

Don Futterman

## When a prime minister plays kingmaker

By trying to interfere in the U.S. presidential elections, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has broken faith with American Jewry.

On no previous trip to New York can I recall so many American Jewish friends asking me to explain what Israel's premier is up to. These loyal Israel supporters are equally rattled by the idea that Israel seems as if it is about to launch a war against Iran, by Netanyahu's attempts to dictate terms that could limit the United States' freedom to act, and by an Israeli prime minister so baldly meddling in the race for the American presidency.

Just two weeks ago, Americans were dismayed by the murder of an American ambassador and members of his staff in Libya, and then watched Islamic hatred explode across the globe. Islamic government leaders called upon the U.S. to arrest the maker of an allegedly blasphemous film for insulting their faith, showing their poor understanding of freedom of speech but their fine grasp of police-state tactics.

By chance, author Salman Rushdie recently resurfaced with a book about his years in hiding, reminding the English-speaking world of Iran's leading role in promoting a violent and intolerant form of Islam. According to the author, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered Rushdie's murder in 1989 without having read "The Satanic Verses," based on his son's comment that the book was blasphemous – not that better research could have justified the subsequent fatwa, the riots or the attacks on translators and bookstores that left dozens dead over the last 23 years.

Americans believe blasphemy is a private affair and reject political cultures that promote mob violence to support absolutist religious dogmas. With these latest events, the ball was teed up perfectly for Netanyahu to convince America that the United States must keep Iran free of nuclear weapons.

Last week, Netanyahu's misguided attempts to unseat the U.S. president and his toxic dependency on Sheldon Adelson prevented him from getting his message across. On NBC-TV's "Meet the Press," Netanyahu argued that it is in Americans' interests for their government to articulate "red lines" beyond which it would not allow Iran's nuclear program to proceed without risking direct American military intervention. But Netanyahu had to bend himself into a pretzel to avoid answering questions from the show's host, David Gregory, about whether he supported his "old friend" Mitt Romney's charge that President Obama had "thrown allies like Israel under the bus."

Indeed, how could Netanyahu deny that he has been trying to get Romney elected after so publicly courting Republicans, dressing down President Obama on international television, and endlessly undermining his administration? It is not by chance that the same Sheldon Adelson who bankrolls a free Israeli newspaper – a daily

paean to Netanyahu and mouthpiece for the Likud – has, by his own admission this week, already spent \$70 million to defeat Obama.

Netanyahu and his sugar daddy may have been able to buy Republican support for their pet positions: that Iran must be attacked and settlements allowed to flourish. They forgot to consider the possibility that Obama might be reelected. At this moment, it seems Netanyahu may have bet on the wrong horse, but why was the leader of the Jewish state betting on horses at all?

Netanyahu headed to the United Nations this week, to debate Iran's nuclear program, having antagonized the American president – whom Israel needs more than anyone on the planet to stop Iran. If the future of the Jewish people is once again at risk, why has our leader gambled with the goodwill of the United States? Are settlements worth it? Is Netanyahu's right-wing coalition worth it? Is Netanyahu worth it?

Iranian leader Ahmadinejad, in his UN speech, claimed Iran was the nation under threat, from "uncivilized Zionists," but initial media coverage noted how tame this lame duck president's talk was compared to past provocations. While the U.S. delegation walked out on the Iranian leader, the stage was hardly set for a doomsday message from Netanyahu (who was scheduled to address the body after these lines were written).

And Netanyahu is so deep inside his right-wing bubble he can't see how many American Jews he is alienating. U.S. Jews, like other Americans, and like Israelis, don't like foreign leaders meddling in their internal politics. The non-Orthodox liberal majority of American Jewry is appalled by Netanyahu's Republican

allies, and knows their antipathy toward liberal values could undermine the bedrock of American Jewish prosperity. While it may be a sign of how secure American Jews feel that there's little discussion among them of the danger posed by an outrageously wealthy Jewish gambling mogul trying to buy the White House for his candidate – no student of anti-Semitism can believe this is good for the Jews.

The Iranian threat should never have become a partisan issue in U.S. election politics. If only our prime minister could have looked after Israel's interest with dispassionate concern instead of trying to play kingmaker. Due to the damage he has done to Israel's relationship with the U.S. administration and the personal animus he has demonstrated toward one of the most supportive American presidents Israel has ever known, Netanyahu's legacy may prove more apocalyptic than messianic. His failure could be epic and historic.

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*At the moment, it seems Netanyahu may have bet on the wrong horse, but why was the leader of the Jewish state betting on horses at all?*

Raymond Barrett

## The dangers of playing at regime change

When is an Iranian terrorist not a terrorist? When it comes to the exiled opposition group Mujahideen-e Khalq, the answer is simple: whenever the West says so.

The delisting of the MEK as a "foreign terrorist organization" (FTO) by the U.S. State Department (following similar moves in the United Kingdom and the European Union) comes after an intense million-dollar lobbying campaign in Washington involving incumbent congressmen, former White House security officials and retired four-star generals. Luminaries such as former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former Congressman Patrick Kennedy and presidential also-ran Newt Gingrich have all insisted that the group (founded with a Marxist-Islamist philosophy) no longer deserves the moniker of FTO, despite having both American and Iranian blood on its hands.

Of course the hypocrisy in this decision is staggering. One of the reasons the U.S. and the U.K. offered for invading Iraq in 2003 was Saddam Hussein's harboring of "terrorists" such as the MEK. Notwithstanding the moral relativism of first condemning and then supporting "terrorism," depending on which way the wind blows, the efficacy of Washington supporting the MEK to achieve its aim of regime change in Iran is also dubious.

Led by the husband and wife team of Maryam and Massoud Rajavi, the MEK has been blamed by U.S. officials for the killing of American military personnel and defense contractors working for Rockwell International during the 1970s – a period when Washington supported Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's tenuous grasp on power.

The MEK supported the Iranian revolution in 1979 before coming into conflict with the new Islamic Republic headed by Ayatollah Khomeini. Once the clerics consolidated their grip on power, some MEK leaders were tried and executed, thus forcing others into exile. After finding a home in Iraq, the MEK fought alongside Iraqi troops after Saddam Hussein ordered the invasion of Iran in 1980, an eight-year conflict that left an estimated one million Iranians dead – a fact conveniently (and shamelessly) omitted by MEK's U.S. supporters. The MEK also participated in suppressing the Shi'ite uprising in southern Iraq after Operation Desert Storm in 1991.

While "terrorist" groups in Ireland and elsewhere have evolved into legitimate political movements over time, the MEK has been linked to recent assassinations of civilian members of Iran's nuclear program – one outside his daughter's nursery school – reportedly at the behest of Israel and with the tacit blessing of the U.S.

From a hawkish U.S. policy perspective, the logic for the delisting appears straightforward. The MEK opposes the clerical regime in Tehran, the U.S. wants regime change there – thus the two make for natural bedfellows. But the effectiveness of supporting exiled opposition groups has been called into question as a policy strategy by recent events in the Middle East. Both the "Green Revolution" in Iran after the disputed 2009 elections and the Arab

Spring clearly show that homegrown opposition movements have the greatest potential to generate real political change.

Backing exile opposition groups has historically been a risky decision. When the Bush administration jumped into bed with Ahmed Chalabi before the invasion of Iraq, they were led up the garden path (some would say willfully) on the issue of weapons of mass destruction.

In the case of Iran, even former CIA analysts such as Paul Pillar, now at Georgetown University, insist that domestic opposition groups want "nothing to do with the MEK." The MEK has been in exile for more than a generation, and while many Iranians oppose Ahmadinejad and Khomeini, they are still likely to be repulsed by a group that threw its lot in with Saddam Hussein – an avowed enemy who ordered the use of chemical weapons against their fellow citizens. In fact, some commentators have suggested that Tehran could use the delisting of the MEK as an effective propaganda tool to categorize the entire "Green Movement" as U.S.-backed "traitors," rather than an indigenous opposition group with legitimate concerns.

In Chalabi, the United States also supported an exile without a significant support structure on the ground to deal with the chaos that erupted across Iraq after the ousting of Saddam.

We all know how that turned out. Israel, too, has seen the results of backing Yasser Arafat's long-term Fatah exiles,

whose years in Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia ill prepared them to rule in the eventual Palestinian Authority established in the West Bank and Gaza.

Perhaps most important, after its experiences over the past decade, it should be clear to the U.S. that promoting "regime change" as a foreign policy objective will always be a dangerous game.

The Obama administration – by convincing the EU to get on board with tougher sanctions on oil and financial services, and through cyber attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities – has hurt Tehran more in the last four years than in the previous eight of its more belligerent predecessor, while maintaining a relatively safe distance. But by pushing the MEK as a viable alternative to the current Iranian regime, U.S. politicians are violating a basic rule of political science: People do not like to be told what to do, especially by foreigners.

And after the killing of the U.S. ambassador to Libya by Islamist militants who were on the same side as Washington only a few months ago, the Obama administration should have learned another lesson: The enemy of one's enemy is not always the wisest choice of friend.

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Though strategically located in the very heart of Jerusalem, at the junction of Jaffa Road and the Ben Yehuda Street pedestrian mall, and historically important as well, Zion Square is far from what it should be, lacking any real sense of "place" or identity. For all the public expenditure on it over the years (its current incarnation represents the third time it has been redesigned since Zion Cinema was demolished, in 1979), it remains today little more than a mere corridor.

About a month ago, dozens of Jewish youths brutally assaulted three young Palestinians in the square. One of the victims had to be hospitalized in intensive care. A special police team was set up to investigate the suspects, nine of whom were detained and subsequently indicted. But the police do not deal with the causes of criminality, and certainly not with the design of the physical environment of a crime scene, even though this can play an important role.

Dominating the square (to the south) is the Kikar Zion Hotel, a massive structure unrelated to its surroundings, with its lower levels occupied by Bank Hapoalim. The ground floor of this building, a half-level below the square, is bare – just a series of columns – a boon to drug dealers and prostitutes. The new light-rail line on Jaffa Road is to the north, a new department store to the east, and two additional banks take up invaluable ground-floor frontage to the west. The all-important Ben-Yehuda pedestrian mall terminates at the square without the slightest design response.

The space itself is ill-defined, lacking a sense of enclosure or any visual focal point. But perhaps more important is the fact that no fewer than three

Gerard Heumann

## There's no 'there' at the Square

banks and a major new department store border the square, killing any opportunity to give it life.

When a bank or a department store closes in the afternoon or evening, it becomes dead space. To make matters worse, the upper levels of the buildings adjacent to Zion Square are occupied mainly by offices. Windows are the eyes of a building. Here, after business hours, there is no one behind them, and natural visual surveillance (eye contact) is nonexistent. Such a setting is a perfect invitation to criminal activity.

In an urban environment, the street-level design and functions of a building are of the utmost importance. It is the interaction between adjoining buildings and the square that should make it interesting, lively and safe. Plazas are successful when life goes on around them, as well as within. A thoughtful mix of small-scale retail businesses and several cafes bordering Zion Square, and residential mixed with office use above, would ensure that it doesn't die at 7 P.M. Places of entertainment,

such as a theater or cinema, would help activate the square at night.

With economic incentives, it should be possible to get the existing banks to relocate. As they own many branches, the city can permit them to transfer their existing building rights to more appropriate locations, or alternately, could encourage them to move to an entirely new location, by offering building rights bonuses.

The basic underlying ideas behind the proposals listed above are as old as Jane Jacobs' landmark book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," first published in 1961. Since that time, cities worldwide have instituted all manner of urban design guidelines for preventing precisely the kind of problems that exist at Zion Square. Among those guidelines have been measures that specify permissible uses in buildings situated along major commercial thoroughfares or public open spaces, and that limit the length of ground-floor frontage of certain types of businesses, such as banks and

*While it's clear that the city is making great efforts to revive Jerusalem's center – on the matter of public squares, it has shown little ingenuity. Zion Square is the perfect place to begin.*



Raymond Tanter and Ivan Sascha Sheehan

## Now the cards are on the table

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's September 21 announcement that she will remove the Mujahideen-e Khalq from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations is an important step toward correcting Washington's Iran policy and an occasion for Jerusalem to adopt a fresh approach toward the Iranian opposition.

Delisting Iran's primary opposition organization that rejects clerical rule is, in and of itself, a threat to the Iranian regime. Removal from the list is therefore an opportunity to assess and reset American and Israeli policy toward Tehran.

Removing the MEK's terror designation plays on Tehran's suspicions that an "unholy alliance" of Jerusalem, Washington and the MEK is colluding to launch covert attacks against Iran's nuclear program. If there were such an alignment, it would also contribute to deterrence of Iranian assaults against Israeli diplomats and serve as a check on Iranian aggression.

In a September 23 Washington Post article that proposed a fictive scenario involving an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities, analysts imagined how Israel might be accused of working with the MEK. They speculate that the MEK will be widely perceived as reinforcing Israel's air assaults with military operations on the ground in Iran: "Within hours, Twitter, in and of reports of explosions in various parts of Iran. All seemingly can be traced to one source: the Iranian opposition group Mujaheddin-e-Khalq."

That the group stokes the regime's fears by mobilizing broad political support in the expatriate community and holding massive rallies around the world does little to quiet the regime's anxieties. A 2005 study found that the MEK was given 350 percent more attention by Iranian state-run media than all other opposition organizations challenging the regime.

The disproportionate number of protesters who were arrested or sentenced to death during the 2009 uprising because of their association with the MEK is also indicative of the regime's intent to block the group's political influence on the Iranian street.

The MEK is the largest dissident organization in the Paris-based de facto parliament in exile, the National Council of Resistance of Iran. It has long failed to meet the statutory criteria necessary for terror tagging under U.S. law. That it remained on the list can be attributed to persistent lobbying by the Iranian regime and miscalculation by successive U.S. presidents that concessions would appease Tehran's theocrats and eliminate state-sponsored proxy violence.

If Clinton had failed to delist, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington would in any event have removed the organization from the list on October 1. By taking the initiative rather than hiding behind the judiciary, Washington signals to Tehran that regime change from within is on the table. Iran has threatened to curtail its negotiations with the West

when it takes actions that favor the MEK; Clinton's removal of the group's designation thus acknowledges that engagement with Iran is no longer a top priority, although sporadic and unproductive nuclear talks might continue.

Removal of the terror designation in the midst of a hotly contested presidential election confirms that U.S. counterterrorism policy remains unpoliticized. Strong bipartisan support for the MEK on Capitol Hill, where Israel also commands strong backing, is further indication that the shift was not partisan.

American and Israeli officials should follow the delisting of the Iranian resistance with efforts to empower the opposition and support calls for democratic change. Free of the terror label, supporters can now put their money where their mouth is and embrace the opposition in its campaign for democracy.

In light of last week's announcement by Secretary Clinton, here's what can be done to help reset policy toward Tehran.

First, the worldwide pro-Israel community can help push back against the Iranian regime's disinformation campaign against removal of the MEK from the State Department's terror roster. The Iranian lobby in Washington is as well funded as it is deceptive and the opposition is enemy number one. Consider the unsubstantiated allegation made by Mohammad Javad Larijani, a senior aide to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. On February 9, 2012, Larijani alleged to NBC-TV News that the Mossad and the MEK were jointly responsible for the targeted killing of Iranian scientists. Though never backed up with evidence, this sensational accusation was

frequently repeated to justify the group's terror designation in the lead-up to the delisting. Second, because the heat will be turned up by the pro-Iranian Iraqi government on the 3,000 MEK dissidents housed at Camp Liberty in Iraq, the pro-Israel community should speak publicly about the safety of the residents and press humanitarian concerns.

Third, in the wake of Secretary Clinton's decision, Jerusalem and Washington should reset their Iran policy by embracing regime change in Iran as a priority. Support for the Iranian opposition would give further credence to threats to take military action and complement sanctions meant to coerce Tehran. Unless the survival of the regime is on the table, Iran will continue to pursue its efforts to obtain nuclear weapons as well as threaten Israel and the United States. The removal of MEK's terror classification rings an alarm bell among the theocrats in Tehran that their illegitimate reign is coming to an end.

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chain stores. Measures of this type, supported by a reasonable city tax policy on smaller commercial enterprises, have in recent years been tried out successfully in such cities as New York, San Francisco and Vancouver. Needless to say, no such ordinances have ever been experimented with in Jerusalem.

Zion Square is not alone in its plight. The newly designed Davidka Square, half a kilometer up Jaffa Road, is dead as a doornail, and Safra Square too is deserted. Desperately needed, then, is an enlightened public policy regarding the city center and its relationship to overall land use (with special emphasis on the pedestrian level) that would reflect its crucial role as the capital's social center. While it's clear that the city is making great efforts to revive the center, after years of neglect and construction – on the matter of public squares, it has shown little ingenuity. Zion Square is the perfect place to begin.

Cosmetic solutions – such as architect-artist Ron Arad's 2006 proposal for a sculpture covering the entire square and part of Jaffa Road itself – have less than nothing to do with the problem. It is high time to take it out of the hands of amateurs. Thoughtful urban design will not only enliven the downtown area, but also play a most important role in guarding our personal safety and security. Although well-designed open public spaces may not be capable of eliminating the violent racism that was behind last month's attack, they can make it less likely for such attacks to take place in the city's heart.

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