

# Uri Bar-Ner, the Consummate Ambassador

It is difficult to imagine what the Judean warrior, Judah Maccabee, must have contemplated when he took on the Seleucid Empire in the second century B.C. From the village of Modi'in, he and his brothers led a revolt that still brings the clashing of swords to the ears of their descendants in the 21st century.

Uri Bar-Ner is one of those descendants, a proud Israeli living today near Modi'in. Like his ancestors, he fights for Israel, but on a different battlefield. I had the privilege of visiting with him in Israel last summer, and then again a few weeks ago.

Bar-Ner, the former Israeli ambassador to Turkey, is a delightful conversationalist, and his knowledge of geopolitics is unparalleled.

Born in Haifa, Bar-Ner graduated from the Hebrew University with a bachelor's degree in international relations and history. He also earned a master's in political science from Emory University, and that training served him and his country well over the years. Bar-Ner has been a key diplomat for Israel for five decades.

Out of 200 candidates, Bar-Ner was one of a handful selected for the Foreign Ministry.

"I became a glorified gypsy," he said with a laugh.

If he was a gypsy, he was a very sophisticated one. Bar-Ner was posted to Bombay in 1968, and afterward landed as deputy ambassador in Copenhagen. It was in 1973 that he made his way to Washington, D.C., to become a minister of information at the Israeli Embassy.

And then the Yom Kippur War broke out. While Israeli military personnel were at home, Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal and made their way through the Sinai; Syrian forces sped across the Golan Heights.

"It is a delicate question," he said when asked about that delicate time. "I was in the embassy when we worked with [U.S. Secretary of State] Henry Kissinger. In the negotiations with Egypt, we worked for partial agreements, step by step, then a peace treaty."

Over time, Bar-Ner worked more closely with the government of Anwar Sadat.

"As a member of the embassy, I was involved mainly in efforts to sign an agreement with them for cultural exchanges, beginning in 1980. That was very significant because we understood then that we have to cement the agreement in such a way that it will last forever."

When we spoke, the so-called Arab Spring was convulsing the Middle East, signaling the most significant changes in geopolitics since Bar-Ner entered the foreign service. In regards to what the near future might hold for countries like Egypt and Turkey, he expressed optimism that key safeguards were in place that at least gave the decades-long agreements with Egypt an opportunity to remain.

"The way it was done with the U.S. [during the Jimmy Carter years] was a commitment to support Egypt annually for \$2 billion, which has been done since then. Then the gas pipeline which was developed."

He paused, then addressed the current situation, as Hosni Mubarak teetered on the edge of power.

"No matter who will rule Egypt, I hope that they will keep at least the military agreement, because if they don't, they will lose American support." As a man who has learned that patience

over the long term is a useful tool, Bar-Ner didn't seem overly alarmed by potential outcomes.

"I think it is quite clear what needs to happen, obviously. I believe we will overcome it all, echoed from the 1978-79 peace treaty."

In other words, the hope is that cooler heads will prevail.

Between stints with the Foreign Ministry (Bar-Ner was also director of information affairs and, no small posting, ambassador to Turkey from 1998-2001), this urbane, warm man lends his time to a couple of causes near to his heart.

"There is life beyond the ministry. I returned home in 2001 and since then have been working with the Schneider Center."

He participates in efforts to fundraise for Schneider Children's Medical Center in Israel. His experiences as ambassador underscore Bar-Ner's deep compassion for people.

"During times of the earthquakes in Turkey, Israel saved thousands of people, for three weeks with rescue teams. One time, a young Turkish man came and said, 'I saw my wife under the rubble—can you save her?' We rushed. A doctor gave her four hours to live, saying he had to amputate. An Israeli doctor said, 'No, we don't need to amputate.' He gave her morphine, broke her leg and pulled her out!"

Furthermore, Bar-Ner lends his experience to the America-Israel Friendship League (), a New York-based organization that works to strengthen ties between Israel and the U.S.

A key element in that effort involves AIFL's vaunted "people-to-people" programs. Various groups are taken each year to Israel, in order to better understand the cultural and moral values shared by Israel and her long ally.

"From 1978 until today, we have hosted 5,000 students and families from both sides," Bar-Ner noted. Young people (and

other groups, such as attorneys, even culinary experts) are selected coast-to-coast.

“AIFL sends states attorneys-general, school superintendents, students and others; there is cross-cooperation in such areas as development of curriculum.”

Uri Bar-Ner is a delight, and represents the best of the growing relationship between Israel and evangelicals. With three children and six grandchildren, he and his wife are enjoying the fruits of an abundant life.

It is a life his ancestors would surely approve.

**Jim Fletcher** is a writer, speaker and researcher who specializes in pro-Israel activism. He blogs for WorldNetDaily, RaptureReady, Beliefnet and the Jerusalem Post. His latest book is *It's the End of the World As We Know It*. Jim can be reached at [jim1fletcher@](mailto:jim1fletcher@).