

An Ode to Joy: President Obama has no peace plan!

Most Israelis and Jews were relieved to hear that Obama has no intention of upsetting the status quo. After all, “We’ve never had it so good”, as Golda Meir told Richard Nixon in 1973.

By [Chemi Shalev](#) | Haaretz.com Mar.10, 2013 | 9:49 PM | 34

The news that President Obama has no intention of presenting a new peace plan on his upcoming [visit to Israel](#) was greeted by a collective sigh of relief that was so pronounced that it sounded like a giant roar of approval.

Hallelujah, Israel is saved. Just in time for Passover, as usual.

Obama himself assured Jewish leaders at the White House in Washington last week that he has no intention of submitting new proposals, offering new formulas or concocting fresh recipes to get the stalled peace talks moving. His aides, advisers, confidantes and spokespeople have been making the same point over and over again to anyone who’s been willing to listen.

True, no one really expected a new peace initiative at this juncture, but with suspicions towards Obama always running high, the reassurances were both timely and welcome. After all, for most of the Jewish leaders who met with the President, as well as the Prime Minister Office in Jerusalem and the majority of politicians, pundits and public opinion in Israel and the Jewish Diaspora, an American peace initiative – indeed any outside peace offering - is an unwelcome irritant, at best and an existential threat, at worst.

A new U.S. peace offer would plunge the fledgling Israeli government, which is expected to be born within a day or two, into an immediate coalition crisis between center and right; it would mar the president’s visit by spurring the settlers and their supporters to hold disruptive demonstrations, which may not go over too well on U.S. TV networks; it would spark a massive “We told you so” campaign by the always vigilant and vociferous Jewish, Republican and conservative critics of the president; it would place American Jewish leaders between the rock of Israel and the hard place of their president; and it would dash hopes of turning over a new leaf in relations with Obama, who, everyone assumed, had gotten over his periodic bouts of Palestinian-Israeli Hyperactive Syndrome (PISH, from the French) that had afflicted him during his first two years in office.

In any case, the reasoning goes – why tinker with success? If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it, as Jimmy Carter’s budget director Bert Lance famously said in 1977, (a few short months before his own reputation shattered and forced his resignation). After all, the territories are as quiet as they’ve ever been, the settlements are booming, the Palestinians are agonizing over their internal split, and the Arab world, indeed the entire world, is otherwise engaged with the degenerating Arab Spring. And with a showdown on Iran looming, why introduce unnecessary noise into the equation by reviving talk of an

agreement with the Palestinians? Because it would help mobilize moderate Arab support against Tehran? That's a consideration?

Very few Israelis are impressed anymore by demographic doomsday projections – especially as the settlers have come up with a complete set of alternative statistics - or by the nightmare scenarios of the imminent collapse of the Palestinian Authority. Very few people see any reason to connect the 46-year-old occupation – (shouldn't there be a committee to start planning the 50 year jubilee celebrations?) – and the growing incidents of racism, intolerance and brutality in Israeli society. Hardly anyone believes, in any case, that the Palestinians are capable of entering serious peace negotiations or that the Arabs would support them in doing so.

In fact, there is something vaguely disturbing about the very idea of a peace plan that entails, as most do, concessions and gestures by both sides. Israelis are convinced that they've done everything possible in order to advance peace and now it's the Palestinians turn to initiate (as if). Any U.S. peace plan would once again instill an illusion that the Palestinians can come to the negotiating table and expect to resume negotiations along the same uninspiring parameters that have been under discussion for the past two decades, rather than starting from scratch, with absolutely no preconditions other than recognizing Israel as the one and only Jewish State.

Nonetheless, Israelis and their supporters would be well advised to be more circumspect in their reactions to the banner headlines that herald the fact that the President has no tricks up his sleeve and no rabbits in his hat. Obama will come to “connect to the Israeli public,” which is great, because Israelis love to connect; they are probably the most connected people on earth. But too many naked expressions of joy at the expectation that the status quo will continue unabated might give some people the impression that Israelis actually prefer the present stalemate to the kind of peace-shmeace that Obama seems to have believed in, once upon a time.

One needs to keep up appearances, after all. In reality, as we all know, “time is working in our favor” as Ariel Sharon said on a tour of the Suez Canal with the Knesset's Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee in the early 70's and “we've never had it so good”, as Golda Meir assured President Nixon in their March 1, 1973 meeting in the White House, a few short months before the start of the Yom Kippur War.

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