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PART B6

**From:** sbwhoeop [redacted]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 17, 2010 10:15 AM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** H: Israel, couple of things. Sid

H: In case you haven't seen it, this is the fully articulated view of the Netanyahu government and Likud about "the crisis." The New Republic is a preferred outlet for the highest level Likud/neocon propaganda. Michael Oren, a channel for Israeli intel, was a frequent contributor in the past. On a lower level, so was Michael Ledeen when he was trafficking disinformation. The New Republic was critical in undermining Carter when he pressed Begin. Israeli intel used Ledeen and TNR to put out the stories on Billy Carter. But TNR is only one key being hit in the Wurlitzer. Here's one small but frank thing: Axelrod should not be a foreign policy spokesman on any issue or area. He has badly exacerbated this one. Many people in the press feel he's out of his lane and resent being lectured by him on foreign policy. Foreign Policy magazine website has run a piece on this, reflecting widespread sentiment. (I've enclosed this article below the TNR one below.) I'd make Steinberg tell Donilon they need to rein in Axelrod. Axelrod has enough to do fixing the domestic messes he's made. Let it come from Steinberg. He's unhappy anyway. Sid

<http://www.tnr.com/article/world/the-crisis?page=0,0>



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## The Crisis

Was Obama's confrontation with Israel premeditated?

- Yossi Klein Halevi
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JERUSALEM—Suddenly, my city feels again like a war zone. Since the suicide bombings ended in 2005, life in Jerusalem has been for the most part relatively calm. The worst disruptions have been the traffic jams resulting from construction of a light rail, just like in a normal city. But now, again, there are clusters of helmeted border police near the gates of the Old City, black smoke from burning tires in the Arab village across from my porch, young men marching with green Islamist flags toward my neighborhood, ambulances parked at strategic places ready for this city's ultimate nightmare.

The return of menace to Jerusalem is not because a mid-level bureaucrat announced stage four of a seven-stage process in the eventual construction of 1,600 apartments in Ramat Shlomo, a Jewish neighborhood in northeast Jerusalem. Such announcements and building projects have become so routine over the years that Palestinians have scarcely responded, let alone violently. In negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, the permanence of Ramat Shlomo, and other Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, has been a given. Ramat Shlomo, located between the Jewish neighborhoods of French Hill and Ramot, will remain within the boundaries of Israeli Jerusalem according to every peace plan. Unlike the small Jewish enclaves inserted into Arab neighborhoods, on which Israelis are strongly divided, building in the established Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem defines the national consensus.

Why, then, the outbreak of violence now? Why Hamas's "day of rage" over Jerusalem and the Palestinian Authority's call to gather on the Temple Mount to "save" the Dome of the Rock from non-existent plans to build the Third Temple? Why

the sudden outrage over rebuilding a synagogue, destroyed by the Jordanians in 1948, in the Old City's Jewish Quarter, when dozens of synagogues and yeshivas have been built in the quarter without incident?

The answer lies not in Jerusalem but in Washington. By placing the issue of building in Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem at the center of the peace process, President Obama has inadvertently challenged the Palestinians to do no less.

Astonishingly, Obama is repeating the key tactical mistake of his failed efforts to restart Middle East peace talks over the last year. Though Obama's insistence on a settlement freeze to help restart negotiations was legitimate, he went a step too far by including building in East Jerusalem. Every Israeli government over the last four decades has built in the Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem; no government, let alone one headed by the Likud, could possibly agree to a freeze there. Obama made resumption of negotiations hostage to a demand that could not be met. The result was that Palestinian leaders were forced to adjust their demands accordingly.

Obama is directly responsible for one of the most absurd turns in the history of Middle East negotiations. Though Palestinian leaders negotiated with Israeli governments that built extensively in the West Bank, they now refused to sit down with the first Israeli government to actually agree to a suspension of building. Obama's demand for a building freeze in Jerusalem led to a freeze in negotiations.

Finally, after intensive efforts, the administration produced the pathetic achievement of "proximity talks"—setting Palestinian-Israeli negotiations back a generation, to the time when Palestinian leaders refused to sit at the same table with Israelis.

That Obama could be guilty of such amateurishness was perhaps forgivable because he was, after all, an amateur. But he has now taken his failed policy and intensified it. By demanding that Israel stop building in Ramat Shlomo and elsewhere in East Jerusalem—and placing that demand at the center of American-Israeli relations—he's ensured that the Palestinians won't show up even to proximity talks. This is no longer amateurishness; it is pique disguised as policy.

**Initially, when the announcement about building in Ramat Shlomo was made, Israelis shared Vice President Biden's humiliation and were outraged at their government's incompetence. The widespread sense here was that Netanyahu deserved the administration's condemnation, not because of what he did but because of what he didn't do: He failed to convey to all parts of his government the need for caution during Biden's visit, symptomatic of his chaotic style of governing generally.**

But not even the opposition accused Netanyahu of a deliberate provocation. These are not the days of Yitzhak Shamir, the former Israeli prime minister who used to greet a visit from Secretary of State James Baker with an announcement of the creation of another West Bank settlement. Netanyahu has placed the need for strategic cooperation with the U.S. on the Iranian threat ahead of the right-wing political agenda. That's why he included the Labor Party into his coalition, and why he accepted a two-state solution—an historic achievement that set the Likud, however reluctantly, within the mainstream consensus supporting Palestinian statehood. The last thing Netanyahu wanted was to embarrass Biden during his goodwill visit and trigger a clash with Obama over an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood.

Nor is it likely that there was a deliberate provocation from the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, which runs the interior ministry that oversees building procedures. Shas, which supports peace talks and territorial compromise, is not a nationalist party. Its interest is providing housing for its constituents, like the future residents of Ramat Shlomo; provoking international incidents is not its style.

Finally, the very ordinariness of the building procedure—the fact that construction in Jewish East Jerusalem is considered by Israelis routine—is perhaps the best proof that there was no intentional ambush of Biden. Apparently no one in the interior ministry could imagine that a long-term plan over Ramat Shlomo would sabotage a state visit.

In turning an incident into a crisis, Obama has convinced many Israelis that he was merely seeking a pretext to pick a fight with Israel. Netanyahu was inadvertently shabby; Obama, deliberately so.

According to a banner headline in the newspaper *Ma'ariv*, senior Likud officials believe that Obama's goal is to topple the Netanyahu government, by encouraging those in the Labor Party who want to quit the coalition.

The popular assumption is that Obama is seeking to prove his resolve as a leader by getting tough with Israel. Given his ineffectiveness against Iran and his tendency to violate his own self-imposed deadlines for sanctions, the Israeli public is not likely to be impressed. Indeed, Israelis' initial anger at Netanyahu has turned to anger against Obama. According to an Israel Radio poll on March 16, 62 percent of Israelis blame the Obama administration for the crisis, while 20 percent blame Netanyahu. (Another 17 percent blame Shas leader Eli Yishai.)

In the last year, the administration has not once publicly condemned the Palestinians for lack of good faith—even though the Palestinian Authority media has, for example, been waging a months-long campaign denying the Jews' historic roots in Jerusalem. Just after Biden left Ramallah, Palestinian officials held a ceremony naming a square in the city after a terrorist responsible for the massacre of 38 Israeli civilians. That too didn't merit an administration rebuke.

Obama's one-sided public pressure against Israel could intensify the atmosphere of "open season" against Israel internationally. Indeed, the European Union has reaffirmed it is linking improved economic relations with Israel to the resumption of the peace process—as if it's Israel rather than the Palestinians that has refused to come to the table.

If the administration's main tactical error in Middle East negotiating was emphasizing building in Jerusalem, its main strategic error was assuming that a two-state solution was within easy reach. Shortly after Obama took office, Rahm Emanuel was quoted in the Israeli press insisting that a Palestinian state would be created within Obama's first term. Instead, a year later, we are in the era of suspended proximity talks. Now the administration is demanding that Israel negotiate over final status issues in proximity talks as a way of convincing the Palestinians to agree to those talks--as if Israelis would agree to discuss the future of Jerusalem when Palestinian leaders refuse to even sit with them. To insist on the imminent possibility of a two-state solution requires amnesia. Biden's plea to Israelis to consider a withdrawal to an approximation of the 1967 borders in exchange for peace ignored the fact that Israel made that offer twice in the last decade: first, when Prime Minister Ehud Barak accepted the Clinton Proposals of December 2000, and then more recently when Prime Minister Ehud Olmert renewed the offer to Mahmoud Abbas. Abbas, says Olmert, never replied.

The reason for Palestinian rejection of a two-state solution is because a deal would require Palestinians to confine the return of the descendants of the 1948 refugees to Palestine rather than to Israel. That would prevent a two-state solution from devolving into a bi-national, one-state solution. Israel's insistence on survival remains the obstacle to peace. To achieve eventual peace, the international community needs to pressure Palestinian leaders to forgo their claim to Haifa and Jaffa and confine their people's right of return to a future Palestinian state—just as the Jews will need to forgo their claim to Hebron and Bethlehem and confine their people's right of return to the state of Israel. That is the only possible deal: conceding my right of return to Greater Israel in exchange for your right of return to Greater Palestine. A majority of Israelis—along with the political system—has accepted that principle. On the Palestinian side, the political system has rejected it.

In the absence of Palestinian willingness to compromise on the right of return, negotiations should not focus on a two-state solution but on more limited goals.

There have been positive signs of change on the Palestinian side in the last few years. The rise of Hamas has created panic within Fatah, and the result is, for the first time, genuine security cooperation with Israel. Also, the emergence of Salam Fayyad as Palestinian prime minister marks a shift from ideological to pragmatic leadership (though Fayyad still lacks a power base). Finally, the West Bank economy is growing, thanks in part to Israel's removal of dozens of roadblocks. The goal of negotiations at this point in the conflict should be to encourage those trends.

But by focusing on building in Jerusalem, Obama has undermined that possibility too. To the fictitious notion of a peace process, Obama has now added the fiction of an intransigent Israel blocking the peace process.

The administration, according to a report in the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Aharonot, is making an even more insidious accusation against Israel. During his visit, wrote Yedioth Aharonot, Biden told Israeli leaders that their policies are endangering American lives in Afghanistan and Iraq. The report has been denied in the White House. Whether or not the remark was made, what is clear today in Jerusalem is that Obama's recklessness is endangering Israeli—and Palestinian—lives. As I listen to police sirens outside my window, Obama's political intifada against Netanyahu seems to be turning into a third intifada over Jerusalem.

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## Will David Axelrod please be quiet, please?

Posted By [Daniel W. Drezner](#) □ Monday, March 15, 2010

Commentary's [Jennifer Rubin](#) is reacting way out of proportion to [David Axelrod's](#) [tour of the Sunday morning talk shows](#). That said, she's got a germ of a good point:

David Axelrod — a political operative who now seems at the center of foreign-policy formulation (more on this later) — went on the Fox, ABC, and NBC Sunday talk shows to repeat how insulted the Obami were over Israeli building in Jerusalem and what an effort this was to them....

[I]t might have something to do with the fact that Axelrod and the Chicago pols are running foreign policy. It's attack, attack, attack — just as they do any domestic critic.

Quibble away with Rubin's characterization of "Chicago pols," but she does raise a decent question: why on God's green earth is the Obama equivalent of Karl Rove talking about foreign policy in public?

Since [the VIP trip from Hell](#), it's clear that the Obama administration has ratcheted up the rhetoric in private, in public, in press leaks and through multilateral channels to their Israeli counterparts. Given what transpired, it's entirely appropriate that the Obama administration make its displeasure felt publicly.

Why Axelrod, however? Sure, the Sunday morning talk shows wanted to talk health care as well. And it's true that Axelrod, thought of as pro-Israel, could send a tough signal. Still, couldn't the administration have sent Hillary Clinton to one of the Sunday morning talk shows instead? Wouldn't she have been the more appropriate spokesman. I've spent enough time inside the Beltway to be leery of the gossip tidbits I collect when I'm down there. That said, there was one persistent drumbeat I heard during my last sojourn -- that Axelrod and the political advisors were acting as Obama's foreign policy gatekeepers. Now, I am shocked, *shocked*, that politicians are thinking about foreign policy in a political manner. That said, there is a balance to be struck between political and policy advisors. Even David Frum admitted that this balance got out of whack during the Bush administration. I'd like to see things return to the pre-21st century equilibrium. It would be disturbing if the new equilibrium is that someone like David Axelrod becomes the foreign policy czar.