



The US and Us: The Mitvim-DC Monthly

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The US and Us: The Mitvim-DC Monthly is a monthly report on US-Middle East issues. Each report includes an analysis, a roundup of commentaries, and a profile of a major US policymaker. The series is of particular importance for Israel's regional foreign policies as the second Obama administration takes shape – a time in which personnel changes and policy re-evaluations regarding Israel and the Middle East are taking place.

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A. Analysis

The diplomatic headaches have only increased for Obama in March and early April. It was not enough to merely be pre-occupied with Russian aggressions in Crimea and a [crisis-point in the relationship with Saudi Arabia](#), the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations had to rupture with Abbas' surprise announcement earlier last week that the Palestinians would be seeking international acceptance in 15 new conventions/treaties. With the US currently scrambling for a response, April looks to be a crucial month in the history of the peace process.

Much of the debate surrounding the negotiations revolved around Jonathan Pollard and what the US could do to keep the talks going. In the US, the debate raged on, with many - if not [most](#) - [against releasing Pollard](#). Indeed, that the US had to 'coerce' Israel to abide by a prisoner release they had previously agreed to at the beginning of the negotiations struck many as [imbalanced](#). As one [former government consultant said on Twitter](#): "If the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks were divorce court, Israel would walk away with joint custody of the judge's kids." With talks at a dead-halt this week, [many have criticized the Obama Administration](#), questioning what it would take to get both parties to concede on the core issues if the US cannot even get the parties talking again.

The approximate reason for the current impasse in the talks is the announcement by Abbas of the pursuit of Palestinian acceptance in 15 international organizations. Indeed, the Palestinian initiative seems to have caught the US entirely by surprise. And while analysts, such as myself, have argued that the [15 conventions/treaties that Abbas has mentioned are actually rather innocuous](#), Kerry and the negotiating team [appear to be at their wit's end](#). The Palestinians, however, have stated they are committed to negotiating until the end of April, and the US should use that to their advantage and re-double political pressure on both parties to force concessions and extend talks to the end of the year.

B. Article Roundup

The Middle East Peace Process

Michael Crowley, at *Time*, argues that despite the focus on Russia and Asia, the Middle East remains the spot of Obama's [two largest policy initiatives](#) (Iran and Israel/Palestine), and is therefore the most important foreign policy issue to the president.

Jeffrey Goldberg, in *Bloomberg View*, writes the obituary for John Kerry's attempts at negotiating peace, [but argues that one cannot really blame Kerry](#) for trying to 'seek peace.'

John Judis, at the Carnegie Endowment, writes in March that Kerry's attempts at negotiating peace were nearing their end, saying that [both sides were eager to push other initiatives](#), including the Palestinians' desire to go back to the UN.

Dennis Ross, Robert Satloff, and David Pollock, at the Washington Institute, discuss the recent breakdown in talks and [what this means for the peace process](#).

US-Saudi Relations

Anthony Cordesman, at CSIS, argues that the US-Saudi relationship does not need a restart, it needs a [US reassessment of interests](#) in the Middle East.

Suzanne Maloney, at Brookings, assesses the Obama visit to Riyadh, and ultimately concludes that [reconciliation between the two countries](#) depends on the US's vision for the Middle East.

Egypt

Shadi Hamid, in *The Atlantic*, writes the obituary for the Morsi regime in Egypt, asking if the deposed Egyptian ruler [truly qualifies as an autocrat](#) given Egypt's recent political history.

C. Policy Profile

Susan Rice, National Security Advisor

In recent weeks, reports have emerged of a rift between members of the Obama Administration and their Israeli counterparts, most significantly, of Obama's National Security Advisor, Susan Rice. Rice, the former US Ambassador to the UN, has apparently [not even met with the Israeli Ambassador](#) to the US in months. When Israeli officials made disparaging comments towards John Kerry, Rice was quick to jump to Twitter in [lambasting the Israeli critics](#). It has become clear to observers of the current talks that Rice has been less than favorable in her opinions and remarks towards the Israelis. According to reports quoting American and Israeli officials, Rice has [advocated a withdrawal of the Obama Administration from the peace process](#), citing a lack of progress and willingness to negotiate on both sides. According to the officials, Rice is joined by a number of colleagues in the government who are advocating a decreased US role in the Middle East. As the current negotiations reach their proposed end-date on April 29th, it will be important to monitor the internal nuances and debates within the Obama Administration.