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The Ultimate Ally By Michael Oren

The "realists" are wrong: America needs Israel now more than ever What is the definition of an American ally? On an ideological level, an ally is a country that shares America's values, reflects its founding spirit, and resonates with its people's beliefs. Tactically, an ally stands with the United States through multiple conflicts and promotes its global vision. From its location at one strategic crossroads, an ally enhances American intelligence and defense capabilities, and provides ports and training for U.S. forces. Its army is formidable and unequivocally loyal to its democratic government. An ally helps secure America's borders and assists in saving American lives on and off the battlefield. And an ally stimulates the U.S. economy through trade, technological innovation, and job creation.

Few countries fit this description, but Israel is certainly one of them. As U.S. President Barack Obama told a White House gathering, "The United States has no better friend in the world than Israel," a statement reflecting the positions of Democrats and Republicans alike. The importance of the U.S.-Israel alliance has been upheld by successive American administrations and consistently endorsed by lawmakers and military leaders. It should be unimpeachable. But for some it is not. Rather than viewing Israel as a vital American asset, an increasingly vocal group of foreign-policy analysts insists that support for the Jewish state, including more than \$3 billion in annual military aid, is a liability. Advocates of this "realist" school claim that the United States derives little strategic benefit from its association with Israel. The alliance, they assert, arises mainly from lobbyists who place Israel's interests before America's, rather than from a clearheaded assessment of national needs. Realists regard the relationship one-dimensionally -- America gives Israel aid and arms -- and view it as the primary source of Muslim anger at the United States. American and Israeli policies toward the peace process, the realists say, are irreconcilable and incompatible with relations between true allies.

By definition, realists seek a foreign policy immune to public sentiment and special interest groups. In this rarefied view, the preferences of the majority of the American people are immaterial or, worse, self-defeating. This would certainly be the case with the U.S.-Israel alliance, which remains outstandingly popular among Americans. Indeed, a Gallup survey this February showed that two out of three Americans sympathize with Israel. Overall, since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan -- and in

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spite of Israel's responses to the second intifada and rocket attacks from Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2008 -- support for Israel in the United States has risen, not declined.

The surveys prove that most Americans do not accept the argument that U.S. support for Israel provokes Islamic radicals or do not especially care even if it does. In a Senate hearing last year, Gen. David Petraeus, then head of U.S. Central Command, testified that the Arab-Israeli conflict "challenges ... our ability to advance our interests." Critics of the U.S.-Israel relationship seized on the remark as evidence of the alliance's prohibitive costs -- an interpretation Petraeus strenuously rejected -- but the incident wrought no change in popular opinion. In fact, a CNN survey taken later that week showed that eight out of 10 Americans still regarded Israel as an allied or friendly state.

That kind of popular foundation for the Israeli-American alliance is all the more important at a time of great upheaval in the Middle East. As Iran's malign influence spreads and Turkey turns away from the West, Israel's strategic value in the region, both to the United States and to pro-Western Arab governments, will surely increase. Following Hezbollah's recent takeover of Lebanon and the political turmoil in Egypt, Jordan, and the Persian Gulf, Israel is the only Middle Eastern country that is certain to remain stable and unequivocally pro-American. In Israel alone, the United States will not have to choose between upholding its democratic principles and pursuing its vital interests.

And yet, for all their urgency, the close ties between the United States and Israel are hardly new. Their roots extend further than Israel's creation 63 years ago -- rather, they took hold with the Pilgrims' arrival in North America. The fore bearers who landed on Plymouth Rock in 1620 considered themselves the founders of a "New Israel." Committed to studying Hebrew and bridging the Old and New Canaans -- the Holy Land and America -- they pledged to restore the Jews to their ancestral homeland. Far from peripheral, this "restorationist" movement flourished in colonial America and widely influenced the Founders: Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin wanted the likeness of Moses leading the children of Israel to serve as the Great Seal of the newly independent United States. John Adams wrote that he "really wished the Jews again in Judea an independent nation." Abraham Lincoln similarly backed the "noble dream" of a re-created Jewish state, as did Woodrow Wilson, a descendant of

Presbyterian ministers, who declared, "To think that I ... should be able to help restore the Holy Land to its people."

America's commitment to the Zionist movement to create a Jewish state deeply influenced Harry S. Truman. A fervid Baptist and past member of the restorationist American Christian Palestine Committee, Truman made the United States the first nation to recognize Israel on May 14, 1948. None of the predictions of his realist advisors -- that recognition would trigger an Arab oil embargo, Europe would fall to the Soviet Union, and Israel would turn communist -- became a reality.

The spiritual attachment to the reborn Jewish state has continued to resonate in America, the nation with the highest frequency of church attendance in the industrialized world. Many Americans have also been drawn to the Zionist story of pioneering, hearing in it echoes of their own national narrative. Theodore Roosevelt, who fancied himself a frontiersman, urged that "the Jews be given control of Palestine" and that "a Zionist state around Jerusalem" be created. In a similar vein, Rev. John Haynes Holmes, on talking with Palestinian Jews in 1929, "could think of nothing but the early English settlers who came to the bleak shores of Massachusetts.... Here is the same heroism dedicated to the same ends." Israel emerged not only as a Jewish and pioneering state, but also as a democracy. In urging Truman to recognize Israel in 1948, White House counsel Clark Clifford argued that "in an area as unstable as the Middle East ... it is important to the long-range security of our country ... that a nation committed to the democratic system be established, one on which we can rely." The fact that Israelis cherished the same values enshrined in the U.S. Constitution -- free speech and assembly, respect for individual rights, an independent judiciary -- created another layer of affinity with Americans. John F. Kennedy said Israel "carries the shield of democracy and honors the sword of freedom," and Bill Clinton likened Israel to America, "an oasis of liberty, a home to the oppressed and persecuted."

While grappling with the challenges posed by its large Arab minority and, since the Six-Day War, the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, Israel has remained the Middle East's only functional democracy. In a region in which some countries deem homosexuality a capital offense, Israel has hosted gay pride parades and provides shelter for Palestinian homosexuals. And in contrast to the Middle Eastern leaders who hold themselves above the law, a former Israeli president was recently convicted of sexual offenses, the verdict handed down by three judges -- two women and an Arab. Withstanding pressures that have crushed many liberal societies, Israel is one of a handful of states that has never experienced interregna of nondemocratic rule.

Americans intrinsically value these facts -- and that appreciation is reciprocated in Israel. As there are streets in the United States named for David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir, so, too, can one find Washington and

Lincoln streets in Israel. Alone in the Middle East, Israel hosts memorials for Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. and two exact replicas of the Liberty Bell.

Still, accepting the dispassionate definition of America's interests, can Israel realistically be considered an ally? Has it traditionally stood by the United States on issues of world importance and in periods of crisis? Is American support for Israel based on calculated estimates of national interests, or is it the product of pressure from richly funded lobbies?

Israel has always sided with the United States on major global issues. At the United Nations and in other international institutions, the two countries' voting patterns are virtually identical, as are their policies on human rights and international law. Beginning with the Korean conflict and throughout the Cold War, Israel backed America's military engagements, and it has maintained that support in the struggle with radical Islam. In times of danger, especially, Israel has responded to America's needs. Acceding to Richard M. Nixon's request to intervene to save Jordan from Syrian invasion in 1970, Israel mobilized its army, and in 1991, in spite of missile attacks from Iraq, Israel honored George H.W. Bush's request not to retaliate.

Israel is not, of course, situated in some geographical backwater, but at the junction of paramount American interests. Its prominence on the eastern Mediterranean littoral, at the nexus of North Africa and Southwest Asia, has enabled the United States to minimize its military deployments in the area. In the Persian Gulf, by contrast, the absence of a dependable and sturdy ally like Israel has impelled the United States to commit hundreds of thousands of troops and trillions of dollars. Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig's observation 30 years ago still resonates today: "Israel is the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk, does not carry even one American soldier, and is located in a critical region for American national security."

The strategic synergy between the United States and Israel melds into tactical realities. U.S. troops train with their Israel Defense Forces (IDF) counterparts in aerial combat and special operations. U.S. Navy ships routinely dock in Haifa, Air Force planes refuel at Israeli bases, and the Marines will soon use an Israeli laser to pinpoint targets. In addition to pre-positioning \$800 million of arms and medical equipment in Israel, the United States guarantees by law its commitment to preserving Israel's "qualitative military edge," enabling the Jewish state to defend itself, by itself, against Middle Eastern adversaries. As Assistant Secretary of State Andrew Shapiro put it, "Israel is a vital ally and a cornerstone of our regional security commitments," and, accordingly, the two countries have developed the world's most advanced anti-ballistic missiles. Together with the X-band radar station in the Negev -- manned by the first American troops deployed permanently on Israeli soil -- these systems can protect friendly nations from Iranian rockets. In the intelligence field, in particular, the cooperation between Israel and the

United States is vast. According to Maj. Gen. George J. Keegan Jr., former head of U.S. Air Force intelligence, America's military defense capability "owes more to the Israeli intelligence input than it does to any single source of intelligence," the worth of which input, he estimated, exceeds "five CIAs." Israeli and American intelligence agencies continuously exchange information, analyses, and operational experience in counterterrorism and counterproliferation. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and its Israeli counterpart also share technical know-how in defending ports and terminals from terrorist attacks, countering unconventional weapons and cyberthreats, and combating the drug trade. On the battlefield, Israeli armament protects Bradley and Stryker units from rocket-propelled grenades, while Israeli-made drones and reconnaissance devices surveys hostile territory. U.S. fighter aircraft and helicopters incorporate Israeli concepts and components, as do modern-class U.S. warships. The IDF has furnished U.S. forces with its expertise in the detection and neutralization of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the largest cause of American casualties.

Israel not only enhances America's defenses -- it also saves American lives. A kibbutz-based company in the Galilee has provided armor for more than 20,000 U.S. military vehicles. "Two days ago, my patrol was ambushed by insurgents using 7.62mm PKM Machineguns," David C. Cox, a platoon sergeant in Iraq, wrote the manufacturers. "None of the rounds penetrated the armor of the vehicle, including one that would have impacted with my head." Marine gunner Joshua Smith, whose Israeli-armored vehicle tripped an IED near Marja, Afghanistan, described how his unit "walked away smiling, laughing, and lived to fight another day." Military medical experts from both countries also meet annually to discuss advances in combat care. One such breakthrough was a coagulating bandage, the brainchild of a Jerusalem start-up company, a million of which have been supplied to U.S. forces (and even applied by a Tucson SWAT team medic to stanch the life-threatening head wound of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords).

In return for its aid to Israel, the United States receives not only an armed but an innovative ally, enhancing America's military edge. That contribution is real and requires no lobbyists to fabricate it. While organizations such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) press Israel's case in government and in popular forums, they represent American citizens who view the alliance with Israel as a national American interest. By contrast, the lobbyists for the Arab states and their domestic oil industries represent foreign interests. The hundreds of millions of dollars they have spent on lobbying and public relations campaigns and donations to influential universities such as Harvard and Georgetown have vastly exceeded the budgets of Israel's advocates in Washington.

Pro-Israel groups neither determine America's course in the Middle East nor derail it. Responding to

the realists' charge that a so-called Israel Lobby exerts undue influence over American policies, White House Middle East special advisor Dennis Ross wrote in this magazine that "never in the time that I led the American negotiations on the Middle East peace process did we take a step because 'the lobby' wanted us to. Nor did we shy away from one because 'the lobby' opposed it." A 30-year veteran of Middle East diplomacy, Ross concluded that pro-Israel groups "don't distort U.S. policy or undermine American interests."

Understandably, the most sober assessment of American interests is conducted by the U.S. military. The alliance with Israel, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. Mike Mullen told Congress in March, "is of extraordinary value." Israel, according to America's highest-ranking officer, is "absolutely critical" to U.S. national security.

Israel is among the few countries in the world -- and the only Middle Eastern state -- to consistently stand alongside the United States on strategic issues. But the U.S.-Israel relationship is far from one-dimensional. The two countries also cooperate in a broad range of nonmilitary fields -- humanitarian, commercial, and scientific. Close coordination with the United States enabled Israeli medical teams to arrive first on the scene in earthquake-devastated Haiti. They similarly assisted the victims of Turkish and Indonesian quakes and of famines in Somalia, Mauritania, and Kenya. Together with the U.S. Agency for International Development, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation has trained more than 200,000 people from Africa, South America, and Asia in fields as diverse as agrobusiness and ophthalmology. Since 1985, American and Israeli scientists have jointly consulted for developing countries on public health and women's issues. Israel also assists the American people by stimulating trade, spurring technological innovation, and creating jobs. Despite a population of just 7.7 million people, Israel is America's 20th-largest customer in the world, surpassing Russia and Spain. Warren Buffett's first foreign investment was a \$4 billion stake in Iscar, an Israeli tool manufacturer. "I believe in the Israeli market and the Israeli economy," Buffett explained. Between 2000 and 2009, direct U.S. investment in Israel totaled \$77.2 billion, while Israelis invested \$51.4 billion in the United States. More than 25 years ago, America's very first free trade agreement was signed -- with Israel.

Google, Microsoft, IBM, Intel, AOL, and Motorola are just some of the high-tech companies with major research and development operations in Israel. In addition to providing software and hardware for most American computers and mobile phones, Israel also pioneered the USB flash drive, the ingestible microcamera, advances in drip irrigation, and the portable MRI. Through Better Place, the world's first comprehensive electric-car system, Israel is poised to help Obama achieve his goal of placing 1 million electric vehicles on America's roads by 2015. "It's no exaggeration to say that the kind of innovation going on

in Israel is critical to the future of the technology business," observed Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates on a 2005 visit to Israel. After the United States and China, Israel is the most represented country on the Nasdaq stock exchange.

And at a time when American corporations are outsourcing to Asia, Israel is outsourcing to the United States: Tens of thousands of Americans are employed by Teva, the world's leading generic-drug producer, and by dozens of Israeli high-tech, textile, and defense plants throughout the United States. The nearly 6,000 projects mounted by three U.S.-Israel foundations have generated myriad American jobs, as does the \$3 billion in American military aid to Israel, \$2.25 billion of which is spent in the United States.

In spite of the overwhelming advantages of the U.S.-Israel alliance, the realists still insist that it stokes Muslim rage and renders Americans more vulnerable to terrorism. To substantiate their claim, the realists quote Osama bin Laden as well as the state-controlled Middle Eastern media. But bin Laden initially justified his attacks on America's profligacy and only later, after his setbacks in Afghanistan, linked them to Israel. An influential Saudi Wahhabi book published online describes the United States as "the source of evil, moral corruption, oppression, despotism, and aggression ... in the world" and makes no mention of Israel. Neither do recently published diplomatic papers from the Middle East or most of the demonstrations that have convulsed the region.

The official U.S. documents released by WikiLeaks show that Arab rulers are not preoccupied with Israel but with the perils posed by Iran. One report recounted Saudi King Abdullah urging the United States to "cut off the head of the snake" -- Iran -- and to attack the country's nuclear facilities at once. Bahrain's king warned that "the danger of letting [the Iranian nuclear program] go on is greater than the danger of stopping it." The word "Israel" does not appear.

Middle Eastern populations, meanwhile, have shown that they, too, are less concerned with Israel than with urgent issues at home. When able to express themselves freely, they have preferred to focus on political rights and economic opportunity. Conspicuously absent from the protests that swept the region in 2011 were burning Israeli -- or American -- flags or any reference to the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Although emerging Arab governments might in the future -- as in the past -- seek to gain legitimacy by harnessing anti-Israeli sentiment, the claim that American support for the Jewish state axiomatically translates into anti-Americanism in the Middle East is no longer sustainable.

Israel is America's staunchest ally in the Middle East, but even the warmest friendships are never disagreement-free. This was certainly the case with the Anglo-American relationship during World War II, modern history's most celebrated alliance, but one that was riven by disputes over military planning and postwar arrangements.

The United States and Israel could not, therefore, realistically be expected to concur on all of the Middle East's labyrinthine issues. Ronald Reagan, for example, condemned Israel's attack on an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, and Israel objected to his sale of advanced jets to Saudi Arabia. The realists say that the gaps between Israeli and American policies on the peace process are unbridgeable. The United States, they maintain, is committed to creating a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel allegedly opposes these goals and thwarts them by building in those areas.

But historically, progress in the peace process has been directly related to the strengthening of America's alliance with Israel. That bond convinced Arab rulers that they had no conventional military option against Israel and fortified Israelis to make the concessions necessary for peace. American security assurances -- including guarantees of continued oil supplies from Sinai and the replacement of evacuated air bases -- enabled Israel to withdraw from an area three times its size and to conclude the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt.

The realists ignore or dismiss this linkage, as they do Israel's record of seeking peace. In the euphoric aftermath of the Six-Day War, Israeli leaders offered to create a West Bank Palestinian state, but Palestinian leaders rejected the plan. Israel in 2000 offered the Palestinians sovereignty over virtually the entire West Bank, all of Gaza, and part of Jerusalem, but the Palestinians refused the deal and instead killed more than 1,000 Israelis in terrorist attacks. In 2005, Israel provided the Palestinians with the chance to create a peaceful prototype in Gaza, but it quickly devolved into a launching pad for thousands of rockets. In spite of these traumas, a significant majority of Israelis -- 66 percent, when recently asked by the Tel Aviv University Peace Index -- still favor the two-state solution, testifying to their commitment to peace.

Settlements, meanwhile, have never been the impediment to peace. They did not preclude the signing of the Egyptian and Jordanian treaties or 16 years of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Israel uprooted all 21 settlements in Gaza and received war, not peace. Later, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu froze West Bank construction for an unprecedented 10 months, but the Palestinians still refused to negotiate. Internal Palestinian documents published recently by Al Jazeera reveal that Palestinian negotiators in 2008 were willing to concede the bulk of the Israeli communities in the West Bank, as well as most of the Jewish neighborhoods built over the 1967 line in Jerusalem, as part of a peace arrangement. Israeli leaders were ready to sign; the Palestinians again walked away.

Blind to Israel's record of peacemaking, the realists also overlook the broad confluence of American and Israeli policies toward the process. Both insist that there is no alternative to direct negotiations and no solution to the conflict other than two states for two peoples. They understand that the Palestinian state, situated opposite Israel's narrowest and most populous area, will

have to be demilitarized and that Israel will require detailed security guarantees. And they agree that any peace treaty must provide for mutual recognition between the nation-states of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples, signifying an end to all claims.

American and Israeli positions also dovetail on the most monumental -- and potentially divisive -- Middle Eastern issue: Iran. A nuclear-armed Iran, both countries hold, will imperil every pro-Western Middle Eastern state and ignite a nuclear arms race in an inherently unstable region. The United States and Israel have promoted international sanctions designed to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, while keeping all options on the table. Americans know that, at a time of transformation in the Middle East balance of power, Israel remains the region's only credible foil to Iran.

Ultimately, the litmus test of any alliance is not whether the partners agree on every issue, but rather the ways they deal with discord. During World War II, the United States and Britain bridged their differences and achieved victory. America and Israel have similarly worked through their differences and are together striving for a different triumph -- peace.

WHO ARE AMERICA'S ALLIES in the world today? Which countries are both capable and willing to advance American interests? A truly realist assessment would strive to answer these questions and fairly weigh Israel's worth.

In the Middle East, every Arab or non-Arab Muslim country has at times vacillated in its support of the United States or adopted anti-American positions. Some regimes have also placed oil embargoes on Americans and bankrolled their enemies. Although democratic governments may yet emerge in some Middle Eastern states, autocracy, monarchy, and dictatorship remain the region's norm. And even elected representatives can be profoundly hostile to the United States, as in Iran, Lebanon, and Gaza.

Elsewhere in the world, new powers are arising, but few are likely to act as American allies in the realist sense. Others will be robust competitors. America's European allies, meanwhile, are further restricting the conditions under which their forces fight and drastically slashing defense budgets. British military sources estimate that troop numbers will soon be reduced to 80,000, leaving Britain with its smallest army since the 1820s. With similar cuts expected in Germany, Italy, and France, the United States will become harder-pressed to rely on European support during crises. "[W]e won't be able to defend the security on which our democratic societies ... depend," NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has warned. "We risk a Europe increasingly adrift from the United States."

Israel is the only Middle Eastern state never to oppose America on major international issues. Its fundamental interests, like its values, are America's. For the price of annual military aid equaling roughly half the cost of one Zumwalt-class destroyer, the United States helps maintain the military might of one of the few nations actively contributing to America's defense. It reinforces the only country capable of deterring Hamas and Hezbollah and impeding the spread of Iranian hegemony. According to published sources, the Israel Defense Forces is larger than the French and British armies combined. The IDF is superbly trained and, when summoned, capable of mobilizing within hours. These benefits of the U.S.-Israel relationship are of incalculable value to the United States, far outweighing any price. Americans know that Israelis have always stood by them, ready to share technology, intelligence, and innovation -- ready to aid them in conflict and to make the painful sacrifices for peace. Israel may be one of a handful of countries that fully fits the definition of ally, but its willingness to support the United States unwaveringly makes it the partner par excellence, America's ultimate ally.

Mr. Oren (a native-born American) is the Israeli ambassador to the United States

The Arab Spring and The Palestine Distraction

By Josef Joffe The Wall Street Journal April 26, 2011

Arab peoples aren't obsessed with anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. It's their rulers who are. In politics, shoddy theories never die. In the Middle East, one of the oldest is that Palestine is the "core" regional issue. This zombie should have been interred at the beginning of the Arab Spring, which has highlighted the real core conflict: the oppressed vs. their oppressors. But the dead keep walking. "The plight of the Palestinians has been a root cause of unrest and conflict in the region," insisted Turkish President Abdullah Gul in the New York Times last week. "Whether these [recent] uprisings lead to democracy and peace or to tyranny and conflict will depend on forging a lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace." Naturally, "the U.S. has a long overdue responsibility" to forge that peace.

Writing in the Financial Times, former U.S. National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft intoned: "The nature of the new Middle East cannot be known until the festering sore of the occupied territories is removed." Read: The fate of democracy hinges on Palestine. So do "Iran's hegemonic ambitions," he insinuated. This is why Tehran reaches for the bomb? Syria, too, will remain a threat "as long as there is no regional peace agreement." The Assad regime is slaughtering its own people for the sake of Palestine? And unless Riyadh "saw the U.S. as moving in a serious manner" on Palestine, Mr. Scowcroft warned, the Saudis might really sour on their great protector from across the sea. So when they sent troops into Bahrain, were they heading for Jerusalem by way of Manama?

Shoddy political theories—ideologies, really—never die because they are immune to the facts. The most glaring is this: These revolutions have unfolded without the usual anti-American and anti-Israeli screaming. It's not that the demonstrators had run out of Stars and Stripes to trample, or were too concerned about the environment to burn Benjamin Netanyahu in effigy. It's that their targets were Hosni Mubarak, Zine el Abidine Ben-Ali, Moammar Gadhafi and the others—no stooges of Zionism they. In Benghazi, the slogan was: "America is our friend!"

The men and women of the Arab Spring are not risking their lives for a "core" issue, but for the freedom of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria. And of Iran, as the Green revolutionaries did in Tehran in 2009.

Every "Palestine-first" doctrine in the end comes down to that fiendish "Arab Street": The restless monster must be fed with Israeli concessions lest he rise and sweep away our good friends—all those dictators and despots who pretended to stand between us and Armageddon. Free Palestine, the dogma goes, and even Iran and Syria will turn from rabid to responsible. The truth is that the American and Israeli flags were handed out for burning by those regimes themselves.

This is how our good friends have stayed in power: Divert attention and energy from oppression and misery at home by rousing the masses against the enemy abroad. How can we have free elections, runs a classic line, as long as they despoil our sacred Islamic lands? This is why anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism are as rampant among our Saudi and Egyptian allies as among the hostile leaders of Iran and Syria.

The Palestinians do deserve their own state. But the Palestine-first strategy reverses cause and effect. It is not the core conflict that feeds the despotism; it is the despots who fan the conflict, even as they fondle their U.S.-made F-16s and quietly work with Israel. Their peoples are the victims of this power ploy, not its drivers. This is what the demonstrators of Tahrir Square and the rebels of Benghazi have told us with their silence on the Palestine issue.

So Palestine has nothing to do with it? It does, though not in the ways insisted by Messrs. Gul and Scowcroft. The sounds of silence carry a different message: "It's democracy, stupid!" Freedom does not need the enemy at the gate. Despots do, which is why they happily let the Palestinian sore fester for generations. Israel, which has reacted in utter confusion to the fall of Mubarak, might listen up as well. If democracies don't have to "busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels," as Shakespeare has it in Henry IV, then Israel's reformed neighbors might at last be ready for real, not just cold peace. Mr. Mubarak was not. Nor is Mr. Assad of Syria, who has refused every Israeli offer to hand back the Golan Heights. If you rule at the head of a tiny Alawite minority, why take the Heights and give away a conflict that keeps you in power? Peace at home—justice, jobs and consent—makes for peace abroad. Still, don't hold your breath. Yes, democracy is where history is going, but it is a long, perilous journey even from Tunis to Tripoli, let alone all the way to Tehran.

Mr. Joffe is senior fellow at the Freeman-Spogli Institute for International Studies and a fellow at the Hoover Institution, both at Stanford.

Why Israel is Losing the Information War

By Rob Miller The Jewish Press (New York)

April 13, 2011

Many people who are informed about what's actually happening in the Middle East constantly wonder why Israel fares so badly in the information wars. The following example gives us a pretty good idea why.

Jawaher Abu Rahmah, a Palestinian "activist," died on January 1. Palestinian spokesperson Saeb Erekat, who once was the right fork of Yasir Arafat's tongue, claimed she died during a demonstration in the Palestinian town of Bil'in, killed by "poison" contained in tear gas fired at the demonstration by Israeli soldiers after it deteriorated into what could best be termed a riot.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas called Abu Rahmah's death a "new Israeli crime carried out by the occupation army against our helpless nation." She was given a martyr's funeral, with crowds of mourners, as a victim an Israeli "war crime."

The story was almost instantaneously reported around the world as fact, with Time's resident Israel basher Tony Karon getting off a piececelebrating it as the occasion of an alliance between Palestinian activists and Israeli leftists.

The real story? According to the IDF, there's no evidence Abu Rahmah was even at the Bil'in

demonstration, nor does she show up on any of the videos. There's no evidence she died from inhaling tear gas (if it was in fact poisonous, why weren't there other deaths?) and the death certificate shows the cause of death as "inhaling gas of an Israeli soldier according to the family."

That's an indication that no doctor actually examined Abu Rahmah but that the death certificate was simply filled out by a nurse or orderly. And the accounts of her actual state of health are contradictory.

Was Abu Rahmah the victim of an honor killing exploited by the PA? It certainly wouldn't be the firstPollywood productionwe've seen.

And really, none of the facts matter at this point.

Run with me for a second. Let's say evidence surfaces that Abu Rahmah was never at the demo, and that this was an honor killing rather than death by tear gas. What changes?

By the time the truth comes out, the Palestinian propaganda machine and its allies have already publicized their version, it's gone around the world and the media have already moved on to the next story. The Muslim world will certainly never hear the truth, and

Israel's enemies in the West will simply take the Palestinian version as factual.

And that's the core of the problem.

Jews culturally are geared toward parsing facts and evidence, which is one reason so many of them are attracted to the legal profession. Anyone studying the Talmud essentially receives a legal education in miniature.

But what happens when you're up against people who care nothing for facts and everything about impact and propaganda? What happens when you fight an information war against people who care nothing for the truth and merely want to consume your flesh?

In today's media climate, you're left foundering, trying to decipher the facts while the other side has already made its impact.

The Tehran-Damascus Axis

By Amir Taheri The Wall Street Journal
Reports that Iranian snipers are gunning down Syrian democracy activists are credible given the deep military and intelligence ties between the regimes. When the Arab uprisings started in Tunisia this winter, there were no more enthusiastic cheerleaders than the Khomeinists in Tehran. Their cheering got louder when revolution spread to Egypt, and louder still when Libyans rose in revolt.

But Tehran's cheering has begun to fade. The reason is that the revolt has spread to Syria, the mullahs' sole Arab ally.

A sign that Tehran may be getting nervous came last week when the Islamic *Majlis*, Iran's ersatz parliament, published a report on "The Arab Revolution." The authors ask for "urgent action to protect our strategic interests" in case the regime of President Bashar Assad is toppled.

What kind of action? Syrian opposition sources claim that Tehran has sent snipers to help Mr. Assad kill demonstrators. The regime used this tactic during the protests following the disputed presidential election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009. (Neda Agha-Soltan, the young woman who became the symbol of the pro-democracy uprising in Iran, was killed by one such sniper.) President Barack Obama has also spoken of Iran's possible involvement in Syria.

Whether or not Tehran has sent snipers to prop up Mr. Assad, the Islamic Republic is bound by treaty to help him fight "any threats against Syria's security and stability." Tehran and Damascus first signed a military cooperation treaty in 1998. At the time, Iran's minister of defense, Adm. Ali Shamkhani, stated publicly that the treaty would also cover "intelligence and security issues" with regard to dissident armed groups. Since then the treaty has been refined and deepened on several occasions, most recently under Mr. Ahmadinejad in 2008.

Syria is the only country with which the Iranian armed forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard

This is the sort of thing that happens when you play defense instead of offense -the other side controls the game and you're limited to reacting.

That's why Israel has been losing the information war. Israel would be far better off going on offense by publicizing the Palestinian Authority's inherent corruption, its official endorsements of terrorism against Israeli civilians, and its refusal to make a single concession in any negotiations.

Instead of constantly reacting to the "Palestinian narrative" with frantic attempts to dredge up facts, Israel would be far better off simply calling out people like Erekat and Abbas for lying, challenging them to prove their vicious allegations, and reminding the world of all the other fairy tales the Palestinians have spun over the years.

April 27, 2011

Corps hold joint staff meetings at least once a year. Iran has also emerged as a major supplier of weapons and materiel to Syria, according to the official Iranian news agency IRNA.

Iran started using the Assad regime as a means of dividing the Arabs in the 1970s, when the shah wanted to squeeze the Baathist regime in Iraq. To this end, he supplied Syria with cut-price oil and aid totaling \$150 million in 1977.

Under the mullahs, Syria retained its role in preventing the Arabs from ganging up against the then-fragile Islamic Republic. Throughout its eight-year war against Saddam Hussein, Iran benefited from Syrian support, including vital intelligence on Iraqi armed forces. As a gesture of goodwill, Tehran arranged for some mullahs to issue fatwas declaring the Alawite minority, to which the Assad family belongs, to be "part of Islam." Most Islamic scholars, on the other hand, have long regarded the esoteric Alawi sect as heretical.

Iran and Syria also share an interest in Lebanon. Syrian despots have always dreamt of annexing Lebanon. And under the shah, Iran regarded itself as the protector of Lebanon's Shiite community.

Under the mullahs, Lebanon has been recast as "our revolution's perimeter of defense," in the words of Gen. Hassan Firuzabadi, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces. In a speech in Tehran last month, Gen. Firuzabadi justified Iran's support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and for Hamas in the Palestinian territories by underscoring the role that the two groups played in fighting "the Zionist enemy." And because of its geographical proximity, Syria plays a crucial role in channeling arms from Iran to both Hezbollah and Hamas.

Iranian-Syrian cooperation in Lebanon has a long history. In the words of Iran's former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, the countries worked together "to push the Americans out" with a suicide attack that killed 241 U.S. servicemen in 1983. In the decades that

followed, Tehran and Damascus used Hezbollah in hostage-taking operations and assassinations of Western diplomats and Arab politicians.

Under Mr. Ahmadinejad, Iran has expanded its presence in Syria significantly. At least 14 Iranian "Islamic Cultural Centres" have opened across Syria, and hundreds of mullah missionaries have been sent to introduce Iranian-style Shiism to Syrians. Similar tactics in Lebanon have succeeded in "Iranizing" a large chunk of the Lebanese Shiite community.

The Assad regime has a larger strategic importance for the Islamic Republic. "We want to be present in the Mediterranean," Mr. Ahmadinejad said in a speech last month in Tehran, marking the arrival in the Syrian port of Latakia of a flotilla of Iranian warships. This was the first time since 1975 that Iranian warships had appeared in the Mediterranean.

Indeed, Iran could build a presence in the Mediterranean through Syria and Lebanon. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has already developed mooring facilities in the Syrian port as a prelude to what may be a full-scale air and naval base.

Mr. Ahmadinejad, who believes that the United States is in historic retreat, sees Iran as the successor to the defunct Soviet Union as the principal global challenger to what he says is "a world system, imposed by Infidel powers." The loss of Syria would puncture many of Mr. Ahmadinejad's aspirations.

Over the years, it is possible that Iran has built a network of contact and sympathy within the Syrian military and security services. It may now be using that network to encourage hardliners within the beleaguered Assad regime to fight on.

From the start, Tehran media have labeled the Syrian uprising "a Zionist plot," the term they used to describe the pro-democracy movement in Iran itself. In 2009, the mullahs claimed that those killed in the streets of Tehran and Tabriz were not peaceful demonstrators but "Zionist and Infidel" agents who deserved to die. The Assad clan is using the same vicious vocabulary against freedom lovers in Syria as snipers kill them in the streets of Damascus, Deraa and Douma.

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Faithful Service By Editorial The Jerusalem Post March 29, 2011

New Shin bet head Yoram Cohen's commitment to his faith will only help boost his motivation to meet these myriad challenges and others.

Assuming he passes the Turkel Committee's vetting process – a far from forgone conclusion, judging from recent precedents in the Prisons Service and the IDF's General Staff – Yoram Cohen will become the 13th head of the Shin Bet, the covert organization responsible for our internal security.

No small matter has been made of the fact that Cohen, if approved, will be the first kippa-wearing Shin Bet head and that he is the latest in a line of religious men appointed to high-ranking security positions. Maj-Gen. Yair Naveh, who, like Cohen, graduated from a yeshiva high school, was recently tapped to serve as deputy chief of the General Staff and will probably compete for the top spot when Lt.-Gen. Benny Gantz completes his term in three years. Ya'acov Amidror, who went to a national religious public school, was recently appointed head of the National Security Council.

Extensive media coverage was also devoted to reports that rabbinic figures supposedly lobbied Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu not to appoint Y., a leading competitor for the top Shin Bet position. Apparently Y., who until a few months ago was responsible for, among other tasks, monitoring potential Jewish terrorism, had developed bad relations with leading religious Zionist rabbis and leaders.

The increased attention that religious Zionist leaders are paying to security matters and the fact that Cohen, Naveh and Amidror are religious reflect the changing personnel makeup of our security services. According to rough estimates, for some time now about a quarter of soldiers graduating officers' training courses

for combat units have been Orthodox, even though they make up no more than 15 percent of the total manpower. In some elite combat units such as Shaldag, a reconnaissance unit that works on the ground with the air force, and the Golani Brigade's reconnaissance unit, where Cohen served, percentages are even higher.

In part, this is a result of religious Zionist rabbis' educational messages. A study published in the August 2010 edition of *Maarachot*, the IDF's magazine, noted that the religious Zionist educational system, and particularly the post-high school pre-military Orthodox academies, were contributing significantly to the rise in the number of religious officers and soldiers serving in elite combat units. For many religious young men, military service is seen as a fundamentally positive and important undertaking, even a mitzva, which combines religious conviction with civic responsibility.

Concerns raised by some journalists, social scientists and politicians that religious soldiers might be torn between competing loyalties when a military command seems to contradict a religious edict have so far been proven baseless. During the Gaza disengagement in 2005, when IDF soldiers were tasked with evacuating Jewish settlements, a few dozen cases of insubordination were reported – a troubling phenomenon, but far from the wide-scale rebellion some had predicted. By contrast, some rabbis have marshalled theological arguments in favor of following orders for the sake of national unity. Many Orthodox leaders evidently recognize that insubordination on the Right would only justify left-wing refusal to perform military service in the West Bank, and lead to the deconstruction of the "people's army" ethos.

Inevitably, high-ranking officers and commanders such as Cohen, Naveh and Amidror, with decades of

dedicated service behind them, have fully internalized the command structure to which they belong. If anything, their religious convictions, rather than an obstacle to loyalty, are a source of inspiration to serve their country.

The challenges facing Cohen if and when he takes over the helm of the Shin Bet are formidable. These include gleaning new intelligence on the whereabouts of captive soldier Gilad Schalit; confronting a potential third Intifada being organized for May 15; foiling cooperation between Islamists in Iran and Lebanon with

Arab Israelis and Palestinians; maintaining intelligence contacts on the West Bank at a time when the IDF is transferring more security responsibilities to Palestinian Authority forces; and thwarting attempts by Iran and other Muslim extremists to smuggle arms into Gaza.

Judging from the tremendous success of Orthodox soldiers in the IDF in recent decades, as exemplified by the rise of Naveh, Amidror and many more like them, Cohen's commitment to his faith will only help boost his motivation to meet these myriad challenges and others.

the Arab Spring and U.S. Policy – The View From Jerusalem

By Ted Koppel The Wall Street Journal April 29, 2011

Israeli officials want a public commitment It is provocative, but not entirely inaccurate, to suggest that U.S. foreign policy these past few months has been sufficiently erratic to make America's allies reconsider the degree to which we can be trusted—and our adversaries re-evaluate the degree to which we must be feared. The canary in the coal mine on such matters is Israel. None of America's allies is more sensitive to even the most subtle changes in the international environment, or more conscious of the slightest hint of diminished support from Washington.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been so concerned that a member of his fractious coalition might give vent to some damaging public observation on this issue that he has imposed a strict "nobody talks on the subject but me" rule. That the gag has been even partially effective, given the wide-open nature of the Israeli political process, is astonishing. It is also a measure of how worried the Israelis are.

My own reporting on the Middle East in general and Israel in particular goes back almost 40 years—to the days of Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in the region. On a recent visit to Jerusalem, I met with a number of very senior current and former government officials who spoke on a not-for-attribution basis. They were anything but restrained in voicing their concerns, and some of the views expressed in this article reflect the outlook of the prime minister himself.

Overshadowing all other concerns is the fear that Iran is poised to reap enormous benefits from the so-called Arab Spring. "Even without nukes," one top official told me, "Iran picks up the pieces. With nukes, it takes the house."

Hearing Israeli leaders express grave concerns about Iran and its nuclear potential is nothing new. What is new is a growing worry that America's adversaries will be less inclined to take warnings from Washington seriously. Each week that passes without the overthrow or elimination of Moammar Gadhafi is perceived in Jerusalem as emboldening the leadership of Iran and North Korea. "Imagine," one source told me, "how Gadhafi must be kicking himself for giving up the development of Libya's nuclear program."

The Israeli government is so concerned that America's adversaries may miscalculate U.S. intentions

that it is privately urging Washington to make it clear that the U.S. would intervene in Saudi Arabia should the survival of that government be threatened. That is, after all, what President George H.W. Bush did more than 20 years ago when Saddam Hussein ordered Iraqi forces into Kuwait and moved forces in the direction of Saudi Arabia. "This," President Bush said on more than one occasion, "will not stand." And it didn't.

Given the current wide range of U.S. responses to public upheavals throughout North Africa and the Persian Gulf, the Israelis are convinced that the principle needs to be unambiguously restated, if only as a reminder that Washington knows where its critical national interests lie. Absent such a public recommitment, they worry that Iran will be encouraged to even greater mischief. Wherever there is a restive and newly active Shiite minority, as for example in Bahrain, a mere causeway from the coast of Saudi Arabia, Tehran can be expected to provide assistance and stir the pot.

Just as enemies such as Iran need to be cautioned, America's traditional allies need to be reassured. That's why Israeli officials are recommending a Marshall Plan for Egypt. The overthrow of Hosni Mubarak may have been no loss in the annals of democracy, but under Mr. Mubarak Egypt was a pillar of stability and a reliable if not always warm partner for Israel. Egypt's political future at this time is uncertain enough; the Israelis believe it is essential to prevent its economic collapse. The U.S. has poured billions of dollars into Egypt since Anwar Sadat made peace with Israel, and senior Israeli officials believe the economic spigot should remain wide open. With almost no margin for error, the Israelis have long been among the world's foremost pragmatists. While I was in Jerusalem, events in Syria were coming to a boil. Since the Syrians are closely allied with Israel's bitterest enemies—Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hezbollah's main sponsor, Iran—one might expect Israeli leaders to take some comfort in seeing the regime of Bashar Assad in trouble. But here, too, the Israelis are far more comfortable with stability on their borders. Assad, like his father before him, has maintained an uneasy truce along Syria's border with Israel, despite Israel's continued occupation of the Golan Heights.

Little, if anything, that has happened during the past few months has improved Israel's standing in the region.

One of the most telling blows to Israel's security has gone all but unnoticed in the swirl of uprisings. For years, the most stable relationship that Israel enjoyed with any Muslim nation was with Turkey. Even under the leadership of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has specialized in publicly baiting the Israelis, the relationship between the two countries' intelligence agencies remained strictly professional. "That," a high-ranking Israeli official told me, "is no longer the case."

The outlook from Jerusalem these days is not encouraging. Iranian influence is growing throughout the Persian Gulf and beyond. Egypt's commitment to its peace treaty with Israel is uncertain. Syria could explode into total chaos at any moment. Jordan's stability is in

So it wasn't Israel By Rich Lowry Arab governments were real problem or predatory government of their Arab neighbors.

The last few months should have finally shattered the persistent illusion that the Israeli-Palestinian question determines all in the Middle East.

In an essay in Foreign Policy magazine titled "The False Religion of Mideast Peace," ex-diplomat Aaron David Miller recounts the conventional wisdom running back through the Cold War: "An unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict would trigger ruinous war, increase Soviet influence, weaken Arab moderates, strengthen Arab radicals, jeopardize access to Middle East oil, and generally undermine US influence from Rabat to Karachi."

Behind these assumptions has long stood a deeply simplistic understanding of the Arabs. Professional naif Jimmy Carter insists, "There is no doubt: The heart and mind of every Muslim is affected by whether or not the Israeli-Palestinian issue is dealt with fairly."

This is reductive to the point of insult. Carter thinks that Muslims have no interior lives of their own, but are all defined by a foreign-policy dispute that is unlikely to affect most of them directly in the least. He mistakes real people for participants in an endless Council on Foreign Relations seminar.

The Israeli-Palestinian issue certainly has great emotional charge, and most Arabs would prefer a world blissfully free of the Zionist entity. But the Israelis can't be blamed -- though cynical Arab governments certainly try -- for unemployment and repression in Arab countries.

Monumental events in recent decades -- the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq War and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait -- were driven by internal Muslim confessional, ideological and geo-political differences. Israel has nothing to do with the Sunnis hating the Shia, or the Saudis hating the Iranians, or everyone hating Moammar Khadafy.

Adam Garfinkle muses in his book "Jewcentricity": "Imagine, if you can, that one day Israelis decided to pack their bags and move away, giving the country to

question. Pakistan, a Muslim country with more than a 100 nuclear warheads, is confronting an uncertain future—made all the more unpredictable by the commencement of a U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan this summer. Whether any U.S. troops will remain in Iraq after the end of this year remains an open question. America is war-weary and facing a crushing deficit. The only glimmer of good news for the Israelis may be that, when it comes to reliable allies in the region, Washington's list also keeps getting shorter.

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the Palestinians with a check for sixty years' rent. Would the Arabs suddenly stop competing among themselves, and would America and the Arab world suddenly fall in love with each other?"

Yet the pull of the illusion is so powerful that even those who don't profess to believe in it, like George W. Bush, eventually get sucked in. Barack Obama came into office ready to deploy his charm and fulfill the millennial promise of the peace process once and for all. He couldn't even get the Palestinians to sit down to negotiate with the Israelis, in an unintended "reset" to the situation decades ago.

According to the illusion, the region should have exploded in rage at Jewish perfidy and American ineffectualness. It exploded for altogether different reasons.

We witnessed revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt without a hint of upset at the Israeli settlements or America's continued failure as a broker of peace. We've seen the Arab League petition the United States -- whose sole function is supposed to be monitoring Israeli housing developments and paving the way for a Palestinian state -- to undertake a military operation against another (recently suspended) member of the Arab League, Libya.

It'd be easier if the key to the Middle East really were sitting around a negotiating table with a couple of bottles of Evian, poring over a map adjudicating a dispute so familiar that people have built diplomatic, academic and journalistic careers on it.

The current terrain of the Middle East as it exists -- not as we assume it should be -- is hellishly disorienting by comparison: What to do when an ally invades another ally to knock around protesters in violation of our values? When a tin-pot dictator thumbs his nose at us and the rest of West and crushes his opponents with alacrity despite our earnest protestations? When popular uprisings threaten our allies more than our enemies?

It makes the old peace process seem alluringly comfortable and manageable. No, the illusion will never die.

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