

Joel Rosenberg: Israel on Its Own When It Comes to Iran

It is not exactly starting off as a happy New Year in Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his security cabinet have to be mortified by what they are seeing unfold—not in Damascus, but in Washington.

To be sure, Israeli leaders are concerned but not surprised by the horrific bloodletting that is underway between the evil Assad regime and the demonic forces of al-Qaida and their radical Islamic partners. But the Israelis are stunned and dismayed by the vacillating, lurching, confused and chaotic approach to decision-making being taken by President Obama and his top advisers.

Officially, the Israeli government supports the Obama administration's approach to Syria.

"Israel agrees with President Obama that the use of chemical weapons is a 'heinous act' for which the Assad regime must be held accountable and for which there must be 'international consequences,'" says Michael Oren, the Israeli ambassador in Washington. "Israel further agrees with the President that the use of chemical weapons promotes the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and encourages 'governments who would choose to build nuclear arms.'"

This statement of official support should not be surprising. Israel is, after all, America's best friend in the Middle East and its most loyal ally on the planet.

But behind the scenes, Netanyahu and his team have never felt more alone.

If President Obama is so distrusted by the American people and her representatives in Congress that he cannot build solid support for limited military strikes against Syria's chemical weapons facilities, the Israelis are coming to the painful realization that there is no chance for the president to pull together support for preemptive military action against Iran's nuclear facilities. Zero. Nada. Zilch.

Mr. Obama cannot even persuade former Defense Secretary Don Rumsfeld or former U.S. ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton—two outspoken hawks, ready and willing to use military and force against WMDs in the Middle East when necessary—to support his limited plan for action in Syria. This just shows how deeply the president is mistrusted by those who would otherwise support bipartisan efforts to take out tyrants and their most dangerous weapons.

That means one thing: The Israelis are on their own, and now they know it.

“Until [recently], Obama's Middle East policies were generally regarded by the Arab world as confused and incoherent,” notes the *Times of Israel*. “As of Saturday, he will be perceived as one of the weakest presidents in American history. That scent of weakness has emphatically reached Iran. ... Khamenei and his advisers recognize that the likelihood of this administration using military force against a country with Iran's military capability are very low, if not nonexistent.

“And they're not the only ones who realize this. The same conclusions are being drawn by Hezbollah and al-Qaeda. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his cabinet colleagues, who will doubtless have been watching the Rose Garden speech, will have internalized what they had long suspected: that Washington will not be the place from which good news will emanate about thwarting Iran's nuclear drive.”

“The punch line is that the more that Israel perceives the

U.S. as hesitant, the more Israel will be pushed to deal alone with the Iranians, something that the U.S. really did not want," Michael Herzog, an Israel-based fellow of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told the *New York Times*. "People ask, 'If this is the case on a relatively simple thing like striking Syria, how will they act against Iran?' It deepens the question marks."

Ari Shavit, a columnist for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, told the *New York Times* that U.S. actions were leaving Israelis with the "feeling of orphans" and that they are wondering "if there is still a reliable parent in Washington who is really committed, who understands what's going on and who is willing to act."

On a radio show this morning, I was asked whether I thought my novel *Damascus Countdown* was coming to pass. Not yet, I said. But it's getting dangerously close. Let me explain:

- The premise of *Damascus Countdown* (and the novel that preceded it, *The Tehran Initiative*) is that an American president tries to persuade an Israeli prime minister not to launch a preemptive military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities on the premise that this could blow up the entire Middle East.
- The Israeli prime minister sees weakness, vacillation and indecision in the president and knows that, regretfully, he cannot depend on Washington to neutralize the Iranian nuclear threat before it's too late.
- Fearing a nuclear Holocaust, Israel decides it is all alone and thus has no choice to take military action against Iran.
- Then Iran teams up with Syria to launch weapons of mass destruction against Israel from Syrian soil.

No, we are not there yet—thank God. But we are getting close. And President Obama's approach toward Syria is driving us

there all the faster.

It's all the more reason to be praying for the peace of Jerusalem, as the psalmist commands.

Joel C. Rosenberg is the author of numerous New York Times best-selling novels and nonfiction books, with nearly 3 million copies sold. He is also the founder of the Joshua Fund (). His books include The Last Jihad (2002), The Last Days (2003), The Ezekiel Option (2005) and The Copper Scroll (2006).

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