



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.

This report is prepared by Grant Rumley, a Visiting Fellow at Mitvim, grumley@mitvim.org.il. Previous issues can be [read here](#).

A. Analysis

May looks to be the month of reassessment for the US. As talks between the Israelis and Palestinians broke down past a point of salvation, the Obama Administration began to look elsewhere. John Kerry made a few trips to Africa, Obama had an official visit to China, and Martin Indyk's team of negotiators look to be on their last leg. As the month goes on and John Kerry begins his reflections, the biggest decision facing the Secretary of State is whether or not to release his parameters like Clinton did at the end of his negotiating efforts.

In a revealing interview with Nahum Barnea at *Yedioth Ahronoth*, [senior American negotiators gave a play-by-play description of the talks' failure](#), and placed most of the onus on the Israelis and Netanyahu. It's clear that though Netanyahu was able to move an inch, Abbas was boxed in, and after the failure to release the fourth batch of prisoners, combined with Uri Ariel's announcement of new settlement tenders, Abbas began to look elsewhere. According to the US officials, this was when Abbas began to lose faith in the talks and turn his attention towards reconciliation efforts with Hamas.

The question for the US remains to what extent future involvement in the talks will be, as well as how to interact with any type of national unity government comprising members of Fatah and Hamas. US officials have iterated that any contact with a Hamas-involved government would require Hamas's acceptance of the Quartet's three principles, something senior officials in [Hamas have flatly rebuffed](#). As the peace process slowly dies and the US reevaluates its position and involvement, look to Palestinian reconciliation to be a rather accurate barometer for future US involvement – if any.

However, the state of the peace process is not the only remaining question for the US in the region. With US aid and US-made military equipment being used for less-than-reputable means in Egypt, many in the US are worried about the effectiveness of aid to the politically fragile country. As the [debate heats up in DC](#), expect more [scrutiny to be placed on Cairo](#).

B. Article Roundup

US Foreign Policy

Brian Katulis, of the Center for American Progress, [says the US should be more assertive in promoting its values across the world](#), and that only through a reformed approach to foreign policy can the US end its “strategic drift.”

The US and the Future of the Peace Process

Michael Singh, of the Washington Institute, [says the US should now focus on low-profile, economic based diplomacy](#) between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Yezid Sayigh, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, says the fact that the EU broke ranks with the US on the Palestinian reconciliation announcement shows that the [US is no longer an honest broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#).

Khaled Elgindy, of Brookings, says if the US is serious about approaching the peace process it [should welcome the national reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas](#). Only through a unified Palestinian leadership, says Elgindy, can the peace process prosper.

US-Egypt Relations

Former Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer [wonders if the US-Egyptian relationship can be reinvented](#), and ultimately decides that any real progress in the relationship would require Egyptian steps towards pluralism and political tolerance.

Several experts at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [debate whether Egypt is making strides towards good governance and transparent democracy](#), and if the US should continue its aid program.

C. Policy Profile

Joseph Westphal, newly-appointed US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia

Joseph Westphal, the [recently-appointed](#) US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, is a very respected figure in both academia and government in the US. [Previously](#) a professor of political science at the University of Maine, Oklahoma State, and Georgetown, Westphal most recently served as Under Secretary of the US Army, and was also the Army’s first Chief Management Officer. He has an extensive career in government, having worked for the Department of Interior and EPA during the Clinton Administration, as well as serving as an advisor to US Congress. In 2009, he served as a defense advisor on Obama’s transition team in the White House.

The appointment of a former secretary of the Army to Ambassador in Riyadh suggests a [reinforcing of the undercurrent of US-Saudi relations](#), and his relationship to Obama is close enough for the president to keep close tabs on developments in the Gulf. Obama has made a pattern of appointing political donors to Ambassadorial positions, but he has clearly opted for a technocrat to be sent to Saudi Arabia, a wise choice given the situation with Iran and the state of the region.