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Israel Update

The Dangers of a Comprehensive Peace Deal

By Sarah Ann Haves

Pro-Israel supporters have been focused on the new relationship between U.S. President Barak Obama, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The international community has been waiting for a new Middle East peace initiative to come forth from the Obama Administration that will set the agenda for peace negotiations in the region over the next several years.

Obama's June 4 appearance in Cairo, Egypt is slated to begin an unprecedented effort by the U.S. to reach out to the Moslem world, displaying America's interest in partnership with moderate Arab states. Middle East analysts wonder if Obama will begin unveiling his Middle East plan during talks in Cairo. Some officials in Jerusalem are concerned that Obama's new initiative might attempt to push Israel into concessions that could threaten the stability and security of the Jewish State.

Obama, and U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, have already placed demands on the Israeli government. Concentrating on Israel's settlement policy, they have voiced their expectations that Israel immediately freeze all settlement construction in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) including allowance for "natural growth". So far, the Netanyahu government has only agreed to dismantle 26 illegal settlement outposts, while defending Israel's right to continue with natural growth in existing settlements. **The disagreements between the U.S. and Israel have officially begun.**

Similar to the Bush Administration's approach, both the White House and State Department are also pushing for Israel to accept a two-state solution. This concept was already a part of the foreign policy initiative of former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and former Foreign Minister Tzippi Livni. But, Netanyahu has not publicly agreed to a two-state solution. First, he is demanding that the Palestinians accept Israel as the state for the Jewish people. Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas has refused to comply. So far, both Netanyahu and Abbas have not met with each other and probably won't until this issue is resolved.

In order to move Middle East peace negotiations forward, past the stalemate between Israel and the Palestinians, the Obama Administration is taking a new approach... that is, the idea of a comprehensive peace deal in the region that would include Arab states in the process. Looking seriously at the Arab Peace Initiative, Obama is trying to take that formula and work it into a new U.S. foreign policy initiative that would be palatable to both Israel and moderate Arab regimes. Some Israeli leaders have shown interest in the Arab Initiative, despite the fact that it would not allow Israel to have defensible borders. And, it would require more than 100,000 Israelis to move out of the West Bank to other parts of Israel at a cost of approximately \$30 billion. **The Arab Initiative also demands that Israel divide Jerusalem, and that the Jewish State allow some Palestinian "refugees" to return to Israel rather than to a new Palestinian State.**

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There are consequences that Israel faces if Obama decides to push for a comprehensive peace deal that goes beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One of the ways Israel will be required to enter into peace agreements with other Arab states in the region, will be to strike a deal with Syria, which will mean a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. This key issue has hardly been on the radar screen of the international media, but is one of the most pressing demands behind the scenes that Israeli leaders are currently faced with. Netanyahu has already said he is willing to sit down with Syria's President Bashar Assad and talk about peace without pre-conditions. He's considering this option, despite Syria's refusal to comply with any of the requests of the international community that would bring Syria out of the radical Islamic axis into an improved relationship with moderate Arab nations and the Western world.

In a recent press conference in Jerusalem, Major General (res.) Giora Eiland, former Chairman of the National Security Council, gave his assessment regarding Israel's indirect talks with Syria during the Olmert government's reign, and how Israel should conduct future negotiations on the Syrian track. He said that Israelis are expecting much more than what Syria can deliver. There are illusions, he claimed, about what Syria will do or not do in making peace with Israel. For example, Syria has no intention of pulling out of its strategic relationship with Iran, which therefore does not help Israel's attempt to stop Iran from going nuclear. Also, Syria will not stop supplying arms to Hezbollah in Lebanon. And, it is not in Syria's interest to expel terrorist organizations from its soil.

During the time when current Defense Minister Ehud Barak held the position of Prime Minister of Israel, (1999-2001), experts in Israel's military circles were asked if Israel could defend itself without the Golan Heights. "And, the answer that Ehud Barak gave, along with the military, was 'No, Israel cannot defend itself without the Golan Heights,' " Eiland explained.

Today, Eiland asks how Israel can, therefore, enter into a peace agreement with Syria. At the press conference he alluded to the fact that the Olmert government, in holding indirect talks with Syria (through Turkish interlocutors), did not take into account many of the strategic threats to Israel's security in the event of a Golan Heights withdrawal. According to Eiland, "Some political initiative began without any real discussion about the very basic consequences of such a solution."

Eiland further explained that Israel needs the strategic Heights for a quick response to a Syrian threat of war. In the event of a pre-emptive strike against Israel by Syria, Israel would have to take control over Syrian air space within a very short period of time in order to win the war. This entails having air superiority. Without the Heights, Israel would be pre-occupied with first controlling Syrian ground forces on the Heights. Only then, would Israel's air force be able to focus on obtaining air superiority. At that point, it could be too late for Israel.

Meanwhile, the main reason that the situation between Israel and Syria has been so calm over the past 35 years, in Eiland's opinion, is because of Israel's superior position on the Golan. This has provided an effective deterrence from Syrian aggression. In considering a withdrawal from the Golan, he stated, "If you give up such an advantage, you might encourage aggression against Israel rather than to decrease the possibility of a war."

Acknowledging that Israel should try and find a way of reaching a peace agreement with Syria some day, Eiland insisted it should not be considered now. "To reach a solution which is a bad solution only because some people say it is achievable doesn't mean we should do it...The peace agreement that is offered to us by the Syrians, by the international community, unfortunately by some of the previous Israeli leaders that did agree to such a concept, is a very poor solution."

Eiland further stated that a future agreement would bring a very cold peace between Israel and Syria, and from an Israeli military point of view would put the Jewish State at too great a risk. Furthermore, there has not been a satisfactory alternative solution expressed by Israel's military generals. "I don't think in the past 10 years, any Israeli general reached a conclusion that Israel can defend itself without the Golan Heights."

This writer asked Eiland how Israel could retreat from American expectations at this time.

He responded that there has been little discussion with the Obama Administration on the Syrian issue until now. "Israel has to be strong enough in order to defend itself, by itself, against any enemies or any coalition of enemies. I don't think there is a real professional answer to this, and maybe it has to be discussed between Israeli and American officials when the time comes. But, it is not going to be easy."

While discussions are expected to continue regarding the Syrian track, Israel and the U.S. will be pre-occupied in the days to come with two major Middle East elections. On June 7, it is expected that Hezbollah will increase its political and military control over Lebanon after elections take place in that country. And, on June 12, the Iranians go to the polls to decide whether to re-elect their current Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, or vote for a more moderate candidate.

What's disconcerting to Israeli and U.S. officials is the fact that **an Iranian-led Islamic regional bloc is emerging, threatening to tip the balance of power in the Middle East.** This may be solidified after these two elections, resulting in a greater foothold of Shiite power in the region.

Syria is a supporter of Hezbollah, and a strategic partner of Iran, and can only gain in political strength from these two key elections. Without a peace agreement with Israel, Syria will continue to strengthen itself militarily for a future confrontation with the Jewish State.


Israel, while making peace overtures to Syria in order to appease America, will also prepare itself militarily for war with Syria, but from the advantage of overlooking Syrian military positions from the strategic Golan Heights.... currently, still in Israel's hands.

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore, hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me." Ezekiel 3:17

Ms. Haves is a news analyst, reporting from Israel on political, diplomatic, military and spiritual issues affecting the nation.

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