

# US-Israel Relations: Approaching a Turning Point?

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## Introduction

Since the beginning of Barack Obama's term as president, US-Israel relations have been characterized by almost continuous periods of tension of varying levels of intensity. In itself, tension in the bilateral relations is not new and has accompanied US-Israel relations for decades. While there is mutual recognition of shared values and interests, at the same time there is a long series of issues on which the two countries disagree. Occasionally the administration chooses to blur the disputes and lower their profiles. Sometimes it chooses to highlight them. The Obama administration has generally chosen the second option, emphasizing the disputes and granting them high media prominence.

The core of the dispute between the two countries focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. What is most apparent in this regard is the Obama administration's aim – to what depth and extent it is still unclear – to bring about a change in the framework and rules of the game that have existed for years between the two countries. On other broad extensive features of US-Israel relations, e.g., strategic cooperation, economic assistance, and political support in international institutions, a close and tight relationship has, at least at this stage, been preserved.

The administration's policy towards Israel on the Palestinian issue stems primarily from its estimation that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the prime cause of instability in the region and America's eroding status there. It is a supreme national interest of the Obama administration to

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bring about stability in the region, largely due to its desire to remove US forces from Iraq and Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. It fears, and justifiably so, that should the region's lack of stability deteriorate to a situation of overall conflict and anarchy, dangers would abound for the international system in general and the US in particular.

President Obama apparently believes that an Israeli-Palestinian accord is within reach. He feels it is within his ability, thanks to his personality, great determination, and readiness to harness the power of the office of president for this objective, despite the failures of previous administrations to do so. In addition, the current US administration is convinced that achieving an Israeli-Palestinian accord would make it much easier for the US to realize an objective President Obama ascribed as supremely important to the US: reconciliation with the Arab world.

This essay examines President Obama's policy regarding an Israeli-Palestinian accord and the administration's attitude towards Israel, as manifested in disputes on freezing construction in Judea and Samaria in general, as well as in East Jerusalem.

### **The Demand for a Total Settlement Freeze**

The first dispute with the Obama administration made headlines following President Obama's demand for a total freeze on settlements. As far as is known, this demand was presented to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu already in his first meeting with President Obama in May 2009, and was reaffirmed in President Obama's June 4 speech in Cairo. Statements were made openly and in an unequivocal manner, leaving no room for any other interpretations. President Obama declared: "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop."<sup>1</sup>

In subsequent messages relayed by the administration to Israel, it was stressed that understandings and agreements with previous administrations cannot be impediments to an accord in the spirit of President Obama's vision. This was expressed clearly by the president early in his term, when he stated explicitly that the attitude of previous administrations to Israel and its policy on the Palestinian issue was flawed. The implication was that the administration did not intend to

adhere to these understandings merely because they existed. Rather, it intended to turn over a new leaf regarding Israel and its positions on the Palestinian issue. This posture of suppressing or ignoring previous understandings does not suit basic norms of relations between states. It certainly appears incongruous with Israel's status as a close ally of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, following President Obama's demand that Israel accept a total settlement freeze, his administration firmly refused to accept Israel's claim concerning understandings between Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert and President George Bush. These called for delimiting areas in which Israeli construction would be permitted on a defined scale. From the start, leaders in the administration tried to deny the existence of these understandings. However, after senior figures of the Bush administration, foremost among them Elliott Abrams, explained that understandings on the settlement issue did indeed exist, administration spokespeople rushed in. They clarified, some explicitly and some implicitly, that those understandings were irrelevant and that the president was determined that Senator Mitchell, special envoy for the region, formulate new understandings with Israel.<sup>3</sup>

This conduct by the administration has produced fissures in the special relationship formed over the years between Israel and the US. True, in the past there were also instances in which an administration renounced, directly or indirectly, commitments it undertook regarding Israel. However, in the sixteen years of the Clinton and Bush presidencies (1993–2009), it appeared that Israel and the US enjoyed a close, tight relationship. And what was regarded as acceptable in the past today seems an unacceptable deviation from conventional bilateral relations between them. This conduct of the Obama administration, particularly since it involves an opposing stance on a fundamental, broad issue and not a localized small matter, damages Israel's unique status. It alters the rules of the game that have formed over the years between the two countries.

Suppressing or ignoring previous understandings does not suit basic norms of relations between states, and appears incongruous with Israel's status as a close US ally.

In fact, the message the administration has sent Israel regarding the Israeli-Palestinian matter is of a power oriented policy devoid of sentiment, based on viewing the balance of power between the two sides

at a specific point in time. Such a policy seeks to deliver the message that the administration is determined to implement the blueprint of an accord with strong determination and decisiveness, and it is the presidential echelon that is directing the moves.

Sometimes the policy leads to a demonstration of excessive self-confidence or in any event to demands, especially from Israel, that are unrealistic. The demand for a total freeze on construction in Judea and Samaria, and later in East Jerusalem, is a clear example of this. In the weeks and months following the president's call for an immediate, total construction freeze in the settlements, it seems to have become clear to the administration that Israel's complex political, social, and economic reality made this demand unrealistic and in fact unattainable. President Obama was forced to relax his positions in an effort to minimize the damage caused to him and to Israel-US relations from the crisis that ensued. He sent Senator Mitchell to Israel to conduct a dialogue with Israel concerning the parameters of the freeze. The starting assumption was that a total freeze was not possible; now what had to be discussed was the scope of the freeze and the areas in which it would be realized. Ultimately, an understanding was achieved with the president's emissary – in part official and written, and in part, almost certainly, based on unwritten understandings – concerning areas in which construction is prohibited and others in which it is permitted on a defined scale. As far as is known, East Jerusalem was not included in the areas in which a construction freeze was agreed upon with Mitchell.<sup>4</sup>

Following the understandings that were achieved, it seemed that Israel and the US were in agreement over the basic parameters concerning renewed political negotiations with the Palestinians. In his State of the Union speech (January 27, 2010), the president avoided any mention of Israel and the issue of an accord with the Palestinians. There were those who interpreted his omission – considering the circumstances, the president's intensive involvement in an Israeli-Palestinian accommodation, and the high importance he ascribed to the issue in US national priorities – as an expression of satisfaction, even if relative, with the existing situation. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went even further and confirmed Prime Minister Netanyahu's declaration: that there was never a demand to stop settlement construction as a condition to negotiations. She even complimented Prime Minister Netanyahu

for his willingness, more than that of any prime minister of Israel, to implement moves to freeze construction activity in the West Bank.<sup>5</sup> The president seemed to acknowledge the limits of his ability to impose the initial sweeping demands on Israel when he said: “We overestimated our ability to promote peace between Israel and the Palestinians.”<sup>6</sup>

### Construction in East Jerusalem

Within a short time it became clear to the Obama administration that the understandings achieved with the Netanyahu government fell well short of satisfying the Palestinian Authority, which was not prepared to renew negotiations with Israel based on those understandings. It appeared that the root of disagreement was mainly the issue of construction in East Jerusalem. Added to these actual issues were most probably feelings of frustration and rage in the higher echelons of the administration. This was due to rising criticism over the continued deadlock in the peace process as well as media reports in Israel that from the Netanyahu-Obama confrontation, the prime minister emerged with the upper hand.

It is also possible the American administration received leaks that right wing factions in the Netanyahu government saw the freeze agreement as a lever to undermine the understandings between the Sharon and Olmert governments and President Bush. These limited the right for continued construction to settlement blocs only. Based on this interpretation, the freeze agreements abolish the unique dimension of settlement blocs and in fact produce an identical ranking among communities in settlement blocs and isolated settlements. From the standpoint of a right wing government whose senior figures seek to preserve Israeli control over the entire West Bank, this development could be considered a significant, positive achievement.<sup>7</sup>

Within a short time the calm that ostensibly prevailed between Israel and the US evaporated. The issue of continued construction in Jerusalem, the most sensitive nerve center of Israeli-Palestinian relations, rose to the top of the agenda, leading to what some might call one of the most serious crises in Israel-US relations.

The dispute on the issue made headlines during the visit to Israel of Vice President Joe Biden (March 2010), following reports on the approval of permits for 1,600 new housing units in Ramat Shlomo in East Jerusalem. These types of disclosures are not an unusual phenomenon.

Many administration figures have been apprised of decisions on settlements shortly before or during their visits to Israel. In general, such announcements led to temporary rage, which would ebb during the visit. But this time the situation was different. The announcement led to unprecedented anger and astonishment in the vice president's delegation over the stinging insult suffered by the American guest during his visit to Israel. This visit, it was claimed, was meant to enlist the US vice president's sympathy for Israel to create a reconciliatory atmosphere in relations between the two countries and improve the relationship in light of the prevailing friction. It was meant to bring the sides closer towards declaring the opening of proximity talks. However the provocative steps of the Israeli government overturned those efforts.

Despite the anger, tensions seemed to subside during the visit, due to Netanyahu's willingness to apologize for the incident and pledge that his government would act to prevent the recurrence of such phenomena. Eli Yishai, minister of the interior and direct overseer of building committees, also quickly apologized for the insult to the vice president. However, as time went by it became evident that what transpired was not buried so easily. Within a short time, leaks emerged from administration circles in Washington that President Obama was fuming and did not intend to overlook this serious incident. Joe Biden, as White House circles reported, came to Israel in order to work towards renewing peace talks with the Palestinians; the announcement on construction came just as he was prepared to express full and unqualified US commitment to the security of Israel.<sup>8</sup>

This conduct of the Obama administration alters the rules of the game that have formed over the years between the US and Israel.

The impression among different circles in Israel was that the Obama administration decided to use the unexpected and humiliating incident in Jerusalem to embarrass Israel and extract a commitment that previously had not been demanded: to agree, during early stages of discussions towards the possible renewal of negotiations between the sides, to avoid continued

construction in extensive areas of East Jerusalem. Over the years, an unwritten agreement had formed between Israel and the US that Jerusalem is the most difficult issue to resolve and thus any discussion of arrangements concerning the city would be postponed for the final stages

of negotiations. This far reaching demand on the part of President Obama prompted a supposition among circles defining themselves as “close to the office of the Prime Minister,” to the effect that the administration’s sentiments of rage were not an expression of authentic anger. Instead they were a careful ambush meant to force the Netanyahu government into de facto recognition of the principle of dividing Jerusalem between Israel and the Palestinian Authority – even prior to the start of negotiations.<sup>9</sup>

The administration tried to reaffirm its demand for a construction freeze in East Jerusalem by asking Prime Minister Netanyahu to respond to a series of concrete questions as early as possible. This tactic of presenting questions was also employed in the past in dialogues with Israel. One recalls the questions referred by the Kennedy administration to Ben-Gurion concerning the reactor in Dimona (January 1961) and the questions of US Secretary of State James Baker to Prime Minister Shamir (1991–92). In part this technique is meant to convey the image of an hierarchal relationship between Israel and the administration, between the questioner and the one questioned. The administration’s questions were ultimately supposed to bring about acceptance of the demand to cease construction in different areas of East Jerusalem. Serving the questions in a subpoena-like fashion and the atmosphere of urgency regarding a response were meant to demonstrate to the Israeli government that at work was an order, not a request. Unlike in the past, the administration’s aim was to avoid entering a prolonged dialogue that would lead to an erosion of its demands.

Since then it appears that with the demand for a total freeze on settlements, Obama has understood, albeit gradually, that a sweeping demand to freeze construction in East Jerusalem is extremely hard to implement. Perhaps the demand is unrealistic and as such cannot be realized as it was formulated. In practice, it has become evident to the administration that the Israeli government possesses tools, even if limited in scope, to weather the stormy winds blowing in Israel’s direction from the administration. Thus the sense of urgency the administration sought in order to oblige the Israeli government to give answers under time pressure has eroded, as significantly, the Israeli government intentionally delayed its answer

It seems that the administration has essentially come to terms with the fact that the Netanyahu government will not accede to all of its demands.



to the US demands. At the same time, explicit and implicit threats of the administration's intent to present a peace plan of its own have ebbed, and the extensive criticism at home and abroad has waned somewhat.<sup>10</sup>

When the prime minister ultimately gave his answer, it became clear to the Obama administration that the Israeli government also possesses the option to respond negatively to the president's demands, despite its awareness of the great risk this entails. From the multitude of reports, it appears that Israel's negative answer was softened skillfully with fuzzy wording given to different interpretations, with a professed willingness for various gestures to the Palestinians and, apparently, a slowdown and curbing of construction in different neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. From the viewpoint of the current Israeli government, the price it was forced to pay in order to appease the administration temporarily was reasonable. The fact that decisions on the freeze did not spark serious protests in right wing circles inside and outside the government (and even among settlers in Judea and Samaria) shows that the price was almost certainly tolerable from their point of view. From a formal standpoint, a sort of precedent of no small importance was established in the shaping of future relations between Israel and the Obama administration: non-agreement to the president's unilateral demand to freeze construction in East Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup>

Within the framework of the administration's pressure on the Israeli government to accept its demands regarding an Israeli-Palestinian accord, it crossed a line in its treatment of Israel.

It now seems that the administration has essentially come to terms with the fact that it will not receive full agreement to all of its demands from the Netanyahu government. Its responses following Israel's answer were measured and guarded. Actually, clear signs have been evident in recent weeks of the administration's readiness to appease Israel and its government. At the same time, there is a new self-scrutiny in the administration on the question of its policy for advancing an Israeli-Palestinian accord in general and the question of

its relations with Israel in particular. Based on numerous reports, the president recently said to a delegation of Democratic senators that there had indeed been missteps in the administration's handling of disputes with Israel: "I walked through a minefield and lost a few fingers."<sup>12</sup>



To summarize the current state of affairs, although the prime minister emerged beaten and bruised from his recent skirmish with the president and secretary of state, from his standpoint he scored very important points in his continued handling of the peace process vis-à-vis the Palestinians and vis-à-vis the United States. He weathered the most serious crisis he has faced since the beginning of his term after making it clear to the administration that Jerusalem is one of his government's red lines. Meantime, his domestic political standing remains firm, and has perhaps even grown.<sup>13</sup>

### **Where is the Obama Administration Headed?**

If the prime minister supposes – which is presumably not the case – that he has reached a secure, calm position, he will likely soon be proven false. The administration's demands concerning cessation of construction in East Jerusalem and countless statements by senior officials in the Obama administration, including the president himself, are expressions of a well defined outlook, somewhat different from in the past. The outlook concerns the administration's perception of the required degree of resolve in advancing an Israeli-Palestinian accord, Israel's standing in the international system, and its relations with the American administration.

This change is not reflected in positions the Obama administration presents on the issue of an Israeli-Palestinian accord: these positions are very close to those presented by almost all American administrations since the Six Day War, including presidents considered sympathetic to Israel such as President Clinton. In general terms, the agreement will likely comprise the following basic components:

- a. Israel will withdraw to the June 4, 1967 border with Jordan.
- b. Several border adjustments will be made to allow heavily populated Jewish settlements beyond the Green Line to remain under Israeli sovereignty, apparently in the spirit of the April 14, 2004 letter of President George W. Bush to Ariel Sharon.
- c. These border adjustments will oblige Israel to transfer land in Israeli territory to the Palestinians.
- d. Jerusalem will be divided between Israel and the new Palestinian state and special arrangements will be made regarding control over holy places.

- e. No formal recognition will be conferred on the Palestinian demand to the right of return for refugees. However, the administration is likely to demand that Israel agree to accept a limited number of refugees, such that the Palestinian right of return is to some extent recognized without fundamentally endangering Israel's Jewish character.<sup>14</sup>

The administration can claim – and with a great deal of justification – that this outline clearly represents the national interests of the State of Israel. Similar plans were offered to the Palestinians by two Israeli prime ministers: Ehud Barak, at the Camp David conference, and Ehud Olmert towards the end of his term as prime minister. The Obama administration can claim that practically speaking, it is helping Israel realize its most vital interests. Already in his Cairo speech, Obama exhorted that the sole solution lies in the aspirations of both sides being realized through two states in which Palestinians and Israelis live side by side in peace and security. The solution is “in the interest of Israel, the interest of Palestine, the interest of America, and the interest of the world.” It is quite possible the administration assumes that its pressures on Israel help the prime minister set in motion the accommodation process he would want, if not given to severe political pressure at home.<sup>15</sup>

President Obama's actions and statements on an Israeli-Palestinian accord raise justified concerns over a new, far reaching trend in the winds blowing from the White House: the creation of a new framework of game rules, different from in the past, between Israel and the US. If these concerns indeed materialize, their primary expressions would be a sterilized version of the unique Israel-US relationship and a fading of the empathy and special relations between the two countries. The new relationship, if indeed set in place, would be based on explicit rules of give and take and cost versus benefit in the narrowest sense of the word, with an emphasis on presenting Israel as an American liability rather than an asset.<sup>16</sup>

This turning point in US policy towards Israel will materialize if the Obama administration concludes that an Israeli-Palestinian accord is a top priority from a US standpoint, and if the Israeli government's conduct seems to intentionally stymie the realization of such an accord. Should this indeed become the administration's sense, it could lead to an overall change in relations with Israel, including within contexts unaffected thus

far, i.e., the security level, strategic cooperation, economic ties, and the administration's support for Israel in international organizations.<sup>17</sup>

From the standpoint of the current Israeli government, this dangerous trend is intensifying due to President Obama's firm decision to throw all his weight behind plans to bring about this change. Obama made this fervent commitment unequivocally clear in his Cairo speech: "I intend to personally pursue this purpose [resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict] with all the patience that the task requires."<sup>18</sup> In the reality created since Obama entered office, the lack of substantial progress towards an accord necessarily signifies a serious blow to the prestige of a president wishing to run for a second term. The president is clearly in desperate need of political success in the international arena in order to strengthen his political standing.

Within the framework of the administration's pressure on the Israeli government to accept its demands regarding an Israeli-Palestinian accord, it crossed a line in its treatment of Israel. Very senior officials in the American administration created a clear association between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the one hand, and the ability of the US to confront threats from radical Islam on the other. The strongest statement was attributed to General David Petraeus, commander of the US Central Command. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 16, 2010, the general enumerated root causes of instability or obstacles to security in the areas under his command. Among other factors, he mentioned the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the lack of an accord between the two sides.

The enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the AOR [area of responsibility]. Israeli-Palestinian tensions often flare into violence and large scale armed confrontations. The conflict foments anti-American sentiments due to a perception of US favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of US partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support.<sup>19</sup>

In media reports it was stressed that the significance of this declaration was its positioning of Israel as a factor endangering the lives of American soldiers fighting in the Middle East. Although in a conversation with IDF Chief of Staff Ashkenazi General Petraeus took pains to explain that he did not make such a statement, the message attributed to him had already permeated American public opinion. For its part, the administration did not display any efforts to refute those remarks.<sup>20</sup> Similar statements followed, though more nebulous, from the secretary of defense and the president. President Obama was quoted in several reports as declaring that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “is costing us significantly in terms of both blood and treasure.”<sup>21</sup>

The bottom line of these statements – whether or not worded explicitly as such – is the positioning of Israel by the most senior figures in the administration in a regrettable and defensive situation within American public opinion. This occurs notwithstanding that administration figures almost certainly understand that claims of this sort have no solid basis, since:

- a. Israel is involved in the US military’s combat against Islamic terror groups through a broad variety of courses of action.
- b. The war of Islamic terror groups against the US is the expression of a war against all of Western culture in which the “Great Satan,” the US, is its chief representative. Israel plays a marginal role as the “Little Satan.”
- c. Even if an Israeli-Palestinian accord is signed that leads to peace and mutual acceptance between Israel and the Palestinians, it will be unacceptable to the radical terror groups the US is currently combating.<sup>22</sup>

Thus it seems highly inappropriate for such senior figures in the administration to suggest such claims if the aim is to preserve a relationship of allies between Israel and the US.

## Conclusion

The bottom line of this essay suggests that there is a possible inclination on the part of the Obama administration to bring about a dramatic change in Israel’s unique status in the US. At this stage, this trend is expressed solely regarding the issue of an Israeli-Palestinian accord. Other issues in Israel-US relations – economic assistance, security cooperation, strategic

dialogue, support for Israel at international institutions, longstanding US commitment to Israel's nuclear policy, and others – at this time remain fairly intact, though some have been targeted and sustained painful hits.<sup>23</sup>

Numerous and diverse considerations will guide the Obama administration on the question of future US-Israel relations. Different opinions are no doubt circulating in the administration on the question of its continued treatment of an Israeli-Palestinian accord in general and its attitude to Israel in particular. Public admissions by the president and his close advisors on mistakes that accompanied the administration's moves in the region thus far clearly indicate that the determination and self-confidence that accompanied those moves has somewhat ebbed. Critical factors that will influence the administration's process of policymaking include the reactions of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority; strategic developments in the Middle East, mainly in the Iranian matter; weighty political constraints at home; and other burning problems around the world, be they political, military, or economic. These will likely oblige the president to adjust the list of priorities that he has embraced thus far.<sup>24</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Obama's speech in Cairo, June 4, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09>.
- 2 See Barak Ravid, "Obama: US will be honest with Israel on settlements," *Haaretz*, June 2, 2009.
- 3 Elliott Abrams, "The Settlement Freeze Fallacy," *Washington Post*, April 8, 2009.
- 4 Barak Ravid, "Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu: 'Disputes with the US on construction in the West Bank have been solved,'" *Haaretz*, October 19, 2009. See also the interview with Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman concerning the settlement construction freeze, Foreign Ministry website, November 26, 2009.
- 5 Joint press conference of Netanyahu and Hillary Clinton, October 31, 2009, website of the Prime Minister's Office, <http://www.women.gov.il/PMO/Communication/EventsDiary/eventclinton311009.htm>.
- 6 "Obama: 'We overestimated our ability to advance peace between Israel and the Palestinians,'" *Haaretz*, November 21, 2009; "Obama: We cannot force a peace agreement," Galei Tzahal, April 22, 2010, website article <http://glz.co.il/NewsArticle.aspx?newsid=60836>.
- 7 Speech of Haim Ramon at the INSS Yariv memorial "State of the Nation" conference, May 17, 2010.
- 8 Jonathan Weber, "New York Times: Israel's construction green light 'slap in the face,'" *Ynet*, March 11, 2010.

- 9 Ran Dagoni, "Washington Post: Escalation with Israel – Obama's personal directive," *Globes*, March 16, 2010.
- 10 Barak Ravid, "US: We expect answers from Israel within a day," *Haaretz*, March 17, 2010. See also Barak Ravid, "Intensification of Crisis with the US: Obama demands a written commitment from Netanyahu on confidence building measures," *Haaretz*, March 25, 2010.
- 11 Mark Landler, "Netanyahu Takes Hard Line on Jerusalem Housing," *New York Times*, March 22, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/23/world/middleeast/23diplo.html>.
- 12 Ran Dagoni, "Obama Confesses: Israel has a special place in the heart," *Globes*, May 20, 2010. Even more explicit remarks are attributed to Rahm Emanuel. According to one report he said: "We screwed up in our relations with Israel." See Shlomo Cezana, "White House Chief of Staff in a Discussion with Rabbis: 'It will take time to fix what we spoiled in 14 months,'" *Yisarel Hayom*, May 17, 2010.
- 13 Barak Ravid, "Defense Minister Ehud Barak: In order to move forward in negotiations we must broaden the government," *Haaretz*, May 3, 2010.
- 14 Ran Dagoni, "One Fell Swoop? Leak from Washington on a comprehensive peace plan," *Globes*, April 7, 2010.
- 15 Natasha Mozgovaya, "Barack Obama following his meeting with Mahmoud Abbas: The two-state solution – an Israeli interest," *Haaretz*, May 29, 2009. On the Olmert accord proposal see: Zaki Shalom, "Oslo Revisited: Are the Fundamental Assumptions Still Valid?" *INSS Insight* No. 122, August 7, 2009. Details of the proposals of Prime Minister Olmert to the Palestinians were also given by Minister Benny Begin and Haim Ramon at the INSS Yariv memorial "State of the Nation" conference, INSS, May 17, 2010, as well as by Saeb Erekat at a lecture at the Institute for National Security Studies, May 16, 2010.
- 16 Yonatan Liss, "Head of Mossad to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee: Israel gradually evolving from asset to liability for the US," *Haaretz*, June 1, 2010.
- 17 Amos Harel, "Funding Found for Iron Dome: US President Barack Obama," *Haaretz*, May 13, 2010. See also: Aluf Benn, "Take Prestige, Give Concessions: Israel's path to the OECD goes through Obama," *Haaretz*, May 13, 2010. See also: Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu Surprisingly Invited to Meet with President Obama in Washington Next Week," *Haaretz*, May 26, 2010.
- 18 Obama's speech in Cairo, June 4, 2009.
- 19 Statement of General David Petraeus before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Posture of US Central Command, March 16, 2010.
- 20 Amir Oren, "American General Petraeus to Chief of Staff Ashkenazi: 'I didn't say you were endangering Americans,'" *Haaretz*, March 25, 2010.
- 21 Yitzhak Benhorin, "Obama Taking Reins on Policy towards Mideast Conflict," *Ynet*, April 16, 2010.

- 22 Hilary Leila Krieger, "Arab-Israeli Conflict Hurts US: Petraeus tells Congress hostility presents challenges to US interests in ME," *Jerusalem Post*, March 18, 2010.
- 23 On the troubling change in the US position towards Israel's nuclear status, see Barak Ravid, "Israel: Not obligated to the nuclear conference resolution," *Haaretz*, May 29, 2010. On the decreased support by the US for Israel in UN institutions, see Elliott Abrams, "Joining the Jackals: The Obama administration abandons Israel," *Weekly Standard.Com*, June 2, 2010, <http://www.weeklystandard.com>. See also Anne Bayefsky, "Obama Abandons Israel to UN Feeding Frenzy," *FOXNews.com*, June 01, 2010, <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2010/06/01/anne-bayefsky-obama-abandons-israel/>.
- 24 On the constraints applied on the president at home see: Lahav Harkov, "Senators Stress Value of US-Israel Ties, Bipartisan letter to Obama administration signed by 3/4 of Senate," *Jerusalem Post*, April 14, 2010. See also: "Author Elie Wiesel in an Open Letter to US President Obama: Jerusalem is above politics," *Haaretz*, April 16, 2010. See also Akiva Eldar, "The Day's Topic: 'Alan Dershowitz, why in your opinion did Obama humiliate Netanyahu?'" *Haaretz*, March 28, 2010; and letter from Ronald S. Lauder to President Obama, at <http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/main/showNews/id/9264>.