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## **Clinton is Mistaken and Misleading**

By Avinoam Bar-Yosef

Near the end of Bill Clinton's presidency, when his popularity among the American public was beginning to fade, he repeatedly visited the region and felt at home in Israel. His parting words in his eulogy for Yitzhak Rabin, "Shalom, Haver," expressed the warmth he exhibited towards the citizens of Israel and his familiarity with the intricacies of life in Israel gave us a feeling that he is a friend of all of us.

The peculiar statements he made during the Clinton Initiative conference he convened in New York last week -- that the immigrants from the former Soviet Union are an obstacle to peace -- are hurtful and false. The opening the Soviet Union's gates and the departure of millions of Jews constitute an essential contribution not only to Israel, but also to the West as a whole. The addition of tens of thousands of doctors and hospital staff, engineers and technicians, scientists and philosophers, musicians, actors and artists, not only assisted in creating the economic miracle that is currently unfolding here and enabled Israel to become a high-tech power, but also significantly enriched Western civilization in its entirety.

The analysis of differences in support of peace among native Israelis and immigrants from Europe and Morocco in a country that is characterized by true integration of immigrants from different cultures and countries, based on a survey that he had perhaps seen or heard of, is clearly not serious. How, in his opinion, will a child whose father is from Morocco and whose mother is from Russia, vote? What is the degree of support in the political process to be expected from a soldier whose parents emigrated from Louisiana in the United States and settled in Samaria? There is no case to respond to his accusations against the freedom fighter Natan Sharansky being opposed to peace, when he is not also aiming at Iranian President Ahmadinejad, or Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, or head of Hamas head, Mashal.

This is not the first time that Clinton has switched hats, from president to political commentator on Israel. He used to do this from time to time during Rabin's

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government, delving into the intricacies of Israeli politics in order to analyze the coalition pressures, but in those days it was meant to support the Israeli Prime Minister, not the opposite. This time such statements may sound like preparing the background for blaming Israel and the chosen representatives of parts of its population, which he called "the tough guys in the neighborhood," for a possible failure of the new round of negotiations with the Palestinians.

It could have been said differently. Clinton, Yitzhak's friend - our friend - should have seized the opportunity presented by his conference he headed in order to lead a worldwide movement to recognize Israel as the core state of the Jewish people. It is possible that this will be the only achievement these immigrants will get for the sake of peace. In exchange they will be required to make painful concessions concerning parts of their homeland and places that are holy to their culture and religion. Security agreements are important but they are no more than technical arrangements. Recognition of the Jewish character of Israel is important in order to mark the end of the conflict and to prevent new demands being made by Arab Israelis a decade from now for new concessions. This en route to realizing the Islamic ambition of creating a Palestinian state alongside a bi-national state – even if its name, Israel, remains intact for now.

It is not fashionable to do so in an era in which delegitimization has become a regular battering ram against us in the Arab world and in Europe, a phenomenon that is trickling into the United States as well. It is possible that those who claim that the answer to this phenomenon is to be found not only in Hasbara but also in changing reality for the better and thinking strategically are right. However, they make a grave mistake when they underestimate the degree of damage caused by delegitimization at home, its influence on supporters and friends such as Clinton, and on Jews in the Diaspora, who are being increasingly attacked for their identification with the people of Israel and with Jewish values and civilization.

Bill Clinton is not only a victim of this campaign against Israel and the Jewish people, but with his words he becomes one of those stoking the flames.

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