

JAC NEWSbreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

May 26, 2011

On my mind this month...



Gail Yamner

The build up and the buzz about the Middle East engaged analysts of the region for weeks. What would President Obama say on May 19?

What would Prime Minister Netanyahu say to the President, AIPAC and Congress? Many expressed concern at the timing of the speech. Some were outraged, viewing it as an affront to the Prime Minister. Others felt it was the right moment to suppress the Palestinians' bid for statehood in the UN.

Thursday, the President spoke of the emerging democracies in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and the need for financial support. Then he used the words 1967 borders with land swaps as a starting point for the peace talks. The words "'67 borders" were all that were heard. It was as if the rest of the speech didn't matter.

When he met with PM Netanyahu on Friday, the newspaper photos showed poses of the distance between the two. Television news reported on the Prime Minister's stern talk and lecturing tone toward the President.

Sunday, speaking to AIPAC, President Obama spoke firmly and eloquently about the bond of friendship between the US and Israel. He promised that the US would stand by Israel in the UN and fight against delegitimization and isolation. He spoke of the challenges that Israel faced and the military co-operation between the two countries. He explained that his position was the same as the American position for the last decades. He wanted progress before the September UN session so that others would join the US in supporting Israel.

"Israel's legitimacy is not a matter for debate. That is my commitment. That is my pledge to all of you." With those words, I let my breath go.

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Israel

A sequence of events over the past week has put the U.S.-Israel relationship front and center. Whatever has been said by President Obama, by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, by leaders of both parties, all have stressed the unshakable bond between the two countries and the United States commitment to the security, legitimacy and well being of Israel. The President made a definitive statement that the United States would not support a Palestinian resolution that the United Nations declare an independent state next September. At the same time, it would be ignoring the reality that the Palestinian Authority could have enough votes in the General Assembly to pass such a resolution.

The United States needs the support of its European allies to stave off this Palestinian initiative. That is one of the main reasons that President Obama is in the midst of a week long trip to Europe - to discuss the "revolutions" that are occurring in the Middle East, the overriding threat of Iran's nuclear capability and the necessity to restart a peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The best way to stop any action in the United Nations is for Israel and the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table. The President's calling for the 1967 borders to be the basis for new discussions brought biting criticism from analysts and pro-Israel activists. However, it means that the parties themselves — Israelis and Palestinians — will negotiate a border that is different than the one that existed on June 4, 1967. That's what mutually agreed-upon swaps means. Only direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians can decide the borders of the two states based on the realities of 2011, not 1967. Prime Minister Netanyahu said, at AIPAC and to a joint session of Congress, that President Abbas should make peace with Israel, not with Hamas. "I have accepted a Palestinian state...Mr. Abbas needs to say 'I will accept a

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United States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The annual Gallup poll on abortion, released last week, shows that "Americans are rather conservative in their stance on abortion, with 61% now preferring that abortion be legal in only a few circumstances or no circumstances." Gallup doesn't specify those "few" circumstances, but does ask about cases such as rape, incest, or the life of the mother. A majority of Americans agree that "only life of the mother or rape and incest" should be the exceptions. Republicans are considerably more anti-abortion than independents or Democrats with 79% saying they want almost all abortions prohibited. Sixty percent of independents and 44% of Democrats agree.

On May 18, Sen. John Boozman (R-AR) with 5 additional GOP sponsors — Dan Coats (R-IN), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Mike Johanns (R-NE), Jim Risch (R-ID), and John Thune (R-SD) — introduced S 1005, a bill that would require abortion providers to notify parents by certified mail if their minor daughter seeks an abortion. Providers would have to wait four days before performing the procedure, a provision designed to allow parents time to seek a court action to block it. Violations of the requirements could result in fines of up to \$1 million and prison terms of up to 10 years for providers. Parental notification laws already exist in many states as do waiting periods from one to four days. Sen. Boozman believes, "that a nationwide law is needed to prevent minors from crossing state lines to seek abortion care."

Yet another anti-choice, anti-women health measure was passed in the House May 25th. An amendment offered by Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC) to HR 1216, the Public Health Service Act, bars medical teaching centers from training on abortion care.

According to a recent article in AlterNet, 916 new restrictive laws were introduced by state legislators in the first quarter of 2011. In Texas, Gov-

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Research & Races

SENATE UPDATE

The 2012 cycle began with Democrats having to defend 23 seats, including the seat in Connecticut currently held by Independent Sen. Joe Lieberman, versus 10 seats for Republicans. Two Republican Senators announced their retirements, Kay Bailey Hutchison in Texas and Jon Kyl in Arizona, both coming from states which demographically favor the GOP.

Democrats now have 6 retirements, leaving open seats in Hawaii, Connecticut, New Mexico, North Dakota, Virginia and Wisconsin. All are competitive, with the last four starting out as “toss-ups,” and the possibility that Hawaii and Connecticut could move there as well, depending on the

strength of the respective nominees.

The Republican-held seat in Nevada remained “open” for a very short time, following Sen. John Ensign’s decision not to run again. Ensign was encouraged to resign early, thus allowing the GOP governor to appoint a replacement. Former GOP Rep. Dean Heller was sworn in earlier this month, giving him the advantage of incumbency when he seeks a full term in November, 2012. Rep. **Shelley Berkley**, a Democrat and long time JAC member, will challenge Heller.

The latest Democratic retirement is that of Herb Kohl from Wisconsin, who earlier this month announced his intention not to run for a 5th term.

Kohl was considered a “shoo-in” for the Democrats and his retirement puts the Wisconsin seat squarely in the “toss-up” column. Several Democratic names are being mentioned, including former Sen. **Russell Feingold** who was defeated in 2010. Tommy Thompson, former Governor and Secretary of Health and Human Services, is the name most often mentioned as the Republican’s choice. He would be a formidable opponent for any Democratic nominee. Even the race in Hawaii, often considered a “safe” seat for Democrats, could be a battle if former GOP Governor Laura Lingle decides to run.

[Next month: House Update]

Right Wing Watch

Religious Right power is on the upswing. Speaker of the House, John Boehner (R-OH) spoke before the National Religious Broadcasters to assure them “that their concerns are his concerns.” A fight over funding for Planned Parenthood, a long sought Religious Right goal, almost shut down the government. And a few weeks later, the House voted to end funding for National Public Radio, another long time target of the Religious Right. In the end, a budget deal was cut – funding for Planned Parenthood was retained and NPR funding was restored; but voucher subsidies for D.C. schools were added, allowing subsidies to religious schools, and D.C. was banned from using its own money to pay for abortions for poor women.

The Religious Right has expanded its agenda. It now includes issues such as the deficit, unions, judicial appointments. And, the House is busy pushing

symbolic resolutions to please groups like the Family Research Council and American Family Association. H.Con. Res 13, introduced by Rep. Randy Forbes (R-VA), is a measure “reaffirming” the use of “In God We Trust” as the national motto and encouraging its display in all public buildings, including public schools.

Facts and Figures:

Pat Robertson’s “empire” includes Christian Broadcasting Network, Regent University, American Center for Law and Justice, all based in Virginia, and Christian Advocates Serving Evangelism, in Atlanta. Combined budgets total several hundred million dollars.

The Falwell “empire” includes Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Ministries, and Liberty Counsel, all located in Virginia. Their combined budgets exceed \$400 million.

Family Research Council and FRC Action PAC, located in Washington, D.C. and headed by Tony Perkins, have a combined budget of \$14.5 billion. FRC “seeks to merge fundamentalist Christianity with government.” FRC opposes reproductive freedom, engages in gay bashing and often joins with the Tea Party. FRC has become so extreme that this year it was designated as a “hate group” by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Alliance Defense Fund is located in Scottsdale, Arizona with a budget of \$30 million. ADF President Alan Sears says “there is no such thing as church-state separation in the Constitution and the bricks in the church-state wall are being removed one by one.” The group sponsors “Pulpit Freedom Sunday” to openly defy federal tax law by encouraging pastors to endorse or oppose candidates from the pulpit. (AU *Church and State*, May 2011)

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Jewish state.” The progress that has taken place in the West Bank should be a signal of what peace could mean for the Palestinian people. President

Obama spoke clearly that the United States does not expect Israel to sit down with people who are committed to violence and who will not acknowl-

edge its existence. Israel wants peace; the United States wants peace. The question mark is whether Palestinian leaders want peace.

Reproductive Rights, continued from page one

ernor Rick Perry has signed into law a measure that requires women seeking abortion to first get a sonogram. If the woman declines to view it, her doctor must describe “the size of the embryo or fetus and the presence of organs

and limbs.” In cases of rape, incest or serious fetal abnormalities women may refuse to hear the description.

Minnesota’s state Senate voted earlier this month to eliminate state funding

of abortions for poor women and to prohibit all abortions after 20 weeks. The state House passed almost identical bills. Gov. Mark Dayton said “he would not sign bills violating the ‘fundamental right’ to an abortion.”