



MEI MEDIA WATCH

(A Survey of Editorials)

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Bibi-Barack Meet, July 2010

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[The meeting between US President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the White House on 6 July came against the background of growing tensions over the peace process. The earlier meeting between the two leaders in March ended with a negative tone and without a photo opportunity. Subsequent meeting slated for early June was cancelled over the *MV Mavi Marmara* affair. This time around, both leaders exhibited warmth and friendship. **Editor, MEI Media Watch.**]

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Editorial, 6 July, Tuesday

1. Mr. Netanyahu at the White House

President Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel satisfied their short-term political goals with an Oval Office meeting on Tuesday. It is less clear that they achieved much of substance.

Both were desperate to show their voters that their frigid relationship has warmed. So they posed — smiling — for an official photo, spoke with reporters and shared lunch.

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There was plenty of upbeat rhetoric. The two leaders expressed hope that direct Israeli-Palestinian peace talks — following the current ‘proximity talks’ conducted by George Mitchell, the American envoy — would begin before Israel’s limited moratorium on settlement construction is due to expire in September.

We would like to have confidence in Mr. Netanyahu’s declaration that he is ‘committed to that peace’ with Palestinians and President Obama’s assertion that the Israeli leader is ‘willing to take risks for peace.’ Mr. Netanyahu didn’t offer any specifics about what he will do to help move peace negotiations forward.

Unlike Mr. Obama, the Israeli prime minister did not publicly mention a two-state solution. Mr. Netanyahu committed to that goal in June 2009 — but only under pressure from Washington. Each time he neglects to repeat it, he feeds doubts about his government’s sincerity.

President Obama has made a serious effort when it comes to Israel’s main security concern, Iran’s nuclear program. Mr. Obama rightly recognizes the threat to Israel and this country. He and his aides pushed the United Nations Security Council to pass a fourth round of sanctions and have worked with the Europeans and others, pressing them to adopt even tougher punishments on Iran. More pressure is needed, but the president’s commitment appears solid.

Mr. Obama is going to have to keep working hard to persuade Mr. Netanyahu that a peace deal with the Palestinians is also essential for Israel’s long-term security, the health of its democracy and its international standing — and not just something he has to try to mollify Washington.

Mr. Netanyahu promised after Tuesday’s meeting to take unspecified ‘concrete’ steps in the coming weeks to move the peace process along in a ‘robust way.’ He could start by committing to extend the moratorium on settlement construction past the Sept. 26 deadline and by outlining his plan for reaching a two-state solution.

The United States has an unshakeable bond with Israel. Still Israelis must worry about the battering their country’s reputation has taken — and the bolstering Hamas’s extremist government has gotten — since Israeli commandos killed nine activists on an aid ship trying to break the Gaza blockade.

Mr. Netanyahu took an important step when his government lifted restrictions on most imports into Gaza, except military-related items. It must go further and allow exports from the territory, as well as greater freedom of movement for people living there.

President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and his government also must do their part, doing more to discourage incitement against Israel — and seriously preparing to make the hard choices that peace will inevitably require.

We know that it will not be easy, but Mr. Abbas needs to drop his insistence that he will begin direct talks only after Israel agrees to a complete freeze on settlement construction.

That is what the White House had promised him originally — and it would have been better for all. But more stalemate only feeds extremism. The only way to test Mr. Netanyahu is to get back to the table.

Arab states must do a lot more to support the Palestinians — with aid and political support for the tough compromises ahead. They also need to demonstrate to Israel their willingness to improve relations as negotiations move forward.

At their press conference, Mr. Netanyahu invited the American president to visit Israel, and Mr. Obama said: ‘I’m ready.’ He should go and explain to Israelis directly why it is in the clear interest of both Israel and the United States to move ahead with a peace deal.

Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/07/opinion/07wed1.html?_r=1



Beirut, Editorial, 7 July 2010, Wednesday

2. Either a state or more bloodshed

While Barack Obama and Benjamin Netanyahu juggled multiple political agendas in and around their Tuesday sit-down, opinion among the public, media and more and more high-ranking officials – now beyond the control of the traditional spin machines – has noticeably changed, leaving the political leaders with an either-or decision for a Palestinian state or further bloodshed and the continued erosion of their political fortunes.

From the distracting political perspective, Obama was looking at Tuesday’s meeting as an opportunity to shore up donor and voter support for the bruising electoral challenge awaiting his Democrats in November’s midterm elections. Netanyahu, meanwhile, wanted to use the Obama face-to-face to counter Israel’s growing international isolation in the wake of the bungled raid on the flotilla of aid ships heading to Gaza.

Of course, many in this region cannot hear of US-Israel relations without wild-eyed finger-wagging about the omnipotent Jewish lobby; yes, yes, Israel has a strong lobby in the US, but all of these political factors add up to so much irrelevant tinkering while reality has moved on.

The most obvious demonstration of the new reality was the unvarnished public statement this spring by David Petraeus that the perception of unalloyed US support for Israel created the most effective recruiting tool for Muslim radicals and in the end was putting American lives in danger. The Web site The Daily Beast on Monday led its pages with a historian’s examination of whether the existence of Israel makes Jews and Americans safer. Yes, that’s right, not merely a critique of Netanyahu or settlements, but an exploration of the costs and benefits of Israel’s existence. For those unaware of the site, The Daily Beast – along with The Huffington Post and

Politico – now rivals traditional media outlets such as The New York Times and The Washington Post for their audience and sway.

In other words, deep misgivings about US backing for Israel are no longer a marginal phenomenon; despite politicians' conventional wisdom and ingrained habits, this also means that Israel can no longer – to put it diplomatically – finesse the US into uncritically supporting the Jewish state.

The new dynamic requires changes on the ground, not toying with photo opportunities. Tuesday's meeting was merely cosmetic, and Obama and Netanyahu will see their relationship become only a burden on the political career of each man if they do not adjust. Regardless of the unpleasant political consequences, both men must take steps to foster the creation of a Palestinian state, with specific measures on settlements, roadblocks, the Gaza blockade and support for the Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad. Absent meaningful steps in this direction, the only certainty is the loss of more American, Arab and Israeli lives for a less and less tenable status quo.

Source:

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=116791#axzz0ubqVxR2G



Beirut, Editorial, 9 June 2010, Friday

3. The Palestinians lack an agenda

A much-anticipated meeting took place this week in Washington between US President Barack Obama, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The two men sought to create the illusion that things are moving in the right direction in the Middle East, despite all of the warnings to the contrary. It went well for Netanyahu, whose last visit to the White House several months ago saw him receive a harsh upbraiding. This week, the Obama administration appeared to lift the 'red alert' sign and signal an 'all clear,' or pretty much clear, on the bilateral relations front.

The meeting didn't produce anything substantive on the peace process, just a few friendly slaps on the back from Obama. He gave Netanyahu a gentle push in the direction of direct talks, but all couched in terms of pressure on the Palestinians to, as usual, fulfil conditions.

The meeting was a short-term success for both Obama and Netanyahu. It also took place amid an obvious lull on the military front; the Hamas method of resistance by rocket has dropped off of late, and 'Gaza's rockets' isn't heard as frequently from the Israeli propaganda machine. Moreover, the notorious suicide bombing tactic has declined dramatically. When the daily

pressure of such a militarized atmosphere lifts, it becomes imperative to re-build and re-orient for the future.

Palestinians have largely realized the weakness of using such tools against Israel; they might cause momentary fright, but in political terms they often do more damage than they're worth. A Palestinian civil resistance strategy is the way out of the impasse; not a pacifist turning-of-the-cheek, but an alternative to both the crude military response, as well as the dysfunctional mess that is Palestinian politics today.

Neither the political-diplomatic clout of Fatah, nor the military clout of Hamas, is turning the tide against Israel, and their rivalry continues to bleed their people.

A civil resistance movement must go beyond both parties, and involve the vital elements of Palestinian civil society – its professionals, its activists and its thinkers.

As Obama and Netanyahu meet, to at least talk about making decisions, the Palestinians have no sole, legitimate, effective decision-maker of their own to represent them. They need to restructure their politics and regain their footing at the table, and if left to the devices of Hamas and Fatah, the current situation will only deteriorate further, feeding Netanyahu's inclination to eliminate the option of a Palestinian state.

The words 'Palestinian state,' it should be noted, are rarely heard from the White House these days. The Palestinians have only themselves to blame for not taking advantage of the recent chill in US-Israeli relations to promote their agenda. Obama has his agenda, and Netanyahu certainly has his, but without a single Palestinian agenda, the Palestinians will get nowhere.

Source:

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=116870#axzz0uc7hhx7G

HAARETZ.com

Tel Aviv Editorial, 8 July 2010, Sunday

4. Netanyahu's second chance

It's Netanyahu's turn to prove Obama's statement that he believes the PM wants peace and is ready to take risks for it.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received a second chance from U.S. President Barack Obama on Tuesday.

After more than a year of tension between Washington and Jerusalem, accompanied by expressions of mutual dissatisfaction, Netanyahu received a friendly welcome in the White House. Obama was profuse in his praise, smiles and florid figures of speech, and

said he believes that Netanyahu wants peace. The president also called on the Palestinians to open direct talks with Netanyahu and indicated support for Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity.

The close ties with the United States are Israel's strategic support, and it is difficult to overstate their importance to Israel's survival, security and prosperity. If Netanyahu came under justified criticism for his role in damaging relations with the Obama administration over the past year, he can feel content with these efforts at rehabilitation.

But don't get confused: Obama's gestures of friendship, which can be partly attributed to the impending congressional elections, do not change anything about the administration's basic policy.

Obama has made it clear that his goal was, and still is, the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. And he expects Netanyahu to help reach that objective, through negotiations with the Palestinians and confidence-building measures aimed at strengthening the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and improving the economic situation in the Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu must take advantage of the chance he has been given, say yes to Obama, and act seriously and swiftly to end the occupation and establish an independent Palestine. But his appearance at the White House on Tuesday raises doubt if he will do so. Netanyahu was careful not to make any statement deviating from the political line of the watchful right wing. He did not say the words 'Palestinian state' and focused on warning of the security risk involved in withdrawal and on the demand to change Palestinian textbooks. Once again, it seems that Netanyahu prefers his political partnership with Avigdor Lieberman, Moshe Ya'alon and Eli Yishai to a partnership with the president of the United States.

Obama says he believes Netanyahu wants peace and is ready to take risks for it. Now it's the prime minister's turn to prove, in words and indeed, that he is worthy of this belief and is not merely trying, as is his wont, to gain more time in power without taking the peace process forward.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/netanyahu-s-second-chance-1.300688>

guardian.co.uk

London, Editorial, 8 July 2010, Thursday

5. Obama and Netanyahu: All smiles over gritted teeth

If Netanyahu has been punching the air over not having to make concessions that threaten his coalition, his triumph will be short-lived.

There is a current in Israeli thinking, shared by left and right, which is deeply relaxed about the case for change. The argument goes thus: if the present occupation is messy, a future

solution will be messier still; there will be no dramatic political consequence caused by demography – that point in the future when Jews are outnumbered by Arabs in their own land; wars are brief, terrorism containable and neither involves an unacceptable level of Israeli casualties; the Palestinians are weak and divided, and besides, as one former top adviser put it, we are not negotiating a marriage but a divorce.

Wrong on all counts. Things cannot carry on as are they, and, if to make no other point, Barack Obama should go to Israel and say so in those terms. Set to one side the dreadful familiarities of the occupation. Apart from tearing up the diplomatic relationship it had nurtured over three years with Turkey, by killing Turks on the flotilla attempting to break the blockade of Gaza, the second enemy Israel identified was the one lurking within: Haneen Zoabi, an Israeli Arab member of the Knesset, and Sheikh Raed Salah, head of the Islamic Movement's northern branch, who were both on the Mavi Marmara. Zoabi was accused in the Knesset of being a terrorist and a traitor and faces the stripping of her parliamentary privileges and the possible loss of citizenship.

Her party, *Balad*, rejects the idea of Israel as a Jewish state, but even those Palestinians with Israeli citizenship who express no such views face the loss of residency rights. In 2008 the residency rights of 4,557 Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem were abrogated – the highest number ever. Even if the foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman does not speak for his country when he says a land swap should be accompanied by a population swap of Israel's Arab citizens, it is not difficult to see where the next battleground could be. What worse reaction could a government that fights international boycotts, ostracism and delegitimization, have than to turn on its own citizens – people with a history of being shunned by the Arab world?

Barack Obama and Binyamin Netanyahu made a show of getting on with each other on Tuesday. But the former talked of a sovereign Palestinian state, while the latter said no such thing. If Mr Netanyahu has been punching the air in his Washington guesthouse over not having to make concessions that threaten his coalition, his triumph will be short-lived. Until he realises there is a choice to be made between continuing to expand the nationalist state and stopping it on, or close to, the 1967 border, and that he cannot do one while talking indefinitely about the other, there is no future, other than one dominated by war.

Source:

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/08/obama-netanyahu-israel-talks-editorial>

Editorial, 7 July y 2010, Wednesday

6. An opportunity to mend relations

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's meeting Tuesday with US President Barack Obama will give the two leaders a chance to mend strained relations.

Netanyahu will undoubtedly seek to be reassured of US backing for Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity, no longer taken for granted in Jerusalem. In May, at the conclusion of the review of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the Obama administration yielded to Arab pressure and signed a 40-page document that failed to mention Iran but singled out Israel as a treaty violator.

On the other hand, a UN Security Council vote for stiffer sanctions on Iran, followed up last month with additional, more stringent sanctions passed by Congress, helped allay Israeli misgivings about the intentions of the Obama administration. And as November 2's mid-term elections for Senate and House seats approach, the US president – with an eye to the pro-Israel vote – has a political interest in warming relations, which hit a new low in March after the Ramat Shlomo fiasco.

Netanyahu's meeting with Obama also presents a welcome opportunity to push for progress in talks with the Palestinians – progress that the prime minister has made clear Israel needs, as it seeks to guarantee its Jewish, democratic future alongside what it must be certain would be a peaceful, stable Palestinian state.

Arguably more than any other politician, Netanyahu is capable, either by juggling the disparate elements of the present coalition or by leading an alternative coalition with *Cadim*, of maintaining consensual Israeli support for substantive advances toward an accord with the Palestinian Authority – if, that is, the PA proves genuinely committed to reconciliation with the Jewish state. The prime minister has neutralized hard-line elements of the Likud's Central Committee unwilling to acquiesce to territorial compromise, and managed on the eve of his departure to torpedo a bill that would have stripped him of the power to impose a further building moratorium in the West Bank should he so choose.

Meanwhile, security conditions in the West Bank are more encouraging than they have been for many years, if still fragile. Israel has removed numerous roadblocks and checkpoints, gradually giving more scope to the PA security forces and enabling freer movement of goods and people. Under PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, the West Bank economy is thriving and a more transparent government bureaucracy is taking shape.

All that said, Israel, which would have to make wrenching territorial compromises in support of any accord, is still uncertain of the peacemaking credentials of PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Fayyad. Fayyad is constructing the institutions of a Palestinian state, but would that state be committed to permanent peaceful relations with Israel? Abbas has reached out to American Jewish leaders and Israeli journalists recently, declaring Palestinian recognition of the historic Jewish link to this land, but his populace is still bombarded with PA TV reports claiming Palestinian rights throughout today's Israel.

The recent flurry of reports concerning Abbas's position regarding the status of the Western Wall is emblematic of Israeli concerns. The London-based Arab daily *Al-Hayat* reported Saturday that Abbas had accepted, in 'written ideas' presented to US Middle East envoy George Mitchell, Israeli control at the Wall, a remnant of the destroyed Temple.

This was hardly a stellar concession, but that same day, the chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, rushed to deny it had been made, and an ideal opportunity for the PA to reach out to the Israeli mainstream – and recognize the Jewish people's unique religious, cultural and historical ties to Jerusalem – was missed.

FOR ALL the obstacles to progress between Israel and the Abbas-led PA, however, the elephant in the room remains Hamas-controlled Gaza. Even if Israel and the PA managed to overcome their differences, and Abbas and Fayyad began publicly urging their people toward reconciliation with Israel – instead of encouraging boycotts and disseminating incitement against it – the Gaza conundrum, and the constant threat of a Hamas takeover in the West Bank, would remain.

Netanyahu could, perhaps, manage to convince his coalition partners to agree to keep in place a partial building freeze outside the large settlement blocs when the present moratorium expires, provided the PA agreed to direct talks and the US reiterated the Bush administration's recognition that Israel would retain those blocs under any future agreement. But in parallel, with the blockade designed to weaken Hamas in Gaza now largely removed, new strategies must be developed toward ending Hamas's rule. Otherwise, even if reaching an accord becomes possible, implementing it will not be.

Source: <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Article.aspx?id=180529>



Dubai, Editorial, 7 July 2010, Wednesday

7. Bibi goes to Washington

As Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu visits Washington, US President Barack Obama faces a stark choice: Go along with the pretence that all's well with the world and that America and Israel remain the chums that they have always been; or confront the Jewish state on the dangerous games it has been playing for decades endangering the Middle East—and the world.

Having kept Netanyahu at arm's length for his open defiance of his warnings on the construction of new settlements on Palestinian land, President Obama is now under pressure to 'reach out' to the visiting Israeli leader.

In view of the upcoming midterm elections in the US, the governing Democrats who draw significant support from pro-Israeli forces in domestic politics, are nervous that Obama's cold war with Israel could cost them dearly.

This is why it is being suggested that the White House could roll out red carpet for the Israeli leader with all the regulation frills and photo ops and even a lunch after the talks thrown in for good measure. But this change of heart in Washington is far from justified. For there's been no change in Israel's policy whatsoever. If it chose to personally humiliate Obama by announcing new settlements of 1,600 housing units in March in the presence of US Vice President Joe Biden, it has unveiled a new demolition drive targeting Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem even as Bibi visits Washington. Gaza continues to struggle for survival as it staggers under the cruellest occupation in history.

Although Israel has agreed to relax its stranglehold on Gaza slightly to allow in 'consumer goods' and essential food items following international outrage over the recent attack on aid flotilla, Palestinians still live in open or in the ruins of their homes. Israel still persists with its ban on construction material arguing it could be used by Hamas to build weapons to attack Israel! Can you get any more absurd?

Even that endless farce of 'negotiations' with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas that went on under Ehud Olmert has come to an end.

So there's little hope of Israel changing its stance or even paying attention to the world community's solemn calls for a two-state solution, end of Gaza blockade or a freeze on settlements. As the recent attack on the international aid flotilla amply demonstrated, Israel cares two hoots for what the international community thinks.

The belligerent, reckless regime will fall in line only if the US really asserts itself. During the current visit, Netanyahu is almost certain to persuade Obama that Iran, and not Israeli occupation, is the real threat to the Middle East. This has been a consistent Israeli strategy over the past couple of years.

It's time to call that bluff. Iran's rhetoric and its recent muscle flexing in the Gulf are all a direct result of Israeli policies and actions. This is a reality that is not lost even on the Americans now. Of late, there's been an increasing realisation in the US establishment that the Israeli persecution of Palestinians a threat to the US national security. President Obama and his top military commanders Admiral Mike Mullen and General David Petraeus are convinced of the fact. It remains to be seen if Obama can persuade Israel, and its powerful friends in the US, to see the writing on the wall. For peace in the Middle East is in the US — and that of Israel — national interest.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/July/editorial_July13.xml§ion=editorial&col=

THE JORDAN TIMES

Amman, Editorial, 8 July 2010, Thursday

8. For peace to succeed

Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, is in the US doing his best impression of a statesman. All it would take for peace to happen, he keeps on saying, is for the Palestinians to sit down across the table from him and talk directly.

What he fails to hint at is, then what? What will happen, if they do that? Will Israel withdraw from its illegal settlements? Will Israel finally accept the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital? Will Israel finally take responsibility for the millions of refugees that the creation of Israel spawned?

Nothing this Israeli government has said or done since it was sworn in has indicated any such thing.

Israel had to be forced to suspend building in settlements, and did so only in the West Bank, only partially and only temporarily. These are not the policies of a country seriously seeking peace.

Israel only eased its blockade on 1.5 million Gazans after it was put under sustained international pressure in the wake of its illegal and murderous raid on a boat of activists in international waters. Yet the easing is entirely cosmetic. While more goods will enter Gaza, the kind of

measure, namely free access for imports, exports as well as people that is really needed to kick-start a Gazan economy and ensure sustainability, is singularly lacking.

Israel continues to refuse being held to account by unbiased international actors. It refuses to recognise the result of the UN investigation into its actions during its brutal onslaught on Gaza last year, and refuses any similar inquiry into its raid on the flotilla of aid activists in May.

In both cases, Israel has set up entirely non-credible commissions of inquiry in a bid to divert international attention. It may well, should attention continue to focus on its illegal actions, start a war in Lebanon, a tried and tested way for Israel to escape international censure.

But Israel is bending, and if the international community gets its act together, continued and sustained pressure to abide by international law, end its occupation and accept the creation of a Palestinian state may just succeed.

Of course, the international community needs to be in it for the long term, and not try to curry favour with Israel and its propagandists, for that way lie only stagnation and conflict.

Source: <http://jordantimes.com/index.php?news=28137>



Karachi, Editorial, 10 July 2010, Saturday

9. Israel's strategic doctrine

BENJAMIN Netanyahu reportedly suffered great humiliation during his fourth meeting with Barack Obama on March 7. The Israeli prime minister was kept waiting for a long time, and when finally the president came there was no media.

There must have been a handshake, but since there were no cameras, leaked reports said there was none. No joint statement was issued, no press conference was held, and the president left his Israeli visitor high and dry and proceeded to eat his dinner.

For a country whose leaders are used to pampering in Washington, this was indeed humiliation, and gave much ammunition to the Likud leader's domestic critics to go after his skin and call the visit a disaster. What the media didn't bother to advertise, perhaps deliberately, was that in spite of the snub, the Israeli prime minister had not surrendered on what mattered to him — an end to the colonisation of the West Bank.

The media hype about Netanyahu's reported humiliation, it now appears, was basically intended for Obama's political benefit to shore up his macho image — that he was a tough president who had the gall to snub, of all persons, an Israeli prime minister.

The March 7 encounter was their fifth meeting since Obama moved into the White House, and in every meeting — and in the historic June 4 address to the Muslim world last year — the president declared in unambiguous terms that Israel must halt settlement activity in the West Bank. Each time Netanyahu held on.

Their meeting on July 6 was an entirely different affair. After all, a congressional election is around the corner, and Obama would not be a politician worth his salt if he didn't realise that without Jewish votes and without the support of America's powerful Israel lobby, with its limitless funding lucre and monopolisation of the American media his Democrats will be rudderless.

Just as George Bush had called mass murderer Ariel Sharon 'my friend', Obama said Netanyahu wanted peace, held his hand firmly and long enough for the cameras to record and declared 'I have trusted ... Netanyahu since I met him before I was elected president'. Then he reaffirmed that the bonds between the two countries were unbreakable.

The end-result was Netanyahu's unadulterated victory, for the Israeli leader made no commitment, despite the conferment of the 'man of peace' honour, that he would halt the construction of new housing units in the West Bank, including Arab East Jerusalem, or extend the freeze beyond September.

There was plenty of diplomatic rhetoric—read read nonsense — enough to cloud and obfuscate the one issue of which settlements are just one dimension: Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza for the last 43 years, its perpetuation of tyranny on the Palestinian people, and the Zionist *wehrmacht's* periodic forays into Gaza to slaughter Palestinians.

Both Obama and Netanyahu spoke of the need for direct talks between Israel and Palestinians, the president emphasised the need for negotiations to begin before the settlement freeze ended, and the Likud leader spoke in a vein which suggested as if it was the Palestinian side which was dragging its feet and that it was he who in his magnanimity was offering parleys. The truth is Israel has no intention of quitting the occupied territories, and if anyone has any doubts, let him know what Israel's strategic doctrine and its implications for the 'peace process' are.

One of the finest studies of Israel's war strategy is that conducted by Yaov Ben-Horin and Barry Posen for the Rand Corporation. A massive, well-documented 70-page report, it charts the evolution of Israel's war philosophy out of the experiences gained during the 1948-49 fighting and the three subsequent wars — 1956, 1967 and 1973 — and dwells on their impact on Israeli strategic thinking. Briefly, it points out that one of the principal aims of Israeli war planning is to have 'defensible borders'.

If peace means Israel has to give up its lebensraum and settle for 'indefensible borders' then peace is not worth it. All Arab armies and air forces, so the doctrine goes, must be kept as far away from Israel's borders and its population centres as possible, so that in case of a surprise attack Israeli armed forces have the time to mobilise and counterattack with overwhelming force

to not only throw the enemy back but to destroy the attacking armies in a way that the enemy will not be able to mount another war for a long time.

Realising, however, that the Arabs have the advantage of a large landmass, higher populations and, thus, the ability to mobilise again for a war after defeat, the Israeli strategic doctrine believes the Israeli people and leadership must be ready for war after war. The only way for Israel to survive was, therefore, to have ‘defensible borders’. Israeli generals, the Rand study says, do not think peace is worth it if peace means borders that leave Israel vulnerable. In other words, Israel would rather not have peace than have ‘indefensible borders’. In short ‘defensible borders without peace’ are preferable to ‘indefensible borders with peace’.

Translated into geopolitics and seen in terms of the peace process that has dragged on since Oslo and the signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington on Sept 13, 1993, the strategic doctrine means Israel must hold on to the West Bank because it gives Israel strategic depth. The Jordan River, the Israeli military thinks, is the Jewish state’s ‘natural’ border in the east. For that reason, Israel will hold on to the West Bank, even if it means prolonging the present no-peace situation.

During their five meetings, and the ‘warm’ handshake that took place on July 6 at the White House, Netanyahu has conveyed to Obama in categorical terms — without uttering a word — that Israel has no intention of giving up its defensible borders and going back to the pre-1967 war ‘indefensible’ frontiers.

Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/editorial/israels-strategic-doctrine-070>



Beijing, Editorial, 14 June 2010, Wednesday

10. A change and not a change in U.S. Middle East policy

U.S. President Barack Obama met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House on July 6, or last Tuesday, and they met at the same Oval office on March 23. The Obama administration's treatment of Netanyahu at the first meeting created the impression of a deep crisis in American-Israel relations.

The meeting last Tuesday, however, repaired the damage and lifted the mood music after recent tensions. During their latest meeting, President Obama radically amended his attitude and

discussed ‘unbreakable’ bonds with Israel. Then, why the U.S.-Israel relations have undergone such an intriguing ‘change of face’ at an interval of merely three and a half months?

Obama came to power shouting the slogan of ‘change’, whereas his predecessor, George W. Bush, had gone all out for unilateralism in the Middle East region and pushed the entire Muslim world in precisely the opposite direction as his legacy. Working to capitalize on the momentum created by his new administration, President Barack Obama visited Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey during his first year in office with an aim to have ‘dialogue between America and the Muslim World.’ In a high anticipated speech at elite Cairo University, Obama urged Muslims to enter with the United States into a ‘new beginning’ to jointly press ahead the bilateral relationship.

Former President George W. Bush shelved or put aside the issue of the Palestinian-Israel conflict. On the contrary, President Obama has taken the Palestinian-Israel issue as absolutely central after coming to power and focused on restarting the Middle East peace negotiations. Indirect peace talks between the Palestinians and Israel have begun after more than one year of shuttle diplomacy. Obama urged Palestinians and Israel to resume direct peace talks by September this year and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu promised ‘concrete steps’ to clear the way.

Moreover, with the use of its ‘smart power’, the United States apparently resorts to the ‘carrot and stick’ tactical approach. For Iran’s continued nuclear enrichment program, America has kept offering an Olive Branch to Iran. In the 2009 Iranian presidential election, however, the United States capitalized on new media technologies, like television, to increase public opinions so as to bring down the Iranian government in power then. After its attempt failed, the U.S. returned to its harsh sanction against the central Asian Muslim nation.

On the case for war in Iraq, the Obama administration set a timetable for a troop withdrawal, and repeatedly promised to withdraw its troops as scheduled. But when the new Iraqi government was deadlocked and Iraqi Kurds in the north intensified contradictions with the central government, the United States stopped claiming and turned to suggest taking on United Nations peacekeepers as a supplement force if the US forces had to withdrawn in time.

In spite of varied changes, the sole purpose of the United States remains the same, namely, to retain its strategic interests in the Middle East region and guide to the Mideast peace process. The Obama administration, proceeding from the U.S. strategic interests and taking the Palestinian-Israel conflict as the breaking point, has exerted its utmost to advance the Mideast peace process.

Nevertheless, the Obama administration’s approach across the Muslim world has hardly materialized in the past year or so, as it has so far scored very limited ‘achievements’ on the issue of Palestinian-Israel conflict; the U.S. eventually returns to the starting point of ‘unbreakable bonds’ and, to clear obstacles for restarting the Palestinian-Israel talks, it pressures Israel on the construction freeze in the West Bank and in the East Jerusalem settlements.

Jewish loyalty to the US Democratic Party is traditional and legendary. With the imminent

Midterm elections only three or four months away, the U.S. government will be constrained due to pressure from Jewish lobby.

In the extremely complex Middle East situation today, the Obama government still cannot find sound approaches to address some 'deadlock,' thorny problems, and the issue relating to Hamas is a case in point. The Israeli raid on a flotilla of cargo ships and passenger boats on June 1 has sparked mass protests and demonstrations worldwide and damaged Israel's international reputations. This raid has once again proven that it is impossible to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict without the participation of Hamas. In such impasse circumstances, the U.S. Mideast policy is now facing 'a change' and 'not a change' in coping with an objective changing reality in the region.

Source: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90780/91343/7065970.html>

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