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## Obama at the Edge of a Cliff in Middle East

Posted By [Adil E. Shamoo](#)

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With Syria and Iran, President Barack Obama faces getting mired in two wars that could set the entire Middle East aflame, and perhaps the rest of the Islamic world, too. Such an outcome would be in part due to Mr. Obama's Middle Eastern policy, and the willingness of the current United States Congress to support Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's aggressive posture toward Iran. The lobbying effort in the U.S. by hard-line, pro-Israel interests, is a pivotal factor here we cannot ignore.

In his first visit to Israel last week, Mr. Obama gave every assurance to its citizens that the United States will stand by Israel. Fair enough, but which Israel? Since Mr. Obama became president, Israeli settlers on the West Bank increased from 500,000 to 560,000. Israel is creating new political realities on the ground – those voting settlers will never leave their homes. Can Mr. Obama guarantee that if peace negotiations limp along for another decade, or two, the number of settlers won't reach a million? Let us be frank, Netanyahu and his supporters have used the negotiations to create more settlements while Palestinians are increasingly reduced to living in tiny, non-state enclaves on the West Bank, under the tutelage of Israel.

Simply put, after four decades of negotiations, Palestine is no longer feasible.

Consider that Mr. Obama was not invited to address the Knesset (Parliament) perchance he might be booed by Israeli legislators. In 2011, Mr. Netanyahu received 29 standing ovations

from members of our own congress as he denounced their president's Middle East peace initiative. Mr. Obama instead spoke to an audience of 2,000 young Israelis in Jerusalem. While reports point out that attendees were handpicked to ensure maximum audience support, he should know that the broader Israeli youth do not favor a two state solution, nor do they believe in equal rights for Palestinians. According to a 2010 survey by the Jewish organization B'nai B'rith, only 40 percent of Israelis ages 18 to 24 favored a Palestinian state.

Moreover, it will take several decades for these young Israelis to have any real influence on the Israeli leadership.

The fact is, that with the help of U.S. lobbyists and the neoconservative wing of the Republican Party, Mr. Netanyahu outsmarted Mr. Obama by changing the conversation three years ago from furthering peace negotiations with the Palestinians to setting red lines on Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. Mr. Obama dutifully changed his own policy from containment to preventing Iran from ever having nuclear weapons based upon these arbitrary red lines. In last week's visit to Israel, Obama emphasized that if Iran does not comply with U.S and Israeli demands, then all options are on the table (read: a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities). Never mind that Israel for decades has maintained over two hundred nuclear bombs, and, scholars generally agree, has contemplated using them. Iran, for its own part, signed the non-proliferation treaty, while Israel never did.

Furthermore, America and Israel are becoming isolated from the world community due to their policies, which are increasingly perceived to be unfair and inhumane where the Palestinians are concerned. This isolation was demonstrated last year in the United Nations General Assembly's vote for the Palestinian right to non-voting member status at the U.N. With all of our allies around the world, the U.S marshaled only seven out of 190 members to vote against granting the Palestinians this status.

Indications are that Mr. Obama does not desire sending troops overseas if wars in Iran and Syria become a reality. Yet he seems convinced that drones and missiles might achieve our national security goals with less consequence. If it sounds familiar, it is because the same neoconservative voices were advising Washington politicians and saturating the media prior to Iraq invasion ten years ago. Now, the war hawks are busy convincing the press and Washington's agenda-setters that a humanitarian crisis in Syria demands our intervention. These same neoconservatives showed no such concern when the post-invasion killing in Iraq far exceeded the numbers in Syria. We call this selective morality.

If we get engaged in two new wars, hatred toward America will skyrocket among people of the Middle East and Islamic countries. The war will spread quickly from Syria and Iran to Iraq, Jordan, Bahrain, and Egypt. The blow back to Western countries and especially to the U.S, will be immense. Let us hope that cooler heads in congress and among Mr. Obama's trusted advisors, will prevail.