

**JPPPI Brainstorming Series**

The Triangular Relationship of

**Jerusalem**  
**Washington**  
**North American Jewry**

**October 12-13, 2009**



**THE JEWISH PEOPLE POLICY PLANNING INSTITUTE**

(Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel) Ltd.

**B a c k g r o u n d P a p e r s**

## JPPPI MAIN PUBLICATIONS

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### **Facing a Rapidly Changing World – The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, Executive Report, Annual Assessment No. 2, 2005** *JPPPI Staff and contributors 2005*

### **Major Shifts – Threats and Opportunities – The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, Executive Report, Annual Assessment No. 3, 2006** *JPPPI Staff and contributors 2006*

### **Societal Aspects – The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, Executive Report, Annual Assessment No. 4, 2007,** *JPPPI Staff and Contributors 2007*

### **The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, Executive Report No. 5, 2008, with a Special Section on Women in Jewish Society** *JPPPI Staff and Contributors 2008*

### **Institut de Planification d'une Politique pour le Peuple Juif, Rapport Annuel du JPPPI 2005/2006, Le Peuple Juif en 2005/2006, Entre Renaissance et Declin, Special edition in French,** *JPPPI Staff and Contributors 2006*

### **A Strategic Plan for the Strengthening of Jerusalem,** *JPPPI Staff 2007*

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### **Position Paper: Global Jewish People Forum** *JPPPI Staff 2005*

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### **Soft Power – A National Asset** *Dr. Sharon Pardo*

Today's global changes in the international arena require more consideration of soft assets possessed by the Jewish People. Prepared for the 2005 Herzliya Conference.

### **Strategic Paper: Confronting Antisemitism – A Strategic Perspective** *Prof. Yehezkel Dror 2004*

The increasing ability of fewer to easily kill more and more makes new antisemitism into a lethal danger that requires comprehensive, multi-dimensional and long-term counter-strategies.

### **Alert Paper No. 2: Jewish Demography – Facts, Outlook, Challenges** *Prof. Sergio DellaPergola 2003*

There may be fewer Jews in the world than commonly thought, and if the current demographic trends continue unchanged, there might be even fewer in the future.

### **Alert Paper No. 1: New Anti-Jewishness** *Prof. Irwin Cotler 2003*

The new Anti-Jewishness consists of discrimination against, or denial of, the right of the Jewish people to live, as an equal member of the family of nations.

### **A Road Map for the Jewish People for 2025** *JPPPI Staff 2006*

Published in the context of the Alternative Futures for the Jewish People 2025 project. Prepared for the Herzliya Conference.

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# Part A

# INTRODUCTION

By Stuart E. Eizenstat

2009 has seen great challenges facing the Jewish People and the Jewish future. In the Diaspora, there is rampant disaffiliation, with increased intermarriage rates, with low rates of conversion by the non-Jewish spouse, and low birth rates. Jewish assimilation into the mainstream of American life is a challenge to Jewish identity. Among many young Jews, ties to Israel are tenuous.

The internal non-Jewish, American landscape is also changing, with the old elites, strongly supportive of Israel, giving way to a new generation of leaders from a more diverse ethnic and racial background. Our largest state, California, already has a non-white majority, and by mid-century, that will be true for the United States as a whole. The growing Hispanic and Asian populations are not per se antagonistic to Israel, but they have little connection to the Jewish State.

The Diaspora-Israel relationship is especially challenged by the fact that Diaspora Jews tend to be politically liberal, while the Israeli public and government, facing years of bombs from Hamas and the lack of a strong Palestinian peace partner, has become more conservative.

The U.S.-Israel relationship is also at an important point, and this is at the center of the Glen Cove brainstorming discussions, the first such gathering of my tenure as chair of the JPPPI. I believe strongly that President Obama and his entire leadership team is as strongly pro-Israel as any of its predecessors, although public opinion polls in Israel seem to indicate an inaccurate doubt about this. But the Obama Administration sees the need to strengthen ties to the moderate Islamic world, and building a moderate coalition to confront Iran, as being a central foreign policy goal, and believes that achieving peace between Israel and the Palestinians is a seminal part of the puzzle to achieve this goal.

There is no support in the Obama Administration for Israel expanding settlements further into the West Bank, a key feature supported by important elements of the Israeli government, and little such support among the vast majority of American and Diaspora Jews.

JPPPI has held several conferences in the United States, at the Wye Plantation, and in Israel, including the Conference in May 2008, under the auspices of President Shimon Peres coinciding with Israel's 60th anniversary as a nation. JPPPI has also developed a number of important papers since its formation in 2003.

The seminal papers in this publication are all with the theme of strengthening the triangular relationship of Jerusalem, Washington, and North American Jewry. I would like to see it broadened to include the entire Diaspora, particularly European Jewry, which faces special challenges with the growth of the Muslim population on the Continent, and this will be one of the main subjects of JPPPI's 2010 conference.

Avinoam Bar-Yosef, the founding director of JPPPI, stresses in his paper, "2009-Change of Government in the USA and in Israel: Are We Entering a New Era with Consequences that Could Affect the Future of the Jewish People?", the dilemma facing American Jewry with the different perspectives on key issues—such as settlements, and the priority to be given the Israeli-Palestinian conflict compared to the Iranian threat—by the new governments in the U.S. and Israel, with a conservative government in Jerusalem and liberal one in Washington. Bar-Yosef stresses the challenges in maintaining traditional support among American Jews, with a younger generation removed from the Holocaust and the events surrounding Israel's early decades, and is increasingly focused its American identity.

Avi Gil's piece in this publication, "Developments in the Geopolitical Arena and their Possible Implications for Israel and the Jewish People", explores the challenges posed by Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and how they impact on Israel, the United States, and Diaspora Jews, particularly in America. He perceptively examines how the current economic crisis impacts on the standing of the U.S., Israel's major strategic partner, and how the new Administration is dealing with the Iranian nuclear threat, Iraq, the growing threat from the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He emphasizes how Iran's efforts to obtain nuclear weapons, dramatized by the recent revelations by President Obama of a secret nuclear facility run by the Revolutionary Guards, can impact on the entire Middle East, and the choices it imposes on Israel and the United States.

Importantly, Avi Gil illuminates what he considers significant gaps between the Obama and Netanyahu governments on key issues, and the geopolitical implications.

"Arevut, Partnership and Responsibility" by Meir Kraus, Yehudah Mirsky, Dov Maimon and Yogev Karasenty, provides a set of principles which will guide JPPPI in its task, commissioned by the government of Israel and the Jewish Agency, to redefine the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora. They identify the most significant challenge facing the Jewish People as the "difficulty of preserving, developing and furthering a unique Jewish identity in an open and universally-minded global environment." They are frank in noting the challenges to Jewish continuity in all Diaspora communities, and a "discernable fear of an ever-widening gap between Israel and the Diaspora" Crucially; they set forth concrete recommendations to strengthen Diaspora-Israel ties.

What ties these papers together is a cogent, clear analysis of the changes occurring in Israel and the United States which impact on the triangular Israel-United States-Diaspora relationship.

I am encouraged that the State of Israel and the Jewish Agency recognizes the long-term challenge of strengthening Jewish identity within the Diaspora and between Diaspora Jews and the State of Israel, and is empowering JPPPI to help find solutions to the challenge. The Jewish people over three millennia has faced greater challenges and overcome them.

The Jewish people in the 21st century can do so as well.

**Stuart E. Eizenstat**, Chairman

JPPPI Board of Directors and  
Professional Guiding Council



# 2009 – Change of Government in the USA and in Israel: Are We Entering a New Era with Consequences that Could Affect the Future of the Jewish People?

By Avinoam Bar-Yosef

Barack Obama's election as the US's first African-American President, almost coincident with the second election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister of Israel, could place the two countries on a collision course. Obama represents a liberal shift and a sociological transformation in American society; Netanyahu represents the victory of conservatism and caution that characterizes the current Israeli frustration after sixty years of struggling to obtain regional recognition and international legitimacy as the core state of the Jewish People.

Before solidifying their own political positions, both leaders must demonstrate success on the domestic front. Recovering from the economic crisis and introducing healthcare reform are higher on Obama's list of priorities than a solution in the Middle East. Netanyahu also faces major internal challenges in the economy, education, governance and personal security spheres, in light of the persistent terrorist threat and the escalation of violence and crime. Yet, these cannot overshadow the Iranian nuclear enterprise, which is perceived as an existential threat that could negatively impact on the willingness of Jews to live in Israel.

American Jewry is trapped in between. Loyal to their homeland, the US, the majority were torn between the conviction that candidate Obama was bearing a new message and a chance to lead their country back to prosperity, and the concern that as president, Obama would allow –guided by his liberal mindset and ethnic roots – to garner the support of moderate Islam using Israeli currency. The election campaign and its culmination in sweeping Jewish support for Obama has proved, once again, that despite their commitment to the existence of Israel, for American Jews, naturally and obviously, the US comes first. They were also convinced, through a brilliant campaign, that President Obama's success would promise a stronger America and a better world, which would ultimately benefit the State of Israel as well.

At the same time, the different courses of the two leaders pose some challenges to the American Jewish establishment through some pro-Israel groups that oppose Israeli policies. At the margins of the Jewish community are even arising some fringe groups that identify Jewishly but question the

necessity of states based on religious ideologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including Israel.

The Jewish side in this triangle of relationships is also burdened by the concern that the self-image of Jews may suffer following the recent disclosures of severe misconduct of Israeli leaders and by trusted Jewish community figures in the US.

## **I. Washington - Jerusalem: An Atmosphere of Crisis**

Both Obama and Netanyahu have inherited problematic starting points for establishing a close personal relationship. The American president, who regards the engagement of moderate Islam as a major factor in accomplishing US withdrawal from Iraq and the elimination of the Pakistani, Afghani and Iranian threats, is burdened with the legacy of a pro-Israel bias leftover from the Bush administration. Netanyahu, pressured to pay the Palestinians with hard Israel currency, regards Ehud Olmert's proposals to Abu Mazen as a too pricey starting point for the renewal of the peace process.

These constraints, which have tactically driven both leaders in opposite directions, have helped to create an atmosphere of impending crisis which has characterized the relations between the two governments from the outset: Obama with his initial demands to proceed with a diplomatic process based on the two-state solution and a total settlement freeze, contrary to certain understandings reached with the Bush administration; Netanyahu expressing resistance from which he later backed away, regarding the two-state solution. This was complicated by a number of key appointments made by the two, which were not perceived as overly friendly to the other party, and the new American administration's apprehension that Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman might promote a new policy of rapprochement with Russia.

Difficulties between the two capitals have been compounded by several additional factors. To a certain extent, the Obama Administration has chosen to entangle the labyrinthine Washington system even more deeply. Following his election, many new centers of power were created in each of the areas requiring quick presidential intervention: the economy, defense, foreign policy, homeland security, the legal system, etc. Sometimes this creates internal competition, produces divergent messages, makes it difficult for foreign bodies and lobbies to influence policy, leaving the central decision-making power to the White House and strengthening the inner circle surrounding the President. The Israeli coalition system, too, does not operate smoothly and is adversely affected by diverse ideologies, partisan interests and personal agendas.

The coalition government Netanyahu forged is perceived in the US and the West as firmly right-wing, despite its inclusion of the Labor party. This is due, on one hand, to the power of Israel Beiteinu, positioned as a nationalist party, and its leader Avigdor Lieberman, and on the other hand, the participation of the religious parties, led by Shas. While it is understood in Washington that a nationalist government has a better chance of marketing a compromise agreement to the Israeli public, the difficulty of reaching such an agreement with a government thus composed increased foreign resentment towards it.

In Jerusalem, and among some Jewish leaders in the US, an impression arose that the Obama administration leans towards the Arab side, at the expense of certain Israeli interests. This impression was further complicated by some signs that the American president's inner circle plans to address the Israeli public directly, bypassing the government, as happened during certain periods of the Clinton administration in order to advance its agenda. The Israelis have responded with a weakened trust in the new US administration.

## Common Ground

Regardless of their differences, Obama and Netanyahu may still be able to develop a common language. Obama graduated from Harvard Law School; Netanyahu is an MIT graduate. Both of these Boston institutions of learning are at the top of American academe. They are both regarded as somewhat arrogant. Obama, who oozes charisma and warmth in public appearances, knows how to keep his distance in intimate meetings, even with his cronies. Netanyahu, on the other hand, becomes clearly irritated once he loses interest in his interlocutor. Both are politicians to the core. Both were deeply influenced by their fathers' legacy, albeit in different ways. Both see their roles in terms of assuming a tremendous personal responsibility. As politicians one of the most daunting challenges for both is winning the next elections. Obama must face the possible changes midterm elections may bring, while Netanyahu must work hard just to preserve his precarious coalition.

In addition, the two leaders' timetables are constrained. Obama saw the flattering polls when he entered the White House, and yet knew he must not rest on his laurels. In a year's time he will face a significant political test with the upcoming campaigns for both houses of congress. Campaigns for Governor of Virginia and New Jersey are already underway. Any failure to preserve the power of the Democratic Party may be regarded as a personal problem by Obama. Netanyahu experienced first-hand the power of the extreme right back in 1999. He also remembers vividly where the crisis with the US led Yitzhak Shamir and the Likud party under his leadership in the early 1990s.

The Jewish factor still carries considerable weight, especially towards the congressional elections in November 2010. Under the Obama administration, meetings in the White House with representatives of the Jewish community are also attended by liberal leftist groups, such as J-Street and Peace Now.

This has occurred during Democratic administrations in the past and does not change the basic picture.

The influence of North American Jews does not derive from their electoral weight, but mainly from their standing in society and their amazing organizational and fund-raising skills in service of their favored candidates. This capability, for at least the next decade, will continue to be concentrated in the hands of major organizations, such as AIPAC, which are usually located at the center of the political map. Newer Jewish bodies like J-Street (which is trying to build the capability of an oppositional lobby to the Jewish mainstream and is promoting an agenda that challenges Israeli government policies), could accumulate power mainly if the Jewish self-image, especially among youth, is damaged, if Israel's image continues to suffer from media attacks as a result of the continued wars with Arab countries, and if the links between the memory of the Holocaust and Zionism and the enthusiasm about the establishment of the Jewish state are blurred.

## The Shift

On June 16, 2009 an opinion poll sponsored by the Jerusalem Post was published, showing that Israelis' faith in Obama's friendship dropped from 31 percent to 6 percent in just one month, and that over 50 percent of the Israeli public thinks he is leaning towards the Arabs. There was also erosion among American Jews – albeit to a lesser extent – in their support of the new president, not only due to his attitude towards Israel but as a result of his difficulties – so far – in achieving the internal goals he articulated in his campaign.

Senior American officials have begun to digest that the situation has changed. In Israel in 2009, (following the trauma of the violent Intifada of the 2000s, the victory of Hamas, and the missile attacks on the south in the wake of the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza) the enthusiasm for the peace process is a far cry from the fervor that Israelis felt after the Oslo Accords in the mid and late 1990s.

This was compounded by several factors: the continuation of the dialog between the parties; the decrease in the approval rating of the American administration; the realization that the demands pressuring Netanyahu regarding a total freeze on Israeli construction in the settlements and East Jerusalem are not feasible and even strengthen public support for him; and the recognition that the US cannot rescind the understandings the Bush Administration had with Israel. All of these factors have led the American administration to soften its tone and make an effort to build a relationship with the government of Israel based on mutual trust.

Indeed, a turning point was reached during the last week of July. Four high-ranking US envoys – Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, National Security

Adviser James Jones, Adviser to the President Dennis Ross, and Special Mideast Envoy George Mitchell – have all conveyed a clear message to Netanyahu: We want to work together in order to try to use the window of opportunity created by the aggravated Iranian nuclear threat for promoting a regional peace. Such a complex scheme could only be advanced through careful planning, well-coordinated among all parties, and based on cooperation and mutual confidence-building.

## The Sea Change in the US and Obama's New Administration

Although as the November 2008 elections approached, a clear victory for Barack Obama was evident, the scale of that victory was surprising. The American public held President Bush responsible for failures in several key areas which negatively affected both the domestic situation and international status of the US: (a) the economic crisis, perceived as the worst since 1929; (b) the Iraq imbroglio; (c) the trend of declining US status as the world's single superpower.

The Republican Party also contributed to the victory of the Democratic candidate. It failed to find among its ranks a young, charismatic leader who could sound a new and significant message to compete with a candidate of Obama's caliber. John McCain's choice of running mate, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, backfired. Palin failed to convince the Americans that she was worthy and capable of leading America if and when the time came for her to replace McCain, who was regarded as an aging and possibly unwell candidate.

A decade ago, none of this would have been enough to bring about the victory of an African-American presidential candidate. But American society is currently undergoing major shifts in fundamental patterns of identity and belonging, along with extremely significant demographic changes affected by immigration waves and patterns among minorities. The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute has addressed this phenomenon in its previous annual assessments and has stressed the need to encourage the Jewish community in America to reach out and initiate collaborative projects with ethnic groups such as Hispanics and Asians, whose population numbers are on the rise in the US as is their political power.

It is still too early to conclude that Obama's victory heralds a post-racial era in the US. In an article published on August 24, 2009 by Salim Muwakkil, senior editor of *In These Times* (a newsmagazine that skews left) and host of The Salim Muwakkil Show on WVON, Chicago's historical black radio station, he emphasizes that "Barack Obama navigates a world where color still matters" and "racism persists." Muwakkil analyzes a series of incidents, including Obama's reaction—and the reactions to Obama's reaction-- to the arrest of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., professor of African and African-American studies at Harvard. Obama's reaction to police conduct in this incident was

criticized by two popular TV commentators, one of whom said that Obama's comments were a case of "a black president trying to destroy a white policeman." Another said that Obama's words revealed a "deep-seated hatred for white people or the white culture."

How, then did Obama prevail, first over Hillary Clinton and then over John McCain? He conveyed integrity and focus, symbolized the turnaround so needed after what was viewed as Bush's failure, galvanized the youth who wanted change, mobilized the minorities to his side when he began to prove that he had a chance to win, while at the same time he kept referring to his white ancestry on his mother's side, and the fact that he was raised by his white grandparents, careful not to over emphasize discrimination against blacks during the campaign, so as not to put off white voters.

Muwakkil is concerned that "a black president with a progressive agenda also provides the right-wing with a potent symbol of opposition." He quotes a warning issued last April by the Department of Homeland Security: "The economic downturn and the election of the first African-American president present unique drivers for right-wing radicalization and recruitment." Muwakkil concludes that Obama "must walk a narrow tightrope slick with cultural biases. As America's first black president, he must downplay black Americans' specific needs or he'll lose his political balance." Obama will be closely scrutinized not only because of his ethnic origin, but because of the high hopes and expectations he has raised among his followers. His African roots add yet another responsibility to his shoulders, to make sure the 'racial demon' is not resurgent in future election campaigns.

## Obama's Beehive

The quick hops and skips that characterized Barack Obama's political career before he reached the top job raised fears, even among his staunchest proponents, that in the beginning of his term, his inexperience would affect his performance, which could be ridden with errors that carry a high price tag, both on the home front and in the international arena. It was therefore unsurprising, especially in view of the global crisis that accompanied Obama's entry into the White House, that the whole world waited with bated breath for Obama's key cabinet appointment decisions.

And indeed, Obama chose for his administration's pivotal roles a host of highly capable figures with proven track records in previous administrations, with a view to obtaining the best policy alternatives to assist him in decision-making:

- **Economy and Budget:** Secretary of the Department of Treasury Timothy Geithner, who served as president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, and during the Clinton administration served as Under Secretary of Treasury reporting to Robert Rubin; Larry Summers,

former Under Secretary of Treasury and Secretary of Treasury under Bill Clinton; Chair of the President's Economic Recovery Advisory Board Paul Volcker, a former banker and renowned investment expert who served under President Reagan; Office of Management and Budget Director – Peter Orszag, a high-ranking Treasury official under Clinton, was the Director of the Congressional Budget Office when nominated to his present office.

- **Department of Justice:** Attorney General Eric Holder served as Deputy Attorney General for the Clinton White House.
- **Homeland Security:** Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano was Governor of Arizona.
- **National Security and Foreign Affairs:** Secretary of the Department of Defense: Robert M. Gates, former CIA Director who kept his job having been appointed by President Bush in November 2006; Secretary of State –Hillary Rodham Clinton, who lost the Democratic Presidential nomination to Obama, served as New York's Senator and was Obama's staunchest rival in his party; National Security Advisor – General James (Jim) Jones, USMC (Ret.) and SACEUR/EUCOM (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) under Bush; Tom Donilon and Dennis Ross (NSC), both were senior officials at the State Department during the Clinton administration; Leon Panetta, CIA Director, a former member of Congress, White House chief of staff under Clinton; Ambassador to the United Nations and cabinet member – Susan Rice, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under President Clinton, and one of Obama's closest advisers during his presidential campaign.

Despite this impressive list of personalities, David Rothkopf, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and author of the books: *Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World They Are Making (2008)*, and *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power (2005)*, criticizes Obama's administration for the establishment of an apparatus of 'czars,' overseers who have been appointed to control problem areas demanding urgent intervention, from energy and climate to urban policy. He argues that this policy entailed the establishment of new power centers employing overlapping teams from existing administration agencies entrusted to deal with these issues, creating redundancy and bureaucratic bottlenecks.

In foreign affairs involving the Middle East and Israel, four different power centers exist: around Vice President Biden, at the National Security Council, at the State Department and at the Pentagon. Among those entrusted with Middle East affairs are also three special envoys – Mideast Peace, Afghanistan and Pakistan (AfPak), and Sudan; an advisor on Iran; an Under Secretary of State who is involved in every issue; assistants at the Defense and Energy Departments who coordinate operations in the region; an Under

Secretary of Defense for Policy Issues, and above them, the higher-ranking officials and cabinet members.

The new administration's fingerprints are everywhere. While some analysts claim that Obama has reverted to Bush administration policies, others believe that national security policy has undergone a revolution since his election. The foreign policy trend has changed. Cooperation with US allies has increased. American diplomacy now calls for rapprochement and reconciliation. Attitudes have changed fundamentally in other areas as well. Erecting these new 'intervention centers' often encourages internal rivalries, inconsistent messages and leaks, hampering the lobbying efforts of external bodies, and leaving most of the decision powers in the White House at the risk of violating checks and balances.

The system ultimately concentrates the power to govern and the decision-making process in the hands of the inner circle surrounding the President. This inner circle consists mainly of people who played major roles in Obama's campaign and are intimately connected to him: it includes White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel; Political Advisor David Axelrod; Chief of Staff for the National Security Council Mark Lippert, and the Council's Director of Strategic Communications, Dennis McDonough. The circle of senior advisors also includes Valerie Jarrett, White House Spokesperson Robert Gibbs, Vice President Joe Biden, UN Ambassador Susan Rice, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This group is the forum in which policy alternatives are presented and discussed and decisions are made. Recently, a need was felt to improve integration among the various areas, and the administration is making an effort to improve its performance. The nature of the American presidential regime also makes the cabinet redundant, as it is not required to make decisions. During the first six months of his tenure, Obama convened his full cabinet just twice.

## Goals and Setbacks

His remarkable victory did not provide the new president with a magic wand to wave away the formidable challenges awaiting him. Despite the excitement of his inauguration speech, Obama underwent a transformation from being on the stump to Commander-in-Chief with the entire responsibility of the office resting on his shoulders.

Obama's priorities, which have been mostly focused on domestic issues, may be derived from his first speech before a joint session of Congress on February 24, about a month after his inauguration:

- a. **Economy:** The economic crisis, which to a large extent tipped the electoral scale in Obama's favor, has dictated his agenda. The goal is to bolster the economy and put it back on track with a major inflow of stimulus funds and investments in infrastructures, roads, bridges, upgrading and modernizing public buildings and schools. In this way Obama hopes to channel



cash into the economy, create new jobs and stimulate consumption. He is aware of the price involved – an unprecedented increase in the government’s deficit, currently estimated at 9 trillion dollars.

- b. **Healthcare Reform:** To reduce insurance premiums while offering affordable programs for the uninsured, and removing restrictions like pre-existing condition disqualifications for new enrollees, in order to correct the fact that the US is the only Western country in which a third of its citizens lack health insurance.
- c. **Education:** To make America a country of learners and curb the dropout rate from institutions of higher education, so that future generations can cope with the technological and scientific challenges of a globalized world. Obama stresses that currently, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma, whereas just over half of US citizens achieve that level of education.
- d. **Energy and Climate:** Obama pledged that by 2012, 10 percent of all American power will come from renewable energy sources, and that by 2025, the rate will increase to 25 percent. He has also promised a program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2050.
- e. **The Middle East:** Withdrawing from Iraq, increasing involvement in Afghanistan, promoting the Israeli-Arab peace process, addressing the Iranian nuclear threat, and calling upon the Arab and Muslim world to open a new page in the US’s relationship with the world.
- f. **New Moral Norms:** Closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention center as part of the wish to project a new ethical transparency.

Although in presenting his order of priorities Obama turned inwards, he did not neglect his foreign policy goals, as they are reflected in the geo-strategic section. The disappointment with Obama’s administration so far is due to the pace of progress in domestic affairs, with the fear that the economic crisis is far from over, despite some encouraging signs, and the traditional American distrust in pouring money into the economy while expanding the machinery of government and increasing centralizing trends.

Another issue that contributed to the sharp decrease in the President’s popularity is the foot-dragging regarding healthcare reform. Obama encountered a recalcitrant front of insurance companies, pharmaceutical manufacturers, doctors, Republicans, and some members of his own party. He has been forced to compromise and dilute his original plan beyond recognition.

In early September, support for Obama dropped to 50 percent. A report published by Gallup in late August, which looked at the time lapsed between the inauguration of various presidents and their drop to a 50

percent approval rating, indicates that Obama's drop has been the fastest since World War II, except for Gerald Ford who was in a similar situation after only three months in office (but it should be remembered that he was not elected), and Bill Clinton, whose approval rating fell to below 50 percent four months into his presidency.

The decline in the administration's popularity weakens it and jeopardizes the achievement of its stated goals. The polls do not necessarily suggest that Obama's position in the public's opinion is irreversible. (Clinton, for instance, was re-elected for a second term by a landslide majority, despite his standing in the polls early in his first term.) The prevalent view in Washington and among Obama's supporters across the US is that in order to hang on to the White House in less than four years, the president must order his team to reassess the goals he has set forth and prepare operational plans to introduce the necessary political and methodological revisions, to allow a renewed take-off and to preserve the supremacy of the Democrats in the congressional elections next year.

## II. Jerusalem - Washington: The Turnaround in Israel and Netanyahu's Government

The fall of the Kadima government following the resignation of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in September and the subsequent call for new elections to take place on February 10, 2009, once again prove the difficulties of governance and government stability in Israel. Since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1996, five prime ministers have taken office in Israel. Such frequent changes of government are a hindrance to achieving goals, both domestically and in terms of the peace process.

Voters in Israel are traditionally divided into five major groups: Orthodox Jews, Arabs, FSU immigrants, conservative-leaning secular, and liberal-leaning secular. While voting is not totally homogenous, this division makes assembling any government under the current coalitional power structure an extremely difficult task. The election results usually lead to the formation of two blocs – right and left – and balance tipping is reached through the formation of a 'blocking majority,' stitched together by one of the leading secular parties.

Previous turnarounds have occurred following developments of two kinds: public perception that the outgoing government was a major failure, and/or elections in which a centrist party emerged as the deciding factor. The establishment of Kadima changed the rules of the game. In 2006 Ehud Olmert enjoyed the prestige of Ariel Sharon and rode his coattails to victory, marking the defeat of Likud; in 2009, Kadima managed to maintain its power and position itself as a viable political alternative.

## Tzipi or Bibi

In the 1996 elections, voting was done according to a different method: using two separate ballots, one for party seats in the Knesset and the other for prime minister. This made it easier for right-wing candidate Benjamin Netanyahu to prevail over Shimon Peres, thanks to the right-leaning tendencies of Orthodox and FSU immigrant voters. This method enabled them to cultivate their factional interests through a separate vote for their party while securing the premiership for their favorite candidate. Eventually, this temporary revision of the election method was rescinded following an intensive campaign against it by the Israel Democracy Institute.

Although this year's voting was by single ballot, the failure of the unilateral disengagement from Gaza, missile fire by Hamas over southern Israel, the results of the second Lebanon War, the plethora of criminal investigations and legal cases against Olmert and high-ranking officials in his government, and the erosion of Labor as a result of Kadima's ascent, all worked together to secure Netanyahu's already almost certain victory. In an attempt to reverse the trend, Kadima ran a campaign which focused first on the Labor leader and only later turned against the Likud leader, as if the elections were still being conducted with the double ballot method.

The major surprise was Avigdor Lieberman, who cut his political teeth in Likud and abandoned it; he was widely perceived as a nationalist right-winger in the midst of a criminal police investigation into his affairs. His party, Israel Beiteinu, won 15 Knesset seats placing third, in front of Labor. About two thirds of the votes came from the FSU immigrant population, and the rest were protest votes.

The "Tzipi or Bibi" campaign, designed to scare the left about a possible Netanyahu victory, indeed augmented the support for Kadima. It brought the party 28 seats, one more than Likud (which grew 2.5 times, rising from 12 to 27 seats), but it also meant that Labor lost about 40 percent of its power, Meretz has almost vanished from the map, and Livni was left without any soldiers to assemble a coalition. The victory of the Likud-right-Orthodox bloc on February 10 was clear: 65 seats vs. the 55 seats of the center-left and Arabs. Livni's refusal to join forces with Netanyahu placed Kadima in the opposition, having first courted Lieberman, thereby legitimizing him and paving the road for Ehud Barak to enlist most of his Labor partners to join the Likud government.

## The Coalition Patchwork

During the election campaign Netanyahu stated his wish to form a broad unity government. He also managed to bring back to the fold several former Likud members who had previously defected because they felt that the party had turned either too far to the left or to the right. What seemed on the

eve of elections to be a certain success also enabled Netanyahu to recruit some new faces without preconditions.

After his election, when his attempt to enlist Kadima failed, Netanyahu decided to focus instead on rallying the right and the Orthodox in order to secure a coalition government under his premiership. He did, however, make every conceivable effort to exclude Halhud Haleumi (National Unity), the extreme right-wing party, which won four seats. This move made it easier for him to conduct quiet negotiations with Labor, which ultimately led to its joining his coalition.

Thirty-nine days after President Peres charged him with forming a coalition, the Likud Chairman presented his government to the Knesset. Nominally reliant on 74 members, it is in fact supported by 69 members only, as five of the Labor representatives objected to Barak's move and announced that they did not regard themselves obliged to the coalition. Its 30 ministers make Netanyahu's government the largest in the history of Israel, but the situation he created ensures a period of political quiet. Every one of the coalition members has something to lose if elections are called early, and only Israel Beiteinu has the political power to break up the coalition.

Two additional factors improve the coalition's chances of survival: (a) the state's approval of a budget for the next two years; (b) the establishment of a small cabinet team composed of six senior ministers with Netanyahu at the center, Ehud Barak and Dan Meridor on his left and Bogey Yaalon, Benny Begin and Avigdor Lieberman on his right. This ensemble enables in-depth discussions on issues such as Iran, Syria and the continuation of the diplomatic process. Netanyahu's most impressive achievements, however, are the establishment of effective working relationships and securing President Peres' support. The result: a broad spectrum of political cooperation with Shimon Peres on the moderate end and Benny Begin on the hawkish end. Although, obviously, each of the participants may push in a different direction or try to manipulate the others, on the whole it projects an air of seriousness, unity and power. It has undoubtedly led the Americans to the conclusion that they'd better bridge the gaps with Netanyahu, as his government could survive for a long time, and without him they would find it very difficult to advance their goals within a reasonable timeframe.

### **III. The Third Side of the Triangle – The Jewish-American Community**

For the Jewish community in the US, regardless of the core attitudes and ideologies of its leadership in any given organization, the ascent of a rightwing government in Israel does raise the anxiety level. This is caused

by the potential collision course with the American administration regarding the peace process and Israel's approach to the occupied territories. The victory of Benjamin Netanyahu, less than a month after the victory of a new American president with a distinctly liberal worldview and an alleged linkage to Islam, has put the Jewish community on alert.

Nevertheless, the sweeping Jewish support of Obama (78 percent vs. 22 percent for McCain) indicates once more that when they go to the polls, Jewish voters are more concerned with the American agenda than the Israeli one. This is despite the fact that in Democratic Party primaries, Jews were more inclined to vote for Obama's rival Hillary Clinton. They knew her as First Lady in the White House, she was perceived as friendly towards Israel, and New York Jews supported her in her Senate race.

Clinton's losing to Obama did alarm the Jews, but they were mostly disillusioned with the Republican administration, and the thought that the inexperienced governor of Alaska tapped as the running mate of the 72-year old John McCain with his problematic health history, could end up at the helm, sent shivers down their spines.

The majority of older American Jews feels a deep connection to Israel and is committed to its existence. To them, the memory of the Holocaust is still fresh and compounded by resentment at the failure of their community leaders during WW II to do more to save their European relatives. The excitement that gripped the Jews in 1948 when the State of Israel was established, and less than 20 years later, in 1967 when the Jewish state was perceived to be in existential danger has been passed on to their children.

But America's Jews are naturally loyal, first and foremost, to America; otherwise, they would have chosen to live in Israel. They realized that Obama does not possess the warm emotional attitude towards Israel which characterized Bush Jr., Clinton and Reagan before him, but they believed that he was bringing a new gospel to their country, and that a strong America and a better world would also benefit Israel. Their commitment to the existence of Israel as a Jewish democratic state is deep-seated, but interwoven with American interests. Neither the settlements nor the vision of Greater Israel are at the top of their agenda. Obama's advisors realized that, and tailored a campaign that fit perfectly with these sentiments among the Jews.

In addition, Obama's candidacy emerged at a time when America's demographic composition was changing, increasing the weight of ethnic minorities. These changes have helped the Democrats. Several other factors added to his advantage. Obama spoke to the younger generation. His cosmopolitan nature appealed to Jewish youngsters. His rebellious, defiant style, his community spirit and message of social justice conveyed integrity. He was perceived as anti-establishment at a time when the establishment was bitterly disliked.

Obama's approach played into the hands and was consistent with the prevailing trends in the young, under 40, generation of American Jews who tend to distance themselves from Jewish organizations and institutions and identify much less with their ethnic roots and especially with Israel. Analysts are warning that along the margins of the Jewish community are emerging more groups and individuals who consider themselves Jewish, but for whom, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a state built on the foundation of religion is anachronistic. In their view, Israel falls into this category. This trend should sound the alarm to Jewish leadership in Israel and the Diaspora who must heed and address this ominous development for the sake of the future of the Jewish People.

New liberal Jewish bodies, such as J-Street, which were invited to the White House to attend the meetings of the Jewish leadership with the President, fall into a different category. The organizational resentment towards them is based on their opposing view to the organized Jewish system and Israeli policies. If they are authentic, if they represent real sentiments, and are financed by supporters who identify with their ideology, then they should be included in the community. Perhaps they hold some answers to those troubling trends at the margins.

Although Obama's candidacy was met with reservations and suspicion in Israel, the fact cannot be ignored that there are many Jews in his administration who care deeply about Israel. Accusing some of them, like Rahm Emanuel and David Axelrod, of being 'self-hating Jews,' as was allegedly done by unauthorized persons speaking in Netanyahu's name, has outraged too many in the Jewish community and especially their friends and acquaintances. Writing in the *The New Republic* on August 26, 2009, Leon Wieseltier rejects this sentiment by saying: "If Emanuel is a self-hating Jew (because he believes that Israeli settlement in the West Bank should finally cease), then I, too, am a self-hating Jew."

#### IV. Concluding Remarks

The alerts sounded in this analysis about the future of the triangle of relationships between Jerusalem, Washington, and the Jewish communities in Israel and the US should not be ignored, but it is important to note that they are manageable and it is even more important to coordinate united action in response.

- The major factors that are at the foundation of this triangular relationship such as common morals based on biblical values and deep human traditions along with contemporary democratic and global interests continue to unite American society, Israel, and world Jewry.

- The feared collision course that has created an atmosphere of tension between the new American administration and the new Israeli government is avoidable. Both sides are in the process of recovering from early missteps and efforts to build a workable relationship are underway.
- The commonalities and tangential interests of Obama and Netanyahu may help to build confidence and trust between the two leaders despite their ideological differences.
- Israelis should better understand that North American Jewry is first invested in the society of which they are a part. Judaism is an essential feature of their American identity and Israel is conceived as a sister community with deeply shared roots. Israelis should limit their expectations accordingly. Certainly, an American who has different political views from the government of Israel shouldn't be tarred as a self-hating Jew.
- The American Jewish community should better appreciate the price Israelis pay to safeguard the core state of the Jewish People and the Jewish civilization. While Israelis believe that they are living in the most exciting era of Jewish history, they also feel isolated in a hostile neighborhood. They consider North American Jewry to be their most significant ally. This in itself places a burden and responsibility on the shoulders of the North American Jewish community in the event of an existential threat to Israel.
- Identified American Jews, even those opposed to the Jewish establishment and Israeli policies, should be part of and included in a major and united effort to contribute to the thriving of the Jewish civilization with Israel at its core.

**This background paper aims to deepen the discourse between the two communities. Both communities need to better understand the constraints that exist on each side in order to take a strategic approach to the challenges facing the Jewish People and join forces for unified action.**

# Developments in the Geopolitical Arena and their Possible Implications for Israel and the Jewish People: 2009

By Avi Gil

Geopolitical developments within the last year leave Israel and the Jewish People facing difficult dilemmas. In addition to developments in ongoing, familiar strategic challenges and the emergence of new and daunting realities, above all the global economic crisis, last year saw changes of government in Washington and in Jerusalem, changes that may affect the direction of geopolitical developments relating to Israel and the Jewish People.

The two most central issues on the Jewish People's geopolitical agenda – the Arab-Israeli conflict and the efforts to resolve it, and the threat of Iranian nuclearization – are linked to another critical strategic dimension: the complicated triangle of relations between Jerusalem-Washington-US Jewry. Here too, the coming year could be marked by significant developments in these strategic foci, with substantial and far-reaching implications for the future of the Jewish People.

In the US, the election of the Democratic candidate suggests the American public's resentment of Bush's term in office, but it is also the first time in history that an African-American candidate has been elected, and as such, it also reflects shifts taking place in American society. In light of these changes, the clashes between Israel and the US in recent months raise a question that may be answered in the coming year:

Are these merely passing incidents, or are such conflicts symptomatic of deeper processes, indicating negative shifts in the very infrastructure of Israel-US relations?

The Washington-Jerusalem relationship is not conducted in conventional bilateral fashion; US Jewry comprises a major, triadic component and has a substantial influence on the relationship's content, and is itself affected by the dynamics occurring within it. The unprecedented political and economic thriving of the Jewish People in recent decades is significantly linked to the United States, both as the home of nearly half of the Jewish People and as a strategic and supportive partner of the state of Israel. Therefore, fissures in the infrastructure of the triad could signal a weakening of the robustness of the Jewish people overall, and in turn necessitate a thorough assessment, followed by, if necessary, the formulation and implementation of updated policies.



## The Obama Administration

Despite complex internal challenges, primarily the economic crisis, the new American president signaled right from the beginning of his term, that he intended to assume an active role in leading American foreign policy; in his first six months in office he has visited no fewer than 13 countries (Canada, England, France, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Mexico, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Germany, Russia, Italy and Ghana). In his visits Obama sought to convey a fundamental shift in US attitude towards the international community, and in so doing attempt to rehabilitate and restore his country's international image and prestige.

Obama presents a foreign policy that --at least in theory-- does not presume to force the US's values on other countries, is realistic in defining its goals, prefers diplomacy to the use of force, and chooses to conduct itself in the international arena through cooperative multi-national structures and processes rather than as a single 'super-player.'

Up to now, Obama indeed seems to have registered some achievements in his efforts to alter the anti-American sentiments that arose and increased over the course of the Bush Presidency. While such changes in mood and atmosphere are not to be underestimated, they are by themselves insufficient to secure success in the difficult tests threatening global stability. Chief among these are the economic crisis, the environmental crisis, poverty, disease, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, Iran, North Korea, the Arab-Israeli conflict, extremist Islam, terror, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the list goes on.

There is no guarantee that America's adversaries will heed Obama's call to shake the hand he offers in peace. The events and processes fueling crises around the world do not derive solely from the substance and style of US policy, but rather are grounded in the will of political actors elsewhere and in long-term processes not easily amenable, if at all, to immediate control. Theoretical definitions of 'soft power' and 'smart power' will not provide an effective and automatic solution to the emerging practical dilemmas and future challenges sure to surface in the international arena.

Thus, for example, celebratory proclamations regarding a desire to 'reset' relations with Russia are not going to change Moscow's (or Washington's) strategic considerations overnight. If Washington wishes to enlist Russia in the effort to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, it must fully grasp the benefits Moscow derives from its favorable relationship with Teheran, Moscow's fear of a deterioration in this relationship, and the 'compensation' it expects in return, such as recognition of its dominance over 'the near abroad' - its enveloping countries (which in practical terms means, for instance, the US refraining from deploying anti-missile systems in Poland and the Czech Republic). The actual implementation

of the US's foreign policy thus involves adaptation to the constraints of the international arena, reprioritization, and many painful and sobering compromises. Indeed, there is already in the foreign policy community an emerging school of thought that maintains that, in fact, there is no radical difference between the US foreign policy exercised under Obama and that of the Bush administration. Be that as it may, the difficulty of achieving success in a complex and recalcitrant international arena, along with the recent decline in Obama's popularity the polls show and the sometimes vitriolic domestic criticism directed at him in the healthcare reform debate, leave open the question of just how high foreign policy issues will be on the President's agenda in the near future.

## **A Crisis-Ridden Global Arena**

The last year saw critical developments in several arenas directly relevant to the robustness and future thriving of Israel and the Jewish People. There is no immediate or certain end-point to any of these developments and indeed under different conditions they could lead to contradictory scenarios (for instance: will the civil disobedience in Iran soften or harden Teheran's positions on the nuclear issue? Will the economic crisis lead to long-term US weakening, or to renewed and reformed economic power?)

## **The Economic Crisis**

President Obama recently stated that "the worst part (of the economic crisis) may be behind us," and that the 787 billion dollar stimulus plan is bearing fruit, as are the reforms introduced in the capital market. The President naturally takes care to hedge his assertions and warns that hard times, especially as reflected in unemployment figures, will continue for some time before the economy fully recovers. Among economic commentators, opinions are divided. Some see a positive shift and believe that "the worst is behind us," while others argue that a real recovery will only come in a year or two, and that at least some of the positive changes merely reflect the gradual abatement of crisis processes, not a complete reversal. Thus, for example, while there is a decrease in the growth rate of unemployment in the US, the actual number of unemployed is still on the increase. More pessimistic forecasters caution against the outbreak of more painful crises before the global economy can return to a path of stability and growth, and debate whether the recovery curve will take the shape of a 'V', a 'U', or a 'W'. The failure of most economists to foresee the present crisis casts genuine doubt on their ability to really grasp the current situation; this in turn adds another dimension of uncertainty to the economic system as a whole, and has engendered calls – from inside and outside academia – to rethink the whole science of economics.

More broadly, does the economic crisis mark a watershed moment in the international standing of the United States? Again, opinions are divided. As expected, the crisis adds support to those who argue that the US is on the course of historical decline. The proponents of this approach argue that the uni-polar moment, which characterized the period immediately following the collapse of the USSR and the end of Cold War, has passed, and that the geopolitical arena is being refashioned into a new, multi-polar world order. (Some even claim that until such a new world order is operative, the international system will continue to be marked mostly by disorder, which would make coping with the current challenges even harder). According to this view, the economic crisis, the most severe in 75 years, has dealt a body blow to the West's geopolitical standing and is accelerating the continued shift of economic power from the West to the East, as the economies of China and India continue to thrive and seem to lead the way out of the crisis. (This should increase the interest of Israel and the Jewish People in deepening relations with the Asian world.)

According to this view, the global center of gravity is drifting away from the US, which will be unable to muster the necessary resources to maintain a worldwide strategic presence. Indeed, Dennis Blair, the US's Director of National Intelligence (DNI) publicly stated (in February 2009) that the global economic crisis and its geopolitical consequences is the US's primary concern and the single greatest potential threat to American strategic primacy.

This 'declinist' school has its opponents, of course, who argue that the basic variables determining the power equation in the geopolitical arena (demography, geography, science, technology, natural resources, culture, education, etc.) have not changed significantly as a result of the economic crisis, and that it is too early to lament the passing of US centrality. Moreover, they argue the candidates to replace the US at the world's helm, or at least be a part of its leadership team, are currently coping with extremely severe internal problems (in India, for instance, 400 million citizens live without electricity), lack an ideology of mass appeal, and are unable to compete with the appeal of the American ethos and culture; nor are they eager to assume a global leadership role. Some of the domestic hardships still facing these emerging super-powers have surfaced in the last year; for instance, the violent ethnic upheavals that broke out in Urumqi, a region in China inhabited by Muslims, leaving over 150 dead.

Turning to Israel, the economy seems, at least up to now, to be coping successfully with the global economic crisis. Recent figures released by the Central Bureau of Statistics (August 16, 2009) indicate that after two quarters of decline in GDP, which classified Israel as 'an economy in recession,' the index of total economic activity rose by 1% in the second quarter (following a decrease of 3.2% in the first quarter and 1.4% in the last quarter of 2008). Based on these figures, there are those who already declare Israel to be

out of the recession and economic crisis; but others warn that elation may be premature, inasmuch as a continuing decline in investment may lead to a rise in unemployment.

Outside Israel, the economic crisis has found the Jewish People at a time of what is probably unprecedented prosperity. While reliable data is still scarce, several impacts are discernable. The first is a sudden decline in communal and personal wealth. Initial estimates indicate an average 30% loss of value in communal funds and foundations, even though some of that may have been recovered since the peak of the crisis. In addition, the high concentration of Jewish professionals in the financial and real-estate sectors, particularly hard hit by the crisis, has led to job loss and decline in wealth and income, and in some cases to a possible permanent 'career loss.' Community leaders describe that, in most cases, personal savings have served to cushion the blow, but should the crisis continue for much longer, those who have lost their jobs may find themselves in greater trouble than they anticipated.

The second impact, which is directly related to the first, is increased pressure on the philanthropic sector, both as a result of declines in asset value and contributions, and a rise in assistance requests – mostly for scholarships to enable participation in Jewish life. Even if the economic crisis proves short-lived, the philanthropies might continue to feel pressure for a while, due to a 'lag effect' in giving, whereby donors and foundations only find the confidence to resume giving once the memories of the sudden loss of wealth being to fade.

Finally, the third impact has to do with matters of image and values, as a result of the disclosure of the Madoff and the New Jersey Rabbis scandals. While the Jewish community has distanced itself in no uncertain terms from these individuals, beyond the loss of money and sense of shame, there has been a discussion and questioning of the manner in which the Jewish community could send a clear signal about the unacceptability of such actions.

Taken together these effects have served to raise initial questions about possible changes in community structure, as well as its power within American society and politics. Should the economic crisis prove short-lived, these effects might be no more than a blip, but if not, a deeper restructuring and repositioning may become necessary.

## **Global Axes of Instability**

In the arenas most threatening to world stability – aside from the economic crisis and the ongoing ecological threats – there were no signs of positive changes signaling calm in the near future. Some commentators were quick

to laud certain positive developments as examples of the 'Obama effect' in the international arena. According to these analysts, we are witnessing the beginning of an historical shift marking a decline in the power of extremist Islam. To support this claim, they point to the success of the American strategy in stabilizing Iraq and weakening al-Qa'ida (this assessment is of course contested by other analysts), the civil disobedience in Iran which has eroded the regime's legitimacy and its aspiration to serve as a role model for others, and the victory of the West-oriented coalition in the recent elections in Lebanon (a victory which has already been jeopardized by the defection of Druze leader Walid Jumblatt from the coalition and his courting of Damascus along with the difficulties of Hariri to assemble a broad-based coalition government).

The centers of attention for Israel and the Jewish People – the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iranian issue (which are discussed in more detail below) – are part and parcel of a broader regional context and influenced by its dynamics:

## **Iraq**

True to his promise during the presidential campaign, Obama announced on February 27, 2009 his intention to pull out most of the US soldiers stationed in Iraq by the end of August 2010 (50,000 will remain for special assignments and training, but these too are expected to return home by 2012). In this spirit, and according to the agreement with the elected government of Iraq, in July the US began the withdrawal of its forces from Iraqi towns. Opinions regarding the future of Iraq are divided. One view is that the pessimists were wrong – that Iraq is stabilizing not disintegrating, and has not deteriorated into a civil war between Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds. The other view is that it's too early to declare a victory in Iraq. Terrorism is still rampant (on August 19, for instance, some hundred civilians were killed in a series of terror attacks in Baghdad), and, once the US departs, deterioration – including civil war - is a possible scenario, one that could destabilize the entire region.

## **Afghanistan – Pakistan**

The task assigned to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, appointed as the US special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan (Afpak), is a highly intricate challenge, which no one expects to be successfully addressed in the foreseeable future. Obama made clear (on March 27, 2009) that the US's objective is to defeat al-Qa'ida in Pakistan and Afghanistan and prevent it from returning to these countries in the future. This objective necessitates fighting the Taliban, who are harboring and aiding al-Qa'ida and thwarting the efforts of the central government in Kabul to exercise some measure

of control over the country. In Obama's view, the threat to US security lies in Afghanistan more than in Iraq, and he regards such fighting as a 'war of necessity.' Although the high command has been refreshed and the forces augmented (the addition of 21,000 combat soldiers and instructors brings the total number of US forces in Afghanistan to 60,000), doubts remain regarding the likelihood of victory in Afghanistan and the ultimate value, not to mention cost, of the military enterprise there. Some warn that Afghanistan could become "Obama's Vietnam"; the American public is unenthusiastic about the US's continued involvement there, and there has been no apparent erosion in the power of Taliban fighters and their capacity to destabilize Afghanistan, while continuing to harbor and assist al-Qa'ida troops.

Instability continues to characterize Pakistan as well; in addition to the continued presence of al-Qa'ida warriors in the tribal regions near the Afghan border, Pakistan is weighed down by severe economic problems, internal disputes, and long-term tensions vis-à-vis India. These factors drive fears of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal falling into the hands of radical Islamic terror groups. In this context, the US National Intelligence Assessment, presented in April 2009, is – and should be – cause for continuing alarm. According to this assessment, al-Qa'ida and other terrorist groups continue to seek to acquire non-conventional weapons and materials (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear – CBRN), and, should they acquire them, will not hesitate to use them.

## **North Korea**

In view of the potential generational change of leadership in North Korea, signs of instability and defiance are increasingly evident in Pyongyang's behavior. It carried out a nuclear experiment on May 25, 2009, and continues to test the missile systems it is developing, ignoring the protests of the US and the international community. Obama's administration is proceeding cautiously with respect to the North Korean challenge, and currently rejects the recommendations of those in the US calling for a military punitive response that would convey a clear message well beyond the Korean Peninsula, to Teheran and other rogue capitals. Hardliners argue that a soft approach to North Korea encourages Iran and others to regard Washington as merely a paper tiger.

## **Iran**

International intelligence bodies are divided in their assessments of the time frame in which Iran will possess nuclear weapons. Some maintain that Iran is already technologically capable of manufacturing an atomic bomb and

is equipped with the missiles required for its delivery. They argue that from the point at which a political decision is made it will only take one year to finish the enrichment of enough uranium and complete the production of the weapon itself. An opposing assessment, arguing that Iran will not be able to produce adequate materials for a nuclear bomb before 2013, was offered by Dennis Blair, the US Director of International Intelligence, at a congressional hearing in April 2009. He further said that Iran's leaders have not yet made the decision to produce a bomb, and they are not expected to do so as long as their nuclear program is under international scrutiny.

President Obama has tried on a number of occasions to send positive signals to Teheran. Thus, on the eve of the Iranian New Year (March 19, 2009), he sent a videotaped message in which he expressed his desire for dialogue and rapprochement. In the same vein, in his Cairo speech (June 4, 2009), Obama presented almost symmetrically Iran's and the US's transgressions (when in 1953 the US covertly took part in ousting the "democratically elected Iranian government"), and made clear that he understood those around the world who protest against a reality in which "some countries have weapons that others do not." He also declared that he accepted the principle that every country, including Iran, has the right to benefit from peaceful nuclear energy, as long as it complies with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The civil disobedience that broke out in the wake of Iran's mid-June election added new dimensions and more dilemmas to the Iranian nuclear issue, including the question of whether it's possible that the public demonstrations could ripen and effect a regime change in Tehran before it actually acquires nuclear weapons.

In truth, Middle East and Iran watchers failed to foresee the magnitude of the civil unrest in Iran, so we should be especially skeptical of "expert views" on this issue. The Iranian authorities for their part also failed to estimate the power of the opposition; otherwise it is hard to believe they would have allowed 500 foreign journalists to enter the country to cover the elections.

Future scenarios for Iran following the post-election unrest essentially focus on three potential outcomes:

- Ousting the Ayatollahs' regime and transferring power to the reformists.
- The Ayatollahs' regime survives despite the blow to its legitimacy (President Ahmadinejad may have to be 'sacrificed' and forced to resign at some point).
- Actual control (and possibly full authority) will be transferred from the Ayatollahs to Ahmadinejad and the military forces within the Revolutionary Guards.

The uncertainty in the internal Iranian arena makes Obama's Teheran policy difficult to implement. Iran's leaders are preoccupied with domestic problems and their own survival, and there is no unequivocal answer to the question whether the fragile internal situation might radicalize Iran's nuclear stance, or perhaps push the regime into greater transparency and even a willingness to be more flexible. Against the backdrop of President Obama's declaration that without Iranian willingness to negotiate, he will reassess American policy with respect to Iran in September, Tehran declared its willingness to open such talks, currently scheduled for early October. Lack of progress in these talks, especially following the recent revelation that Iran has built secretly a second uranium enrichment plant, could lead to tougher sanctions against Iran.

Experts are divided regarding the efficacy of sanctions as means of effecting a change in Iran's nuclear policy. The proponents of sanctions explain that curbing fuel supplies to Iran (although Iran is one of the world's largest oil exporters, about half of its oil consumption is imported, because its ability to refine crude oil is very limited) could put considerable pressure on Iran's economy and threaten the regime. Yet others argue that Russia and China will not join in such a move, and that Iran can easily bypass the sanctions by using neighboring countries such as Turkey, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. When the negotiation process opens between Washington and Teheran, it is likely to be fraught with difficulties, not least because the Iranians' starting point will focus on their claim that their nuclear program is not for military purposes, and that it is within its rights – as signatories to the NPT – to enrich uranium. Moreover, Israel's name is likely to come up, as it is regarded as already possessing nuclear weapons.

President Obama's overall conception of the nuclear issue will be relevant to any dialogue with Iran. It bears noting that in his Cairo speech Obama painted a vision of a world without nuclear weapons. While this may at first glance seem to be utopian wishful thinking it is in fact backed by the support of leading (and definitely security-minded) figures such as Henry Kissinger, George Shultz and other former high-ranking officials, and may, under certain circumstances, evolve into an actual policy that would affect Israel. A striking hint at this possibility was revealed in the utterances of US Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottenmoeller, who on May 6, 2009, explicitly named Israel – along with India, Pakistan and North Korea – as countries that should be made to adhere to the NPT. Gottenmoeller stressed that this was a fundamental objective of the US. Uncomfortably, from Israel's point of view, the issue could be on the agenda in the coming year, given Obama's plan to invite 30 heads of state to a Washington conference in March 2010 to discuss the security of existing nuclear materials and arsenals.

For the foreseeable future, Israel will continue to face the dilemma of whether to act militarily and unilaterally against Iran, or to wait for the international effort led by the US to bear fruit.



From Israel's point of view, Iran's continued striving to obtain nuclear weapons is working to change the regional strategic picture beyond recognition, because it will drive other countries in the region to obtain nuclear capability (primarily Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey) and ensnare the region in an arms race with potentially grave consequences

Even under the assumption (which is far from certain) that Israel is capable of causing significant damage to the Iranian project and significantly delaying its completion, Israel must carefully consider the possible costs of such an attack, which may include:

- The strengthening of Iran's leaders' motivation and resolve to obtain a nuclear bomb.
- The positioning of Israel as an even more likely target of Iranian nuclear retaliation.
- The strengthening of the Ayatollahs' regime and the rallying of public support in response to an attack.
- A possible crisis in the relationship with the US, if an Israeli attack is launched despite US opposition and is deemed to endanger US soldiers, citizens and interests.
- A conventional military counter attack by Iran against Israel.
- Terror attacks against Israel and Jewish institutions around the globe.
- Igniting the northern front, which has been largely calm in the last year, through Hezbollah, who have compensated for their damages during the Second Lebanon War and have increased their rocket arsenal to 40,000 or more.
- Driving Hamas into attacking southern Israel with missiles and mortars fired from Gaza.

Obviously, the different ways in which the danger of Iran's nuclearization is perceived and defined, and as a result, the different senses of urgency for action to remove that threat, expose a potential chasm between Israel and the rest of the international community, the US included.

## **Israel-USA**

From the earliest days of his term, President Obama has made it clear that achieving a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is central to

his foreign policy. The prompt appointment of former Senator Majority Leader George Mitchell (January 23, 2009) as the President's special envoy to the region, illustrated the high standing this issue holds in Obama's set of priorities. In his view, resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves fundamental American interests in stability and international credibility. To a large extent, Obama has adopted the key conclusions of the Iraq Study Group, a bipartisan commission that deliberated during Bush's term and was co-chaired by former Secretary of State James A. Baker III, a Republican, and Lee Hamilton, former Chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, a Democrat. The recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton report reflect the positions of many in the US foreign policy community:

- A preference for acting within multilateral frameworks (such as the UN and other international bodies).
- A relaxation of the restrictions and preconditions to relationships and communications with extremist regimes (e.g. Iran, Syria).
- Seeing a direct link between the Arab-Israeli conflict and key issues throughout the Middle East of concern to the US: Iraq, Iran, terrorism, extremist Islam, etc. This is accompanied by the unequivocal declaration that "the US will not be able to achieve its goals in the Middle East unless it deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict and regional instability."

President Obama's view of the conflict and the importance of its resolution is part of a broad conceptual framework and an overall strategic picture. It is not merely the product of one man's thinking, but a reflection of deep trends and broad consensus in America regarding its foreign policy, and may even, as argued by some, represent deep shifts occurring in American society. These shifts relate to demographic trends in the US, including the incorporation of a new generation of Asians, Hispanics and others into American elite groups. For this new generation, less shaped by historical memories of the Holocaust and the Cold War and the longstanding "special" relationship between the US and Israel, Israel is just one country among many that have a relationship with the US, and attitudes towards Israel are determined by considerations of American interests, rather than sentimental or religious disposition. According to this interpretation, the phenomenon is part of a trend of decreased influence by both Israel and the Jewish community in the American decision-making process.

The conceptual shifts in US foreign policy, along with the reaction to Bush's policies, were apparent in the President's speech in Cairo (June 4, 2009). Obama made clear his desire to open a new page in the relationship with Islam. He acknowledged the sins of the colonialist West towards Islam and presented his personal history as part of his effort to pay tribute to Islam. In referring to Israel, he emphasized for the Muslim world to hear: "America's strong bonds with Israel are well-known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based

upon cultural and historical ties and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied." Obama condemned the denial of the Holocaust and the murder of six million Jews. Concurrently, and in a nearly-symmetrical manner that enraged some of his Jewish listeners, he referred to the sufferings of the Palestinian people in practically the same breath and declared the right solution to be two states for the two peoples. In calling upon the Palestinians to abandon violence he advised them to learn from the experience of the non-violent civil disobedience of black people in America.

These celebratory declarations cannot, however, stitch together deep intra-Palestinian divisions overnight, nor alleviate the political and coalition constraints on Israel's government, and they fail to impress the basic elements of the Middle East and the Islamic world. Thus, this year's UNDP report on the state of human development in the Arab world paints a harsh picture. According to the report, the Arab world is marked by a basic lack of personal security – both physical and psychological – necessary to safeguard human existence and development. The document, prepared by dozens of Arab researchers, depicts a deeply disturbing reality: water shortages, desertification, lack of representative institutions, violation of human rights, deprivation of women's rights, unemployment, hunger, malnutrition, underdeveloped economies, poor education and healthcare systems, failing countries, violent conflicts and external military involvement. Natural growth rates promise that in five years' time, the Arab world will count 395 million people (compared to 150 million in 1980). Sixty percent of the population in the Arab world is under 25, necessitating the creation of 51 million new jobs in the next ten years, without which millions of Arab youngsters are sure to become easy recruits for terrorist and extremist groups.

## **The Continuation of the Peace Process**

The press conference following the Obama-Netanyahu meeting in Washington on May 18, 2009, exposed significant gaps on key issues:

- Iran – the President rejected the linkage posited by Netanyahu, according to which, as long as there is no solution to the threat posed by Iran, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be resolved. In fact, Obama posited an opposite linkage: The resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would facilitate the consolidation of a moderate regional front which would help the effort to thwart Iran's nuclearization plans.
- The establishment of a Palestinian state – while Obama presented the two-state solution formula as the basis for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Netanyahu refused to agree to that. His position changed a month later, and the change was announced during the Prime Minister's speech at Bar-Ilan University on June 14, 2009.

- Continued building in the settlements – Netanyahu did not accept Obama’s demand to completely freeze construction in the settlements, insisting on Israel’s right to keep building in order to satisfy what he defined as needs arising from natural growth.

In the months following the Obama-Netanyahu meeting, an effort has been made to bridge these gaps between Washington and Jerusalem, in order to pave the way for a renewal of the peace process and formulate its diplomatic architecture and terms of reference. The tripartite meeting between President Obama, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas in New York City on September 22 did not yield a clear decision regarding the restarting of the peace process. No agreement has been reached yet regarding the settlement issue and the principles that would guide the process and its relation to the Road Map and the Annapolis process.

In this context it is important to mention that the Annapolis Conference in November 2007 marked a significant change in the general outline of the Israeli-Palestinian political process. Until Annapolis, this outline was defined in the Road Map as a sequential, goal-driven, phased process: Progress from one phase to the next was conditioned on the fulfillment of the requirements by each of the parties, as specified in the program’s three parts. Based on this logic, the Road Map stipulated that negotiations over the permanent status agreement, as specified in the third phase, could only begin upon the completion of the first two phases of the program.

At Annapolis, Israel relinquished this demand. The sequential logic of the Road Map was removed, and both parties agreed to a plan that would be executed along two parallel channels: implementing the requirements specified in phase 1 of the Road Map, while conducting simultaneous negotiations to reach a permanent status agreement. These negotiations, conducted by the Olmert government, have not been completed, but it turns out that fairly concrete positions regarding all of the core issues of the agreement, including the fate of Jerusalem, were presented, and that the parties have made some progress towards narrowing the gaps. In an interview in *Newsweek* on June 13, 2009, Prime Minister Olmert described the positions he presented to Abu Mazen, the President of the Palestinian Authority, in the closing weeks of his term in office, on the issue of a permanent status agreement:

- The territory of the Palestinian state would comprise 93.7 percent of the West Bank and Gaza territories, with an additional compensation of 5.8 percent to be deducted from Israel’s sovereign territory in a land swap, along with a safe-passage corridor linking the West Bank and Gaza.
- The Holy Basin of Jerusalem would be under no single-state sovereignty and instead be administered by a consortium of Saudis, Jordanians, Israelis, Palestinians and Americans.

- Israel rejected the Palestinian demand for the right of return and instead, was prepared, as a humanitarian gesture, to absorb a small, symbolic number of returnees.

Netanyahu's government is by no means committed to Olmert's positions, but it is hard to ignore the fact that even a negotiation process that did not ripen into a signed agreement has residual implications for its eventual resumption, both in terms of the positions presented and for the outline of the future process.

The changes of government in Washington and in Jerusalem, along with the difficulties stemming from the geographic and ideological divisions of the Palestinian side, have created a political reality that requires a renewed assessment. Indeed, in the months that passed since the appointment of Special Envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell, the Americans have been trying to formulate, in consultation with both parties, a revised outline for the process.

The Palestinian side maintains that the negotiations over the final status agreement should resume from the point at which it stopped, that the work of the negotiating teams is now completed and it is time for the leaders to make historical decisions that would bridge the remaining gaps. The Israeli side sees no point in reaching a permanent status agreement that the Palestinian side is unable to implement ('a shelf agreement'), and fears a situation in which a slippery slope is created, along with the temptation to exert pressure on Israel to begin implementation while the Palestinian side is still not ready and has not fulfilled its obligations (especially due to Hamas' control of the Gaza Strip). The Americans are aware of this reality, and are examining possibilities to overcome the division in the Palestinian camp by encouraging an accord between Fatah and Hamas. In his Cairo speech, Obama refrained from defining Hamas as a terrorist organization, admitted that the movement had won the support of the Palestinian people, and called upon the organization to play a role in the fulfillment of Palestinian hopes by putting an end to violence, accepting previous agreements and recognizing Israel's right to exist.

Despite declarations by Hamas officials during the last year to the effect that they would accept the reality of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders - albeit without recognizing Israel - attempts by Egypt to broker an accord between Hamas and Fatah have not yet been successful.

Operation Cast Lead (December 27, 2008 - January 18, 2009) dealt a major blow to Hamas while at the same time causing considerable damage to Israel's international image. (The establishment of a rightwing government in Israel and the appointment of Avigdor Lieberman as Minister of Foreign Affairs have also exacerbated criticism of Israel.) Nevertheless, in practical terms, the operation did create deterrence and, at least for now, has

stopped rocket fire on southern Israel. Egypt is investing much more effort in curbing arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip, but Hamas remains stable and continues to be a security threat and a political obstacle.

As part of the new administration's efforts to revive the peace process, it is now working with Arab countries to consolidate, alongside the Israeli-Palestinian path, a regional track designed to bring about a gradual normalization in the relations between Israel and the Arab world; while the final peace accords are to be signed along with the Israeli-Palestinian permanent status agreement. This track is meant both to lend pan-Arab legitimacy to the moderate Palestinian camp, and to encourage and convince Israel that the returns it would receive from being forthcoming in negotiations will be of great strategic importance.

The main target of this American move is Saudi Arabia, but Riyadh's leaders are in no hurry to respond to the American appeals. Obama's journey to Saudi Arabia on June 3, 2009, was not a resounding success. On July 31, 2009, Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Saud al-Faisal declared in Washington that "incrementalism and the step-by-step approach has not, and we believe will not, achieve peace. Temporary security, confidence-building measures will also not bring peace."

In this context it should be emphasized that based on Phase II of the Road Map, the Arab world is committed to revive the multilateral engagements with Israel that first began as part of the Madrid process (i.e. five working groups: arms control, economic development, environment, refugees and water resources), and to reopen trade offices that were closed (Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Mauritania and Tunisia). The Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, (OIC), which convened in Damascus in May 2009, while sharply criticizing Israel, also reaffirmed in its resolutions both the Arab peace plan and the Road Map.

Recent months have exposed disagreements and tensions between Israel and the US. The first dispute focused on the refusal of the Israeli government to accept the principle that the solution of the conflict is based on the establishment of a Palestinian state. This dispute was settled, as mentioned above, when Netanyahu accepted this principle in his Bar-Ilan speech on June 14, 2009. Another serious argument concerns the US demand that settlement activity be totally frozen, including construction to accommodate natural growth.

The Israeli side argued that this demand violated previous understandings between the American administration and Jerusalem. Secretary of State Clinton rebuffed the Israeli claim as fallacious, but Elliott Abrams, who headed Near Eastern Affairs at the National Security Council during George W. Bush's presidency, argued that, in fact, Israel and the US had reached certain understandings. These include: no expropriation of additional

Palestinian land, no economic subsidies or incentives provided by Israel to the settlements, no new settlements to be built, and no further construction beyond 'the built-up line.' Taken together one can infer that according to these prior agreements, construction within settlements was not totally frozen.

As this document goes to print it appears that the United States is moderating its demands on Israel with respect to the settlement freeze, and does not wish discord over this issue to prevent the renewal of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations towards a final agreement. Assuming that an understanding is reached that would allow the renewal of the peace process, the sides will have to choose between several options:

(1) continued negotiations over the permanent status agreement; (2) focusing in the beginning on a single core issue: the permanent border lines; (3) reverting to the sequential outline of the Road Map, and in this framework, the establishment of a Palestinian state within provisional borders; (4) some combination of the these three alternatives.

Both parties have their reservations, of course. For example, the Palestinians object to the establishment of a state with provisional borders, while Israel objects to negotiations yielding a 'shelf agreement.'

The challenge for Washington now is to design a plan that would be both acceptable to the parties and viable. For any alternative chosen, the US expects the Arab world to play a supportive role. It is likely that the US plan would regard the integration of Syria and Lebanon into the process in a positive light. The US has recently sent high-ranking diplomats, including Mitchell, to conduct talks in Damascus, and has announced its intentions to reinstate its Ambassador to Syria.

It is to be expected that strengthening Abu Mazen's status will be a major focus under any scenario. In recent months, positive developments have occurred in the West Bank. Israel has removed blockades that encumbered freedom of movement, and the local economy is showing healthy signs (7% growth in the past year). The Palestinian security forces, trained and supervised by Lieut. Gen. Keith Dayton, US Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority, have achieved good results in the areas they control, and do not hesitate to engage in violent confrontations with Hamas elements. Personal security in Palestinian towns has improved, and armed militant gangs have disappeared from the streets. These processes are led to a large extent by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who is promoting a strategy of building a fully functioning state and civil society even before the formal proclamation of its establishment. These achievements coincide with the success of Fatah's conference, which took place in Bethlehem on August 4-10, 2009. Abu Mazen was strengthened by the conference and his leadership won further legitimacy. Many new faces were elected to the

executive committee; the older generation, led by Abu Ala (who failed to be re-elected) suffered a devastating defeat; Fatah is able to claim that it is now on the road to rejuvenation and recovery. It is difficult to estimate whether this process will survive intra-Palestinian divisions and rivalries, also in part because the stifling of Hamas's power in the West Bank relies on an IDF presence in the area.

## Progress in the Peace Process and the Jewish Dimension

The possibility of the renewal of negotiations for an Israeli-Palestinian permanent status agreement raises highly sensitive issues that are close to the heart of the Jewish People in Israel and the Diaspora: securing the safe existence of the State of Israel, the nature of the agreement regarding Jerusalem, the future status of the holy places and historical sites in Judea and Samaria, the evacuation and dismantling of settlements, preserving the Jewish majority in Israel, and the Jewish-democratic nature of the state. All these strain and threaten internal solidarity in Israel and the Diaspora.

An indication of this is reflected in the survey conducted by J-Street among US Jews in March 2009. The survey found a majority (57% for vs. 43% against) regarding the question: "Would you support or oppose the United States playing an active role in helping the parties to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict if it meant the United States exerting pressure on Israel to make the compromises necessary to achieve peace?"

A similar question (albeit without the reference to "pressure on Israel") was part of an ADL survey conducted in April 2009. 44% responded positively to the statement: "Peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians will never take place without the continuing leadership and involvement of the US government," while 47% preferred the statement: "It is up to the Palestinians and the Israelis to solve their problems; any LASTING agreement between them must be reached with the US only playing a role as a facilitator."

It is no coincidence that as the political negotiation process draws nearer to addressing the sensitive core issues, the intra-Jewish debate is becoming increasingly heated, not just regarding the opportunity or the danger inherent in the process, but also around the question of whether (and how) world Jewry should take part in historical decisions which could affect the future of Jerusalem, Israel, and the entire Jewish world. If, indeed, the talks ripen in the coming year towards the possibility of reaching an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, the US may exert pressure on Israel to agree to some last-moment concessions in order to enable the parties to sign. As a result, tensions may appear in the Washington-Jerusalem relationship and within Jewish communities themselves. Tensions may of course rise in the case that Israel appears to be the party hindering the progress of the process. Such a reality may put the Jewish community in the US in an awkward position,



especially in view of the familiar published claims that American foreign policy in the Middle East is influenced by Israel and the Jewish lobby in a manner that is contrary to US interests.

The Iranian threat and the Arab-Israeli conflict are the two main themes that currently dominate the dynamics of the Washington-Jerusalem-American Jewry triad. The developments that will take place in these areas in the coming year might have a substantial impact on the stature of Israel and the Jewish People.

# 'Arevut, Partnership and Responsibility

By Meir Kraus, Yehudah Mirsky, Dov Maimon and Yogev Karasenty

*This Background Paper is based on a project commissioned from JPPPI by the Government of Israel and the Jewish Agency for Israel to chart a new course in Israel's efforts to strengthen Jewish identity and enhance the connections between Diaspora communities and Israel.*

## Goals

On September 28, 2008, the Government of Israel formally resolved to formulate a comprehensive policy aimed at strengthening Jewish identity in the Diaspora and enhance the linkage between world Jewry and Israel. This decision proceeds from a widely-shared sense of ongoing erosion of Jewish identity around the globe, and from concern over a steadily-widening gap between Israel and masses of Jews. By this decision, the Government of Israel has expressed the position that it regards itself, jointly with world communities, as responsible for the future of the Jewish People, and that the State of Israel has a central role to play in the endeavor to secure that future. The implementation of this responsibility entails a consistent and continued investment, jointly with Jewish communities and individuals around the world, in activities which could positively affect Jewish identity and the connection between Jews and Israel.

This governmental decision is pioneering and unique in its attempt to define a formal – and budgeted – Israeli policy regarding the future identity and thriving of the Jewish People outside the borders of the State of Israel; indeed it marks a deliberate strategic investment in the future of the Jewish People.

Following that decision, the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute was chosen by the Government of Israel to prepare and submit a policy paper with recommendations as to how the government should go about implementing this decision.

The objective of the present work is, therefore, to recommend to the Government of Israel the actions it should take, in collaboration with Jewish communities and individuals, to strengthen Jewish identity and the linkages between Israel and Jews around the world, and especially among the younger generation.

For the purpose of preparing the present policy paper, the Institute's team engaged in consultations with some three hundred men and women, young and old, representatives of communities and organizations, communal leaders, educators, philanthropists, activists and scholars.

## Basic Principles

The basic principles which guided us in this work are:

- Securing the future of the Jewish People at the present time necessitates the existence of both a thriving State of Israel and vital Jewish communities around the world.
- A comprehensive and deeply meaningful relationship between the State of Israel and Diaspora communities, and an ongoing, meaningful and fruitful dialogue between Israel and the Diaspora, are of the utmost importance to the existence, thriving and welfare of the state of Israel, and to the existence and flourishing of those communities themselves.
- Israel, which was founded as the State of the Jewish People, is committed to securing the future of the Diaspora communities and their vitality, dynamism and thriving.
- The profoundest challenge currently facing the Jewish People with respect to its future is the difficulty of preserving, developing and furthering a unique Jewish identity in an open and universally-minded global environment.
- Efforts to promote Jewish identity and connection with Israel in the Diaspora must be accompanied by efforts to promote knowledge, awareness and a sense of belonging to the Jewish People at large within the State of Israel itself.
- An Israeli effort to strengthen Jewish identity is not a one-off project within a limited timeframe; it must be a persistent, committed and long-term responsibility.

## Challenges to Continuity

Analysis of the challenges to Jewish continuity indicates that in all Diaspora communities, their great variations notwithstanding, two key phenomena are deeply affecting Jewish life; one is qualitative and the other quantitative.

The qualitative phenomenon is the danger of erosion in meaning and intensity in the experience of Jewish identity. Most researchers agree that in the absence of concerted action this trend is expected to continue, notwithstanding the vast scope and range of current efforts throughout the Jewish world to preserve – and make meaningful – Jewish identity.

The quantitative phenomenon is the demographic decline which characterizes Jewish communities everywhere, except for a few rare

cases. Demographers are divided regarding the rates of decline, and some forecasts are bleaker than others, but the basic trends are glaringly and painfully clear.

In addition to these phenomena, there is discernible fear of an ever-widening gap between Israel and the Diaspora and concern over the diminishing sense of mutual connectivity between Israel and Jews around the world. This gap especially manifests itself in the distancing of Diaspora youngsters from Israel, decreasing identification with Israel, steadily declining interest in its affairs and less concern for its future.

The core components of identity – meaning and belonging – arise from a wide variety of factors which may roughly be categorized in three groups: universal factors, which reflect global societal trends; external local factors which impact the spaces Jews inhabit and their identities therein; and intra-Jewish processes and developments. Understanding all of these is a prerequisite for grasping where and how we meaningfully can interact with and impact upon the elements of identity.

Our ability to influence universal and external factors is very limited (if indeed it exists at all), and so this Report focuses on intra-Jewish dimensions.

## **Suggested Policy Directions**

In light of our analysis of the components of identity and the factors shaping it, and based on the general insights we have gleaned from our extensive consultation process and the research and theoretical literature we have reviewed, we posit the following set of policy directions as a basis for our recommendations.

- Positioning Israel and strengthening its status as a focus of identification for the Jewish People.
- Disseminating Jewish knowledge, cultural treasures and Hebrew language among ever larger circles.
- Anchoring Jewish identity in moral normative values including social justice, and working towards Tikkun Olam in both material and spiritual terms, as they arise out of the richness of Jewish heritage.
- Expanding and enhancing the weave of connectivity among Jews and Israelis overall.
- Enhancing Jewish identity and the consciousness of belonging to the Jewish People among Israeli youth.

A program that includes action strategies based on these policy directions could substantially contribute to the strengthening of Jewish identity and the link between Israel and the Diaspora.

The following are the key recommendations as to the substance of the policies to be pursued, and the practical framework to pursue them.

## **Key Recommendations: Substance**

This Report recommends a program that includes an array of action strategies, reflecting the diversity of the world's Jews and the many and varied manifestations of Jewish identity.

- The Government of Israel will encourage all Jewish youth to visit Israel at least once between the ages of 15-30, through a variety of programs targeted at the entire range of populations and ages.
- The Government of Israel shall act to disseminate Jewish intellectual and cultural riches, including classic texts, contemporary Israeli culture, Hebrew language, and the inculcation of the idea of study as a defining Jewish value, among Jews around the world, through a variety of formal and informal activities and collaborative projects.
- The State of Israel will serve as a center of training, support and consultation for Jewish education in the Diaspora, help develop programs in existing schools and assist in establishing new schools abroad for the study of Jewish culture and heritage.
- The Government of Israel shall act to encourage and establish Tikkun Olam ventures, in which young men and women from Israel and diaspora communities will work together on issues of social justice and humanitarian concern.
- The Government of Israel shall act to strengthen Jewish identity and the sense of belonging to the Jewish People among Israeli youth through the educational system and other means.
- The Government of Israel shall establish a Global Jewish Foundation for supporting innovative grass-roots ventures and initiatives proposal by or for Jewish youth.

## Key Recommendations: Governance, Implementation and Funding

The Report recommends the following framework for implementing the comprehensive program outlined above:

- The Government of Israel will initiate the implementation of the program and invite Diaspora Jewry to take part in its realization.
- A joint forum of the Government of Israel and representatives of various organizations, communities, educators, activists, intellectuals, spiritual leaders and independent philanthropists will serve as the program's steering committee.
- The steering committee will delegate to a professional executive staff responsibility for planning, defining standards, budgeting, monitoring and conducting ongoing research and evaluation.
- The executive staff will in turn delegate implementation to already-existing organizations with proven track records on the ground. New organizations may be created as needed.
- The Report suggests an initial five-year program. The program will develop during those five years in terms of scale and budget, and by the fifth year it should attain the goals specified in the recommendations detailed in the body of the Report.
- A research and evaluation team will escort the program from its inception, and its work will forge the research infrastructure necessary for evaluating the program's performance and accomplishments and planning for its future phases, beyond the fifth year.
- An effort such as this should be funded jointly by the Government of Israel and Jewish communities and philanthropists around the globe, as part of their responsibility for the future of the Jewish People and Jewish civilization.

The authors of the Report believe that the implementation of the entire range of recommendations specified therein could contribute substantially to strengthening Jewish identity, creating a sense of belonging to the Jewish People, and intensifying the sense of connection with Israel now and into the future.

# Part B

# Schedule:

## DAY 1 – MONDAY OCTOBER 12, 2009

11:00-12:00	Registration and Welcome
12:00-2:00	Plenary and Working Lunch
2:30-4:00	Working Group Sessions (in parallel)
4:00-4:30	Break
4:30-6:30	Working Group Sessions (in parallel)
6:30-7:30	Break
7:30-9:30	Plenary and Working Dinner

## DAY 2 – TUESDAY OCTOBER 13, 2009

8:00-9:00	Breakfast
9:00-11:00	Working Group Sessions (in parallel, crystallizing summaries and recommendations)
11:00-1:00	Final Plenary Session
1:00-2:30	Closing Remarks and Lunch



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