



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

**Shocking - The New
Ambassador to Israel**
By Stephen M. Flatow

A Jewish ambassador to Israel who is more sympathetic to Israel than to the Palestinians, and who will respect the wishes of the Israeli public and government? Shocking!

I'm not being sarcastic. It really is shocking. Critics of Israel are so

accustomed to Jewish ambassadors who harass and undermine the Israeli government, that the prospect of someone completely different has left them frothing at the mouth.

David Friedman, President-elect Trump's choice for ambassador to Israel, is completely unlike his predecessors. And that's what drives the critics of Israel crazy.

For many decades, the top tiers of the State Department and the diplomatic corps were closed to Jews. Everyone knew that their ranks were reserved for blue bloods and white shoes--people who came from the "right" segment of society and belonged to the "right" country clubs.

In the 1970s, though, a certain kind of Jew began to squeeze through the doors at Foggy Bottom. They had names like Daniel Kurtzer, Dennis Ross, Aaron Miller, and Martin Indyk. They were different than most Jews because they were stridently critical of Israel and were willing to devote themselves to forcing Israel to make one-sided concessions to the Arabs.

Indyk served as U.S. ambassador to Israel from 1995 to 1997 and again from 2000 to 2001. His haughty attitude was obvious from early on: he boasted to the Washington Post (2-24-97) that he saw his job in Israel as similar to "a circus master" who "cracks the whip" in order to "get [the animals] to move around in an orderly fashion."

Indyk's practice of interfering in Israel's internal affairs was notorious. In 1995, for example, he lobbied Knesset Members to oppose a law that would have reduced the chances of Israel surrendering the Golan Heights to Syria.

One shudders to think of the dangers Israel would face today if Indyk had his way and the Golan was in the hands of either the genocidal Assad regime or its genocidal ISIS opponents.

Indyk tried to pressure Israel's chief rabbi to oppose a housing project in a part of Jerusalem that Indyk wanted Israel to give up. He also tried to block the selection of a cabinet minister whom he thought was insufficiently dovish. Things got so bad that the chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee took the unprecedented step of publicly declaring: "Ambassador Indyk needs to be reminded that he is not the British High Commissioner," alluding to the British Mandate that preceded Israel's independence.

The appointment of the second Jewish ambassador to Israel, Daniel Kurtzer, in 2001, did not improve matters. Kurtzer repeatedly pressured Israel to remove security checkpoints (lest Palestinian Arab travelers be inconvenienced) and make one-sided concessions on settlement construction (while never asking the Palestinian Authority to limit its illegal construction). He denounced Israel's budgetary allocations--an extraordinary act of interference in Israel's internal affairs. Kurtzer even publicly called on the Israeli public to put pressure on the government to make more concessions.

When Israel responded to Yasser Arafat's sponsorship of terrorism in the autumn of 2002 by besieging Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah, Kurtzer rode to the rescue of the arch-terrorist by demanding that the Israeli government end the siege. This took place nine months after Israel had captured Arafat's ship, the Karine A, with its fifty tons of weapons--the episode that revealed Arafat had never changed his terrorist spots. Yet there was the Jewish U.S. ambassador to Israel, nine months later, trying to rescue the mass murderer.

The third Jewish ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro, has not been much better. In an interview with Israel Army Radio last year, Shapiro indicated that U.S. support for Israel at the United Nations and other international forums was conditional on Israel accepting moving towards creation of a Palestinian state. That kind of linkage was all too reminiscent of the Indyk "crack the whip" approach.

Earlier this year, Ambassador Shapiro falsely claimed that "Israeli vigilantism in the West Bank goes on unchecked," that "Israel has two standards of adherence to rule of law in the West Bank-- one for Israelis and one for Palestinians," and that Israel's settlement policy "raises questions about Israeli intentions."

That was a thinly-veiled way of saying that Israel is not really interested in peace if it permits the construction of a kindergarten in Judea,

Commentary...

On Settlements and Defamation By Dror Eydar

How symbolic is the passage through Ofra, up the winding road to the top of Amona Mountain, the passage from the ancient flagship of the settlement in Judea and Samaria to the young elite company of the Amona pioneers. The ascent up the mountain leaves behind the veteran leadership and reveals a new social elite in the making. At a height of around 900 meters (3,000 feet) above sea level, the bare, rocky mountain has for the past 20 years been covered in vineyards, olive groves, cherry orchards, herds of sheep, wineries, homes, families and the laughter of children playing.

It was there that I met hope: people of land and vision; pioneers who guard the lowlands and the coastal plain from up high, holding fast to the soil of the homeland. Zionism at its best. I did not find arrogance, but simplicity and humility and a recognition of the enormity of the role history had conferred upon them. In the discourse so replete with cynicism that dominates these parts, it is difficult to risk such writing. But in the late 1930s, the poet Nathan Alterman called for the removal of these heavy and important words from the prison of quotation marks and for them to be treated naturally, because they are our lives and our longevity on this good land.

I have seen many youths who left everything to come and support the settlers. They clean and tidy up and provide an easygoing milieu to the drama in the air. Some of them are angry at the unnecessary demolition of the homes -- a natural reaction, especially from those who were born there. The adults tolerate them. They have a difficult time ahead of them, of wandering and transition and laying down new roots.

All day yesterday, the disgraceful claims of the Left were heard, the ones that make the people of Amona out to be "real estate dealers" who got millions in return for the demolition of their homes. It's only money those Jews care about, huh? The realization of Zionism requires resources -- first and foremost human capital, and financial capital, too. But contrary to the slander, a vast majority of the money does not end up with the settlers. Of the 150 million shekels (\$39 million), only NIS 20 million (about \$5.2 million) goes directly to the 42 families as compensation for what they built and invested in Amona in the last 20 years. Around NIS 20 million is compensation for the nine homes in Ofra. I have seen them: big stone homes, built from the ground up. Evacuation costs are set at NIS 40 million (\$10.4 million). The rest of the money goes toward the development of the settlement enterprise, and not to the people of Amona.

The smear campaign against the settlers is meant to cover the naked shame of the slanderers, who once belonged to the pro-settlement camp, and belong today to the camp destroying what the sons and the daughters of their nation have built. By the way, a senior official calculated the cost of the petitions submitted to the High Court by leftist organizations in the last decade alone as -- wait for it -- around NIS 1 billion (\$259 million)!

And then I turned to the south of the settlement and saw nine ugly slabs of concrete, twisted iron rods growing out of them; a souvenir from the sin of the demolition of homes in February 2006. The first homes in Amona were left in their destruction, a monument to the heartlessness of the organizations for demolition rights. No one will come to work the lands of this abandoned mountain. Destruction for destruction's sake. The state offered generous financial compensation to Arabs who claimed uncertain ownership of these lands -- this would have cost a lot less. They could not accept the financial compensation because they are just a tool in the Left and the Palestinian Authority's fight against the settlements.

When I came down from the mountain, I turned on the radio. The first thing I heard was Shlomo Artzi singing:

"To the home where I used to live/ to those same beginnings.

It is not by chance I passed this way/

Here it is quiet, I am no longer so."

"Again will I build thee and thou shalt be built" (Jeremiah 31:3).

(Israel Hayom Dec 20)

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Samaria, or many parts of Jerusalem. Shapiro's statements were so mean-spirited and inappropriate that Prime Minister Netanyahu himself issued a stinging rebuke: "The ambassador's statements, on the day when a mother of six who was murdered is buried, and on a day when a pregnant woman is stabbed - are unacceptable and wrong," the prime minister said.

So yes, David Friedman is going to be a very different kind of Jewish ambassador to Israel. Unlike his disreputable predecessors, Friedman will respect Israel's right to make its own decisions, instead of "cracking whips" and dictating to Israel how to behave. Friedman will be on the side of the exemplars of democracy and freedom in the Middle East, not the terrorists and the totalitarians. In short, Ambassador Friedman will work to strengthen ties between America and its loyal ally, Israel, instead of undermining them.

What a difference! (IsraelNationalNews.com Dec 18)

Failed Diplomat Kurtzer Attacks America's Newest Ambassador to Israel By Shumley Boteach

A predictable pattern has emerged over the last several decades of U.S. Middle East policy. The State Department will urge the president to pursue its formula for bringing about peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The president and his secretary of state waste years in this endeavor, made quixotic, because of the failure to confront Palestinian irredentism.

Equally predictable, the diplomats behind these failures retire and use the media to pontificate on what their successors should do. Thanks to the media's practiced interest in criticizing Israel, these former failed diplomats are given a platform to criticize every idea that conflicts with the ineffective ones they advocated when they had the power to implement them.

The latest representative of the class of former emissaries to spout off is Daniel Kurtzer, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel. I was proud of Kurtzer because he is an orthodox Jew who celebrated his adherence to his faith while serving as America's top diplomat to the Jewish state.

While I do not know him, I do know his son who is an accomplished and serious academic. But none of these impressive achievements should provide Kurtzer with a protective shield to permit him to rail against Israeli policy and anyone who advocates positions different from those he unsuccessfully endorsed.

The newspaper of record for Jews attacking other Jews and Israel seems to have become The New York Times. So it was not surprising to read an op-ed by Kurtzer in the Times complaining that Trump's selection of David Friedman as United States ambassador to Israel is a serious mistake.

Why?

Kurtzer asserts that "Mr. Friedman would be representing not the American people but a small, extreme minority of Americans who have in mind the interests of a small, extreme minority in Israel." He's got it backwards as it is Kurtzer who, respectfully, represents the fringe of Jewish opinion here and in Israel.

Consider what Friedman has said that Kurtzer believes disqualifies from the job: "Mr. Friedman has been publicly arguing that Israel has a right to build settlements and annex parts of the West Bank. He believes that the United States should recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem."

Kurtzer disseminates Palestinian propaganda about the West Bank being occupied when he knows full well that these areas are disputed. Israel has as much right and, historically, politically, religiously and geographically, more right to sovereignty in Judea and Samaria than the Palestinians.

No one disputes that the West Bank was the Biblical cradle of early Jewish civilization and no one disputes that the land was unlawfully occupied by Jordan between the 1948 and the 1967 war. Jordan's annexation of the West Bank on 24 April, 1950 was recognized only by the United Kingdom, Iraq, and Pakistan. So what illegal occupation of the West Bank is Kurtzer referring to? Which legal entity did Israel illegally occupy it from?

Eugene Rostow, a former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs in the Johnson Administration, observed that UN Security Council Resolution 242, the backbone of all peace negotiations, gives Israel a legal right to be in the West Bank. The resolution "allows Israel to administer the territories" it won in 1967 "until 'a just and lasting peace in the Middle East' is achieved."

Thus, Ambassador-designate Friedman is correct when he says Israel has a right to build settlements in the West Bank. In fact, the Palestinians agreed to it when they signed the Oslo accords. Whether doing so is in Israel's best interests is for Israel's government (elected three consecutive times) to decide rather than those uncomfortable with the decisions of Israeli democracy, such as Kurtzer, Peter Beinart, Thomas Friedman, CNN, the New York Times or the Washington Post.

The second part of that same sentence Kurtzer found objectionable referred to Israel's right to annex parts of the West Bank. Again, a statement that is consistent with Israel's claims to the land. Israel is under no obligation to maintain the status quo forever because the Palestinians

refuse to coexist with a Jewish state.

After Israel annexed the Golan Heights (and no one is talking about concessions there any more), Professor Julius Stone of Hastings College of the Law wrote: "There is no rule of international law which requires a lawful military occupant, in this situation, to wait forever before [making] control and government of the territory permanent ... Many international lawyers have wondered, indeed, at the patience which led Israel to wait as long as she did." Israel has been even more patient in holding off annexation of some or all of the West Bank.

Friedman's third outrageous statement was that the United States should recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Kurtzer knows that the US Congress passed a law to this effect in 1995 - that is U.S. policy, not what the State Department advocates.

Congress made the mistake of providing the president a loophole to ignore the law and that is why the embassy remains in Tel Aviv. So Friedman not only has the law on his side but the foresight Palestinian apologists lack, namely, the understanding that recognizing Jerusalem as the indivisible capital of Israel will end the Palestinian fantasy of one day controlling Jerusalem.

From there the Palestinian house of cards will collapse. Arab governments who have used innocent Palestinian refugees as pawns by which to demonize Israel will recognize they will never be migrating to Israel to demographically overrun the Jewish state and Palestine will never be liberated from the river to the sea.

Kurtzer also criticized David Friedman for referring to J Street as the equivalent of Jewish kapos who collaborated with the Nazis at concentration camps. I agree that this language was inappropriate. Nothing short of genocide should be compared to the Nazis. I know David Friedman and he is a man of sophistication, humility, warmth, and total decency. It may be that in the heat of the campaign he used language that was unacceptable but is in no way characteristic of the fine man he is.

The point he so indelicately made was consistent with the views of most Jews and Israelis who do not consider J Street pro-Israel or pro-peace. Rather, J Street reflects the belief of Arabists that Israelis don't know what's good for them and that their democratic process should be replaced by the judgement of State Department officials and critics of Israel living thousands of miles away in London, Paris, and Oslo.

Many American presidents have believed that they can somehow persuade the Palestinians to live in peace with Israel. Each of their peace plans have failed. Francis Fukuyama, a former State Department official, has observed that Arabists "have been more systematically wrong than any other area of specialists in the diplomatic corps. This is because Arabists not only take on the cause of the Arabs, but also the Arabs' tendency for self-delusion." (The Hill Dec 20)

The Success and Failure of Orthodox Judaism By Michael Freund

Seemingly by every measure, this is a time of triumph for Orthodox Judaism in the United States. Just five decades after being written off as a relic of the past, Orthodoxy in America is on the upswing, spiritually, demographically, socially and economically.

More Torah is being studied on the continent than at any time since the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus.

Minyanim have proliferated to the extent that there are apps to help one locate the closest mincha or maariv service, and you can even join one during the seventh-inning stretch at numerous baseball stadiums throughout the country.

Kosher food is plentiful in ways that previous generations could only dream of, with a selection of restaurants ranging from Chinese to Mexican to good old-fashioned deli. And US supermarket shelves are lined with products labeled with a cornucopia of letters indicating which of the dozens of kosher certification agencies oversee their production. Indeed, since the Romans destroyed the Temple more than nineteen centuries ago and Jewry was scattered to the four corners of the earth, it has never been easier for a Diaspora Jew to observe kashrut than it is today in the US.

Demographic data also bears out the explosive growth of Torah-observant Jews in America. As Professor Steven M. Cohen noted in a recent article in The Forward, careful analysis of figures compiled by the Pew Research Center over three generations of American Jews reveals that, "Counting up all Orthodox Jews, we find 79,000 "grandparents," nearly 200,000 "parents," and over 340,000 children.

In other words, over two generations, the Orthodox pretty much quadrupled in size.

Cohen further pointed out that, "The growth of the Orthodox and the decline of the others means that the Orthodox 'market share' has been soaring. Among the oldest generation, they're 5% of all Jews. Among the middle generation, they rise to 15%. And among children, the Orthodox are home to 27% of the total. Within two generations, the Orthodox fraction of the Jewish population has more than quintupled. And it continues to grow." If current trends continue, the majority of American

Jews will be Orthodox within a few generations.

Underlining this success is the fact that in less than a month, when President-elect Donald Trump moves into the White House, it will mark the first time in history that an American commander-in-chief has an Orthodox Jewish daughter and son-in-law.

And yet, despite its phenomenal expansion, there is one area where American Orthodoxy has clearly failed to deliver: aliya to the Jewish state.

Each year, an average of just 3,000 North American Jews emigrate to Israel, over 80% of whom are Orthodox. That translates to about 2,400 Orthodox Jews who annually make the long journey home to Zion, which is approximately one-third of 1% of American Orthodox Jews. That is little more than a drop in the bucket, and an embarrassing one at that.

After all, the measure of a community's success is not necessarily by size, wealth or the number of tons of kosher sushi it consumes per annum. Orthodoxy is a set of ideals, one that is supposed to inform and guide every sphere of a person's life.

And yet, for some reason, when it comes to fulfilling the Jewish dream of making aliya, most Orthodox Jews don't seem to give it much consideration.

What makes this so troubling is that even a cursory glance at traditional Jewish sources indicates the importance that is attributed to living in the Land of Israel.

The Torah (Deuteronomy 11:12) describes Israel as the land "which the Lord your G-d cares for; the eyes of the Lord your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year."

And the midrash on Deuteronomy known as the Sifrei definitively states that, "dwelling in the Land of Israel is the equivalent of all the mitzvot in the Torah."

Centuries later, Nachmanides, the great medieval commentator, ruled unambiguously that the commandment to live in Israel is incumbent upon every Jew and applies even if the land is under foreign control.

The Pit'hei Teshuva, in his 19th century commentary on the Shulhan Aruch, notes that all the earlier and later authorities agree with Nachmanides that there is a positive Torah commandment to live in Israel.

To be sure, there are other opinions as well, but even those who say there is no obligation to make aliya nonetheless concede that doing so is a tremendous mitzva rife with spiritual benefit.

And yet, ironically, even as many American Orthodox Jews drift to the right and adopt various stringencies, few of them seem to seek Halachic guidance when it comes to the cardinal question of whether they should move to Israel.

I do not mean to cast aspersions on anyone or their life decisions. Making aliya is no simple task, and I do not think it is my right or anyone else's to pass judgment.

But if people are concerned enough about Jewish law to ask questions about whether they need separate meat and dairy salt shakers, shouldn't they also query their rabbi about where they choose to live out their days on this earth? Now more than ever, Israel needs Jews. A flood of Orthodox American Jews making Aliya could reshape Israeli society in so many positive ways.

For two millennia, our ancestors turned to face Jerusalem three times a day every day, pleading with the Creator to "gather us in from the four corners of the earth."

Doing so has never been easier than it is today.

So here's hoping that the next time one of my fellow Orthodox Jews recites the Amida prayer in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles, he will take a moment to consider not only why he is praying, but where it is that he truly belongs. (Jerusalem Post Dec 21)

Is Anyone Really Surprised? By Reuven Berko

The manner in which the terrorists and murderers of Jews managed, surprisingly, to keep more than 10 mobile phones in an empty prison cell just at the end of Joint Arab List MK Basel Ghattas' visit to Ketziot Prison is truly miraculous. Israel Prison Services' top intelligence officials, who secretly watched the incident and intercepted the cell phones -- an amazing accomplishment in its own right -- were not impressed by Ghattas' denials and sought to question him.

But the respected doctor, graduate of the Technion Institute of the "Zionist occupation," cynically took advantage of his immunity, refused questioning and left the premises. Since the visit to the terrorists' cells, Ghattas ("diver" in Arabic) has disappeared and, despite statements from his associates promising that he will show up for questioning as required, the Public Security Ministry expressed concern that he might have gone into hiding.

Indeed, if Ghattas does emerge from hiding, he certainly has what to fear. Precedent shows that others have been punished for a similar crime (smuggling mobile phones to terrorists) with a three-year prison sentence. Under these circumstances, it is difficult not to recall former Balad MK Azmi Bishara -- Ghattas' patron, mentor and cousin -- who fled Israel immediately after he was suspected of operating as a spy and terrorist who

aided Hezbollah.

The truth is that no one is surprised. It has not been hard to see for a while now that the muddy waters in which Ghattas dives are clouded with incitement, subversion and adversity toward Israel and its Jewish residents. And indeed, along the convoluted path that Ghattas follows, as a Christian communist, after his mentor Bishara, the man has not missed an opportunity to harm Israel -- despite having pledged allegiance to the state upon joining the Knesset. Like an angry bull, Ghattas lunged at Israel and slandered it from every platform, raised money for the Gaza flotillas and recently stated at a conference in New Jersey that Israeli citizenship was forced upon him.

Among other crimes, Ghattas joined the flotilla supporting the Hamas terrorist group; he visited Al-Aqsa mosque wearing a keffiyeh, in a clear provocation to religious war -- this despite the prohibition on Knesset members visiting the site; he visited the homes of terrorists and murderers who were killed by our forces; he stood for a moment of silence in memory of these terrorists alongside Joint Arab List MKs Jamal Zahalka and Hanin Zoabi; and he called late President Shimon Peres a "war criminal."

Experience teaches us that cell phones, like the ones Ghattas "apparently" passed on to terrorists at Ketziot Prison, are smuggled to manage and coordinate terrorist activities against Israel from inside prison cells. Who knows what other damage Ghattas and his friends have done by taking advantage of their immunity during their frequent visits to prisons?

There must be a new approach taken against terrorists in prison, according to which we must stop MK visits to cells, especially at a time when Israel has no contact with our missing soldiers, and we must prepare to dismiss from the Knesset via rapid legislation any MK who works against the security of the state.

Since he says that Israeli citizenship was forced upon him, we should free Ghattas from this most hated citizenship. Moreover, if he chooses to flee to Qatar or to the Palestinian Authority, we should allow it. Qatari money is better. The alternative is the precedent of the punishment for smuggling phones to terrorists. Law enforcement and judicial authorities will send the man, if convicted, to jail. Perhaps there, he will have the luck of finding a familiar cell phone that he smuggled, after all, "You should think before you act." (Israel Hayom Dec 20)

The Danger of Political Correctness By Haim Shine

Joint Arab List MK Basel Ghattas is laughing all the way to the Fatah and Hamas-run bank, a bank that is operated by murderous terrorists from their prison cells. Any intelligent person understands that the cell phones that Ghattas is suspected of smuggling to prisoners were not meant for the communication of warm wishes. They are used by the heroes of the Palestinian nation, the vile mass murderers, to give orders for attacks on Israeli citizens.

We should not be surprised by Ghattas' ongoing ridicule of the law enforcement system in Israel. His cousin, former Balad MK Azmi Bishara, who allegedly aided Hezbollah in the Second Lebanon War, managed to flee the country. In 2015, Ghattas took part in the flotilla of terrorist supporters to Gaza; he expressed support for the boycott of Israel; he claimed that any means of resistance to the occupation is justified -- including the murder of innocent civilians; and he stood for a moment of silence in memory of terrorists from east Jerusalem. He never faced any real consequences for these deeds, and now, too, as he faces suspicions of smuggling mobile phones to security prisoners and the demand to be suspended from the Knesset, MKs on the Left -- and also those who purport to be rightists -- are speaking highly of the right to the presumption of innocence. They are not prepared to extend the same right to another Knesset member -- a kippah-wearing Jew -- who is facing a bunch of rumors.

Political correctness has become one of the central threats to Western civilization. The truth cannot be spoken due to political correctness. Reality is wrapped in false, obsequious discourse, and this dulls citizens' ability to identify hidden threats behind the laundered words. Political correctness is the reason why U.S. President Barack Obama refused to recognize the clear link between Islam and terrorism. In the name of the same political correctness, countries in Europe see the Palestinians as oppressed. And in Israel, the left-wing media is not prepared to refer to well-known Arab MKs as people endangering public security -- and yet, this political correctness does not exist for them when it comes to discussing Mizrahi Jews, the ultra-Orthodox or settlers.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's victory is indicative of the American public's rejection of political correctness, which has turned their country into an atrophied power. The time has come for Israel too to stop hiding lies and delusions behind political correctness. (Israel Hayom Dec 20)

Ban Ki-Moon's Last Hypocritical Hurrah By Ruthie Blum

The outgoing secretary-general of the United Nations outdid himself this week. In his final briefing to the U.N. Security Council on Friday, Ban Ki-moon said, "Over the last decade, I have argued that we cannot have a bias against Israel at the U.N. Decades of political maneuvering have created a disproportionate number of resolutions, reports and committees against Israel. In many cases, instead of helping the Palestinian issue, this reality has foiled the ability of the U.N. to fulfill its role effectively."

Listening to the head of the international body that long ago ceased to fulfill any role other than that of providing a platform for despots, one might have mistaken him for an innocent bystander whose voice has been drowned out by the cacophony against the Jewish state.

In fact, Ban is a prominent member of the Israel-bashing choir he has been conducting for the past 10 years, taking every opportunity to equate the only democracy in the Middle East with the forces bent on its destruction and on the subjugation of the West.

Indeed, he even performed this feat in his farewell address, admonishing both Israel and the terrorist organization that rules the Gaza Strip in the same breath. Israel, he warned, "needs to understand the reality that a democratic state, which is run by the rule of the law, which continues to militarily occupy the Palestinian people, will still generate criticism and calls to hold her accountable." Hamas, with its "anti-Semitic charter, which seeks to destroy Israel," he said, should "condemn violence once and for all and recognize Israel's right to exist."

He conveniently forgot to mention that Israel withdrew completely from Gaza in 2005, and that Hamas -- which took control over the enclave two years later -- has no reason to "condemn" the violence against Jews that it perpetrates and promotes.

But no matter. Ban, like the rest of his cohorts at the U.N., never lets facts get in the way of ideology. Nor do his own contradictions in terms cause him to pause, which is why he had no problem saying that though the Palestinian conflict is not at the root of the other wars in the Middle East, "its resolution can create momentum in the region." If he has some notion of how, exactly, the mass murder of Syrians at the hands of the Russian- and Iranian-backed regime of President Bashar Assad and rebel forces would be affected by some deal between Jerusalem and Ramallah, he is keeping it under wraps.

What he has never been quiet about, however, is his belief that Israelis are responsible for Palestinian terrorism, and his hurt feelings when called to task for holding this view. Take last January, when Ban said it was "human nature" for downtrodden people like the Palestinians to express their frustration through violence. This caused a stir among defenders of Israel, particularly since the U.N. chief had never made a similar statement about, say al-Qaida, Islamic State or Boko Haram -- the group that, at the end of the same month, burned 86 Nigerian villagers alive, among them many children.

Offended at the mere suggestion that he had justified Palestinian terrorism, Ban penned an op-ed in The New York Times -- titled "Don't shoot the messenger, Israel" -- to claim that his words had been unfairly "twisted." To prove that he had been misquoted, he clarified, "The stabbings, vehicle-rammings and other attacks by Palestinians targeting Israeli civilians are reprehensible. So, too, are the incitement of violence and the glorification of killers. Nothing excuses terrorism. I condemn it categorically."

Then, without skipping a beat, he proceeded to blame Israel.

"It is inconceivable ... that security measures alone will stop the violence," he wrote. "As I warned the Security Council last week, Palestinian frustration and grievances are growing under the weight of nearly a half-century of occupation. Ignoring this won't make it disappear. No one can deny that the everyday reality of occupation provokes anger and despair, which are major drivers of violence and extremism and Israeli settlements keep expanding. ... Palestinians -- especially young people -- are losing hope over what seems a harsh, humiliating and endless occupation."

Given his false depiction of the situation -- including by omitting Israel's withdrawal from more than 90% of the territory it obtained after the attempt of surrounding Arab armies to obliterate it in the Six-Day War -- it stood to reason that his proposed solutions would be preposterous. And they were.

"We continue to work with Israel and the Palestinian Authority to rebuild Gaza and prevent another devastating conflict, and to press Palestinians for genuine national reconciliation," he wrote, ignoring the fact that it has been impossible to "rebuild" Gaza, when Hamas has used all the American and European funds provided for this purpose to rebuild all its terror tunnels through which to kidnap and kill Israelis -- and boast about this in video clips.

However, he said he was "disturbed by statements from senior members of Israel's government that the aim [for a two-state solution] should be abandoned altogether" because the "stalemate" will lead to "a corrosion of the moral foundation of Israeli and Palestinian societies, ever more inured to the pain of the other."

After attacking Israel for "lashing out at every well-intentioned critic," Ban concluded that "the status quo is untenable. Keeping another people under indefinite occupation undermines the security and the future of both Israelis and Palestinians."

It takes serious nerve for someone who has exhibited anti-Israel bias for years to bemoan the practice. But then hypocrisy is what Ban and the U.N. are all about. (Israel Hayom Dec 21)

Channeling Machiavelli By Gidon Ben-Zvi

With all the zeal of a convert, Barack Obama in the waning days of his presidency has abandoned the Russian "reset" policy and reprised the Cold War rhetoric that he mocked back in 2009, when he said that "great powers do not show strength by dominating or demonizing other countries. The days when empires could treat other sovereign states as pieces on a chess board are over."

To date, there is precisely zero evidence that Russian hacking actually distorted the voting process of the U.S. election. However, this has not prevented U.S. President Barack Obama from stating that the United States would retaliate for Russia's efforts to influence the presidential election.

In fact, Russia's cyber-espionage and disinformation activity has nothing to do with a nefarious plan to install Donald Trump as a Vladimir Putin puppet. Rather, the Russian president's goal is much more grandiose: to destabilize the Western alliance and reassert his country as a great power. As a result, intelligence agencies and high-level officials in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden and elsewhere have all voiced concerns over the threat of cyber sabotage by Russia.

How could such an intelligent, sophisticated statesman such as Obama have missed Russia's numerous attempts to influence Western European elections? Occam's razor is a principle that suggests that the simplest explanation is usually the correct one. Since it's patently absurd to think that Obama wasn't aware of repeated Russian attempts to organize small minorities of angry people with the goal of dividing fearful majorities in Western Europe, the simplest yet most elegant answer is that he well understood Putin's modus operandi and even accepted, however reluctantly, that there is some value in supporting groups that can influence the outcome of an overseas election.

Obama's transformation from starry-eyed idealist to cold-blooded realist is glaringly apparent in his attempt to toss Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu out of office. Unlike the Russian hacker story, which is being fueled by circumstantial evidence, a U.S. Senate inquiry published in June, 2016 actually found that the U.S. government supported a group that had tried to unseat Netanyahu in the 2015 Israeli elections, to the tune of nearly \$350,000. Similar to the Russian hacker's influence over the U.S. presidential elections, we will probably never know to what extent the V15 group affected the outcome of the Israeli election. However, what can't be denied is that Obama in the U.S. and Putin in Russia both meddled, to a greater or lesser degree, with the ostensibly free and open democratic process in Israel and the U.S.

Putin is undoubtedly an autocrat who talks like a democrat. Yet Obama's soaring rhetoric is similarly contradicted by the findings of a report that harshly criticized the State Department for having failed to prevent funds from being used, albeit legally and indirectly, to influence an allied country's internal political process.

How can one explain the State Department's support of OneVoice, a group of young grass-roots activists in Israel and the Palestinian territories that was openly and actively anti-Likud and anti-Netanyahu?

Again, let Occam's razor be our guide. There's no tangible evidence to suggest that the 44th president of the United States is obsessed with weakening Israel and demonizing the Jewish state on the international stage. No, the most probable explanation for funding a politically active group in a politically sensitive environment, with taxpayer dollars, against the leader of America's closest Middle Eastern ally, is that such meddling in the internal affairs of friends and foes alike has worked like gangbusters for Russia.

Obama, ever the student of history, took a page from Putin's chapter on realpolitik that is quickly turning Russia into an indispensable nation. It turns out that while Obama never tires of signaling his own personal virtue, underneath the radiant smile and winning personality beats the heart of an astute, calculating political operator. The die was cast once Netanyahu accepted U.S. House of Representatives Speaker John Boehner's invitation to address Congress and speak out against Obama's signature foreign policy initiative, the Iran nuclear deal.

It's interesting to ponder how different the balance of power in the Middle East might be today had Obama channeled his inner Machiavelli at the outset of his presidency, instead of being content to be adored as the nice, compassionate, liberal former professor of constitutional law. (Israel Hayom Dec 22)