

## Opinion &amp; Comment

Nachik Navoth

## Listen to Obama, remember Brezhnev

The Yom Kippur War was the result of three failures, not surprises. The first blunder: We failed to read the peace signals. The second blunder: We misinterpreted our rivals' intentions and goals. The third blunder, which constituted a strategic misunderstanding: We overlooked developments in relations between the superpowers that had a direct implication for our fate.

For many years the leaders of Egypt had tried to forge clandestine ties with Israel, in order to find a diplomatic solution to the ongoing hostility between the countries. As early as 1965, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser invited the Mossad chief, Meir Amit, to visit Egypt. The government forbade him from going. Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, had written, many years before he became president, about the need to negotiate with Israel so that Egypt could focus on its own problems. Once he became president – and after his efforts to enter talks with Israel failed – Sadat believed that a limited military operation would restore Sinai to Egypt. Egyptian military commanders conditioned such a move on receiving upgraded materiel from the Soviet Union.

Upon the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty between the USSR and the United States, in May 1972, as part of the detente between the two superpowers, Sadat set off for Moscow to ascertain what the impact would be on the supply of up-to-date equipment to his army. When the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, told him that no arms would be forthcoming, Sadat stopped off in Tehran on his way back to Egypt, to convey a message to Israel about his desire to talk. The message was transferred to Israel immediately – but went unanswered.

In light of this, and despite the lack in materiel, Egypt went on with its preparations for war. The Mossad passed along plenty of reports about this to the political and military echelons. But because of the human factor, they did not sink into the awareness of those in charge of intelligence assessments. Their thinking was that, if the Israel Defense Forces were in the Egyptian army's place, and it lacked the aforementioned equipment, it would not go to war. That was the origin of the assessment that there was a "low likelihood" of war.

But there was another failure, a third one, that contributed to this appraisal: Israel's leadership did not try to grasp the significance for the region of detente, the changing relationship between the USSR and the U.S. Of this failing we learned only recently, following the release of declassified records of meetings from the U.S. State Department archives.

In June 1973, four months before the war broke out, Brezhnev met with U.S. President Richard Nixon at his estate in San

Clemente, California, to sum up the first year of detente. Among the topics discussed was Brezhnev's initiative to get Israel and Egypt talking, because of his urgent belief that "we must put this warlike situation to an end."

But the Americans did not accede to Brezhnev's persistent pleas. This refusal can be explained by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's thinking, that Israel would win the war; the victory would weaken the Soviet Union in the Middle East; and the U.S. would take its place there. And so it was. One might also speculate that this was why Egypt refrained from going to war according to the plan devised in May of that year. Apparently Brezhnev told Egypt that he was going to the U.S. to prevent a war – and it should wait.

Now Barack Obama is the one trying to prevent a war, in an era in which nuclear weapons are again becoming a factor in regional policy. Perhaps today we will have the wisdom to respond to the efforts by a global superpower to prevent war. The failure of these efforts will weaken the superpower and harm its interests

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in the region, a process that already has begun. Back then it was Brezhnev who failed; today it will be Obama, whom we so love to criticize. But the first casualty of this failure, then and now, will be Israel.

The human factor in intelligence and policy is the only possible explanation for such dramatic events in the life of a nation. It is the human factor that makes the decision to go to war or to prefer peace despite the price it entails, the political price that comes with saving human life. The human factor – the power and courage of leaders – was and has remained crucial and decisive, for peace or for war. These are the lessons of the past, which should be internalized for the sake of a good and worthy future for the children of this people and its country.

Nachik Navoth is a former deputy chief of the Mossad.

Matthew A. Taylor

## Just who is misguided?

When North American Jews gathered in New Orleans for their annual General Assembly earlier this week, the mainstream Jewish establishment unveiled a new initiative to counteract the growing international condemnation of Israel's policies of occupation and land theft. The big plan: delegitimize the delegitimizers.

The Jewish Federations of North America announced at the conference that over the next three years they will invest \$6 million to launch an "Israel Action Network." Based on speakers' comments at the GA, the strategy seems to be to tar and feather virtually anyone who supports any form of boycott, divestment or sanctions (BDS) as a "delegitimizing" who is participating in an alleged plot to "destroy the State of Israel." Instead of spending millions to persuade Israel to change its path, the JFNA prefers to shoot the messengers.

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Meanwhile, a few days before the assembly, the U.S.-based advocacy group Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) convened a gathering of young Jews from the U.S. and Israel to explore difficult questions that the mainstream leadership seems eager to avoid, such as: How does the occupation delegitimize Israel? When Israel bulldozes Palestinian homes, uproots olive trees, and builds roads designated for settlers only, is that consistent with the Jewish value of respecting your neighbor?

This young group of Jewish activists seems to be an embodiment of Peter Beinart's recent essay in The New York Review of Books, which explored why Israel's oppressive policies cause young American Jews to feel alienated. "[Many American Jews have] imbibed some of the defining values of American Jewish political culture ... a skepticism about military force, a commitment to human rights ... They did not realize that they were supposed to shed those values when it came to Israel," Beinart wrote in his piece, "The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment."

Disaffected with the mainstream American leadership's "Israel: Right or wrong" attitude, the participants at JVP's gathering, the Young Jewish Leadership Institute, outlined a vision for engagement with the Israel/Palestine problem. "We won't be won over by free vacations and scholarship money. We won't buy the logic that slaughter means safety," the group wrote in its declaration, which is posted at youngjewishproud.org.

At a GA forum entitled "Confronting Israel's Delegitimizers," Julie Bernstein, of San Francisco's Jewish Community Relations Council, spoke about how to

delegitimize the delegitimizers. "We need to make BDS the issue and not Israel," Bernstein said. "What's challenging is, we have [young Jews] on the front lines advocating for boycott, divestment and sanctions, who truly want peace, who want to help the Palestinians. They have good intentions, and they don't know that they are essentially pawns in this game of bringing Israel down."

On the contrary, the young Jewish progressives see BDS as a nonviolent strategy that can influence Israel to change its behavior, and bring about a just, equitable resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. They see themselves not as well-meaning idiots, as Bernstein implies, but as highly educated Jews who've personally witnessed the brutality of the occupation and feel a moral obligation to take action.

During the question-and-answer segment of the GA forum, UCLA law student Rachel Roberts expressed her outrage at Bernstein's remarks. "What you said about the young, conscientious Jews who have joined with their Palestinian peers to work on divestment campaigns is so unfair and condescending," Roberts said. Before she could say another word, a chorus of panelists and audience members interrupted and began hurling insults at her.

This dynamic of the older establishment patronizing and being condescending to the young was also palpable in Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech to the GA on Monday. Before Netanyahu could even spit out the word "delegitimize," the first in a succession of five young Jews rose from her seat and unfurled a large white banner that read, "The loyalty oath delegitimizes Israel." Other protesters

followed with "The siege of Gaza delegitimizes Israel" ... "Silencing dissent delegitimizes Israel."

Netanyahu had sharp words for the protesters. "Attempts by our enemies and their misguided fellow travelers to delegitimize the Jewish state must be countered," he said to thunderous applause.

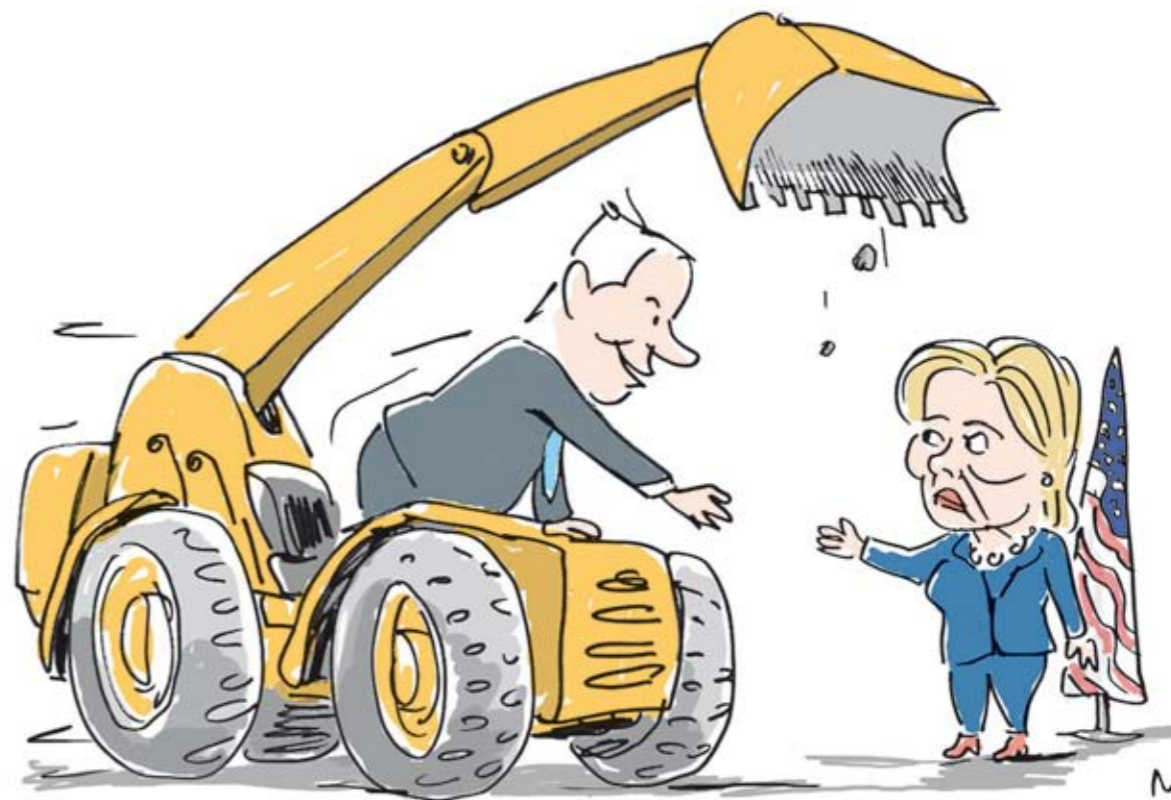
I'm one of the five who was dragged out, clutching a sign that said, "The occupation delegitimizes Israel." When I envision Israel ending settlement expansion and living in equality with the Palestinians – while Netanyahu's government confiscates more Palestinian land and builds more settlements every single day – I wonder who is misguided?

The fifth and final protester, Rae Abileah, a Jewish American activist of Israeli descent, stood up and proclaimed: "The settlements betray Jewish values." Members of the crowd tackled her, shoved a towel in her mouth, and then chanted "Bibi, Bibi, Bibi" in unison.

Gandhi said, "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win." In the case of Israel and the tone-deaf American Jewish establishment, one could revise this statement to: First they ignore you, then they call you a self-hating Jew, then they call you a delegitimizing and fight you with \$6 million.

What's next? We young Jews won't back down, our numbers are growing, and we will win. Israel will change its cruel, self-destructive behavior. We won't rest until Israelis and Palestinians live together in true equality, safety and mutual respect.

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## Toward new arms-control thinking

The final document from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May includes a clause on a conference to be convened in 2012 on making the Middle East a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone (WMDFFZ). The clause was adopted in the wake of massive pressure by Egypt, which threatened to block a consensus on the entire final document if its demands were not accepted.

Whether or not the United States was pressured by Egypt into accepting this idea, recent indications are that it has become committed to helping realize it. This does not mean that the U.S. necessarily likes the idea, or that it will accept additional Egyptian efforts to pressure Israel. But Israel's working assumption should be that the Americans are not going to actively resist the idea either.

A clear indication of the American position became evident in the leadup to the International Atomic Energy Agency's annual conference in September, when the Arab states – led by Egypt – pushed for a resolution calling on Israel to join the NPT. The U.S. made tactical use of the proposed 2012 conference as a means of convincing some states to vote against the resolution. The American argument was that pressuring Israel with an IAEA resolution would lower the chances that it would agree to take part in the proposed conference on a WMDFFZ. Thus, while the U.S. was signaling that pressure on Israel in the nuclear realm was not acceptable, it also lent implicit support to the conference itself.

At present, planning of the proposed conference has not proceeded beyond the idea stage. The lack of definition may be an opportunity for Israel to take a more active stance in the process of shaping the event's parameters and conceptual logic. Indeed, Israel's positions in this regard should be raised clearly in conversations with the U.S. Moreover, if construed correctly, the conference need not necessarily be a negative development.

One important issue touches upon the overall framework of this event. Because the idea of the 2012 conference was raised in the final document of the NPT review conference, it creates in the minds of some a link between discussion of a WMDFFZ and the NPT. Egypt's interest in this regard is no secret: It would like this connection to be strongly reinforced. Creating an inextricable link would better serve its argument that there is no way to discuss WMD in the Middle East without Israel joining the NPT. Egypt fought hard to have the idea included in the final document of the 1995 NPT review conference, and insisted on its inclusion again this year.

But the idea of regional talks on WMD arms control is neither conceptually nor historically linked to the NPT frame, and a strong case should be made for decoupling the two. The most obvious reason is that a WMDFFZ deals with all categories of weapons of mass destruction – including biological and chemical ones – and not nuclear weapons per se. Even more important, discussing WMD arms control in a regional framework necessitates a different kind of thinking than what is advocated by international disarmament treaties like the NPT. The international treaties focus

on the weapons, whereas the regional context encourages attention to state interests, security concerns, and the quality of inter-state relations. Without building up a measure of mutual acceptance and stability in the regional sphere, there is no way to address reductions in weapons.

Historically, the relevant experience to draw upon is that of the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group that was active for four years in the early 1990s as part of the multilateral track of the Madrid peace process. It was there that a concept for regional dialogue was developed and began to be implemented. The lessons of this experience should serve as an important guide for moving forward. The idea of a WMDFFZ for the Middle East has also been a longstanding item on the agenda of the various Euro-Mediterranean dialogues, with the same message of building confidence and improving inter-state relations as an essential first stage.

In light of deteriorating relations among the states of the Middle East over the past decade – and especially with Iran's developing nuclear program and blatant displays of regional hegemonic tendencies – this logic has only been strengthened. No discussion of regional arms control and security can advance without the active and meaningful participation of all states in the Middle East. Iran and Syria in particular must be willing to sit down and discuss regional issues with Israel. No less can be accepted as a baseline for a regional conference on such sensitive security concerns.

Finally, it must be recognized that what is proposed entails a very long process. Moreover, once regional are

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initiated, an entire range of additional regional issues might surface through the multilateral dynamic, as happened in all the multilateral working groups active in the early 1990s. Power politics and regional rivalries are almost certain to affect the talks, sometimes in unexpected and unpredictable ways. All this must be recognized and factored in by the conveners of the talks, who will have a central and very difficult role to play. Regional dynamics – especially in an area like the Middle East – are anything but easy to navigate, and whoever assumes the external facilitating role must take into account the enormity of the challenge, and be fully up to the task.

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Mordechai Paldiel

## Unsung Spanish righteous

the estimated 600 Greek Jews claiming Spanish descent, despite objections from the fascist Franco regime. He worked ceaselessly to postpone the deportation of Greek Jews, first those in Thessaloniki (Salonica), during the mass deportation of that city's Jews in 1943, and then in Athens, when that city came under direct German control. When Radigales tried to organize a transport of Spanish-descended Jews to Spain that June, his superior, Foreign Minister Francisco Jordana, urged him to find excuses to delay it, and ordered him to adopt "a passive stance by abstaining from all personal initiatives."

When Radigales persisted, Jordana accused him of misrepresenting Spain's policy vis-a-vis Jews, and he threatened "to neutralize the zealotry of the consul-general of Athens, and to paralyze" his pro-Jewish activity. Radigales countered by pointing out that the consulate of Italy (also part of the Axis) was doing everything to "facilitate the exodus from Thessaloniki of those who had some family relationship with Italians," by sending them "en masse" to Athens, "in a special train, with the consent of [the Italian] government." Furthermore, Radigales said, "our decision and conduct have begun to contrast more sharply in comparison with the decision of Italy, Switzerland, Argentina and Turkey, who have repatriated their Hebrew nationals in Thessaloniki, giving them all means of

assistance for the journey."

Finally, on September 30, 1944, Radigales informed Madrid that in order to save the remaining Spanish Jews in hiding in Athens (by then under German occupation), he had taken over a private hotel, "and in it I have already housed some [Jewish] families, alleviating their sad situation." Thus, without prior advance approval, Radigales was sheltering Jews in a building purchased for this purpose by the Spanish consulate. On October 12, 1944, the Germans withdrew from Athens, and the sheltered Jews were at last free.

A bit further east, Julio Palencia, who until August 1943 was the Spanish minister in Sofia, Bulgaria, went so far as to urge his own fascist government to take under its protection not only the so-called Spanish Jews, but, surprisingly, all Jews wishing to leave Bulgaria and transit through Spain.

Palencia assured his government that "the majority of the Jews do not wish to remain in Spain, but rather to move to one of the Hispanic-American nations." In dispatches to Madrid, he denounced the "cruel" and "outrageous" anti-Semitic measures of the Bulgarian regime. Not mincing words, he added: "I've protested numerous times, verbally and through written reports, against the illegal and arbitrary measures put into place by the government." Palencia added another "incriminating"

element to his record: his personal involvement on behalf of a threatened Jewish family, something that eventually led to his diplomatic recall and demotion.

It started when Palencia tried to avert the execution of Leon Arie, a Spanish Jew in Sofia condemned to death for allegedly raising by a few pennies the price of perfume he sold – but to no avail. Then, to the surprise of the whole diplomatic community, Julio Palencia and his wife Zoe requested permission to adopt Leon Arie's son (Klodi, aged 21) and daughter (Renee, aged 26), and this was granted him by Bulgaria's adoption authorities, on June 5, 1943. In the words of Israeli historian Haim Avni, "The Germans and the Jew-haters in Bulgaria were furious. Palencia was declared persona non grata and was recalled to Madrid."

These three diplomats represented a fascist regime that diplomatically closed ranks with Nazi Germany, sent a legion to fight alongside the Germans on the Russian front, and placed obstacles against the passage of Jews through its territory. Yet they defied that regime in order to help save the lives of Jews, who otherwise faced death or severe persecution at the hands of the Germans and their collaborator regimes. This week, as we commemorate the 72nd anniversary of Kristallnacht, we can only hope that the names of these people, whose cases are under consideration by Yad Vashem, will soon be added to the several dozen other diplomats already on Yad Vashem's list of Righteous Among the Nations.

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