Uzi Arad: ‘It behooves allies to listen to each other’

Ahead of Obama’s visit, Netanyahu’s former national security adviser says it is important to get the US president on Israel’s turf to focus completely on Mideast issues for two days

By REBECCA KEDMON

One of the main storylines of US President Barack Obama’s visit to Israel next week is his relationship with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Those who are critical describe their relationship as “rocky.” or the two leaders never developed “good chemistry.”

The U.S. administration has largely avoided the sentiment that a final-status agreement is lurking just around the corner, with Hamas’ consolidation of power in Gaza and the resulting “hardening” of the Palestinian cabinet major barriers for the completion of this assumption.

So the question here is: what is one of the most prominent and readily identifiable leaders of this task force? And while one cannot be sure whether the US president will have a direct role in the final-status agreement, there is a certain level of confidence that he will have a significant role in the negotiations.

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ISRAEL AND THE US share a common strategic vision on Iran, says US Arafat. (Gil Cohen Magen/Reuters)

process to work.
"No one can expect Israel to take steps but that the Palesti-
ninians do not," he said. "Un-
lateral steps will not help people are wider and only. This should be a two-way street."

REGARDING ISRAEL, Arafat sounded confident that Obama would not let the country obtain nuclear weapons.
"We have a common strategic vision," he said. Obama has been "very explicit in declaring that the US is determined to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear capabilities. He also clarified that he is not excluding any means to accomplish this goal."

Arafat stressed that Obama has clarified that the Washington strategic mindset is not acceptance of the possibility of a nuclear Iran and then failing back on a strategy of containment and deterrence, but rather one of "preventing that eventuality."

"If you take the president and his spokesman, listen to what they say he is not bluffing on this, and that he means what he says, and if you assume that the great American nation is determined to keep Iran from going nuclear, then Iran will not become nuclear," he said.

"If that takes time, then so be it."

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Arafat added that the American invention and resolve on this matter, Arafat said, "I trust them as much as they trust themselves."

Obama, Arafat, has not indicated there has been any change in his policy, and has encouraged people to take him seriously on this.

"If he means what he says, we have no reason to doubt because it prevents a nuclear bomb is clearly within its capabilities."

"And, he added, when Obama feels strongly about something, he has shown that he sticks to his guns.

If that is the case, then why all the tension between Washington and Jerusalem over this issue?

"Just in America you don't have uniformity and consensus on this matter," he said. "There are other voices, and there may be some debate. But this has not solved the president's course."

Arafat acknowledged tactical differences between Israel and the US on the matter, but downplayed their importance, saying such differences were normal between allies. He nevertheless advised Israel to listen carefully to what Washington has to say on the matter.

"It behooves any partner in an alliance to listen to the other side," he said, "just as we are free to express our concerns and have them taken into account. If the US has a different take on something we should be very attentive of it, while still making our reservations heard."

Arafat was asked how he expected the Iranian issue to play out. Arafat said he has "not given up hope that one way or another Iran will be prevented from nuclear arms."

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"I believe that it is a foregone conclusion that a negotiated solution to slow or end the program would fail. If that task succeeds "all the better," he said. But if it fails, and all efforts to convince the Iranians to give up their program are for naught, "there is a significant likelihood military means will be applied and Iran will not have a nuclear weapon." I have not given up hope that one way or another Iran will be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons."

Note to readers: Due to an error, the full interview with US Arafat appearing here was not published on Friday.