



# ***ISRAEL MATTERS!***

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Shalom

Issue Number 43  
January 2011

## **WikiLeaks: Israel, Gulf States Conducted Secret Diplomacy**

### **Egypt and Fatah Briefed on Operation Cast Lead**

Although Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas have consistently denied the claim, WikiLeaks documents confirmed Israel collaborated with Egypt and Fatah in advance of its "Operation Cast Lead" on Gaza in late December 2008 and early January 2009.

According to WikiLeaks, a diplomatic cable reported on a meeting between Israel Defense Minister Ehud Barak and U.S. Congressional leaders during which Mr. Barak confirmed both Egypt and Abbas' Fatah were consulted about Israeli plans to launch an attack on Gaza.

The meeting, some five months after the offensive ended, reported Barak as saying "we had consulted with Egypt and Fatah prior to Operation Cast Lead, asking if they were willing to assume control of Gaza once Israel defeated Hamas." "Not surprisingly," Barak said, Israel "received negative answers from both."

A classified 2009 diplomatic cable disclosed through the website WikiLeaks recently provided a rare glimpse into the secret and often high-level diplomacy between Israel and Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates, all countries that officially do not recognize the Jewish state. Contrary to the condemnatory rhetoric opposing Israel in public, behind the scenes Arab diplomats have asked Israel to carry messages to the U.S. government and urged tougher action on Iran.

Apparently written in response to the mutual concern of Israel and the Gulf states about Iran's nuclear program and that country's support for radical political movements and terrorism throughout the Middle East, the cable quotes Yacov Hadas, deputy director of Israel's Foreign Ministry, as telling an American diplomat: "The Gulf Arabs believe in Israel's role because of their perception of Israel's close relationship with the U.S., but also due to their sense that they can count on Israel against Iran." Mr. Hadas then says, "They believe Israel can work magic." The disclosures coincided with other classified cables made public that show Arab leaders have been urging U.S. officials to take military action against Iran.

Throughout its history, Israel has maintained back channel communications with Arab governments, even on the eve of war and during a cold peace. Aaron David Miller, a senior Middle East adviser to six secretaries of state, said, "With the exception of Iraq and Libya, every member of the Arab League had some form of contact, informal or otherwise, with Israel up to 1996."

However, in January 2009, after Israel launched "Operation Cast Lead" against Hamas in Gaza, Qatar, the last Arab Gulf state to have open ties with Israel closed an Israeli trade office. The action left Israel with no open diplomatic channels to the Persian Gulf states that it used during the 1990s. But, as the 2009 cable disclosed, by March of that year the Qataris had invited an Israeli delegation back to Doha to discuss reopening the trade mission.

According to the cable, Israel has had significant access to Qatar's crown prince, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, also known as Prince Hamad. Prince Hamad, it said, told the Israelis in 2006 that he believed Iran was determined to develop a nuclear bomb "no matter the cost."

The document also said former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzippi Livni had "good personal relations" with Sheik Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). According to Mr. Hadas, the UAE was "increasingly hostile" to Iran."

In summary, Mr. Miller said the secret contacts Arabs have maintained with Israel have some value, but not too much. "In a sense, the Arabs are getting the best of both worlds: They get points with the Americans for carrying out quiet contacts with the Israelis, but they don't get hammered by their own press or their regional rivals. That is how they prefer it," he said.

## German President Affirms Commitment to Israel's Security



Germany is committed to the continued existence of the State of Israel in peace and security, said German President Christian Wulff at a reception hosted in his honor by Israeli President Shimon Peres.

Wulff, 51, arrived in Israel during late November on his first official visit to the region since taking office just under half a year ago. Wulff, who early in his presidency expressed a desire to visit Israel, has a history of staunch opposition to anti-Semitism. Accompanying him on his visit were his 17-year-old daughter Annalena and other German teenagers, in a demonstration of Germany's commitment to teach its youth about the evils of the Holocaust and the need to do everything possible to compensate the Jewish people.

In welcoming Wulff, Peres said Israel had followed his statements in his various capacities before becoming president, noting that he had displayed "a deep understanding" of the Holocaust and the Jewish People. "Our relations with Germany are as important as relations can be," said Peres, underscoring that the German leadership and the German people remembered the past and recognized that there must be a special relationship with Israel not only in politics, but in science, culture, the arts and all other levels.

Wulff was in the country as a guest of Peres, who hosted an official reception and a luncheon in Wulff's honor and accompanied him to Yad Vashem.

While the past cannot be changed, said Peres, both countries have to be responsible for the future and must place greater emphasis on a moral code. "Without a moral code there can be no defense for terrorism, corruption and war," he said. He also stressed the importance of a moral code with regard to science, saying that though it could contribute many positive things to humanity, it "can also produce nuclear bombs to destroy countries." Although Israel has great scientific achievements to its credit Peres said, "what we're lacking is peace." Peres expressed appreciation to Germany for its support in attempting to make peace and helping both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to move ahead.

The German president declared Israel could only be guaranteed peace and security through a two-state solution in which Israel and the Palestinians lived side by side at the conclusion of a just and comprehensive agreement. As painful as the settlement issue is for Israel, Wulff continued, it is something that must be discussed in order to be able to take advantage of every window of opportunity.

## Israel Picks Up Pieces After Wildfire

In the aftermath of the deadliest fire in Israel's history, Israelis have set to the task of burying the dead, cleaning up, figuring out what exactly went wrong and who is to blame. Even before the blaze in the Carmel Mountains near Haifa came under control Dec. 5, Israelis were asking why the country wasn't better prepared for a wildfire of this magnitude. In all, 42 people were killed, about 250 homes were destroyed or severely damaged, 17,000 people were forced to evacuate, more than 12,000 acres were burned and an estimated 5 million trees were lost.

The damage to the area of the Carmel Forest in northern Israel was estimated at about \$75 million, including damage to towns and kibbutzim, destroyed forests and damaged roads. On Dec. 5, the Israeli Cabinet approved a \$16.5 million aid package to assist damaged communities, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered that each person whose home suffered severe fire damage be given an immediate aid disbursement of about \$700. Calls came from many quarters for the resignation of Interior Minister Eli Yishai, whose ministry is responsible for the state's firefighting forces. Yishai also is accused of refusing fire-truck donations from the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews.

Israel has 16 firefighters per 100,000 residents. By contrast, the United States, Japan, and Greece have five to seven times that number per capita, the Associated Press reported. In total, Israel has 1,400 firefighters.

The fire's rapid spread revealed a strategic weakness that could be exploited by its enemies, Israeli commentators wrote. Numerous figures in the Arab world cited the fire as punishment from God for Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and its occupation of Arab lands. The Palestinian prime minister in the Gaza Strip, Ismail Haniyeh, said the fire was a "strike from Allah."

The Israeli government issued a rare call for international assistance to fight the blaze. Among the countries that responded were Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, Germany, Russia, France, Switzerland, Britain, Spain, the Palestinian Authority, and the United States. Thirty-five firefighting airplanes came to Israel. The city of New York sent a 747 loaded with a fire retardant chemical in a shipment organized by the Fire Department and the office of the city's mayor, Michael Bloomberg.



Israel also rented the American Evergreen Boeing 747 Super Tanker (photo), one of the most advanced firefighting planes in the world, loaded with 80,000 liters of water and fire retardant. It arrived early Dec. 5 and had an immediate effect on helping douse the flames.

## Facts and Figures: The Rapid Growth of India - Israel Relations

India, the world's largest democracy with a population of 1.2 billion people, has upgraded its relationship with Israel significantly in the last two decades. As both countries are democracies surrounded by mostly authoritarian neighbors, they have improved cooperation in areas of mutual interest and concern. India and Israel have joined together in counterterrorism efforts and increased trade and economic ties, and Israeli high-tech companies and start-ups are increasingly outsourcing much of their development to India. In the field of agriculture, Indo-Israeli cooperation on both the public and private levels encompasses wide-ranging projects, including water management, dairy farming, horticulture and floriculture. Additionally, India and Israel have expanded tourism and cultural exchanges in recent years.

India officially recognized Israel two years after it declared independence in 1948. In the aftermath of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, India implemented many capitalist economic reforms, recognizing the benefits of opening markets in other countries. As India gravitated towards the West, it established full diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992. In February 1992, Israel opened an embassy in New Delhi, and in May of the same year India opened an embassy in Tel Aviv.

India and Israel have stepped up security and military coordination as Islamist extremist terrorism has taken a major toll on both countries. Terrorism has been responsible for more deaths in India than in any other country besides Iraq. More than 700 Israeli civilians lost their lives to terrorism during the Second Palestinian Intifada from 2000-2005. The November 2008 terror attacks on Mumbai were a tragedy for both nations, after 10 extremists from a Pakistan-based terrorist group shot to death more than 170 people and wounded more than 300 others, including Hindus, Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Targeting Indians as well as Westerners, the gunmen attacked several sites, including two luxury hotels frequented by foreigners, a train station and a café. In addition, the terrorists launched a siege against the city's Chabad Jewish center, killing six people, including four Israelis. The only surviving perpetrator, Ajmal Kasab, told police that the terrorists purposely targeted Israelis in Mumbai to "avenge the atrocities on Palestinians."

Since the 1999 armed combat between India and Pakistan, known as the "Kargil War," when Israel rapidly came to India's assistance, India has increasingly turned to Israel for advanced weapons systems, and today Israel is one of the largest suppliers of defense equipment to India. Similarly, Israel's spy satellites were launched by India. Citing both nations' commitment to democratic governance and combating terrorism, Indian Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jyotiradithya Scindia called the India-Israel alliance a "relationship between two souls" in February 2010. Israeli President Shimon Peres has said "India's security is as important to Israel as its own."

Israeli-Indian trade has grown exponentially, from \$80 million in 1991 to about \$4 billion in 2008. India and Israel signed five significant trade and economic agreements from 1993-1996, and negotiations on a free-trade agreement began earlier this year when Peres met with India's commerce minister. On an official visit to India in January 2010, Israeli Trade and Labor Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer said, "It is one of the aims of my visit here to try to push [a free-trade agreement with India] as much as possible. It is progressing quite well and I hope it will happen very soon."

Since 1992, India and Israel have rapidly diversified their trading. Early in the relationship, economic ties were largely limited to the diamond industry, but today bilateral trade includes hi-tech, chemical and agricultural products, as well as medical equipment. Israeli companies hold investments in Indian real estate, agriculture and other sectors, and the countries have joint ventures in telecommunications, software, and medical equipment.

More than 40,000 Israelis travel to India annually – four times the number of Israeli visitors a decade ago. Many have recently completed their mandatory army service. The Chabad movement caters to these visitors by running four centers throughout India, where large numbers of Jews congregate to attend weekly Sabbath meals and other activities. There are another seven Jewish outreach centers in India geared towards Israeli visitors. On their return from India, many Israelis bring back elements of Indian culture, including cuisine and music. More than 20 books of Indian poetry have been translated into Hebrew.

Numerous Indians have immigrated to Israel and are known to have Jewish roots. Israel is home to about 60,000 members of the B'nei Israel community, the largest group of Indian Jews. B'nei Israel flourished in India for more than two millennia, in the absence of widespread anti-Semitism. Another 6,000 Indians are members of the B'nei Menashe tribe, believed by some to be descendants of one of the biblical 10 lost tribes of Israel, and in 2006 more than 200 B'nei Menashe members immigrated to the Jewish state. Additionally, in the 1950s many Jews from the southwestern Indian town of Cochin immigrated to Israel, and today about 600 Jews from that community live in Moshav Nevatim, near the southern Israeli city of Beer Sheva.

## What others are saying about Israel: Robert L. Bernstein, Founder of *Human Rights Watch*, Says Organization Needs to Revise Policy Toward Israel

[Robert L. Bernstein established the Fund for Free Expression, the parent of Helsinki Watch which later became Human Rights Watch. His speech at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, from which the following selected quotes are taken, was delivered in November 2010 and served as the Shirley and Leonard Goldstein Lecture on Human Rights.]

“Having devoted much of my life to trying to make the Universal Declaration of Human Rights come alive in many places in the world, I have become alarmed at how some human rights organizations, including the one I founded, are reporting on human rights in the Middle East...

Believing in all the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, what is taking place on American campuses puzzles me. It seems to me that the State of Israel has all the values [sought by HRW]. It is surrounded by 22 Arab states occupying 99-1/2% of the land in the Middle East and these states do not share these values. Israel, which occupies less than 1/2 of 1%, does share these values. There is a battle about two things: First, the size of the 23rd state, the new Palestinian state, which at present has many of the same values as the other 22 states. Secondly, the claims of many Arab states, Iran and its proxies Hezbollah and Hamas, about the very legitimacy of the State of Israel. I don't think human rights organizations alone can solve this mess but I do wonder about the discussions on many campuses, particularly about Israeli abuses, regardless of what you believe about them, and whether they are constructive. I don't see how discussions of Israeli abuses can take such precedence over the kind of state that will be next to Israel. That is, not only internally, although human rights advocates should care about that more than they do, but in its foreign policy toward its neighbor Israel...

I continue to follow the work of Human Rights Watch and about six years ago became a member of the Middle East North Africa Advisory Committee because I had become concerned about what had appeared to me to be questionable attacks on the State of Israel. In reporting on this conflict, Human Rights Watch – frequently joined by the UN – faulted Israel as the principal offender...

It seemed to me that if you talked about freedom of speech, the rights of women, an open education and freedom of religion – that there was only one state in the Middle East that was concerned with those issues. In changing the public debate to issues of war, Human Rights Watch and others in what they described as being evenhanded, described Israel far from being an advocate of human rights, but instead as one of its principal offenders...

The UN Human Rights Commission, so critical of Israel that any fair-minded person would disqualify them from participating in attempts to settle issues involving Israel, got the idea that they could get prominent Jews known for their anti-Israel views to head their investigations. Even before Richard Goldstone, they appointed Richard Falk, professor at Princeton, to be the UN rapporteur for the West Bank and Gaza. Richard Falk had written an article comparing Israel's treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to Hitler's treatment of the Jews in the Holocaust. Israel, believing this should have disqualified him for the job, would not allow him into the country. Human Rights Watch leapt to his defense, putting out a press release comparing Israel with North Korea and Burma in not cooperating with the UN. I think you might be surprised to learn the release was written by Joe Stork – Deputy Director of Human Rights Watch Middle East Division – whose previous job for many, many years, was as an editor of a pro-Palestinian newsletter...

I came back [from a recent visit to Israel] convinced more than ever that Human Rights Watch's attacks on Israel as the country tried to defend itself were badly distorting the issues...

In closing, when I was in Israel, I talked to 18 year-olds, both boys and girls, who were not going to college but instead were going into the army for three years and then for one month a year until 45 or 50 years old. They've been doing this for 60 years. And most of them have faced some kind of danger during that period. They are involved in the defense of their country and have to hope that their government will avoid war. I also think of the Palestinian 18 year-olds – particularly those in Gaza who can't get jobs because their economy is not thriving. I believe it is not thriving specifically because their government is bringing in arms and Israel is trying to stop them. And their government is preaching genocide. Many of these students can't afford college and that leaves jihad as their only opportunity. If college students can help bring the human rights movement back to trying to make the Universal Declaration of Human Rights truly universal in the Middle East, they will be making a valuable contribution.”

[Editor's comment: Mr. Bernstein's entire speech may be found at: <http://story.israelherald.com/index.php/ct/9/cid/f81a4d9d561822ee/id/711754/cs/1/> In it, the 88-year old Mr. Bernstein categorically takes to task HRW for its continuous and indefensible asymmetrical treatment of Israel as compared to the laws, policies, and actions of the other entities/countries in the region. Although lengthy, it is worth reading in its entirety.]