**Letting Israel hang**

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In less than a week, the Obama administration left Israel hanging out to dry three separate times.

Media coverage of the "flotilla" incident has ignored this critical shift in US policy. But it's a safe bet that America's adversaries, especially the terrorists, understand it all too well. Worse yet, President Obama's visible discomfort in defending hard-pressed US interests around the world is only growing -- with implications America hasn't experienced since Jimmy Carter's presidency.

Let's recap the Obama "defense" of Israel.

First, in the UN Security Council, the administration succumbed to the rush to criticize Israel in a statement that, albeit watered down, nonetheless greatly intensified international pressure on Jerusalem. The correct approach was to resist the diplomatic peer pressure and bar any council action until tempers cooled and more facts were available -- meaning at most a day or two's delay. This America could easily have done. Failure to withstand the short-term heat only feeds the impression of White House weakness, and will come back to haunt us.

Second, at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, America, joined only by Italy and the Netherlands in dissent, overwhelmingly lost a vote to establish an international investigation of the Gaza incident. Even as the Obama administration touted its success preventing a Security Council investigation, it was losing precisely the same issue in Geneva -- demonstrating why concessions in New York did absolutely nothing to stem the anti-Israeli tide. So much for Obama's idea that he could reform the palpably illegitimate Human Rights Council by having the United States rejoin it.

Third, just a few days previously, at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference, the United States joined the consensus on a statement condemning Israel (which is not even a party to the treaty) and its nuclear program, while failing to condemn Iran, an NPT signatory that has been happily violating its treaty obligations. After the vote, National Security Adviser James Jones condemned the reference to Israel, utterly overlooking the fact that the Obama administration could readily have blocked it.

All three cases demonstrate deep-seated White House weakness. It would be a stunning admission of administration incompetence if diplomats in three separate venues had made these decisions entirely on their own (although that does happen too often at the State Department). Instructions to the US negotiators in all three likely came from either Obama or Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, so there is no dodging White House responsibility here, or the unmistakable pattern it represents.

Even more seriously, a potential fourth example of Obama's increasingly anti-Israeli policy now arises: the administration's strongly negative position on Israel's Gaza blockade. Although so far expressed largely in private, with only nuanced statements being leaked publicly, the White House is plainly leaning heavily on Israel to weaken the blockade in potentially fatal ways. Indeed, on Friday, a White House press person said the "current arrangements" were "unsustain- able," a very poorly disguised threat to Israel.

Israel itself is prepared to make some cosmetic changes, so open differences between Tel Aviv and Washington are not currently visible publicly. Beneath the surface, however, the diplomacy is intense.

Ironically, Obama is expending more energy pressuring Israel than he did in the Security Council, the Human Rights Council or the nuclear-review conference to protect US and Israeli equities. This pattern also typifies Obama and his key advisers: They find it is far easier to bend their friends into submission than to stand up to America's determined adversaries.

America's Western European allies, by and large, already are happy to agree that the Gaza blockade violates "international law." This view in part explains why even Britain and France failed to join the US in the Human Rights Council, and negotiated too closely with Turkey in its efforts to slam Israel in the Security Council.

Third World radicals will doubtless build on Europe's position in their ongoing, decades-long efforts to delegitimize Israel entirely. There is equally little doubt that Obama himself is susceptible to these kinds of foreign pressures, especially when withstanding them might cause his own international image to suffer. Here, Israel is merely collateral damage in guarding the cult of our first post-American president.

The harm caused by US weakness on the Gaza blockade issue will reach far beyond the Middle East. Worldwide, America's friends and allies increasingly realize that President Obama won't stand with them in controversial circumstances. Accordingly, those closest to us will calibrate their own interests more carefully to hedge against US weakness, step by step distancing themselves from us.

That will inexorably accelerate the pace of our debilitation -- thus actually further increasing Obama's self-imposed weakness, undermining US positions worldwide.

The really grim news is that we face at least 2½ more years of such Obama policies.

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