



# ISRAEL MATTERS!

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## Israelis Quietly Question U.S. Resolve Against Iran

### Israel Soon to be Larger than Diaspora

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu welcomed a planeload of olim in August at Ben Gurion Airport, telling them "we're close to a tipping point." According to the prime minister, "for the first time in 2,000 years, there are going to be more Jews in Israel than outside it."

Speaking to a terminal full of olim from the United States and Canada, who came with Nefesh B'Nefesh on the organization's 38th chartered aliya flight since the first one in July 2002, Netanyahu said that Israel's Jewish population was nearing six million.

Netanyahu told the 238 new immigrants that aliya had given the Jewish people the "ability to control our fate and our destiny." He called on the new Israelis to work to make Israel "the most advanced country in the world."

The new olim were greeted at the airport by scores of singing and dancing well-wishers, including delegations of Israeli youth movements, family members of the immigrants and public figures ranging from Netanyahu, Jewish Agency chairman Natan Sharansky and MK Uri Orbach to mayors from cities that will be receiving the olim, including Beit Shemesh and Modi'in.

Nefesh B'Nefesh co-founder Tony Gelbart noted in the ceremony that Israel "is the only country where the prime minister and heads of the government come to meet new immigrants."

North American aliya is expected to rise in 2009 due to the worldwide economic downturn, possibly passing the 4,000 mark. In particular, Nefesh B'Nefesh figures reveal that some 450 young olim will be arriving in Israel this year to serve in the IDF.

Israel is encouraged by U.S. vows to curb Iran's nuclear program, but still questions whether the Obama administration is willing to make good on the pledge "no matter what," an Israeli official said recently. The timeline and tenor of Washington's bid to talk Tehran into abandoning atomic projects with bomb-making potential have stirred concern in Israel, which backs the diplomacy but has also hinted at a last-resort, pre-emptive strikes against its foe.

While visiting Israel during late July, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates promoted President Barack Obama's late-September deadline for an Iranian response to the overture. The Americans said any dialogue should show progress by year's end, and threatened "crippling" sanctions against Iran if the deadlock continues.

Iran has rejected calls to curb its uranium enrichment, saying the program is for legitimate energy needs. Israel believes Iran could be just months away from producing enough bomb-grade uranium for a warhead. Western intelligence estimates see such a capability being a few years away. The chief analyst for Israeli military intelligence cast doubt on the prospects of any U.S.-led talks with Iran. "Iran is ready for dialogue, but it is our understanding that such a dialogue would be generalized only," Brigadier-General Yossi Baidatz told a parliamentary panel, "Iran would not be prepared to discuss its right to develop what it claims is a civilian nuclear program on Iranian soil." Baidatz further saw "an increased atmosphere, internationally, of acceptance of the fact that Iran is capable of becoming nuclear Iran."

Israel's Haaretz newspaper reported Americans had unveiled plans to toughen current international sanctions against Iran, including measures targeting its refined oil imports, should the September deadline go unmet. The Israeli official said he was not aware of such a detailed plan but predicted U.S.-led efforts to step up sanctions could gather pace early next year. The official offered no information on whether Gates and Jones had raised the possibility of unilateral Israeli military action against Iran, something the Obama administration has said it would not welcome given the risk of destabilizing the region. But the United States has echoed Israel in saying all its options -- including military -- remained available.

Independent analysts are divided on whether Israeli forces, acting alone, could deliver lasting damage to Iran's nuclear facilities, which are numerous, distant and fortified. Some experts see Israel, which is believed to have the Middle East's only atomic arsenal, coping with a nuclear-armed Iran by making clear to Tehran that it remains outgunned. In what local media saw as one such "deterrent" message, Netanyahu made a visit to Israel's Dimona atomic reactor. Netanyahu "voiced his great appreciation for (the reactor staff's) contribution to the strength and security of the state of Israel," the Prime Minister's office said in a statement.

# The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

## Tough on Israel

Why President Obama's battle against Jewish settlements could prove self-defeating

ONE OF THE MORE striking results of the Obama administration's first six months is that only one country has worse relations with the United States than it did in January: Israel. The new administration has pushed a reset button with Russia and sent new ambassadors to Syria and Venezuela; it has offered olive branches to Cuba and Burma. But for nearly three months it has been locked in a public confrontation with Israel over Jewish housing construction in Jerusalem and the West Bank. To a less visible extent, the two governments also have differed over policy toward Iran.

This week a parade of senior U.S. officials has been visiting Jerusalem to tackle the issues: Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, Middle East envoy George J. Mitchell, national security adviser James L. Jones and senior aide Dennis Ross. But the tensions persist, and public opinion is following: The Pew Global Attitudes Project reported last week that Israel was the only country among 25 surveyed where the public's image of the United States was getting worse rather than better.

In part the trouble was unavoidable: Taking office with a commitment to pursuing Middle East peace, Mr. Obama faced a new, right-wing Israeli government whose prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, has refused to accept the goal of Palestinian statehood. In part it was tactical: By making plain his disagreements with Mr. Netanyahu on statehood and Jewish settlements, Mr. Obama hoped to force an Israeli retreat while building credibility with Arab governments — two ad-

vances that he arguably needs to set the stage for a serious peace process.

But the administration also is guilty of missteps. Rather than pocketing Mr. Netanyahu's initial concessions — he gave a speech on Palestinian statehood and suggested parameters for curtailing settlements accepted by previous U.S. administrations — Mr. Obama chose to insist on an absolutist demand for a settlement "freeze." Palestinian and Arab leaders who had accepted previous compromises immediately hardened their positions; they also balked at delivering the "confidence-building" concessions to Israel that the administration seeks. Israeli public opinion, which normally leans against the settler movement, has rallied behind Mr. Netanyahu. And Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, which were active during the Bush administration's final year, have yet to resume.

U.S. and Israeli officials are working on a compromise that would allow Israel to complete some housing now under construction while freezing new starts for a defined period. Arab states would be expected to take steps in return. Such a deal will expose Mr. Obama to criticism in the Arab world — a public relations hit that he could have avoided had he not escalated the settlements dispute in the first place. At worst, the president may find himself diminished among both Israelis and Arabs before discussions even begin on the issues on which U.S. clout is most needed. If he is to be effective in brokering a peace deal, Mr. Obama will need to show both sides that they can trust him — and he must be tough on more than one country.

## " Hamas May Get Claws into Gaza Aid "

Increasingly concerned that Hamas will steal money donated for Gaza's rehabilitation, the Israeli Defense Ministry distributed a document revealing that unions affiliated with the terrorist group have set up joint committees with UN agencies that dispense humanitarian aid.

The document was distributed to the Foreign Ministry, Finance Ministry and the Israeli intelligence community, and was also sent to the United States to warn it that the \$900 million it has pledged to help rebuild the Gaza Strip could fall into Hamas hands.

"All humanitarian aid sent into the Gaza Strip today needs to receive Hamas clearance," said a senior defense official. "Hamas uses violence against international organizations, including UNRWA, if they do not cooperate."

Hamas recently published an ad in a Palestinian newspaper warning that "whoever does not follow its orders will be forced to leave Gaza."

Israeli government sources said it was "no secret" that UN officials in Gaza were having talks on a technical level with Hamas regarding the distribution of humanitarian aid there.

In response to the report, a UNRWA spokesperson released a statement saying: "UNRWA distributes its aid on basis of need. Humanitarian need dictates the way we distribute aid and nothing else."

## Fatah Resolves: Jerusalem is Capital of Palestine

The Sixth General Assembly of the Fatah faction has approved a resolution stating that Jerusalem is an "integral part of the Palestinian homeland and political entity." The holiest city in Judaism is "awaiting our sacrifices," stated the resolution, which Fatah committed itself to carry out "until Jerusalem returns to the Palestinians void of settlers and settlements."

The resolution which summed up last week's convention also declares that Jerusalem is the "eternal capital of Palestine, the Arab world and the Islamic and Christian worlds," and states that Israel's capital constitutes the "red line" for talks between the Palestinian Authority faction and the Jewish State.