensation; if the West succeeds, their passivity worked.

And they have still another reason for acting this way: The West lets them get away with it. When they choose between fearing the US or defusing radical threats at home and abroad, the decision is easy. It is usually more risky to be moderate or work with the West than to defy it.

If you tell them they would be better off if they went to a more Western-style system, they would reply that this is not their culture; their masses might not like it; and their rivals at home and abroad would portray them as traitors. Arab elites watched what happened in the Soviet bloc in the 1980s. The West cheered a peaceful change for freedom; Arab regimes shivered at the thought of anarchy and their own downfall.

So, is this system pragmatic? Yes and no. It is not pragmatic in terms of keeping people happy through freedom and high living standards. It is pragmatic in judging that demagoguery and control are alternative means of securing passivity or even outright support for the regime. It is pragmatic in achieving the main goal: stability and regime maintenance.

Homework: Apply this model to Palestinian politics. In this framework, why isn't the Palestinian Authority as eager for a complete peace settlement and an independent state through compromise as one would expect using a Western model of politics? (Jerusalem Post Jul 25)

## **Israel's Ruling Class** By: Caroline Glick

In a much discussed article in the current issue of *The American Spectator* titled "America's Ruling Class," Prof. Angelo Codevilla describes the divide between those who run the U.S. - the politicians, bureaucrats and policy establishment - and the rest of the country. He laments, "Never has there been so little diversity within America's upper crust."

In his view, the American ruling class "was formed by an educational system that exposed them to the same ideas and gave them remarkably uniform guidance, as well as tastes and habits. These amount to a social canon of judgments about good and evil, complete with secular sacred history, sins (against minorities and the environment), and saints. Using the right words and avoiding the wrong ones when referring to such matters - speaking the 'in' language - serves as a badge of identity."

The main unifying characteristic of the American "ruling class" as Codevilla describes it, is inexhaustible contempt for the majority of their countrymen who are not part of their clique. In his words, "our ruling class does not like the rest of America. Most of all does it dislike that so many Americans think America is substantially different from the rest of the world and like it that way."

Codevilla's article focuses on U.S. domestic policy. He accuses the ruling class of purposely spending the U.S. into insolvency. He claims the goal is to aggregate power. The more Americans depend on governmental largesse for their livelihoods, the greater the power of the government to dictate norms of social and political behavior and the greater the governing class's hold on power.

Codevilla claims Republicans are the permanent minority in the ruling class, which is naturally aligned with the Democrats. When they are in power, the Republicans repress populist and conservative voices within their ranks in order to maintain good relations with their colleagues in Democratic ruling circles. His prime example of a ruling class Republican is the first President Bush.

Codevilla quotes former Soviet ruler Mikhail Gorbachev's retelling of a conversation he reportedly had with then-Vice President Bush about then-President Ronald Reagan. Gorbachev claimed Bush told him not to take Reagan seriously because "Reagan is a conservative, an extreme conservative. All the dummies and blockheads are with him."

There is a clear foreign policy corollary to Codevilla's discussion. Just as U.S. bureaucrats, journalists, politicians and domestic policy wonks tend to combine forces to perpetuate and expand the sclerotic and increasingly bankrupt welfare state, so their foreign policy counterparts tend to collaborate to perpetuate failed foreign policy paradigms that have become writs of faith for American and Western elites.

A prime example of this is U.S. Middle East policy. Regardless of its repeated failure over the course of four decades, and with ever-increasing urgency since 1988, the consensus view of the U.S. foreign policy elite has been that Israel's size is the cause of violence and instability in the Middle East. If Israel would just contract into the indefensible 1949 armistice lines, everything would be wonderful. The so-called extremists in the Arab and Islamic worlds will become moderates. Iran, Syria, the Saudis, the Palestinians, al Qaeda, Hizbullah and the rest would abandon terror and beat their suicide belts and ballistic missiles into ploughshares.

An outstanding example of this sort of nonsense was the 2006 bipartisan Iraq Study Group's recommendations to then-President George W. Bush. The war in Iraq was going nowhere and the considered view of esteemed Republican and Democratic policy hands was to stick it to Israel.

In the considered view of these wise men, for the U.S. to emerge from Iraq with honor it didn't have to defeat its enemies. Instead, according to Republicans like James Baker and Brent Scowcroft and Democrats like Lee Hamilton and Zbigniew Brzezinski, all Bush needed to do was force Israel to cough up the Golan Heights, Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. Then al Qaeda in Iraq, the Shiite militias and all the rest would shrivel up or - at a minimum - allow the U.S. to withdraw its military forces from the country without being humiliated.

The likes of Baker, Scowcroft, Brzezinski and Hamilton and their students comprise a permanent Middle East policy ruling class that endures regardless of who is in power and what their actual views about Middle Eastern realities happen to be.

But they couldn't survive if they didn't receive help from Israel. Given that most Americans support a strong Israel and view Israel as a vital U.S. ally in the Middle East, they would be hard-pressed to maintain their failed and unpopular policies if they weren't amply assisted by their counterparts

in the Israeli ruling class.

Haaretz - the trumpet of Israel's ruling class - has just given us a primer in how this sort of thing works. In an article titled "Obama Has Ways and Means to Check on Netanyahu," military commentator Amir Oren disclosed the close collaboration between the Obama administration and a handful of hard-left retired IDF officers against the Netanyahu government.

Oren reported that ahead of Obama's meeting this month with Netanyahu, retired IDF brigadier generals Shlomo Brom, Udi Dekel and Baruch Spiegel met secretly in Rome with retired U.S. rear admiral John Sigler, who heads the Middle East Research Institute. The purpose of their meeting was twofold. First, as Oren put it, they were asked to "clarify whether in the dispute between [the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government] Netanyahu truly represents the majority in Israel." That is, they were supposed to tell Sigler how to drive a wedge between the democratically elected government and the Israeli voters who elected it. Second, they were supposed to furnish Obama with arguments to reject Netanyahu's arguments for why Israel cannot retreat to the 1949 armistice lines. As Oren put it, "When Netanyahu tells Obama there is something he can't do because it would be the death of him, experts like the three brigadiers general can map out Israel's ranges of flexibility to Sigler, and through him pass them along to Obama."

Activities like those Oren reports are a permanent feature in Israel policy circles. Regardless of who is in office, the likes of Brom, Dekel and Spiegel and their leader Yossi Beilin are always working with the Americans and Europeans to force Israel to maintain allegiance to the failed land for peace paradigm.

Year in and year out, these anti-democratic and strategically demented but well paid former officials maintain what they euphemistically refer to as "track two" - contacts with their counterparts in the European and American ruling class - to force the majority of Israelis who don't share their derangement to accept their policy dictates.

Codevilla predicts a clash between the ruling class and the ruled in the U.S. is just a matter of time. Just so, the time has come for Israelis to confront their own ruling class and develop methods for weakening its chokehold on Israel's domestic and foreign policy.

For too long and to their unmitigated detriment, Israelis have allowed a small, unelected minority to dictate national policy. The views and loyalties of this minority - like their counterparts in the U.S. - are opposed to those of the majority of Israelis.

If Israel's democracy is to have meaning and if the country is to be defended, Israelis need to empower their elected leaders to stand up to those - like Brom, Spiegel and Dekel - who work actively to subvert the principle of government by consent of the governed. (Jewish Press Jul 28)

---

## **Palestinians Oppose Ending The Occupation** By J.D. Halevi

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman's plan to assist the Gaza Strip in becoming an independent entity has encountered wall-to-wall Palestinian opposition. The dual-headed Palestinian regime in Ramallah (Fatah) and in the Gaza Strip (Hamas) totally rejects Lieberman's proposal to recruit the European Union to build power stations to supply electricity, desalination stations and a sewage treatment plant. This was to be part of a plan that would totally sever all connections with Israel, which would forgo its naval supervision over merchandise entering the port of Gaza and would totally seal the border with the Gaza Strip.

The arguments against exercising Palestinian independence resemble each other. Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for the Palestinian presidency in Ramallah, views Lieberman's plan as a plot "against the Palestinian people's aspirations for unity, liberty and independence" and as one that "expresses the aspirations of the Israeli extreme right."

Ahmed Assaf, spokesman for the Fatah organization that props up the Palestinian Authority, argued that the Gaza Strip is still under "Israeli occupation" and so it will remain, because it constitutes a single geographic unit with the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Sami Abu Zuheiri, a Hamas spokesman, explained that "although Gaza was liberated in practice from the military and settlement presence, it is still from a legal and practical standpoint under occupation" and the Lieberman initiative is "an attempt to elude the responsibility imposed on the occupation." Abu Zuheiri argued that Israel, "the occupying country," must continue to provide for the Gaza Strip's needs including food,

electricity and fuel.

The Hamas position exemplifies one of the major absurdities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hamas, which took pride in liberating the Gaza Strip from the occupation via jihad, is struggling with all its might to preserve the “Israeli occupation” and obligate Israel to continue transferring supplies to an entity that avowedly declares that it will liberate all of Palestine, liquidate the State of Israel and kill and expel its Jewish inhabitants. Hamas receives support for its position from international human rights organizations (Amnesty, Human Rights Watch), Palestinians and Israelis. These, similar to Hamas, vigorously argue that Israel is still “an occupying force” and therefore it must concern itself with “the security and welfare of the Gaza residents.”

Unfortunately, the position of the human rights organizations on which Hamas relies raises substantial questions. If Israel is still an “occupying force” in the Gaza Strip, as they contend, why do these organizations not demand that Israel exercise its obligation to assure the security of the Gaza residents and operate against the Hamas regime that is gradually applying Islamic law while flagrantly trampling human rights, suppressing the opposition with an iron hand and by executions? Furthermore, not a single one of the human rights organizations suggests the necessary conditions for the conclusion of the “occupation,” but all are demanding that it should be extended by a full opening of the border. This position constitutes a paradox, because if Israel was to lift the siege pursuant to the human rights organizations’ demands (including the naval blockade and control of airspace), then the occupation is presumed to have concluded, and therefore Israel will no longer be under the obligation to concern itself with the Gaza population. Even currently there is no real effective Israeli “siege” and the Gaza Strip is not a “prison,” as the data of the Hamas government on the transit of goods (imports of \$1 billion per year) and people (scores of thousands, including personnel of the Hamas military wing) via the border with Egypt will attest.

Egypt as well is interested in the continuation of the occupation and it once again warns Israel that it should not dare rid itself of it. The official explanation explicitly clarifies its policy: “Concurrence with the argument that posits that the Gaza Strip is considered liberated territory conveys reconciliation with the plan that attempts to impose the burden of managing the Strip on the neighbor who lives in proximity to it, namely Egypt. One must not agree to this, because this will provide Israel with an excellent escape outlet from the strait of the occupation and transfer its repercussions to Egypt, and this could result in the liquidation of the Palestinian problem.”

Given this background, the question of why everybody is so enamored with the Israeli “occupation” is accentuated. Why are the Palestinians still adamant in their opposition to receiving total independence, at least at the first stage, on part of Palestinian territory? A possible key to the answer was provided by Prof. Anat Biletzki, formerly the chairwoman of B’Tselem, who warned in a lecture at MIT in 2007 of the danger that the Palestinian leadership, due to its fatigue, might agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state on part of Palestinian soil and two-state solution. Biletzki argued that only the solution of a single state in the entire territory of Palestine can provide a just and realistic solution, and she then proceeded to sharply criticize the preparedness of Prof. Sari Nusseibeh to forgo the refugees’ right of return.

This is primarily the guiding logic behind the position of the Palestinian leadership that has not renounced the idea of liberating Palestine in its entirety. Five years have elapsed since the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Hamas government continues to preserve the refugee camps despite their crowded conditions and immense deprivation, and continues to demand international assistance to help them via UNRWA. Housing refugees in the areas of the settlements that were vacated in Gaza (or by the PA in the West Bank) will not impair the right of the refugees to raise their right of return during negotiations, just as the rights of Palestinians defined as refugees living in cities and abroad is not impaired.

However the goal of both the PA and the Hamas government is identical, namely, to keep the lava of the refugee problem at full boil, as this constitutes the key to the ultimate objective of the historic Palestinian odyssey – the liquidation of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. This is the real reason behind the Palestinian love affair with the “Israeli occupation.”

Hamas wants to eat out of Israel’s hand and then proceed to eat the hand itself and the entire body.

Israel’s opposition to placing the noose over its neck with its own hands

is depicted by Hamas as a violation of international law.

*The writer is a senior researcher of the Middle East and radical Islam at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. (Jerusalem Post Jul 25)*

---

### **Antisemitism and Introspection** By Prof. Robert S. Wistrich

This year, Tisha B’Av once again reminded us of the dangers of “gratuitous hatred” without rhyme or reason for one’s fellow Jews; the kind of hatred for its own sake, which seems more recently to have become part of our everyday Israeli reality. Divisions between Ultra-Orthodox and Secular Jews or the bitter antagonism towards the settlers in the West Bank are of course not new, but they have lost nothing of their malevolent edge. No less distressing are the actions of those Israeli lecturers who defend the international anti-Israel boycott in the name of academic freedom and the much larger numbers of those who denounce any criticism or sanctions against these boycotters as “McCarthyism”.

Such harsh polemics are happening at a time of unprecedented hatred towards Israel as a nation within the international community. The hysteria surrounding the Gaza flotilla brought this trend to new heights of hypocrisy. It reflects the ongoing campaign of branding Israel as the “Jew” of nations - libeling it as a racist, bloodthirsty, pariah-state. At the same time, American Jewish support for Israel’s policies, especially among liberals, has also been increasingly eroded. This has potentially dangerous consequences for our relations with the Diaspora, already tense over the issue of non-Orthodox conversions.

True, the majority of Americans still show remarkable empathy with Israel’s dilemmas and President Obama has more recently chosen to adopt a somewhat friendlier tone to Israel’s prime minister. Many European leaders, while less supportive than the United States, are by no means blind to Israel’s security needs, to the Iranian threat or to the disastrous implications of Hamas’s violent rule in Gaza. Nevertheless, the international weakening of Israel’s legitimacy as a state remains deeply troubling. It has been accompanied by an unprecedented explosion of global anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism during the past few years.

The assault from without is not unconnected with a growing sense of spiritual disorientation and deeply conflicted Jewish identities within Israeli society. This trend is, if anything, the most dangerous of all since social, economic and cultural alienation are centrifugal forces – accelerating the divisive schisms that already exist in Israeli society. Against such a background, the disaffection of the Israeli academic elite from the Zionist ethos is bound to have particularly demoralizing consequences.

For some of the anti-Zionist or “post-Zionist” intellectuals the foundation of the Jewish state in 1948 is evidently the “original sin” that has caused all subsequent Middle Eastern wars. They have, in effect, uncritically adopted the Palestinian narrative, which is not only supported by almost all Muslim holy warriors and many radical leftists, but has also infiltrated an influential sector of mainstream Western opinion. If we are to move forward we will have to find more creative means to circumvent this destructive discourse and show the world that another path is possible – one which rejects Jihadi barbarism and terror but also excessive reliance on Israeli force alone. This will not be easy. We do need to be more sensitive to the suffering of our Arab and Palestinian neighbors. But they too must take responsibility for their own terrorist nihilism, self-deception, and historic guilt (such as the ethnic cleansing of Jews from Arab lands). They must once and for all end their tolerance of genocidal incitement to holy war against Israel.

This will necessitate a major effort of intellectual honesty, introspection and self-criticism on all sides. It also requires considerable political will, broad international support and an unequivocal recognition of the identity of “the other” and his legitimate rights. In order to come with clean hands to the table, we Israelis might begin by putting our own house in order. A good start would be to display greater empathy, tolerance and solidarity with the problems of the underprivileged - whether Jewish or Arab - in our own society. We also need to more positively internalize the tragic lessons of divisiveness and fragmentation in our own history, so that we can achieve a minimal consensus on what kind of Israel it is that we really want – both for ourselves, our neighbors, and the wider world. (Israel National News Jul 28)

*The writer is the director of The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism at Hebrew University.*