

The role of the USA in Israel's peace negotiations

Bruce Gurd

The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States has renewed American attempts to broker a Middle East peace deal. Despite an unexpected number of Jews among his senior advisors, their influence is not as pro-Israel as might be expected.

IN RECENT YEARS the Brotherhood's attention has often been focused on the role of the USA in efforts for peace in Israel. We can look back to the 1970s when President Jimmy Carter achieved the Israel-Egypt peace agreement; in the '80s and '90s it was Bill Clinton's turn. Clinton once remarked that the final rejection of his peace agreement by Yasser Arafat was the biggest disappointment of his presidency (apparently worse than being caught lying about his lack of moral restraint).

In discussion after a recent Youth Aliyah meeting (at the Adelaide ecclesia) in South Australia, Mr Meir Buber, the Jewish speaker, drew our attention to the current US Administration's attitude to Israel. He mentioned that Barack Obama had appointed no fewer than fourteen Jewish advisors. Historically, Jews, around two per cent of the USA population, occupy around thirteen per cent of Senate seats and seven per cent of House of Representatives seats, percentages that are highly disproportionate. In the current situation their power is enhanced, as Obama has appointed Jews into the White House while at the same time apparently shifting power to the White House away from Cabinet. Two of the six most senior advisors to President Obama are Jews: Rahm Emanuel (Chief of Staff of the White House) and his friend David Axelrod (Senior Advisor). The Head of Vice President Joe Biden's office, Ronald Klain, is also a Jew. Outside of the key six are Obama Jewish appointees as the Head of Budget and Director of Economic Policy; there is also the likelihood that Obama will reappoint Ben Bernanke as head of the Federal Reserve. All this is enough for anti-Semitic websites to dub Obama the "first Jewish President".

Jewish influence in the White House

There is no doubting the Jewish credentials of the Hebrew-speaking Emanuel in his position of considerable power in the White House. The name Rahm, similar to the Biblical

town Ramah, means 'High' or 'Lofty'. The family changed their surname from Auerbach to Emanuel to honour Rahm's uncle, Emanuel Auerbach, who was killed fighting Arabs in Jerusalem in the 1930s. His father Benjamin emigrated from Jerusalem after working with the Irgun in resisting the British. Benjamin, a paediatrician, married an American Jew and they had four children: Ezekiel (a renowned Harvard medical ethicist), Rahm, Ariel (a renowned person in Hollywood) and adopted daughter Shoshanna.

Although Emanuel probably never did volunteer for the Israeli Defence Force, as certain biographies suggest, he has nevertheless been connected with Israel. He did attend summer camp in Israel just after the Six-Day War, and developed a feeling for the land for which his father fought. Rahm married Amy Rule, a Gentile, but she converted to Judaism and they have brought up their children (Zachariah, Ilana and Leah) as 'Modern Orthodox' Jews. He has been politically active on behalf of Israel, but his track record is as a moderate, adopting a dovish stand towards Israel. Emanuel worked behind the scenes to engineer the Clinton peace accord and the handshake between Arafat and Rabin. After the Clinton era he had a successful business career and then won a seat in the House of Representatives.

Given his Jewish background, his father Benjamin famously declared how his son would positively influence Obama towards Israel: "Why wouldn't he? What is he, an Arab? He's not going to be mopping floors at the White House". (Emanuel then apologised to the annoyed Arab community.) Yet Emanuel has become tough against Israel. The Rabbi of his Modern Orthodox



Rahm Emanuel

congregation in Chicago is reported as having expressed his disappointment in the way Emanuel is using his power: "In some ways there was a heightened expectation because Rahm is so connected to Israel and the Jewish community. Instead what we've seen is more of the tough Rahm Emanuel. Not the warm Rahm".

Unwelcome messages

By July, Netanyahu, prime minister of Israel, had become so incensed with Emanuel and Axelrod that he labelled them as "self-hating Jews" (*Haaretz* newspaper). He found that their attitude on settlements and the pressure for the two-state solution was just too hard. How is this so? Our Jewish speaker, Mr Buber, suggested that Jews have always had a desire to think they could solve the world's problems. Why were so many of the Russian revolutionaries Jewish? Mr Buber argued that the Jews in the White House were repeating the history of past Jews who thought they had the answers for the world.

In Emanuel's case, his American aspirations and desire to be seen to succeed on the world

stage may be more important than his Jewish affiliations. Like Obama he has written a book; his is called, *The Plan: big ideas for America*. In it he sketches a vision for the USA, and describes how America can be changed with the liberal democratic agenda he favours. His vision is for America—not for the King of the Jews to restore the kingdom to Israel.

Emanuel's tough, sometimes objectionably rude, behaviour has earned him the nickname Rahm-bo. He brings that toughness to the Israeli question, and specifically against Netanyahu and his government. Dan Ephron, writing in *Newsweek*, declares that Netanyahu and Emanuel "could almost be siblings". So far they have shown the way siblings can argue. Up against Netanyahu, he is not willing to compromise at all, eliciting Netanyahu's epithet, "self-hating Jews". Apparently Emanuel believes that he knows all the tricks that the Israelis will try, and that Netanyahu has spent enough of his life in the USA to appreciate the US position.

Emanuel will be Obama's voice to appease the American Jewish community, but even to them he sides with Obama's apparent desire to make concessions to Iran, and he told them, "Our ability to confront the major challenge of Iran will be affected by our ability to show progress in the Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian areas" (*Newsweek*, 1 Jun. 2009).

On 13 July President Obama gathered fourteen US Jewish groups to the White House. His goal was to appease the Jewish lobbies and assure them that, although he may appear tough on Israel, he was really a supporter. His Jewish team might go head to head against the Israeli Government in Jerusalem, but all in the cause of peace.

In whatever way the angels use the Jews in the White House, we can be certain that Israel is moving to the situation described in the prophets, when "All thy lovers have forgotten thee" (Jer. 30:14), for Jerusalem will be a burdensome stone to all nations.

Our Jewish speaker, Mr Buber, suggested that the European right-wing governments of France (Sarkozy), Germany (Merkel) and Italy (Berlusconi) were now relatively friendly towards the nation of Israel, and yet, he admitted, such amiableness is transitory and unreliable. Yahweh is creating inexorable forces drawing the world towards the restitution of the kingdom to Israel, and this will produce Jacob's great time of trouble. No Jew in the White House can save them from that.