



20 May, 2011

Article 1.	<p>NYT</p> <p><u>Obama and Netanyahu Are Facing a Turning Point</u></p> <p>Helene Cooper</p>
Article 2.	<p>The Washington Post</p> <p><u>Obama's Mideast policy looks good — on paper</u></p> <p>David Ignatius</p>
Article 3.	<p>The American Interest</p> <p><u>Obama Embraces His Inner Bush</u></p> <p>Walter Russell Mead</p>
Article 4.	<p>The Washington Institute</p> <p><u>President Obama and Middle East Peace</u></p> <p>Robert Satloff</p>
Article 5.	<p>The Washington Post</p> <p><u>Obama's Mideast peace gaffe</u></p> <p>Jackson Diehl</p>
Article 6.	<p>National Review</p> <p><u>Obama's Empty Speech</u></p> <p>Elliott Abrams</p>
Article 7.	<p>The National Interest</p> <p><u>Exposing Abbas</u></p> <p>Benny Morris</p>

Article 1.

NYT

Obama and Netanyahu Are Facing a Turning Point

Helene Cooper

May 19, 2011 — As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel heads to the White House on Friday for the seventh meeting since President Obama took office, the two men are facing a turning point in a relationship that has never been warm. By all accounts, they do not trust each other. President Obama has told aides and allies that he does not believe that Mr. Netanyahu will ever be willing to make the kind of big concessions that will lead to a peace deal.

For his part, Mr. Netanyahu has complained that Mr. Obama has pushed Israel too far — a point driven home during a furious phone call with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Thursday morning, just hours before Mr. Obama's speech, during which the prime minister reacted angrily to the president's plan to endorse Israel's pre-1967 borders for a future Palestinian state.

Mr. Obama did not back down. But the last-minute furor highlights the discord as they head into what one Israeli official described as a "train wreck" coming their way: a United Nations General Assembly vote on Palestinian statehood in September.

Mr. Netanyahu, his close associates say, desperately wants Mr. Obama to use the diplomatic muscle of the United States to protect Israel from the vote, not only by vetoing it in the Security Council, but also by leaning hard on America's European allies to get them to reject it as well.

Mr. Obama has indicated that he will certainly do the first. But it remains unclear how far Mr. Obama can go to persuade Britain, France and other American allies to join the United States in rejecting the move, particularly as long as Mr. Netanyahu continues to resist endorsing the pre-1967 lines.

From one of their first meetings, at the King David Hotel on July 23, 2008, when Mr. Obama, then the presumptive Democratic nominee for president, visited Israel, the two men have struck, at most, an intellectual bond. Mr. Netanyahu, as the leader of Israel's conservative Likud Party, was far more comfortable with the Republican Party in the United States than with Mr. Obama, the son of a Muslim man from Kenya whose introduction to the Arab-Israeli conflict was initially framed by discussions with pro-Palestinian academics.

"Their relationship is correct at best," said Judith Kipper, director of Middle East programs at the Institute of World Affairs. Mr. Netanyahu "likes the status quo, and he particularly identifies with conservative Republicans."

Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League and a friend of Mr. Netanyahu's, recalled that after the first meeting, Mr. Netanyahu walked out of the hotel and told him that he had been impressed with Mr. Obama's intellect, and that the American presidency "was his to lose."

But things went downhill soon after Mr. Obama took office and, within months, called for a halt in Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank. Mr. Netanyahu refused, handing the president his first foreign policy humiliation when Mr. Obama had to abandon the demand in the face of Israel's refusal to comply.

Compounding the problem, Mr. Netanyahu delivered a fiery speech to a pro-Israel lobbying group in Washington declaring that "Jerusalem isn't a settlement, it's our capital." A furious White

House promptly denied him all the trappings of a presidential meeting with Mr. Obama the next day, refusing to allow photographers to take pictures of the two men in the Oval Office, as is usually the case for meetings with foreign leaders.

Things got so bad, Mr. Foxman recalled, that Mr. Netanyahu “told me, ‘Abe, I need two hours just alone to talk to him.’” Late last year, Mr. Netanyahu got his two hours at the White House with Mr. Obama, a meeting which, both American and Israeli officials say, helped clear the air. “The relationship now is very cordial,” a senior White House official said.

But the easing of tensions ended this spring when, Israeli and American officials said, Mr. Netanyahu got wind of Mr. Obama’s plans to make a major address on the Middle East, and alerted Republican leaders that he would like to address a joint meeting of Congress. That move was widely interpreted as an attempt to get out in front of Mr. Obama, by presenting an Israeli peace proposal that, while short of what the Palestinians want, would box in the president. House Speaker John A. Boehner issued the invitation, for late May. So White House officials timed Mr. Obama’s speech on Thursday to make sure he went first.

“You get so many reports that Bibi is playing politics in your backyard that eventually you’ve got to draw the conclusion that there’s nothing there to work with with this guy,” said Daniel Levy, a former Israeli peace negotiator who is now a fellow with the New American Foundation, referring to Mr. Netanyahu by his nickname. Administration officials said that they were determined not to allow Mr. Netanyahu to get out in front of Mr. Obama.

In a statement after Mr. Obama’s speech on Thursday, Mr. Netanyahu’s office pointedly said that the prime minister would raise his concerns about Mr. Obama’s language about the pre-1967 borders during Friday’s meeting.

“While there were many points in the president’s speech that we appreciate and welcome, there were other aspects, like the return to the 1967 borders, which depart from longstanding American policy, as well as Israeli policy, going back to 1967,” Michael B. Oren, Israel’s ambassador to the United States, said in an interview. “The prime minister will raise the issue with the president. As the president said, the United States and Israel are great friends, and friends have to be able to talk frankly to one another.”

But both men will have to manage any additional irritation as they prepare for the United Nations vote that is headed their way, American and Israeli officials said. Neither side wants to see an overwhelmingly lopsided United Nations vote for Palestinian statehood, with Britain, France and Germany joining the rest of the world and isolating Israel further, with only the United States and a few others voting against it.

“I think the Europeans are sliding” toward voting for Palestinian statehood “because they don’t see a peace strategy coming out,” said David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

He said that the two leaders had to figure out a way to work together to stop a United Nations vote that could harm both the United States and Israel. “If they are incapable of being able to translate a common interest into a common strategy, then it’s a very sad commentary on both countries,” Mr. Makovsky said.

Article 2.

The Washington Post

Obama's Mideast policy looks good — on paper

David Ignatius

May 20 -- With his much-ballyhooed speech on the Middle East , President Obama set himself a challenge that can be summarized in two words: Follow through.

Obama spoke with more clarity than some analysts had expected about the two most incendiary issues in the region right now: President Bashar al-Assad's violent suppression of protests in Syria and the risk of a new Palestinian explosion if a serious peace process can't be restarted.

On both, Obama's answers avoided the conventional wisdom of the day (or rather, yesterday). Instead of offering a quick and easy rhetorical condemnation of Assad, Obama called on him to enact specific reforms (as Assad has claimed he wanted) or leave office; and rather than acceding to Israeli desires to lowball the Palestinian issue, Obama insisted on the need for negotiations and stated some "principles" to guide them.

The Syria passage of the speech offered a blueprint for what Assad must do to survive: "stop shooting demonstrators," "release political prisoners," "allow human rights monitors to have access" to Daraa and other besieged cities, and open "serious dialogue" with the opposition about a democratic transition. Assad probably can't fulfill that list (which would require him to break from Iran), but it's worth one last try before the deluge. Who will carry the message to Damascus? Unfortunately, not clear.

On the Israeli-Palestinian front, Obama edged toward what he should have done two years ago — frame parameters to guide negotiations. He didn't offer a peace plan, but he did go further on specifics, committing the United States to support a Palestinian state “based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps,” in exchange for recognition of “Israel as a Jewish state” and a “non-militarized” status for Palestine. Sadly, the president offered no structure for talks. Obama was admirably specific in talking about Bahrain, too — supporting the Sunni monarchy's demand for law and order but also the Shiite majority's demand for reform. It was a subtle speech, throughout. But that “subtlety” translates either as “two-faced” or “pragmatically effective,” depending on whether policymakers can actually forge the compromises the speechmakers describe. Here's the real test for Obama. Each thread of his “dignity” agenda for the Middle East requires something that has been in short supply at this White House: a systematic ability to implement foreign policy strategy through committed, emphatic follow-up actions. It's this operational question — not the rhetorical framework — that will be the crux.

This White House has had trouble for two years gearing rhetoric and action. Two prominent special representatives — George Mitchell and Richard Holbrooke — both foundered in a system that was so focused on tight messaging that it didn't allow the freewheeling, engaging style the two brought to their jobs. As I wrote last year of Holbrooke, before his death, the Obama White House has had a knack for shrinking large personalities.

Hillary Clinton's State Department hasn't done well on follow-through, either. Clinton is a tireless traveler, and if diplomacy simply rewarded miles traveled, she would already have surpassed Dean Acheson. The problem is in making things happen on the ground: Clinton has announced (repeatedly) a civilian surge in Afghanistan,

but I talked this week with a general who was irate that so little has actually been done by civilians, outside Kabul.

The follow-up diplomacy requires personalities with the manipulative skill and subtlety of a Henry Kissinger or Zbigniew Brzezinski. It's embarrassing to always come back to those two aging diplo-warriors as examples, but their successors today aren't obvious. It's interesting that when the president was looking for strategic advice, he reportedly turned to two columnists, Tom Friedman and Fareed Zakaria. They would be the first to note the difference between a column (or a speech) and a policy breakthrough.

Where are the people who can crack heads, diplomatically, to make all this work? Tom Donilon, the national security adviser, is an unlikely candidate for the Count Metternich role, but he seems eager to manage these operations. Bill Burns, the new deputy secretary of state, has vast Middle East experience, and the White House should be bold enough to use him creatively. A third potential emissary is Sen. John Kerry, who has been one of the most effective back-channel intermediaries in the U.S. government of late, in his trips to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The president admirably outlined the tasks for America in this Arab Spring. It's all there, on paper, the right balance of principle and pragmatism. Now, just do it.

Article 3.

The American Interest

Obama Embraces His Inner Bush

Walter Russell Mead

May 19, 2011 -- President Obama's speech to State Department employees today was billed as a major address on recasting American foreign policy in the Middle East.

It lived up to its billing. President Obama has deep-sixed the 'realism' that marked the first two years of his approach to the Middle East. He has returned to the foreign policy of George W. Bush.

The United States is no longer, the President told us in words he could have borrowed from his predecessor, a status quo power in the Middle East. The realist course of cooperating with oppressive regimes in a quest for international calm is a dead end. It breeds toxic resentment against the United States; it stores up fuel for an inevitable conflagration when the oppressors weaken; it stokes anti-Israel resentment when hatred of Israel becomes the only form of political activism open to ordinary people; it strengthens the hold of extremist religion and strangles the growth of liberal forces.

More, he attacked Iran. All that talk about avoiding polarization with Iran is gone. Instead, President Obama singled out Iran as an oppressive, tyrannical regime supporting terror and running an "illicit nuclear program" as well.

He also followed Bush in attacking some US allies, calling on Bahrain and Yemen to make changes. It was a speech that enraged almost every powerful actor in the Middle East and put America out on a limb. Like Bush, Obama is willing to confront some of America's closest allies (the Saudis, who back the crackdown in Bahrain). Like Bush, he hailed Iraq as an example of democracy and

pluralism that can play a vital role in the transformation of the region. Like Bush, he proposes to work with opposition groups in friendly countries.

His policy on Israel-Palestine is also looking Bushesque. Like Bush, he wants a sovereign but demilitarized Palestinian state. Like Bush, he believes that the 1967 lines with minor and mutually agreed changes should be the basis for the permanent boundaries between the two countries — and like Bush he set Jerusalem and the refugees to one side.

The President is nailing his colors to the mast of the Anglo-American revolutionary tradition. Open societies, open economies, religious freedom, minority rights: these are revolutionary ideas in much of the world. Americans have often been globally isolated as we stand for the rights of ordinary people (like immigrant African chambermaids in New York hotels) against the privilege of elites. A faith in the capacity of the common woman and the common man to make good decisions (and in their right to make those decisions even if they are sometimes wrong) is the basis of America's political faith; President Obama proclaimed today that this needs to be the basis of our policy in the Middle East.

In *Power, Terror, Peace, and War*, I wrote that the Bush administration had articulated a post 9/11 national strategy for the United States that was not only right, it was inescapable. But the Bush administration's tactical errors and profoundly wrongheaded public diplomacy undermined support for those policies at home and abroad.

President Obama has long hesitated between the idea that Bush had the wrong strategy and the idea that the strategy was sound but that the tactics and presentation was poor. He seems now to have come down firmly on the side of the core elements of the Bush strategy. This frankly is more or less where I thought he would end up;

American interests, American values and the state of the region don't actually leave us that many alternatives.

The question President Obama — and we — now face is whether he can advance this strategy more effectively than President Bush did. I very much hope so, but the obstacles are high. President Obama offended and annoyed virtually every important leader in the Middle East during his short speech. Some of the objectives he outlined (in particular, for successful economic development in Egypt) are horribly difficult to achieve. Our open enemies and many of our so-called 'friends' in the region will be working to foil our plans. One of the President's assets, his relative popularity in the Arab world, is in free-fall as the latest Pew Survey reveals.

President Bush was and President Obama is, I believe, right to proclaim that history, even in the Middle East, is on America's side. But history doesn't always move on America's timetable.

Article 4.

The Washington Institute

President Obama, The 'Winds of Change,' and Middle East Peace

Robert Satloff

May 19, 2011 -- President Obama did a great service in sketching out a new paradigm for U.S. engagement with the Middle East in his State Department "winds of change" speech this afternoon, in which he raised the goal of reform and democracy to a top-tier U.S. interest. Nevertheless, after critiquing Arab regimes that have used the Arab-Israeli conflict to distract their peoples from the important business of reform, he undermined the potency and effect of his own message by unveiling a new -- and controversial -- set of principles guiding U.S. efforts to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Specifically, the peace process principles he articulated constitute a major departure from long-standing U.S. policy. Not only did President Obama's statement make no mention of the democracy-based benchmarks injected into this process by President Bush in his June 2002 Rose Garden speech (which might have been appropriate, given the overall theme of his speech), he even included a significant departure from the "Clinton Parameters" presented to the parties by the then president in December 2000:

* President Obama is the first sitting president to say that the final borders should be "based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps." (The Clinton Parameters -- which, it is important to note, President Clinton officially withdrew before he left office -- did not mention the 1967 borders, but did mention "swaps and other territorial arrangements.") The Obama formulation concretizes a move away from four decades of U.S. policy based on UN Security

Council resolution 242 of November 1967, which has always interpreted calls for an Israeli withdrawal to a "secure and recognized" border as not synonymous with the pre-1967 boundaries. The idea of land swaps, which may very well be a solution that the parties themselves choose to pursue, sounds very different when endorsed by the president of the United States. In effect, it means that the U.S. view is that resolution of the territorial aspect of the conflict can only be achieved if Israel cedes territory it held even before the 1967 war.

* Regarding IDF deployment, President Obama said that the Palestinian state should have borders with Egypt, Jordan, and Israel, and referred to the "full and phased" withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces. This statement implies categorical American opposition to any open-ended Israeli presence inside the future Palestinian state. This differs from the Clinton Parameters, which envisioned three Israeli "facilities" inside the West Bank, with no time limit on their presence.

* Although the president noted that he was endorsing a borders-and-security-first approach, leaving the subjects of refugees and Jerusalem for future negotiations, this is an odd reading of the relevance of those two issues. For Palestinians, the refugee issue may be powerfully emotive, going to the core of Palestinian identity; for Israelis, however, it is as much an issue of security as ideology. For the president not to repeat previous U.S. government statements -- e.g., that Palestinians will never see their right of return implemented through a return to Israel -- is to raise expectations and inject doubt into a settled topic.

Perhaps more than anything else, the most surprising aspect of the president's peace process statement was that it moved substantially toward the Palestinian position just days after the Palestinian Authority decided to seek unity and reconciliation with Hamas.

Indeed, the president seemed nonplussed that Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, has opted for unity with Hamas, a group the United States views as a terrorist organization. This reconciliation with Hamas "raises profound and legitimate questions for Israel," the president noted -- but evidently not questions so profound and troubling to the United States that they would impede a shift in U.S. policy that advantages the Palestinians. Also odd was the fact that the president offered no implementation mechanism to translate these ideas into real negotiations. He named no high-level successor to Sen. George Mitchell, the peace process envoy who just resigned, nor did he specifically call for the immediate renewal of negotiations.

Despite this absence of a new mechanism, the likely next step is for Palestinians to take up the president's call, ask for renewal of negotiations on precisely the terms the president outlined -- borders that are "based on the 1967 lines with mutual swaps," with no reference to refugees or other issues on which the Palestinians would make major compromises -- and wait for Israel to say no.

Now en route to Washington, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has already issued a statement objecting to the president's focus on the 1967 borders. The two leaders may find a way to blur their differences over the principles outlined today, given their partnership on strategic issues and mutual interest in political cooperation and amity. But the approach to Israeli-Palestinian peace enunciated today has within it the seeds of deepening tension and perhaps even rift between the two sides -- the very distraction from the focus on democratic reform the president said he wanted to avoid.

Robert Satloff is executive director of The Washington Institute.

Article 5.

The Washington Post

Obama's Mideast peace gaffe

Jackson Diehl

05/19/2011 -- President Obama's State Department speech Thursday has prompted a fevered debate among Middle East policy wonks about whether he has changed past U.S. policy on the terms for Palestinian statehood — not to mention a wave of inflated and mostly erroneous rhetoric from Republican presidential candidates.

The basic question is this: By saying that a division of territory between Israel and Palestine should be “based on” the “1967 lines” between Israel and the West Bank, with agreed “swaps” of land, did Obama move beyond the previous U.S. position on the subject?

The short, technical answer to this question is: no. The longer, political response is that by stating the principle, Obama gave a boost to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has tried to make Israeli acceptance of it a condition for peace talks, and a slap to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who has resisted it. That Obama would do this on the eve of Netanyahu's arrival in Washington for a White House meeting — and apparently without warning the Israeli leader — is a gaffe that has understandably angered Netanyahu and many of his U.S. supporters.

First, let's go to the policy wonk discussion. The facts there are pretty clear: ever since the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks at Camp David in 2000, Israelis, Palestinians and Americans have talked about a Palestinian state that starts with the Gaza Strip and West Bank (the “1967 lines”), but adds West Bank territory to Israel in order to annex the largest blocs of Jewish settlers, and compensates Palestine with territory that now is part of Israel.

The settlement “parameters” drawn up by President Bill Clinton in late 2000 (and approved by the then-Israeli cabinet) called for Israel to annex about 5 percent of the West Bank in exchange for giving Palestine 3.5 percent of Israeli territory, plus a corridor connecting the West Bank with Gaza.

President George W. Bush adopted this same formula. In 2004 he gave then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon a letter saying that the United States recognized that Israel would not return to the 1967 lines and that it would annex large settlements near its borders. But Bush also declared after a 2005 meeting with Abbas that U.S. policy was that “changes to the 1949 armistice lines must be mutually agreed to.” Since the 1949 lines are the same as the 1967 lines, Bush was, like Obama, saying that the old lines would be the starting point.

I asked a former senior adviser to Bush whether he could identify any difference between Bush’s formula and Obama’s. Other than the fact that Bush used the date 1949 rather than 1967, the adviser offered the argument that Bush, unlike Obama, explicitly stated that Israel would never return to its 1967 borders. But it is implicit in Obama’s formula of “swaps” that Israel will not go back to the old lines — and in an interview Thursday with the BBC Thursday the president made it explicit: “Negotiations will involve looking at that 1967 border, recognizing that conditions on the ground have changed and there are going to need to be swaps,” he said.

So the idea that Obama has proposed that Israel “return to the 1967 borders,” as various GOP hopefuls are claiming, is simply untrue. That doesn’t mean that Netanyahu doesn’t have reason to be fuming as he heads for his meeting with Obama today. For months, Washington has been privately pressing the Israeli leader to endorse the 1967-lines-principle as a way of jump-starting moribund talks with Abbas. Netanyahu has resisted, though he inched toward the position in a speech last Monday. Now Obama has publicly sprung

the principle on him — even though there is next to no prospect that negotiations can be started anytime soon.

In the end this looks like another instance in which Obama's insistence on pushing his own approach to the peace process will backfire. The president was urged by several senior advisers not to delve deeply into Israeli-Palestinian affairs in this speech, just as he was warned last year not to continue insisting on a freeze of Israel's West Bank settlements. Apparently at the last minute, Obama chose to include the 1967-lines idea in his speech. The result has been the draining of attention from the speech's central discussion of Arab democracy, a cheap talking point for GOP opponents — and yet another pointless quarrel with Bibi Netanyahu.

Article 6.

National Review

Obama's Empty Speech

Elliott Abrams

May 19, 2011 -- In “balanced” terms, Obama treated Assad as a potential democrat, and proposed a non-plan for Israeli–Palestinian negotiations.

There were some fine sentences in President Obama’s speech, but two of his main points were wrong.

The first thing he did was take credit for the Arab Spring, saying he had supported it all along. This is simply not true. The by-word early in his administration was “engagement,” with a caustic rejection of the Bush “Freedom Agenda.” Bush’s tougher policies toward Iran and Syria were to be replaced by outreach, discussion, diplomacy — far more civilized. And that engagement was with the rulers, not the ruled; Obama’s was a world of states, and you engaged with the people ruling them.

This policy is what led him to react so slowly and unenthusiastically when the people of Iran rose up after the stolen elections of June 2009. It is what led to silence and delay when there were uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. Even today, with 1,000 peaceful protesters murdered in the streets of Syria, Obama cannot abandon engagement with Bashar al-Assad. Instead of saying Assad must go, in this speech Obama announced yet another round of outreach: “The Syrian people have shown their courage in demanding a transition to democracy. President Assad now has a choice: He can lead that transition, or get out of the way.” For President Obama to suggest that Assad might lead a transition to democracy is a gruesome joke to play on the people struggling for freedom in the streets of Syria.

It is traditional now for Obama to insult the Bush administration, and this time he referred at the start to how he had had to “shift our foreign policy” after a decade of war. In fact, the shift he had to perform today was from indifference to democracy in the Arab world to the Bush policy of supporting it.

A second key section dealt with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. It may well be that the administration knows that nothing will happen in the coming year, as Palestinians turn toward internal politics and next year’s elections, and seek to avoid negotiations. The president suggested as much when he said of the new Fatah-Hamas unity agreement, “How can one negotiate with a party that has shown itself unwilling to recognize your right to exist? In the weeks and months to come, Palestinian leaders will have to provide a credible answer to that question.” That is a good challenge, which they will fail to meet. If European or Arab leaders complain about the lack of progress, U.S. officials can refer back to that passage and say, “What can we do? We can’t ask the Israelis to negotiate with Hamas.”

But the president unfortunately went beyond that good question and suggested an illogical way forward. His idea was to put off Jerusalem and refugees, two impossible issues, and instead negotiate borders and security. But in fact, the border issues in the farther northern and southern areas are often simple, and most of the time the Israeli security fence is actually on or very near the 1949 armistice line, often mistakenly called “the 1967 border.” The far harder matter is the Jerusalem area, and if Jerusalem is not solved, borders cannot be solved. It won’t work. Nor will it work to solve security issues in isolation from others, such as whether Palestinians really accept the permanent existence of the Jewish state at all. Hamas’s prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh, said last week he had “great hope of bringing to an end the Zionist project in Palestine,” and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas said, “We will never give up the right of

return,” by which he means flooding Israel with millions of Palestinian “refugees.” In 2004 President Bush told Prime Minister Sharon that “an agreed, just, fair, and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel.” That Bush position, contained in a letter to Prime Minister Sharon, was then endorsed by both houses of Congress. President Obama’s failure to restate it will rightly strike Israelis as a dangerous shift in position, and one can only hope that he clarifies the matter when he addresses AIPAC on Sunday.

President Obama also said the “borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps.” It is worth comparing how President Bush described the agreed, negotiated borders he sought for the Israelis and Palestinians in that 2004 letter: “In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.” The Obama language is a shift away from Israel and toward the Palestinians.

It is hard to believe the president and his aides think any real progress or serious negotiations are in the cards. Perhaps this is why the president did not announce any particular action: no date to resume talks, no new special envoy named to replace George Mitchell, no invitations to Washington or Camp David. Perhaps he believes the rhetoric he used today will be enough to satisfy all audiences, at least until his reelection is behind him. Perhaps he also believes there is

enough here to get the EU on board in September in opposing the Palestinian effort at the [REDACTED], which he went out of his way to criticize.

His political judgment may turn out to be correct on all of this. I would feel better about it had it been discussed with the Israelis instead of being dumped on their heads this morning with zero advance notice or warning or explanation, leaving them scrambling to figure out what it all meant. That alone suggests that whatever the “balanced” rhetoric, the administration persists in treating Israel as a problem rather than as an ally. The Israelis, by the way, responded cleverly to the president’s speech: Their statement said, “Prime Minister Netanyahu expects to hear a reaffirmation from President Obama of U.S. commitments made to Israel in 2004, which were overwhelmingly supported by both Houses of Congress.” Remember those posters with a photo of Bush and the caption “Miss me yet?” We know the Israeli answer.

Elliott Abrams, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, was the deputy national security adviser handling the Middle East in the George W. Bush administration.

Article 7.

The National Interest

Exposing Abbas

Benny Morris

May 19, 2011 -- Mahmoud Abbas's recent op-ed in The New York Times is "worth reading," not because he "speaks some of the most important truths" about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict but precisely because of the lies and distortions it purveys, which tell us—unfortunately—something about the elite that has directed Palestinian politics since the 1960s.

Yasser Arafat, who led the Palestinian national movement from the late 1960s until his death in 2004, was notoriously duplicitous—a serial liar, in fact—and was distrusted by all Middle Eastern leaders across the board, Arab and Israeli. Most breathed a sigh of relief at his passing—as did many in Washington and other Western capitals. But many happily hailed his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestine National Authority and the head of the Fatah party, the chief constituent of the PLO, as a worthier politician, a "moderate." Perhaps it was the suits that replaced Arafat's absurd martial uniforms; perhaps the donnish glasses; perhaps it was the softer verbs and adjectives. They dismissed as youthful whimsy his [REDACTED] thesis from the 1980s, published in Arabic as *The Other Side: the Secret Relations between Nazism and the Leadership of the Zionist Movement*.

In that book, Abbas declared that the gas chambers were never used to murder Jews and dismissed as a "fantastic lie" that six million Jews had died in the Holocaust; at most, he wrote, "890,000" Jews were killed by the Germans. And they were killed, Abbas wrote, in part as a result of Zionist provocation orchestrated by Ben-Gurion from 1942. Or, as he put it: "The Zionist movement led a broad campaign

of incitement against the Jews living under Nazi rule, in order to arouse the government's hatred of them, to fuel vengeance against them, and to expand the mass extermination." All of this was designed somehow to facilitate the victory of Zionism.

So Abbas's distortions of subsequent history in the New York Times need surprise no one (though one wonders why the paper's editors, who probably have some inkling of what actually happened in the Middle East in 1947-1949, should publish such malicious nonsense). First, Abbas tells us that in May 1948, as "a 13-year-old Palestinian boy," he was "forced" and "driven" out of his home in Safad by the Zionists. But on 6 July 2009 he told an interviewer on Falastina TV, in Arabic, that his family had actually fled Safad, fearing Jewish retribution for a massacre the Arabs had committed against the town's Jews two decades before.

The truth, of course, is that Safad's Arabs fled the town as it was mortared and then conquered by Haganah troops on 9-10 May 1948; there was no "expulsion" (a word Abbas later in the article uses to describe what happened to all the Palestinians displaced by the first Arab-Israeli war).

But this is a minor distortion compared to the outright lies that follow. These are embedded in the short, following text that describes the chain of events in 1947-1948:

In November 1947, the [UN] General Assembly made its recommendation [to partition Palestine into two states, one Jewish, the other Arab] and answered in the affirmative. [The meaning here is unclear: Did the Arabs respond to the resolution "in the affirmative", as perhaps Abbas is intimating? Did the General Assembly respond to its own recommendation "in the affirmative"?] Shortly thereafter, Zionist forces expelled Palestinian Arabs to ensure a decisive Jewish majority in the future state of Israel, and Arab armies intervened. War

and further expulsions ensued...Our Palestinian [Arab] state remained a promise unfulfilled.

In fact, what actually happened was this: The Arab states and the Palestinian national leadership, headed by Haj Amin al-Husseini, opposed the partition of Palestine, claiming all of Palestine for the Arabs. When the General Assembly voted in favor of partition, on 29 November 1947, the Palestinian leadership rejected the resolution and the Palestinian militias launched hostilities to abort the emergence of a Jewish state. They were aided by money, arms and volunteers from the Arab states. In the course of this first, civil-war half of the 1948 War (roughly from 30 November 1947 until 14 May 1948) the Palestinian militias attacked Jewish traffic and settlements for four months. But eventually the Jewish militias, chiefly the Haganah, went over to the offensive (in early April) and routed the Palestinians, and some 300,000 were displaced from their homes and lands. On 15 May 1948, the day after the Zionist leaders declared the establishment of the State of Israel, the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq invaded Palestine, in defiance of the will of the international community, as embodied in the partition resolution, and attacked the Jewish state. The army of Jordan, the fourth invading army, occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the core of the territory earmarked in the partition resolution for Palestinian Arab statehood. (The Palestinians failed to declare statehood, and Jordan did not allow the Palestinians to establish a state and subsequently formally annexed the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Egypt emerged from the war in control of the Gaza Strip.) During the weeks and months after 15 May, the Israeli army contained the invading armies and eventually drove them out of most of Palestine. Another 400,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes in the course of the fighting: Some were expelled by Jewish troops (for example, from Lydda and Ramle in July 1948), some were advised to leave or

ordered out by Arab leaders and officers (for example, from Haifa in April 1948 and Majdal in October). But most of the 700,000 simply fled out of fear of being caught up and harmed in the fighting. In summer 1948 the Israeli government decided not to allow the displaced Arabs—most of whom ended up in refugee camps in other parts of Palestine, i.e., the West Bank and Gaza—to return to the area of the State of Israel, deeming them inimical (they had just assailed the Jewish community and tried to destroy the Jewish state) and a potential Fifth Column.

Abbas's twisted history deliberately omits mention of the first half of the 1948 War, the civil war half, in order to portray the Palestinians as innocent victims. In fact, they were primary agents in the events that followed 29 November 1947, and in launching their assault on the Jewish community provoked and generated the Zionist counter-attack that resulted in the collapse of Palestinian society and the creation of the refugee problem. In history, peoples often pay for their aggression and mistakes, and this is what happened in Palestine. Abbas and his authority have now launched a campaign for international recognition of Palestinian Arab statehood, which he promises will be formally declared in September. This, he tells us, will "pave the way for us to pursue claims against Israel at the United Nations, human rights treaty bodies and the International Court of Justice."

What Abbas does not tell his readers is that the Palestinians, as in 1947, were offered statehood in a two-state compromise settlement in 2000 and rejected it (and he, Arafat's aide, did not object); and that he, Abbas, was again offered a state, a two-state settlement, by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2008, and he (again) rejected it. The compromises offered by Barak-Clinton and Olmert were based on a Palestinian state consisting of some 94% of the West Bank, 100% of the Gaza Strip and the (Arab) eastern half of Jerusalem, including

half or three-quarters of the Old City. In return, the Palestinians were expected to recognize Israel, give up their demand for a mass refugee return and agree definitively to an "end of claims" and an "end of conflict."

Arafat and Abbas rejected the offered compromises because they do not want a two-state solution, they want all of Palestine. Hence they had, and have, no interest in negotiating a compromise with Israel. (Abbas, in the New York Times, pays lip service to the idea of negotiation: "Negotiations remain our first option"—but this is hogwash. Last year Netanyahu froze settlement activity for ten months, under pressure from Obama and the Arab world—but Abbas failed to actually negotiate. He dragged his feet. Since then, Netanyahu, in refusing to extend that settlement freeze, has played into Abbas's hands, and has contributed enormously to the ongoing delegitimization of Israel in the West. In the Arab countries, of course, it was neither here nor there, as they have never "legitimized" Israel.)

Abbas is now pursuing a Palestinian state without having to pay the price of recognizing Israel or making peace. Once the Palestinians get their West Bank-Gaza state, they will use it as a springboard for their second-stage assault, political and military, on Israel—and they will no doubt lodge claims "at the United Nations, human rights treaty bodies, and the International Court of Justice" as part of that assault. But the major basis of political and moral assault on Israel will be the Palestinian demand for a "Right of Return"—and its international acceptance and implementation—of the 1948 refugees, who now number, them and their descendants, 5-6 million souls. As Abbas puts it in his article, the refugee problem will need to be resolved "justly" on the basis of UN General Assembly resolution 194, of December 1948, which, in the Palestinian interpretation, endorses the "Right of Return." If the world accepts this Palestinian demand and

there is implementation, Israel will cease to exist (Israel's current population consists of close to 6 million Jews and 1.4 million Arabs: Add to it 5-6 million Palestinian refugees and the country will have an Arab, not a Jewish, majority. Ergo, no Jewish state.). This is the Palestinian aim and end game; this, in fact, is the "truth" that Abbas is purveying and pursuing.

Benny Morris is a professor of history in the Middle East Studies Department of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. His most recent book is One State, Two States: Resolving the Israel/Palestine Conflict (Yale University Press, 2009).