A major gap between Washington, J’lem: Can Israel win favor on the Arab street?

ANALYSIS
* by HERB KEINON

Dore Gold – whose words should be given even more weight now since he will soon likely fill a top slot in the Prime Minister’s Office – said bluntly at last week’s Herzliya Conference that the relationship between US President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu “started off on the wrong foot” four years ago.

Gold, a former ambassador to the UN who always weighs his public words with great care, said he could make that comment “pretty definitely” because he was at two meetings between the two men when they were both running for office, “and the personal chemistry between the individuals was actually very positive.”

Gold said that while it was “hard to identify exactly where this wrong foot began,” his assessment was that it had to do with the “assumptions that were moving in the political systems of both countries.”

One of the assumptions in Washington, Gold said, was that the sides were “just a hairbreadth away from an agreement, and with just a little push here, or a bit more “Camp David time” there, they could be pushed over the ledge to an agreement.

While that was the main difference Gold discussed, it was not the only difference in assumption between the two leaders. There were two major conceptual differences at the time between Obama and Netanyahu that came to the surface time after time and created friction.

The first had to do with Iran, and the idea of linkage. When Netanyahu met Obama in the Oval Office in May 2009, the president linked Iran and the Palestinian