

## **The Worst Crisis in 35 Years?**

*A National Review Online Symposium*

March 17, 2010

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As the Obama administration quarrels so heatedly and publicly with Israel, its goals are not clear.

The main impediments to Palestinian-Israeli peace are on the side of the Palestinians. Their Authority lacks authority, and their moderates aren't moderate. The Palestinian Authority has been handicapped by self-inflicted damage from corruption and the loss of its control of Gaza to Hamas, with which it is at war. The PA cannot even claim to speak for a substantial majority of the Palestinians, and PA leaders, rather than working to isolate Hamas followers as extremists, are trying to compete with them in anti-Zionism. Palestinian Authority leaders are refusing to negotiate directly with the Israeli government, and when they do engage in peace diplomacy, they make demands — for the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, for example — that even leaders of the Israeli Left reject as cynical insistence on Israeli suicide.

President Obama is not pressing the PA to change its principles and practices to make a consensual peace possible. His fight with Israel effectively absolves the Palestinian side from blame for the lack of peace. This vindicates the Palestinian hard line.

The Obama administration evidently thinks it is more important now to soften up the Israeli government. But President Obama has picked a fight about the construction of homes for Jews in Jerusalem. Supporting such construction is not a hard-line position. Across Israel's political spectrum there is support for Jews living in Jerusalem and retaining sovereignty over the city.

This slap at Israel is one of a number of strange shots that Obama administration officials have taken at U.S. allies and friends abroad. The administration has poked its fingers in the eyes of leaders from Britain, Japan, Poland, Colombia, and elsewhere — and now Israel. Meanwhile, the Obama team has given a cold shoulder to pro-democracy advocates in China and Iran. There must be a larger idea at work here. The president should explain his strategy.

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