

## The Turn Against Israel

By John Podhoretz Commentary Magazine July/August 2009

Barack Obama began the first week of June with a series of interviews on the eve of his journey to Cairo to deliver his address to the "Muslim world." In all of them, he spoke of the Israeli-Palestinian situation and the central importance of resolving it as part of his aim of beginning anew with the Arab and Muslim nations that have grown so disenchanted with the United States. To National Public Radio, the President made a point of invoking the ties that bind America to Israel and the "special relationship" between the two nations before asserting that part of being a good friend is being honest. And I think there have been times where we are not as honest as we should be about the fact that the current direction, the current trajectory, in the region is profoundly negative, not only for Israeli interests but also U.S. interests. And that's part of a new dialogue that I'd like to see encouraged in the region.

The President is, of course, entirely right about how "profoundly negative" the "current direction, the current trajectory, in the region" is for American and Israeli interests. A theocratic regime committed in word and spirit to Israel's destruction is relentlessly marching ahead with the development of nuclear weaponry. The conclusion of its march poses not only a threat to Israel's existence but portends a Persian Gulf arms race with implications that ought to terrify everyone. This is precisely the kind of "new dialogue" Israel and the United States should be pursuing in the Middle East - honesty about the trajectory of Iran.

But, of course, honest discourse about Iran was not the fearless truth Barack Obama wished to bestow upon Israel or the Muslim world.

Rather, his honesty solely concerned the trajectory of the "settlements" which is to say, those acres between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea on which Jewish people now live that have not been declared part of the state of Israel by the international community.

The President's honesty compelled him to inform his friend that these acres of earth have been improperly and illegally built upon, and that their existence imperils the creation of the Palestinian state he believes is a political and moral necessity.

Obama's notion that presidents before him have not been "as honest as we should be" about the settlements is a peculiar one. Every occupant of the Oval Office since Richard Nixon has spoken

unfavorably about them. Indeed, when it comes to policy specifics, it is hard to see exactly how Obama has ushered in a new era of "honesty" in the U.S.-Israel relationship.

And yet there is no question that we have entered a new era, one that I expect will be characterized by tensions and unpleasantnesses of a kind unseen since the days when George H. W. Bush was president, James A. Baker III was secretary of state, and the hostility toward Israel oozed from both men like sweat from an intrepid colonial traveler's brow as he journeyed across the Rub-al-Khali.

One tiny detail gives the game away: Obama's very use of the word "honest." It was carefully chosen, and is pregnant with meaning.

In the matter of relations between nations, the adjective "honest" is often deployed to denote animosity. When, for example, a State Department official describes a discussion between diplomats as "open and honest," that description is presumed to mean that the proceedings were heated and confrontational.

And in the relations between the United States and Israel, "honest" has a provenance that cannot be ignored. It is most often used as part of a two-word phrase whose euphemistic purpose has long been to criticize American closeness to Israel and assert that any such intimacy needs to be abandoned in favor of a more distant, distinctly cooler posture.

The phrase is "honest broker," as in, "the United States should serve as an honest broker in the Middle East." It goes back at least 30 years, and seems first to have entered the realm of American cliché in tribute to President Jimmy Carter's role in the Camp David peace process between Israel and Egypt. The success of that negotiation led to calls for the United States to continue to serve as an "honest broker" when it came to the relations between Israel and the 21 other Arab countries that, unlike Egypt, still continued to refuse to recognize its existence.

Therein lay the flaw in the "honest broker" idea whereby it was exposed for the disingenuous notion it was. For Israel's only offense to those nations was its very existence. There can be no honest deal-brokering if one party refuses to accept the reality of another. The term suggested each party had equal weight and equal standing, but that was precisely not the case with Israel and the Arab states. The Arab

nations had the geopolitical weight; Israel had the moral standing.

What the honest-brokerers actually meant when they said that the United States should play an uncommitted role was that we ought to keep our distance from Israel in order to maintain good relations with Arab states many of whom, after all, not only sat atop mammoth oil reserves but whose potentates were also genial and lovely hosts, in contrast to the informal and stiff-necked sabras who simply didn't know how to act in a courtly fashion toward the starched foreign-service officers who served as the nation's emissaries.

It was only in the 1990s, when Yasir Arafat parachuted into the West Bank from his exile in Tunis and reinvented as a negotiating partner for Israel, that the phrase began once again to find purchase. For now, at last, there was a deal to be brokered; the Palestinians were now at the table, eager to claim the land Israel had taken in war.

Those who advocated for the Palestinian cause argued that the only way such a thing was going to happen would be if the United States were to serve as an "honest broker" which is to say, implicitly, as the representative of the Palestinians in the negotiation. And indeed, effectively, that is what the Clinton administration did do, so well that it all but designed a Palestinian state, induced then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to accept it, and then went into slack-jawed shock when Yasir Arafat rejected it and started a terror war instead.

Nonetheless, those in the "honest broker" camp believed the Clinton administration was compromised by its acceptance of the phrase "special relationship" and Clinton's own expressions of closeness to the assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Such is the nature of those who hunger for the "honest broker" role nothing less than a breach with Israel will do. The honest-brokerers presume that the United States has tilted in Israel's direction for all sorts of reasons, all of them corrupt, corrupted, and corrupting.

The government is always being manipulated, the honest-brokerers say, by the all-powerful Israel lobby, the all-powerful neoconservatives, or the all-powerful born-again Christians. Presidents hunger for the Jewish vote in Florida and Pennsylvania, and therefore betray America's true interests. For the honest-brokerers, then, American support for Israel is always viewed as dishonest.

People will argue about the text of Obama's Cairo address as long as he is president, because he is to plain-spoken clarity what blue-hued cotton candy is to nutrient. But the message he was delivering to his own State Department, to his own diplomats who will be carrying out his policies, was plain: The goal of American foreign policy in the Middle East is now the creation of a Palestinian state. Very little will be expected of the Palestinians in the creation of that state; Hamas should renounce terror and recognize Israel, but a failure to do so will not kill the deal. Violence should be foresworn, but even that is of secondary importance to the state itself. A great deal is, however, expected of Israel. Settlements are to be frozen, including their "natural growth." Israel must bolster the Palestinian economy, provide Palestinians with jobs, and make things better in Gaza. Israel is to give; the Palestinians are to receive. Israel's giving is to be accompanied by a promise of reduced violence. Palestinian receiving will be accompanied by Israel's surrender of more territory beyond the entirety of Gaza and the near-entirety of the West Bank already in Palestinian hands. Israel, the president asserts, will be better off if all this happens. Trust him. He's Israel's friend. A better friend than anyone else, remember, because he's willing to be honest about Israel's need to sacrifice itself on the altar of nothing more than a promise, and maybe not even that.

And so the turn against Israel that so many predicted during the 2008 campaign is coming to pass with a smile, and a nod, and an invocation of a word that actually means something very different from friendship. It might even mean its opposite.

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## **Note to Obama: Palestinians still haven't recognized the Jewish State**

**By Ronald S. Lauder The Wall Street Journal August 12, 2009**

More than one American president has tried to bring peace to the Middle East, and more than one has failed. So as the Obama administration outlines its own prospectus for a comprehensive settlement to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians and the wider Arab world, it would do well to take note of some potential pitfalls.

Rule No. 1: Respect the sovereignty of democratic allies. When free people in a democracy express their preferences, the United States should respect their opinions. The current administration should not try to impose ideas on allies like Israel.

The administration would also do well to take heed of the Palestinian Authority's continued refusal to recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. This is not a trivial matter. A long-term settlement can only be forged on the basis of mutual recognition and respect. To deny the essence of the Zionist project—to rebuild the Jewish people's ancient homeland—is to call into question the seriousness of one's commitment to peace.

It is a sad statement of the Palestinians' approach to peace-making that denial of the Jewish homeland is not simply contained in the openly anti-

Semitic leadership of Hamas. It is a widespread belief across the spectrum of Palestinian opinion. This reality must be confronted.

Today's leadership must never forget that the core historic reason for the conflict is the Arab world's longstanding rejection of Israel's existence. The two-state solution was accepted by Israel's pre-state leadership led by David Ben-Gurion in 1947 when it agreed to the partition plan contained in United Nation's General Assembly Resolution 181. The Arabs flatly rejected it. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton knows all too well, President Bill Clinton's peace plans in 2000 foundered due to Palestinian rejection of the Jewish state, even as Israel, once again, accepted their right to statehood.

More recent experience in Europe also offers lessons about the dangers of negotiating with terrorists. Over the past year, officials from Britain, France and the European Union all held talks with officials from the "political wing" of Hezbollah in a bid to get the terrorist group to moderate its behavior. Hezbollah is undoubtedly grateful for the legitimacy that these meetings have conferred, but it is not laying down its arms. Indeed, according to a recent report from the Times of London, the group has now stockpiled 40,000 rockets close to the Israeli border.

To be sure, we must have hope. Peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan are useful models. Nonetheless, the recent rebuffs by Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia of efforts by the Obama administration to promote a more conciliatory

## The lonely Israeli Left

By Carolyn Glick The Jerusalem Post

Israel's leftists are lonely these days. This was the central thrust of an opinion column in Tuesday's New York Times authored by Aluf Benn, editor-at-large of the left-wing Haaretz newspaper.

Benn's article, "Why Won't Obama Talk to Israel?" was a plaintive call for US President Barack Obama to woo the Israeli public. As Benn put it, "Next time you're in the neighborhood, Mr. President, speak to us directly."

Benn's article has been touted by Obama supporters and detractors alike as evidence that the president has a credibility problem with Israelis. Jewish Obama supporters sought to soften the impact of Benn's article on their fellow Jewish leftists by claiming that Obama is listening to the likes of Benn. For instance, the Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg reported without irony that administration officials defend Obama's silence toward Israel by arguing that his June 4 speech to the Muslim world in Cairo was also geared toward Israelis.

The June 4 address of course was the one where Obama compared Israel's treatment of the Palestinians to the Nazi Holocaust of European

attitude to Israel offer a salient reminder that those who started this conflict may not yet be in a mood to end it, whatever their rhetoric to the contrary.

And then there are the settlements. Undoubtedly, this is a complex matter. Yet the administration must beware of overemphasizing it. Compromises between people of goodwill can be made on the settlements, as Israel has demonstrated in the recent past. But no compromise can be made on Israel's right to exist inside secure borders unmolested by terrorist groups or threatened by belligerent states.

That's why an unambiguous strategy explaining precisely how Hamas and Hezbollah can be disarmed and how Iran can be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons is of central importance to any peace plan.

The administration must also be wary of letting Israel's opponents use the settlement issue as a convenient excuse for failing to make moves of their own. The settlements matter, but they do not go to the core of this decades-old conflict.

Making peace in the Middle East is an unenviable task. It is also a noble calling. To be successful, it will require patience and fortitude. It will also require an ability to stand above the fray, to see the problems for what they are, and the courage to confront them at their source.

**Mr. Lauder is president of the World Jewish Congress.**

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Jewry and to black slavery in the antebellum American South. It was also the speech where he embraced Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's claim that Israel owes its existence to the Holocaust and not to the Jewish people's legitimate right to self-determination in our homeland.

Benn's piece is an interesting read, but not for the reasons that have been widely cited. It is interesting for what it says about the Israeli Left on the one hand, and what it says about Obama and his American Jewish supporters on the other.

Although Benn gives a long bill of particulars on why Israelis mistrust Obama, the general thrust of the article is supportive of the administration. Far from an attack on Obama, it is a cry for help. Benn and his fellow Israeli leftists want the administration to help them by changing the tenor of its policies, not the policies themselves.

Whereas the American Left was triumphant in the 2008 elections, the Israeli Left was decimated in Israel's general elections in February. Its two standard bearers - Meretz and Labor - were

effectively wiped out. Its new flagship, Kadima, failed to win the support of any other party in its bid to form a governing coalition. Worse still, consistent polling shows that the general public rejects every one of the Israeli Left's central policies. From the swift establishment of a Palestinian state, to the mass expulsion of Jews from Judea and Samaria and Jerusalem, to unilateral land giveaways to the Palestinians, the Israeli Left today speaks for a but a small minority of Israelis.

Benn cited last month's Jerusalem Post poll which showed that a mere 6 percent of Israeli Jews view Obama as pro-Israel while some 50% of Israeli Jews perceive the president as more pro-Palestinian than pro-Israel. As he sees it, Obama's failure to win the trust of the Israeli public will make it impossible for him to coerce the Netanyahu government into freezing Jewish construction in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. This is a disaster for Benn and his colleagues. For unless the US can force the government's hand, there is no chance that they will be able to see their radical policies implemented.

It is in his attempt to convince Obama to help the Israeli Left that Benn makes his most consequential critique of the US leader. As he puts it, Obama "seems to have confused American Jews with Israelis."

Benn points out that Obama's repeated attacks on Holocaust denial resonate more strongly with US Jews than with Israelis and that the two Jewish populations have "different historical narratives."

Benn is onto something when he notes the differences between Israeli and American Jews. But he fails to grasp the real significance of what Obama is doing and what is actually happening in relations between the two communities.

It isn't that Obama is confusing the two groups. Through both his rhetoric and his actions, Obama is demonstrating his priorities and concerns.

Obama cares about securing the support of American Jews. He does not care about gaining the support of Israeli Jews. Moreover, Obama feels comfortable wooing the former while alienating the latter because he recognizes something that Benn has apparently missed: Today a large and growing chasm separates leftist US Jews from leftist Israeli Jews. During his recent meeting at the White House with hand-picked American Jewish leftist activists and centrist American Jewish leaders, Obama explained that he welcomes open disputes with Israel. As he put it, during the Bush presidency, there was "no daylight [between the US and Israel] and no progress."

Whereas Obama's goal of openly distancing the US from Israel is a source of anxiety and frustration for Israeli leftists who believe that US pressure should be a means to the end of compelling Israel to give away land to the Palestinians, it is a positive

development for American Jewish Leftists. Led by the new anti-Israel Jewish lobby J Street, and supported by groups like Americans for Peace Now, the Union for Reform Judaism, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and the National Jewish Democratic Council, the American Jewish Left supports the White House's hostile positions on Israel as an ends unto themselves.

J Street - a creation of Democratic fund-raiser and anti-Israel activist George Soros - was established ahead of the 2008 elections to lobby the White House and Congress to foment breaches in the US-Israel strategic relationship.

When Soros first raised the prospect of a Jewish anti-Israel lobby in October 2006, he argued that there was a need to institutionalize what had until then been ad-hoc anti-Israel lobbying efforts by American Jewish groups in order to scuttle Congressional support for Israel and undermine mainstream American Jewish organizations.

True to their mandates, today J Street and its fellow leftist Jewish groups Americans for Peace Now and Brit Tzedek v'Shalom lobby Congress to adopt positions that place the US in direct confrontation with Israel. The three groups are presently lobbying Congress to oppose an AIPAC initiative calling on Obama to pressure Arab governments to normalize relations with Israel. In their view, the move is objectionable because it doesn't contain a demand that Israel stop building homes for Jews in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. J Street similarly opposed Operation Cast Lead, claiming that Israel's actions to defend its citizens from rocket and mortar attacks from Hamas-controlled Gaza were contrary to the interests of peace. Although attacking Israel on the Palestinian issue is the central pillar of these groups' missions, they are also involved in defending Iran's nuclear weapons program and championing Syria in Washington. In late May, J Street lobbied Congress not to place new sanctions on Iran, claiming, "On Iran, the president is promoting tough, direct diplomacy... but the chances of [his] success won't be helped by Congress imposing tight timelines or a new round of sanctions."

The group has similarly supported ending sanctions against Syria and pressuring Israel to relinquish the Golan Heights to Syrian control.

In short, through their full-throated support for all of the Obama administration's anti-Israel policies, the organized American Jewish Left has made clear that today it does not share a common goal with the Israeli Left. It does not view US pressure on Israel as a means to achieve peace and normalization between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Rather, like Obama, it views pressure on Israel as a means to weaken US ties to Israel in the interest of pursuing closer ties with the Arab world.

The current split between the Israeli and American Jewish Left, as well as the Obama administration's disparate treatment of both groups have policy implications for the Netanyahu government in its dealings with all three.

According to a number of American Jewish leaders, Obama's decision to meet with a hand-picked audience of American Jews at the White House on July 13 was a direct response to the Jerusalem Post poll. Obama's senior advisers feared that the massive Israeli mistrust of Obama the poll exposed was liable to spill over into the American Jewish community.

To date, in contending with the White House, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has been careful to minimize the significance of the White House-initiated crisis in relations. Fearing a domestic backlash, Netanyahu and his advisers have even gone so far as to leak reports of imminent agreements between the Obama administration and Israel on the issue of home construction for Jews in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.

What the White House's distress over the Post's poll shows, however, is that today - with a domestic consensus now backing Netanyahu against Obama - Netanyahu has less call to minimize the breach than Obama does. Indeed, doing so only advances Obama's fortunes among American Jews and so strengthens the position of anti-Israel Jewish organizations that support him. Rather than leak stories about an impending deal, Netanyahu's advisers should leak stories about American intransigence and hostility.

Moreover, given the administration's overarching desire to put "daylight" between the US and Israel, reaching an agreement with Washington will bring no relief. Since it is the administration's goal to weaken US ties to the Jewish state, clearly any deal that Israel could obtain would either be antithetical to Israel's national interests or breached by the administration.

Perhaps in response to J Street's ever-expanding media presence, Ambassador Michael Oren intimated last month that he intends to reach out to far-Left American Jewish groups. To the extent that this is a serious initiative, it should be dropped immediately.

Through their actions, J Street and its allies have made clear that their institutional interests are served by weakening Israel. Their mission is to harm Israel's standing in Washington and weaken the influence of the mainstream American Jewish community that supports Israel.

Rather than empower these anti-Israel groups by legitimizing them, the government should take a page out of Obama's playbook. Obama gave the impression of hosting a big tent for American Jews by inviting both friendly far-Left groups and friendly centrist groups to meet with him on July 13. He legitimized his friends at J Street and Americans for Peace Now by treating them as equals of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

By the same token, Israel's embassy should act as a big tent by reaching out to Israel's supporters on both the political Right and the center. All groups that support Israel should be welcome.

As to the Israeli Left, to date, Netanyahu has successfully built a strong, stable center-right coalition by going over its head and forming a national consensus around support for defensible borders, a united Jerusalem and rejecting unreciprocated concessions of any kind. While the prime minister arguably made an unnecessary and potentially disastrous mistake in announcing his support for a demilitarized Palestinian state, by and large, he has successfully marginalized the Left.

Benn's anguished plea for help from the Obama administration shows that Netanyahu's policies are having the desired effect. His political opponents are descending into the depths of political irrelevance. Netanyahu should leave them to their richly deserved fate.

## Al-Arabia TV Deputy Secretary-General Calls for Resettlement of Palestinian Refugees By MEMRI August 11, 2009

*Daoud Al-Shiryani, Al-Hayat columnist and deputy secretary-general of Al-Arabiya TV, recently published several articles criticizing how the Palestinian refugees have been treated by the Arab countries in which they live. He called on these countries to integrate the refugees into their societies and to resettle them before they are forced to do so by the international community.*

**Objecting to Refugee Resettlement Is Objecting to Peace** In the first of his articles, published July 15, 2009, Al-Shiryani wrote: "The issue of [refugee] resettlement has begun to

preoccupy the Arab countries, which are keeping the Palestinians in depressing prison camps known as Palestinian refugee camps. Although so far no one in the Arab world has called for their resettlement, the refugee problem has now [gained prominence] in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, both on the political arena and in the media. It has [even] become an issue in forming the next Lebanese government. This means that, in its next stage, the peace process is expected to encounter obstacles [on the part of] the Arabs.

"Objecting to [refugee] resettlement is no different than objecting to peace. It is nothing but an

unrealistic slogan. The Arabs have agreed to peace, although they realize that there cannot be peace without [refugee] resettlement. But they disregard this fact, viewing the refugee issue as a point of controversy, when it is [actually] a central and key issue in the peace process. The fear [of being accused of renouncing the nationalist] slogans [calling for] struggle, resistance, and casting Israel into the sea – slogans which emerged at the outset of the peace process with Israel – and the link that has been established between the issue [of resettlement] and ethnic and political problems in some [Arab] countries – have [all] become an obstacle to a realistic and honest approach to the issue.

"Arabs who object to the [refugee] resettlement plan contend that they are motivated by their zealous devotion to the Right of Return. But they have not lifted a finger to keep this right alive in the consciousness of the Palestinian 'detainees' in the camps of abasement. As a result, this spurious devotion has evoked the opposite reaction: a Palestinian [refugee] now hopes to emigrate to America, Europe, Canada, or Australia in order to escape the hell of the Palestinian refugee camps, which have played a part in killing his will to live.

"It follows that [refugee] resettlement is [already] underway, despite [all the] slogans promoting the Right of Return that have become an [integral] part of the speeches of these countries' politicians.

"There is no doubt that our next campaign [should be aimed at] defending the [refugee] resettlement program and demanding that it be implemented... [The host countries] must open up the refugee camps, which are not fit for human [habitation]. [They must] prohibit the trading in the lives of these people, whether this trading was in the name of security and or in the name of terrorism, and they must make it possible for Palestinians to work, to send their children to [public] schools, and to make a living without conditions or limitations. Without real change in the conduct of the countries 'detaining' the Palestinian [refugees], the number of those demanding resettlement will [only] increase. Opposition to [refugee] resettlement is specious; it is tantamount to the slow murder of the Palestinians..."(1)

**Stop Treating the Palestinians Like A Plague** In another article, published July 20, 2009, Al-Shiryani wrote: "[Refugee] resettlement will undoubtedly happen; let us hope that it happens soon. We are not asking the countries with the refugee camps to grant the Palestinians citizenship out of their own goodwill. But [even] before the refugees are resettled, these countries must tear down the refugee camps' fences, open their gates to let in light and fresh air, [allow] freedom of movement, protect the Palestinians from the

humiliation of poverty, destitution and having to beg from UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency], and enable them to work.

"These countries must stop treating the Palestinians like a plague, using slogans which, as we all know, have become nothing but empty utterances in a loathsome struggle. We must break the isolation of the Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. A Palestinian should be made to feel like a welcome and dear guest – before some external intervention comes along and grants him the right to live in dignity, to everyone's consternation.

"We must support the Palestinians like the West supported the Jews. We must reassess the whole idea of refugee camps, before they collapse on top of us. Be God-fearing [in handling the issue of] the refugee camp dwellers. Stop fighting at the expense of the Palestinian people's dignity."(2)

**The Arabs Have Turned the Palestinians Into a People Defeated Both Morally and Materially** In the third article on the subject of refugee resettlement, Al-Shiryani related the stories of two Lebanese women, one Palestinian and the other Jewish. He wrote: "The [Jewish] Lebanese woman, Hannah [Efrayim], invited the Palestinian woman, Umm Bilal, to come spend the weekend at her house... [saying], 'I want you to help me pack my things, since I have decided to emigrate to the U.S. As you can see, the political and social situation after the 1958 [Lebanese civil] war does not encourage one to stay [in Lebanon], and intensifies sectarianism here. I prefer my son to live far away from Lebanon.' [Shortly thereafter,] Hannah left [Lebanon] and lost touch with Umm Bilal.

"Upon her arrival in New York, Hannah received assistance from Jewish organizations. A short time later, she received U.S. citizenship, enrolled her son in a private school, and started working in a bank, earning a good salary. [Her son] Avraham grew up, finished university, and advanced at his job, becoming director-general of a reputable bank. Ten years after completing his degree he married, had three children, and bought a fine house in a New Jersey suburb [for himself], and another for his mother.

"In 1995, Hannah decided to visit Lebanon and spend her summer vacation there. She arrived in Beirut and moved into a luxurious hotel. The next day, she asked her driver to take her to the refugee camp where Umm Bilal lived. She entered the camp and inquired after her. By nightfall, she managed to find her – [living] in a dilapidated hut with fabric-covered windows, her body ravaged by tuberculosis.

"Hannah asked Umm Bilal about [her husband], Abu Bilal; Umm Bilal replied that he had died in the civil war. 'And what about [your son] Bilal?' [Hannah asked]. [Umm Bilal] replied, 'He is working at a bicycle repair shop down the street. His salary is

barely enough to cover my basic needs and those of his three sisters.' 'Is Bilal married?' Hannah asked. 'In this hole, where would we get the money to feed another mouth?' [answered Umm Bilal].

"Aisha [Umm Bilal] is just one example among the thousands of Palestinian mothers [like her], and Hannah is just one example among the Jewish mothers [like her]. The Arabs kept the Palestinians in refugee camps and made into a people defeated both morally and materially. In contrast, the West welcomed the Jews and made them a leading [force] in science, arts, literature, economics, and politics.

"Are we capable of reassessing the idea of the refugee camps, [thereby] saving the next generation of Palestinians from a fate [similar to that of] Bilal and his contemporaries? There is still an opportunity to do so. The Palestinians do not want to be resettled. All they want is to be treated the same way the West treated the Jews. Then they will win and recover their rights."(3)

**Clinging to the Right of Return Is Motivated by the Wish to Be Rid of the Palestinians** In his fourth article on the issue of the Palestinian refugees, Al-Shiryani addressed a claim advanced by Lebanese politician Wiam Wahhab on Lebanese television – that Shiryani's articles on refugee resettlement were part of the Zionists' proposals and the American plan. Al-Shiryani wrote: "[My] passion for [refugee] resettlement is not a rejection of the Right of Return, but rather of the inhuman treatment of the Palestinians in the 'countries of the refugee camps.' Foremost among these countries is Lebanon, which bars the Palestinians from 72 professions, so as to prevent them from living in dignity – despite the fact that you wouldn't find such a long list of professions even on Mars ...

"Those who raise the banner of the Right of Return have doubtless given up on the diplomatic and military efforts to achieve this aim. Their insistence on refusing to resettle [the refugees] has become an [empty] slogan aimed at getting rid of the Palestinians altogether, regardless of the consequences. Moreover, [they] prevent Palestinian residents from exercising their human and social rights – as if encouraging them to cling to the right of return entails their continued detention and segregation in the camps of dejection and despair.

"The resettlement for which I call [means] that the 'rope' countries, [i.e. countries] that serve as a gallows for the Palestinians, will [allow them] to live as they live in Great Britain, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states – [where] they [have] dreams and jobs, and where they raise their children in a way that will allow them to deal with the conflict in its new context...

"Do those who fight [for the Right of Return] in Lebanon, Jordan, or Syria know that the head of the largest Kuwaiti bank is a Palestinian, and that the information attaché at the Kuwaiti Embassy in the U.S., who now heads an American university, is [also] a Palestinian? Do they know that Palestinians in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman run large companies and live like honored guests? Has the humane treatment they receive [in those countries] affected the continued vitality of the Right of Return?

"Stop [repeating] slogans and stop showing off to us and to the Palestinians."(4)

Endnotes:(1) *Al-Hayat* (London), July 15, 2009.

(2) *Al-Hayat* (London), July 20, 2009.

(3) *Al-Hayat* (London), July 21, 2009.

(4) *Al-Hayat* (London), July 22, 2009.

## Mary Robinson's Medal of Freedom

By John Bolton The Wall Street Journal August 11, 2009

**Anti-Americanism and anti-Israel activism win Obama's approbation.** Barack Obama's decision to award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Mary Robinson has generated unexpected but emotionally charged opposition. Appointed by then-U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan as high commissioner for human rights in 1997-2002, Ms. Robinson had a controversial but ineffective tenure. (Previously, she was president of Ireland, a ceremonial position.)

Criticism of Mr. Obama's award, to be officially bestowed tomorrow, has centered on Ms. Robinson's central organizing role as secretary general of the 2001 "World Conference Against Racism" in Durban, South Africa. Instead of concentrating on its purported objectives, Durban was virulently anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, and at least implicitly anti-American.

So vile was the conference's draft declaration that Secretary of State Colin Powell correctly called it

"a throwback to the days of 'Zionism equals racism,'" referring to the infamous 1975 U.N. General Assembly resolution to that effect. President George W. Bush (whose father led the 1991 campaign that repealed the U.N.'s "Zionism is a form of racism" resolution) unhesitatingly agreed when Mr. Powell recommended the U.S. delegation leave the Durban conference rather than legitimize the outcome.

Ms. Robinson didn't see it that way then, and she has shown no remorse since. In late 2002, she described Durban's outcome as "remarkably good, including on the issues of the Middle East."

Outrage over Durban reignited earlier this year when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton did her best to get the United States to attend the successor conference ("Durban II") to polish Mr. Obama's "multilateralist" bona fides. Because the Durban II draft declaration reaffirmed Durban's hateful

conclusions, even the Obama administration couldn't swallow attending.

Durban is not the only reason Ms. Robinson should not receive the Medal of Freedom. Over the years she has actively opposed "the security or national interests of the United States," one of the categories of eligibility for the Medal. Those in the administration who recommended her either ignored her anti-Israel history, or missed it entirely, as they either ignored or overlooked her hostility toward America's role in promoting international peace and security. Or perhaps they share Ms. Robinson's views.

One example, particularly significant today given the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, is Ms. Robinson's strong opinions about the use of force. During the Clinton administration's (and NATO's) air campaign against Serbia because of its assault on Kosovo, for instance, she opined that "civilian casualties are human rights victims." But her real objection was not to civilian casualties but to the bombing itself, saying "NATO remains the sole judge of what is or is not acceptable to bomb," which she did not mean as a compliment.

In fact, Ms. Robinson wanted U.N. control over NATO's actions: "It surely must be right for the Security Council... to have a say in whether a prolonged bombing campaign in which the bombers

choose their target at will is consistent with the principle of legality under the Charter of the United Nations." One wonders if this is also Mr. Obama's view, given the enormous consequences for U.S. national security.

This February, asked whether former President George W. Bush should be prosecuted for war crimes, Ms. Robinson answered that it was "premature," until a "process" such as an "independent inquiry" was established: "[T]hen the decision can be taken as to whether anybody will be held accountable." In particular, she objected to the Bush administration's "war paradigm" for dealing with terrorism, saying we actually "need to reinforce the criminal justice system." Asked about Mr. Obama's statements on "moving forward," Ms. Robinson responded that "one of the ways of looking forward is to have the courage to say we must inquire."

Ms. Robinson's award shows Mr. Obama's detachment from longstanding, mainstream, American public opinion on foreign policy. The administration's tin ear to the furor over Ms. Robinson underlines how deep that detachment really is.

**Mr. Bolton, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.**

## Text of letter 71 senators sent to President Obama August 10, 2009

Dear Mr. President: We write in support of your efforts to encourage Arab states to normalize relations with the State of Israel. In your June 4th address to the Muslim world, you highlighted the key role that Arab states can play in furthering the peace process and called on them to openly recognize Israel's legitimacy. Secretary Clinton underscored these remarks when she stated that Arab countries "have a responsibility to support the Palestinian Authority with words and deeds, to take steps to improve relations with Israel and to prepare their publics to embrace peace and accept Israel's place in the region." We applaud these comments and agree with you and Secretary Clinton that Arab states must do more to end their isolation of Israel.

Over the past few months Israel has taken concrete measures to reaffirm its commitment to advancing the peace process. Notably, Prime Minister Netanyahu has publically expressed support for the two-state solution and called for the immediate resumption of peace negotiations. We have also been encouraged by Israeli efforts to improve the daily lives of Palestinians, through measures such as removing roadblocks, assisting with economic development in the West Bank, and supporting the training of professional Palestinian Authority security personnel. These actions have

demonstrated that Israel is willing to back up its words with concrete actions, even in the face of continuing threats to its security.

We encourage Arab leaders to take similar tangible steps to demonstrate their commitment to the peace process. Such steps could include ending the Arab League boycott of Israel, meeting openly with Israeli officials, establishing open trade relations with Israel, issuing visas to Israeli citizens, and inviting Israelis to participate in academic and professional conferences and sporting events. We also believe that Arab states must immediately and permanently end official propaganda campaigns which demonize Israel and Jews.

Given these facts, we would like to understand what steps you are urging Arab states to take and what your expectations are from Arab states in the coming weeks and months. We also hope that you will continue to press Arab leaders to consider dramatic gestures toward Israel similar to those taken previously by brave leaders like King Hussein of Jordan and Anwar El-Sadat of Egypt. Such gestures would send a powerful signal that Arab nations are committed to the peace process and could help usher in a new era of peace and security in the Middle East.

Respectfully,

## Autocracy and the Decline of the Arabs

By Fouad Ajami The Wall Street Journal August 6, 2009

**The Arab world is plagued by despots. But don't expect the U.N. to give President Bush any credit for challenging this order.** "It made me feel so jealous," said Abdulmonem Ibrahim, a young Egyptian political activist, of the recent upheaval in Iran. "We are amazed at the organization and speed with which the Iranian movement has been functioning. In Egypt you can count the number of activists on your hand." This degree of "Iran envy" is a telling statement on the stagnation of Arab politics. It is not pretty, Iran's upheaval, but grant the Iranians their due: They have gone out into the streets to contest the writ of the theocrats.

In contrast, little has stirred in Arab politics of late. The Arabs, by their own testimony, have become spectators to their history. A struggle rages between the Iranian theocracy and the Pax Americana for primacy in the Persian Gulf and the Levant. The Arabs have the demography—360 million people by latest count—and the wealth to balance Iran's power. But they have taken a pass in the hope that America—or Israel, for that matter—would shatter the Iranian bid for hegemony.

We are now in the midst of one of those periodic autopsies of the Arab condition. The trigger is the publication last month of the Arab Human Development Report 2009, the fifth of a series of reports by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on the state of the contemporary Arab world.

The first of these reports, published in 2002, was treated with deference. A group of Arab truth-tellers, it was believed, had broken with the evasions and the apologetics to tell of the sordid condition of Arab society—the autocratic political culture, the economic stagnation, the cultural decay. So all Arabs combined had a smaller manufacturing capacity than Finland with its five million people, and a vast Arabic-speaking world translated into Arabic a fifth of the foreign books that Greece with its 11 million people translates. With all the oil in the region, tens of millions of Arabs were living below the poverty line. Little has altered in the years separating the first of these reports from the most recent. A huge oil windfall came into the region, and it was better handled, it has to be conceded, than earlier oil windfalls. But on balance the grief of the Arabs has deepened, and the autocracies are yet to be brought to account. They remain unloved, but they remain in the saddle.

In a clever turn of phrase, The Economist recently wrote of an Arab Rip Abu Winkle awakening from a slumber into which he had fallen in the early 1980s to marvel at how little has changed. He would find Hosni Mubarak still at the

helm in Cairo, the policeman Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, and Moammar Gadhafi in Libya. He would miss Hafez Assad in Damascus, but he would be reassured that his son Bashar had inherited his father's dominion. He would of course find the same dynasties in Jordan and in the Arab states of the Peninsula and the Gulf.

Wily rulers, the men at the helm may have failed their peoples. They may have denied them decent educational systems. They may not have figured out a way into the modern world economy. But they have mastered the art of political survival. "He who eats the sultan's bread, fights with the sultan's sword," goes an Arabic maxim. The economic dominance of the rulers, the absence of the countervailing power of property and the private sector, has increased the awesome power of the governments and their security establishments.

It is no mystery, this sorrowful decline of the Arabs. They have invested their hopes in states, and the states have failed. According to the UNDP's report, government revenues as percentage of GDP are 13% in Third World Countries, but they are 25% in the Middle East and North Africa. The oil states are a world apart in that regard: the comparable figures are 68% in Libya, 45% in Saudi Arabia, and 40% in Algeria, Kuwait and Qatar. Oil is no panacea for these lands. The unemployment rates for the Arab world as a whole are the highest in the world, and no prophecy could foresee these societies providing the 51 million jobs the UNDP report says are needed by 2020 to "absorb young entrants to the labor force who would otherwise face an empty future." The simple truth is that the Arab world has terrible rulers and worse oppositionists. There are autocrats on one side and theocrats on the other. A timid and fragile middle class is caught in the middle between regimes it abhors and Islamists it fears.

Indeed, the technocrats and intellectuals associated with these development reports are themselves no angels. On the whole, they are unreconstructed Arab nationalists. The patrons of these reports are the likes of the Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi and the Palestinian leader Hanan Ashrawi, intellectuals and public figures whose stock-in-trade is presumed Western (read American) guilt for the ills that afflict the Arabs. Anti-Americanism suffuses this report, as it did the earlier ones. There is cruelty and plunder aplenty in the Arab world, but these writers are particularly exercised about Iraq. "This intervention polarized the country," they say of Iraq. This is a myth of the Arabs who are yet to grant the Iraqis the right to their own history: There had been a secular culture under the Baath, they insist, but the American war

begot the sectarianism. To go by this report, Iraq is a place of mayhem and plunder, a land where militias rule uncontested.

For decades, it was the standard argument of the Arabs that America had cast its power in the region on the side of the autocrats. In Iraq in 2003, and then in Lebanon, an American president bet on the freedom of the Arabs. George W. Bush's freedom agenda broke with a long history and insisted that the Arabs did not have tyranny in their DNA. A despotism in Baghdad was toppled, a Syrian regime that had all but erased its border with Lebanon was pushed out of its smaller neighbor, bringing an end to three decades of brutal occupation. The "Cedar Revolution" that erupted in the streets of Beirut was but a child of Bush's diplomacy of freedom.

Arabs know this history even as they say otherwise, even as they tell the pollsters the obligatory things about America the pollsters expect them to say. True, Mr. Bush's wager on elections in the Palestinian territories rebounded to the benefit of Hamas. But the ballot is not infallible, and the verdict of that election was a statement on the malignancies of Palestinian politics. It was no fault of American diplomacy that the Palestinians, who needed to break with a history of maximalist demands, gave in yet again to radical temptations.

Now the Arabs are face to face with their own history. Instead of George W. Bush there is Barack Hussein Obama, an American leader pledged to a foreign policy of "realism." The Arabs express fondness for the new American president. In his fashion (and in the fashion of their world and their leaders, it has to be said) President Obama gave the Arabs a speech in Cairo two months ago. It was a

moment of theater and therapy. The speech delivered, the foreign visitor was gone. He had put another marker on the globe, another place to which he had taken his astounding belief in his biography and his conviction that another foreign population had been wooed by his oratory and weaned away from anti-Americanism.

The crowd could tell itself that the new standard-bearer of the Pax Americana was a man who understood its concerns, but the embattled modernists and the critics of autocracy knew better. There is no mistaking the animating drive of the new American policy in that Greater Middle East: realism and benign neglect, the safety of the status quo rather than the risks of liberty. (If in doubt, the Arabs could check with their Iranian neighbors. The Persians would tell them of the new mood in Washington.)

One day an Arab chronicle could yet be written, and like all Arab chronicles, it would tell of woes and missed opportunities. It would acknowledge that brief interlude when American power gave Arab autocracies a scare, and when a despotism in Baghdad and a brutal "brotherly" occupation in Beirut were laid to waste. The chroniclers would have to be an honest lot. They would speak the language of daily life, and the truths that Arabs have seen and endured in recent years. On that day, the "human development reports" would be discarded, their writers seen for the purveyors of double-speak and half-truths they were.

**Mr. Ajami is a professor at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.**

## Israel on Their Minds By Opinion Europe editorial July 22, 2009

Never mind Iran's crackdown on peaceful protestors, China's killings of ethnic Uighurs or the epidemic murders of Kremlin critics. When it comes to Europe's *bien pensants*, the only country that really seems to engage their moral indignation is Israel. Calling for Israel to be sanctioned may be the one cause that unites British university lecturers and Scandinavian union activists with radical Islamists and neo-Nazis. Now, however, the European Court of Human Rights has called this fixation with the Jewish state what it is: discrimination.

Last week, the Strasbourg-based court upheld a 2003 French court conviction against Jean-Claude Fernand Willem for advocating a boycott of Israel. French prosecutors had charged Mr. Willem—at the time the Communist mayor of the northern French town of Seclin—with provoking discrimination on national, racial and religious grounds. Mr. Willem was first acquitted but an appeal court fined him €1,000, a decision confirmed by France's highest

appeal court in 2004 and now also by Europe's human rights court.

In a 6-1 decision, judges from seven European countries said Mr. Willem's punishment did not violate his freedom of expression. He was not found guilty for his political views or for anti-Semitism. Instead, the judges agreed with their French colleagues that he was "inciting the commission of a discriminatory, and therefore punishable, act." The former mayor wanted to infringe on "the normal exercise of economic activity of the manufacturers based solely on the fact that they belong to a certain nation."

Laws against discrimination have their uses and abuses, and we would rather have seen Mr. Willem voted out of office than sanctioned by a court. But to the extent that the judges' ruling exposes the atavistic fixations of some Europeans with the Jewish state, it does the Continent a service.