



# Foreign Correspondent

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by international syndicated columnist & broadcaster Eric Margolis

16 March 2010

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NEW YORK –After the astounding humiliation of Vice President Joseph Biden by Israel’s rightwing government, that nation’s premier newspaper, “Ha’aretz,” cited an old Hebrew saying, ‘Biden had to wipe spit off his face and say it was only rain.’

Before arriving in Israel, Biden had repeated President Obama’s demand that Israel cease building new housing in East Jerusalem, which violates international law and decades of UN resolutions. Washington and the EU have repeatedly asked Israel to cease most building activity in the occupied West Bank.

Shortly before Biden arrived at an intimate dinner hosted by Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel dropped a bombshell: it would build 1,600 new housing units in East Jerusalem. Some reports in Israel said thousands more are planned on the West Bank and Golan.

All the humiliated Biden managed to do to express his anger was to arrive an hour and a half late for Bibi’s dinner.

What a pathetic, cowardly response. Biden should at least have gotten on his plane and flown home. A great power cannot afford to lose face like this.

Biden’s humiliation showed the unprecedented influence that Israel’s rightwing government holds over Washington and made a mockery of the endless talks about Arab-Israeli “peace.”

The Biden fiasco also delivered another body blow to the wobbling Obama administration.

Netanyahu’s insult was so stinging, that even Israel’s point-woman in the administration, Hillary Clinton, who waits in the wings to replace a fallen Obama, was forced to blast the Israelis. But, of course, everyone knew this was mere political theater. Israel may announce a brief delay in colonization, then go right on gobbling up the West Bank

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and Golan.

How the mighty have fallen. In 1956, Israel colluded with Britain and France to attack Egypt. Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula. President Dwight Eisenhower ordered Israel to get out of Sinai without delay or face a total cutoff of aid and diplomatic support – or even face a military response. Israel got out.

Adding to the black comedy, Israel's hard-line interior minister apologized for authorizing illegal colonization while Biden was in town and promised not to do it again – when Biden was next in Israel that is. As Washington stamped its foot in impotent fury, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu made the mocking excuse that the announcement had been a mistake of timing.

This pathetic episode shows Israel's right wing has Washington in its pocket.

And why not. The Israel lobby had forced candidate Obama to promise that if elected, he would never press Israel into a peace settlement. Congress has become more attuned to Israel's needs than Israel's own Knesset. The US is inching towards war with Iran.

Israel contemptuously scorned Obama's calls for it to cease colonizing the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, and withdraw its 500,000 settlers, many of whom are Americans and Russians.

Netanyahu even denounced senior Obama aides David Axelrod and Rahm Emanuel as "self-hating Jews" for opposing Israel's expansionist policies as injurious to America's strategic interests.

The Obama administration's humiliation by Israel is having loud repercussions in Washington. Staunchly pro-Israel Republicans are elated over Obama's failure, the latest sign of presidential weakness.

Israel and just about everyone in Washington knows that Obama would not now dare to challenge Israel's many supporters in the US Congress, or enrage Israel's powerful American lobby when his administration is floundering and mid-term elections are on the political radar.

The Republican Party is firmly in the grip of Protestant fundamentalists who believe an expanding Israel is an essential part of their faith. Many Republicans mistakenly believe that Obama is an Arab.

Israelis understand that the White House has to pretend to rebuke Israel in order to maintain good relations with its Arab allies, reassure them over the supposed Iranian threat, and pretend the US-backed Palestinian authority of



Who is Ron Paul?

Mahmoud Abbas has legitimacy.

Biden's humiliation was shared by the hapless Abbas, who was just tiptoeing under US prodding into more useless 'indirect' negotiations with Israel. He was left looking confused, helpless and ever more so an American-Israeli puppet. The useless Arab league huffed and puffed. Back to square one.

That suited Israel's Netanyahu just fine. Israel is relentlessly gobbling up the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Its policy is to keep talking and stalling until there is nothing left to negotiate. The only power that can stop Israel's colonization campaign that is destabilizing the Mideast and bringing the threat of war with Iran, Syria and Lebanon, is the United States.

Israel's self-confidence was shown by the assassinations in Damascus of Hezbollah leader Imad Mugniyah and the recent brazen murder in Dubai of Hamas official Mahmoud al-Mabhouh. Israeli officials joked away this crime and dared the world to do something about it.

Israel humiliated the Turkish ambassador over a Turkish TV series that showed Israel in a bad light. It treated a visiting delegation of pro-peace American legislators like dirt. Having largely fended off international criticism of its savaging of Gaza and the UN's ensuing Goldstone Report, Israel understandably felt it could face down any pressure from abroad.

Israel seems to believe that Barack Obama may be a one-term president. Its American supporters never trusted Obama and worried he would press Israel into concessions to the Palestinians.

As Republican electoral fortunes rise, Israel senses it has carte blanche to do whatever it desires. The politically wounded president is sneered at as a weakling by Republicans and Israel's right-wingers. Israel's pro-peace movement has been deflated by America's failure to press for a just settlement.

One really must wonder why Obama allowed Biden's humiliation to take place. This shameful display of American political cowardice was perfectly predictable, even inevitable.

Israel's hard right knows that the one sure way of thwarting any possible peace with the Palestinians is to keep annexing East Jerusalem and squeezing out its Arab population. Some of these activities are even financed by American tax-free "charities."

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