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[Yoav Sivan](#)

Posted September 19, 2008 | 04:53 PM (EST)

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What Obama Must Do in Israel

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Never mind that every Republican Presidential nominee in the past four elections has captured less than a quarter of the Jewish vote, down from an estimated 40 percent of the Jewish vote in 1980. In a Presidential election expected to be close, a shift of just one or two percentage points in states with sizable Jewish populations -- think Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio and New Jersey -- would throw the election to John McCain. Thus the Republican Party is telling Jewish voters, as it has in every election for a generation, that only Republicans are to be trusted with Israel.

Rather than respond to Jewish voters defensively, Barack Obama ought to respond with some spine. From the perspective of an Israeli political operative who cares passionately about the safety and security of his country, here is a four-pronged plan for how the Democrats must present the truth - that they are the party best for Israel.

1. Indict the Republicans for paying insufficient attention to the two-state solution that Israel wants. When Ariel Sharon formed Kadima as a centrist party that also accepted the idea of a Palestinian state -- even advocating unilateral disengagement from the Palestinian territories -- he moved the Israeli center to the left. Whether that was his broad intention or not is disputable. But this much is clear: Sharon understood that maintaining a Jewish majority in Israel, so central to the Zionist dream, would require an independent Palestinian state.

Ehud Olmert surely would have carried out Sharon's plan had not the failed Lebanon War of 2006 left Israel with a placeholder, not a leader, in the Prime Minister's office. These days, you don't have to be a soothsayer or cartographer to expect the border between the states to follow 1967 lines, modified by land swaps.

Particularly after the 2006 Lebanon War, the United States has had the perfect opportunity to help fill the vacuum of diplomacy. Tragically, the Bush Administration's myopic focus on Iraq left it too paralyzed to look elsewhere in the Middle East. Despite his courting of American Jews and American Christian Zionists alike, Bush has invested a fraction of what President Clinton did in a two-state solution that would maintain Israel as a Jewish state. In fact, Clinton's plan would have established Jerusalem as the internationally recognized capital of Israel, the culmination of a two-thousand year dream for Jews around the world.

To be sure, in the final year of the Bush Presidency, Condoleezza Rice finally discovered the sagacity of shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East. But the Administration's shuttle took seven years to lift off, leading to a loss of time, lives and momentum.

2. Indict the Republicans for not doing enough on Iran. Across the ideological spectrum, we Israelis have never considered Iraq to be the top strategic threat to our country. We're far more obsessed with Iran, whose President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has vowed to wipe Israel off the map. Unlike even Hamas in Gaza, Iran is chock full of nuclear weapons or is about to be. Israel's existence is more in danger, arguably, than at any time since the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Notwithstanding Israel's successful strike against Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981, most military experts recognize that a strike against Iran today, whether from Israel or the United States, would be less likely to succeed. Iran is building its nuclear arsenal in a few isolated sites, buried deep in the ground, whose exact location and content are only partially known to Western intelligence.

With Israel and the United States having less room for error in Iran, Republicans' insistence on allow Iraq to drain the American military has, in fact, detracted from the potential leverage against Iran -- economically, diplomatically, and yes, militarily.

President Bush, it's been reported, views Israeli Natan Sharansky's *The Case for Democracy* as a basis for America's continued intervention in Iraq. Certainly Sharansky considers the aggressive spread of democracy to be essential to the preservation of world order. But no power in the region, not Syria or the Palestinians today, and not even Saddam Hussein during his regime, has posed the threat to the one Middle Eastern democracy -- or world order -- that Ahmadinejad has.

In this context, President Bush's prioritization of the various threats in the Middle East, specifically to America's staunchest ally here, has been unconscionable. Apparently the President knows Israel's national interests, and even our neighborhood, better than we Israelis do.

3. Indict the Republicans for not accelerating better relations between Israel and Syria. Given Syria's consistent hostility toward Israel since its establishment in 1948, Israel has every reason to be suspicious when Syrian President Bashar Assad calls for peace talks. But as Prime Minister Olmert considers the signals from Damascus, he's received more resistance from the United States than he has in Israel.

Notwithstanding decades of misreporting by international news organizations, for that matter, Israel has long negotiated with its enemies about trading land for peace. As the American Jewish Committee writes in its booklet, *Israel's Quest for Peace*, Israel has, throughout its modern 60 years, conducted separate territorial negotiations with Egypt and Jordan, both of which resulted in a lasting peace, and with the Palestinians and Syrians, which all sides take great pains to keep unpublicized.

How naïve for the Bush administration to put secular and dangerous Syria, and theocratic and far more dangerous Iran, under the same rubric of "Axis of Evil." It's enough to make Jeane Kirkpatrick, the darling of the American right who often advocated double standards in foreign policy based on *realpolitik*, roll over in her grave.

To be sure, we in Israel don't wear blinders. Like his father who preceded him in office, President Assad will never be a human rights hero. But with President Ahmadinejad whispering in Assad's right ear, who will whisper in Assad's left? Assad has far more incentive to reject Ahmadinejad than to join him, for a successful export of Iran's Islamic revolution to Syria would topple Assad as fast as Saddam Hussein's statue fell in Iraq.

Stymied by President Bush's obsession with Iraq, the United States has not been the interlocutor between Israel and Syria that it had been between Israel and Egypt, and later Israel and Jordan. If, as many American experts believe, the U.S. has become too militarily stretched by the Iraq war, so, too, has the U.S. become too diplomatically stretched. And Israel is suffering because of it.

4. Indict the Republicans for a U.S. energy policy that has put Israel in greater danger. From mocking climate change to paying mere lip-service to conservation, and by failing to seize the opportunities presented by renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power, the Bush Administration's energy policy may well be remembered as the *laissez-faire* laughingstock of the early 21st Century.

Thanks to the Bush Administration's inaction, the world now relies on oil from Israel's adversaries more than ever before. It doesn't take a Nobel Prize winner to understand that a less oil-dependent America would have stronger diplomatic leverage in advancing its interests in the Middle East, which include protecting its strongest ally in the region. As the American Jewish Committee was among the first to point out, America's independence from foreign oil -- and America's taking the initiative to help other countries reduce their dependence on foreign oil -- is inextricably intertwined with maximizing Israel's survival.

Had the United States developed greater energy independence, perhaps the Bush Administration would have had less motive to enter Iraq, and instead paid more attention to the region's more pressing conflicts. But because of the Administration's myopia, today there is increased global reliance on Iranian oil, the world's third-biggest proven reserve. That gives President Ahmadinejad an insurance policy that the world will listen to his promises to destroy the State of Israel for as long as the world needs his oil.

However disastrous these last Republican years have been for Israel, that won't stop the party from again claiming to be the best for Israel. This time, the Democrats must not wait to respond. As the greatest President for Israel, Democrat Harry Truman,


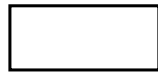
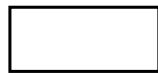

once said of those he faced : " Carry the battle to them. Don't let them bring it to you."

Barack Obama must carry the battle to John McCain and indict Republicans for their disastrous policies for Israel. We Israelis are watching.

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Israel is indeed probably not going to be an important issue in voters decision in November (not even the pro Israeli Jewish ones), but this article does make an important point.
 It is times that the DNC make the point that 'supporting Israel' means advancing the solutions that are supported by the majority of Israelis (and all of Israel's governments since 2003 and the majority of Palestinians). Just promising to back any Israeli military initiative, supply arms and veto Security Council resolutions is not support.

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Yoav Sivan implies American of Jewish religion having only one interest, Israel. This is a false assumption. Majority of Jewish-American are American-centrists and not Israeli-centrists.
 They consider the main issues for this election as the majority of the Americans do: job, housing, medical insurance, infrastructure, retirement and the Bill of Rights. They, like all civilized people of this world, I am expecting to be tired of the

consequences of wars in the Middle East, such a death and destructions and economic consequence of the world. Mr. Sivan's opinion represents those supporting only minority of Jewish Americans. The event is being organized once more by a coalition of American Jewish organizations, under the umbrella group the National Coalition to Stop Iran Now, or more appropriately, "Israeli Lobby to Destroy Iran Now". The same type of rally was created last year. These Israeli Lobby organizations are good at inciting fear, stirring up false hysteria. They used the same techniques prior to inciting Bush Administration to attack Iraq. They are using the same technique once more to create the illusion of fear from Iran. "Vice President Esfandiar Rahim Mashai said Iranians were friends of all people in the world - even Israelis published" reported by Haaretz.com, September 19, 2008. "On Thursday, Ahmadinejad stood by Mashai again, saying Iran is not against Israelis, though he stopped short of calling them friends. We don't have a problem with people. But in no way do we recognize the Zionist regime."

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This is one of the best opinion pieces I've ever read on positioning the Democratic Party as the party best for Israel. Every one of us who wants Barack Obama to win in November should forward this piece to every contact we know in the Obama campaign, no matter what level of the campaign. This has got to get to Barack himself.

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"Barack Obama must carry the battle to John McCain and indict Republicans for their disastrous policies for Israel. We Israelis are watching."

We Israelis are watching??? Why don't you go watch your own govt approve a few zillion more illegal settlements in the West Bank and do something about that!

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