

LESSONS OF NETANYAHU'S TRIUMPH

Caroline B. Glick

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Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu was hoping to avoid his clash with US President Barack Obama [last] week in Washington. Four days before his showdown at the White House with the American leader, Netanyahu addressed the Knesset. His speech was the most dovish he had ever given. In it, he set out the parameters of the land concessions he is willing to make to the Palestinians, in the event they ever decide that they are interested in negotiating a final peace.

Among other things, Netanyahu spoke for the first time about “settlement blocs,” and so signaled that he would be willing to evacuate the more isolated Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria. He also spoke of a long-term military presence in the Jordan Valley rather than Israeli sovereignty along the militarily vital plain. Both strategically and ideologically, Netanyahu’s speech constituted a massive concession to Obama. The premier had good reason to believe that his speech would pre-empt any US demand for further Israeli concessions during his visit to Washington.

Alas, it was not to be. Instead of welcoming Netanyahu’s unprecedented concessions, Obama dismissed them as insufficient as he blindsided Netanyahu...with his speech at the State Department. There, just hours before Netanyahu was scheduled to fly off to meet him in the Oval Office, Obama adopted the Palestinian negotiating position by calling for Israel to accept that future negotiations will be based on the indefensible—indeed suicidal—1949 armistice lines.

So, just as he was about to board his plane, Netanyahu realized that his

mission in the US capital had changed. His job wasn't to go along to get along. His job was to stop Obama from driving Israel's relations with the US off a cliff.

Netanyahu was no longer going to Washington to explain where Israel will stand aside. He was going to Washington to explain what Israel stands for. Obama threw down the gauntlet. Netanyahu needed to pick it up by rallying both the Israeli people to his side and rallying the American people to Israel's side. Both goals, he realized, could only be accomplished by presenting his vision of what Israel is and what it stands for.

And Netanyahu did his job. He did his job brilliantly.

Israel today is the target of an ever escalating campaign to demonize and delegitimize it. Just this week we learned that a dozen towns in Scotland have decided to ban Israeli books from their public libraries. One Scottish town has decided to post signs calling for its residents to boycott Israeli products and put a distinguishing mark (yellow star, perhaps?) on all Israeli products sold in local stores to warn residents away from them.... In San Francisco, there is a proposition on the ballot for the fall elections to ban circumcision. The proposition would make it a criminal offense to carry out the oldest Jewish religious ritual. Offenders will be punished by up to a year in prison and a fine of up to \$1,000.

Israelis shake their heads and wonder, what did we do to the people of [Scotland and] San Francisco? It seems that everywhere we look we are told that we have no right to exist. From Ramallah to Gaza, to Egypt, to Scotland, Norway, and San Francisco, we are told that we are evil and had better give up the store. And then Obama took to the stage...and told us that we have to surrender our ability to defend ourselves in order to make room for a Palestinian state run by terrorists committed to our destruction.

But then Netanyahu arrived in Washington and said, "Enough already, we've had quite enough of this dangerous nonsense." And we felt things we haven't felt for a long time. We felt empowered. We felt we had a voice. We felt proud. We felt we had a leader. We felt relieved.

The American people, whose overwhelming support for Israel was demonstrated by their representatives in both houses of the Congress...also felt empowered, proud and relieved. Because not only did Netanyahu eloquently remind them of why they stand with Israel, he reminded them of why everyone who truly loves freedom stands with America....

Since he assumed office, Obama has been traveling the world apologizing for America's world leadership. He has been lecturing the American people about the need to subordinate America's national interests to global organizations like the United Nations that are controlled by dictatorships which despise them. Suddenly, here was an allied leader reminding them of why America is a great nation that leads the world by right, not by historical coincidence.

It is not coincidental that many American and Israeli observers have described Netanyahu's speech as "Churchillian." Winston Churchill's leadership was a classic example of democratic leadership. And Netanyahu is Churchill's most fervent pupil. The democratic leadership model requires a leader to set out his vision of where his country must go and convince the public to follow him.

That is what Churchill did. And that is what Netanyahu did this week. And like Churchill in June 1940, Netanyahu's success this week was dazzling.

Just how dazzling was made clear by a *Haaretz* poll of the Israeli public conducted after Netanyahu's speech before the Congress. The poll found that Netanyahu's approval ratings increased an astounding 13 percentage points, from 38 to 51 percent in one week. Two-thirds of the Israelis who watched his speech said it made them proud.

As for the US response, the fact that leading Democrats on Capitol Hill, House Minority Leader Steny Hoyer and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, felt it necessary to distance themselves from Obama's statements about Israel's final borders makes clear that Netanyahu successfully rallied the American public to Israel's side.

This point was also brought home with Democratic National Committee

Chairwoman Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz's interesting request to Republicans during their joint meeting with Netanyahu. In front of the Israeli leader, Wasserman Schultz asked her Republican counterparts not to use support for Israel as a campaign issue. Her request makes clear that following Netanyahu's brilliant triumph in Washington, Democrats realize that the president's poor treatment of Israel is an issue that will harm them politically if the Republicans decide to make it an issue in next year's elections....

Netanyahu's extraordinary leadership this week has shown...us that he has the capacity to be the leader of our times.... Netanyahu should realize what his astounding success means for him as well as for Israel. The people of Israel and our many friends around the world will continue to stand behind him proudly if he continues to lead us as well and wonderfully as he did this week. And we will admire him. And we will thank him.

WHAT OBAMA DID TO ISRAEL
Charles Krauthammer
National Review, May 27, 2011

Every Arab-Israeli negotiation contains a fundamental asymmetry: Israel gives up land, which is tangible; the Arabs make promises, which are ephemeral. The longstanding American solution has been to nonetheless urge Israel to take risks for peace while America balances things by giving assurances of U.S. support for Israel's security and diplomatic needs.

It's on the basis of such solemn assurances that Israel undertook, for example, the Gaza withdrawal. In order to mitigate this risk, Pres. George W. Bush gave a written commitment that America supported Israel's absorption of major settlement blocs in any peace agreement, opposed any return to the 1967 lines, and stood firm against the so-called Palestinian right of return to Israel.

For two and a half years, the Obama administration has refused to recognize and reaffirm these assurances. Then last week in his State Department speech, President Obama definitively trashed them. He declared that the Arab-Israeli conflict should indeed be resolved along “the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps.”

Nothing new here, said Obama three days later. “By definition, it means that the parties themselves—Israelis and Palestinians—will negotiate a border that is different” from 1967.

It means nothing of the sort. “Mutually” means both parties have to agree. And if one side doesn’t? Then, by definition, you’re back to the 1967 lines.

Nor is this merely a theoretical proposition. Three times the Palestinians have been offered exactly that formula, 1967 plus swaps—at Camp David 2000, Taba 2001, and the 2008 Olmert-Abbas negotiations. Every time, the Palestinians said no and walked away....

Note how Obama has undermined Israel’s negotiating position. He is demanding that Israel go into peace talks having already forfeited its claim to the territory won in the ‘67 war—its only bargaining chip. Remember: That ‘67 line runs right through Jerusalem. Thus the starting point of negotiations would be that the Western Wall and even Jerusalem’s Jewish Quarter are Palestinian—alien territory for which Israel must now bargain.

The very idea that Judaism’s holiest shrine is alien or that Jerusalem’s Jewish Quarter is rightfully, historically, or demographically Arab is an absurdity. And the idea that, in order to retain them, Israel has to give up parts of itself is a travesty.

Obama also moved the goal posts on the so-called right of return. Flooding Israel with millions of Arabs would destroy the world’s only Jewish state while creating a 23rd Arab state and a second Palestinian state—not exactly what we mean when we speak of a “two-state solution.” That’s why it has been the policy of the U.S. to adamantly oppose this “right.”

Yet in his State Department speech, Obama refused to simply restate this position—and refused again in a supposedly corrective speech three days later. Instead, he told Israel it must negotiate the right of return with the Palestinians after having given every inch of territory. Bargaining with what, pray tell?

No matter. “The status quo is unsustainable,” declared Obama, “and Israel too must act boldly to advance a lasting peace.”

Israel too? Exactly what bold steps for peace have the Palestinians taken? Israel made three radically conciliatory offers to establish a Palestinian state, withdrew from Gaza, and has been trying to renew negotiations for more than two years. Meanwhile, the Gaza Palestinians have been firing rockets at Israeli towns and villages. And on the West Bank, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas turned down the Olmert offer, walked out of negotiations with Benjamin Netanyahu, and now defies the United States by seeking not peace talks but instant statehood—without peace, without recognizing Israel—at the U.N. And to make unmistakable this spurning of any peace process, Abbas agrees to join the openly genocidal Hamas in a unity government, which even Obama acknowledges makes negotiations impossible.

Obama’s response to this relentless Palestinian intransigence? To reward it—by abandoning the Bush assurances, legitimizing the ‘67 borders, and refusing to reaffirm America’s rejection of the right of return.

The only remaining question is whether this perverse and ultimately self-defeating policy is born of genuine antipathy toward Israel or of the arrogance of a blundering amateur who refuses to see that he is undermining not just peace but the very possibility of negotiations.

THE MIDEAST HISTORY LESSON OBAMA SO DESPERATELY NEEDS
Seth Mandel
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After President Obama surprised Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu last week with a now-infamous statement of principle about the 1967 lines, Netanyahu responded with what news outlets characterized as a “history lecture.”

Though the outlets—ranging from the *French Press Agency* to the *Chicago Sun-Times*—meant the phrase derisively, a history lesson on the 1967 lines was exactly what the moment called for. And a lesson on the Israel-Egypt peace treaty and the early negotiations that led to the Oslo process would, for instance, enlighten the president on just why his strategy for Mideast peace is backwards, and doomed to fail.

Anwar Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem to address the Israeli Knesset in 1977 immediately entered the history books as a moment of triumph for political courage and for the power of diplomacy. It held the promise of a Middle East where Israel’s existence is a recognized reality, and it offered a glimpse of what Arab statesmanship could accomplish. Grand gestures weren’t meaningless after all.

But there was one prominent American who disagreed. After the Egyptian president’s dramatic visit to Jerusalem U.S. President Jimmy Carter said, “a separate peace agreement between Egypt and Israel is not desirable.”

In retrospect, of course, it has been very “desirable” for Carter’s otherwise dismal foreign policy record. Historian Arthur Herman explained in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2009 how that came to be: “But by the autumn of 1978, the rest of Mr. Carter’s foreign policy had crumbled,” Herman wrote. “He had pushed through an unpopular giveaway of the Panama Canal, allowed the Sandinistas to take power in Nicaragua as proxies of Cuba, and stood by while chaos grew in the Shah’s Iran. Desperate for some kind of foreign policy success in order to bolster his chances for re-election in 1980, Mr. Carter finally decided to elbow his way into the game by setting up a meeting between Sadat and Begin at Camp David.”

When it became inevitable, Carter took the credit. It should be noted that there is much value in a White House reception for such a deal. It communicates the notion that American moral and physical power stand

behind the agreement, giving it extra weight in the international arena. But the fact remains that because Carter wanted a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, he actually opposed the Egypt-Israel deal. Against it before he was for it, so to speak.

The agreement was the result of diplomacy and negotiation undertaken by the Israelis and the Egyptian government. Only after it became a formality did the U.S. get involved.

A similar path took shape on its way to the Bill Clinton-endorsed Oslo process—the declaration of principles of which were signed at the White House in 1993. As Barry Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin write in *Yasir Arafat: A Political Biography*, what became the Oslo process began in earnest in 1991, when Israeli scholars Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundak met with Palestinian negotiator Hanan Ashrawi in Ramallah to discuss Israeli-Palestinian economic cooperation. Ashrawi suggested the Israelis meet with PLO economist Ahmad Qurei in London in December of that year. Arafat approved.

“This was not just to be a meeting between two Israeli academics and a PLO economist,” the authors write. “Abu Mazin (Mahmoud Abbas) later wrote that the key factor in making the PLO pursue this channel was the relationship of Pundak and Hirschfeld through Yossi Beilin, a prominent figure in the Labor party, to Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. The get-together was arranged by Terje Larsen, a Norwegian sociologist who headed the Institute for Applied Social Sciences. That meeting’s success soon led to more rounds of secret talks between Israel and the PLO hosted by the Norwegians.”

The talks circumvented the U.S. [as well as then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzkah Rabin], which was what Arafat wanted anyway. As Martin Indyk describes in his memoir of Clinton Mideast diplomacy, Arafat’s presence posed a continued logistical problem—at times comical—for the American administration since Arafat was an international terrorist....

The talks moved along, and eventually the Clinton administration got involved. Once that happened, however, things quickly spiraled out of control. Arafat muscled his way into a more public role (he was always involved behind the scenes), and eventually hijacked the process,

derailing virtually the entire Mideast diplomacy of the Clinton administration. (As the Bush administration prepared to take over, Clinton called Colin Powell and told him: "Don't let Arafat sucker punch you like he did me.")

The lesson here is that the American administration can play a productive role in the peace process, but not an overwhelming one. History has shown time and again in the Mideast that negotiations must be done quietly and be free of outside interference. The more public the spectacle, the more it encourages the Palestinians to grandstand, stall, and manipulate.

Unfortunately, this is a lesson Obama has yet to learn. His version of American Mideast diplomacy is the reverse of what has worked, and the photocopy of what has failed. The predictable result is that the Palestinians...are barreling toward a UN General Assembly publicity stunt that would effectively abrogate the Oslo process and introduce a level of anarchy into an already unstable region.

History suggests the president should reverse course immediately to salvage the process. But this may be a lesson too far.

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THE DREAMER GOES DOWN FOR THE COUNT
Walter Russell Mead

American Interest, May 25, 2011

I had never thought there were many similarities between the pleasure-loving Charles II of England and the more upright Barack Obama until this week. Listening to his speeches on the Middle East at the State Department, US-Israel relations at the AIPAC annual meeting and most recently his address to the British Parliament the comparison becomes irresistible.

“Here lies our sovereign king,” wrote the Earl of Rochester about King Charles:

**Whose word no man relies on.
Who never said a foolish thing
Or ever did a wise one.**

This seems to capture President Obama’s Middle East problems in a nutshell. The President’s descriptions of the situation are comprehensive and urbane. He correctly identifies the forces at work. He develops interesting policy ideas and approaches that address important political and moral elements of the complex problems we face. He crafts approaches that might, with good will and deft management, bridge the gaps between the sides. He reads thoughtful speeches full of sensible reflections.

But the last few weeks have cast him as the least competent manager of America’s Middle East diplomatic portfolio in a very long time. He has infuriated and frustrated long term friends, but made no headway in reconciling enemies. He has strained our ties with the established regimes without winning new friends on the Arab Street. He has committed our forces in the strategically irrelevant backwater of Libya not, as he originally told us, for “days, not weeks” but for months not days.

Where he has failed so dramatically is in the arena he himself has so frequently identified as vital: the search for peace between Palestinians and Israelis. His record of grotesque, humiliating and total diplomatic failure in his dealings with Prime Minister Netanyahu has few parallels in American history. Three times he has gone up against Netanyahu; three times he has ingloriously failed. This last defeat—Netanyahu’s deadly, devastating speech to Congress in which he eviscerated President Obama’s foreign policy to prolonged and repeated standing ovations by members of both parties—may have been the single most stunning and effective public rebuke to an American President a foreign leader has ever delivered.

Netanyahu beat Obama like a red-headed stepchild; he played him like a fiddle; he pounded him like a big brass drum. The Prime Minister of

Israel danced rings around his arrogant, professorial opponent. It was like watching the Harlem Globetrotters go up against the junior squad from Miss Porter's School; like watching Harvard play Texas A&M, like watching Bambi meet Godzilla—or Bill Clinton run against Bob Dole.

The Prime Minister mopped the floor with our guy. Obama made his '67 speech; Bibi ripped him to shreds. Obama goes to AIPAC, nervous, off-balance, backing and filling. Then Bibi drops the C-Bomb, demonstrating to the whole world that the Prime Minister of Israel has substantially more support in both the House and the Senate than the President of the United States.

President Obama's new Middle East policy, intended to liquidate the wreckage resulting from his old policy and get the President somehow onto firmer ground, lies in ruins even before it could be launched. He had dropped the George Mitchell approach, refused to lay out his own set of parameters for settling the conflict, and accepted some important Israeli red lines—but for some reason he chose not to follow through with the logic of these decisions and offer Netanyahu a reset button.

As so often in the past, but catastrophically this time, he found the "sour spot": the position that angers everyone and pleases none. He moved close enough to the Israelis to infuriate the Palestinians while keeping the Israelis at too great a distance to earn their trust.... Everyone who followed the events of the last week knows that the President has lost control of the American-Israeli relationship and that he has no near-term prospects of rescuing the peace process. The Israelis, the Palestinians and the US Congress have all rejected his leadership....

Internationally, this matters a great deal; domestically it matters even more.... As the stunning and overwhelming response to Prime Minister Netanyahu in Congress showed, Israel matters in American politics like almost no other country on earth. Well beyond the American Jewish and the Protestant fundamentalist communities, the people and the story of Israel stir some of the deepest and most mysterious reaches of the American soul. The idea of Jewish and Israeli exceptionalism is profoundly tied to the idea of American exceptionalism. The belief that God favors and protects Israel is connected to the idea that God favors and protects America....

Being pro-Israel matters in American mass politics because the public mind believes at a deep level that to be pro-Israel is to be pro-America and pro-faith. Substantial numbers of voters believe that politicians who don't 'get' Israel also don't 'get' America and don't 'get' God. Obama's political isolation on this issue, and the haste with which liberal Democrats like Nancy Pelosi left the embattled President to take the heat alone, testify to the pervasive sense in American politics that Israel is an American value. Said the Minority Leader to the Prime Minister: "I think it's clear that both sides of the Capitol believe you advance the cause of peace."

President Obama probably understands this intellectually; he understands many things intellectually. But what he can't seem to do is to incorporate that knowledge into a politically sustainable line of policy. The deep American sense of connection to and, yes, love of Israel limits the flexibility of any administration. Again, the President seems to know that with his head. But he clearly had no idea what he was up against when Bibi Netanyahu came to town.

As a result, he's taking another ride in the clown car.... I hope I'm wrong, but I think the next intifada got a lot closer this week.