The Israeli cabinet met on October 20. There were no discussions of the formation of a committee to discuss the Gaza war and the Goldstone report. Several ministers, including Defense Minister Ehud Barak objected to consideration of the issue. Israel chose not to cooperate with Judge Richard Goldstone and his team when they were in the region to probe human rights violations related to the war. Israel had previously done its own investigation and “decided that its army acted within international law.” (International Middle East Media Center, 10/22/09). Israel’s foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman has asked UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to keep the Goldstone Commission report from advancing to further votes within the international body. The report was endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council last week despite opposition from Israel and its allies. Lieberman’s stance is that bringing the report for vote in the Security Council or at a General Assembly would harm Middle East peace talks. “It is impossible that the Palestinians will negotiate with Israel in the local arena and fight against Israel in the global arena.”

On September 22, President Obama brought Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Abbas together at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York and declared, “It is past time to talk about starting negotiations; it is time to move forward.” He asked both sides to send diplomats to Washington for serious talks and directed Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to report back to him in a month about what had been accomplished. The deadline was reached this past Thursday, October 22. The secretary “advised the president that challenges remain as the United States continues to work with both sides to relaunch negotiations in an atmosphere in which they can succeed.” Israel has agreed to curtail construction of settlements, not a total halt. The PA has strengthened its security and policy and because their university is in the West Bank. England revoked several licenses granted to U.K. companies to sell weapons parts to Israel. Norway decided to sell its shares in Elbit Systems Ltd., an Israeli company that provides surveillance equipment for the separation barrier between Israel and the West Bank. The government of Egypt prohibited Israeli researchers from attending a medical conference there. (Egypt dropped the ban due to American pressure, but the Israelis did not attend.) Of the twenty-six resolutions regarding human rights abuses passed by the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, twenty have been about Israel - this despite the horrendous human rights records of so many regimes in the Middle East. The organization Human Rights Watch continues to pummel Israel, in violation of its own mandate to make a distinction between democratic societies that have mechanisms to combat human rights abuses and authoritarian regimes that do not. HRW earned the criticism of its own founder and chairman emeritus for casting aside that important distinction. And the list goes on...

Support for Israel, even among democratic countries, has eroded. Human rights organizations reserve most of their criticisms for Israel while letting Middle East dictatorships off the hook. America is different because American Jewish organizations like JAC insist upon it. We will keep the pressure on.
SENATE

Florida -- The newest appointment to the Senate is Republican George LeMieux who replaces GOP Sen. Mel Martinez. Sen. LeMieux is a place holder who says he will not seek the seat in the regularly scheduled November 2010 election. Sen. LeMieux is a lawyer, has been an aide to Gov. Charlie Crist and was the Broward County Republican Party chairman from 2000-02. Gov. Crist is expected to be the GOP nominee for this Senate seat, but he does have a primary opponent.

Massachusetts -- The special election to fill the seat of JAC supported Democratic Sen. Edward Kennedy will be held January 19, 2010. The winner will hold the seat until November 2012, when Sen. Kennedy’s term would have expired. The frontrunner in the Democratic primary on December 8 is Attorney General Martha Coakley. She will face Rep. Michael Capuano, Boston Celtics co-owner Steve Pagliuca and community service activist Alan Khazei. Coakley has been elected to statewide office twice and easily has the highest name recognition in the Democratic field. The winner of the primary will be the heavy favorite in the January special.

HOUSE

Florida -- JAC supported Dem. Rep. Robert Wexler (FL-19) is leaving office in early January to become the head of the Center for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation. Rep. Wexler is currently serving his 7th term in the House and has been outspoken on issues concerning Israel during his entire tenure. He will be missed. The scramble to fill his shoes has already started. State Sen. Ted Deutch (D) won Wexler’s seat in the state Senate in 2006, with the Congressman’s help. Three of Deutch’s potential competitors are st. Sen. Jeremy Ring (D), Broward Mayor Stacy Ritter (D), and Broward County Commissioner Ben Graber, who came in third in the 1996 primary that Wexler won in his first race. All three come from Broward County which is at stake, “It is at times a country. We must win this battle to change the troubling course America is now on.” Several of the groups sponsoring the event are 501(c)(3) organizations and are legally prohibited from political involvement - the FRC, the Heritage Foundation, American Values and the American Family Association. Attendees were invited to a special reception hosted by the FRC Action PAC to be briefed on upcoming races and meet PAC President, Connie Mackey. Mackey told the group that, “We will pray a lot, but if we don’t change the numbers on Capitol Hill, the Democrats are going to continue to overtake us all with government.” FRC has also formed the Virginia Values Voter Political Action Committee and is running ads against the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, R. Creigh Deeds, in Virginia. Virginia is one of two states holding gubernatorial elections this year in November. The GOP candidate, Bob McDonnell, aligns himself with the views of FRC and is anti-choice in all situations, including rape.

Israel, continued from page one

Iran’s envoy to the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) says “his country will respond next week to a UN-drafted plan to ship much of its uranium to Russia for further enrichment.” The US, Russia and France endorsed the UN plan after discussions with Iran earlier in the week. Iranian state TV said that Teheran was waiting for a response to its proposal to buy nuclear fuel rather than ship low-enriched uranium to Russia for further enrichment. Iran has often used counterproposals to draw out negotiations. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak did not like the UN plan, even before Iran’s response. “This agreement, if it is signed, will set Iran’s accumulation of enriched material back by about a year...what is required is a halt to enrichment in Iran, not just an export of the enriched material to build fuel rods...We suspect that this is another attempt by Iran to buy time. Israel must rally the world as this is not only Iran’s problem.” (Jerusalem Post 10/23/09)