

August 26, 2015

Elliot Abrams, who served in foreign policy positions for Reagan and the Bushes, reviews Michael Oren's book *Ally*. It is a long read, but provides an 'inside baseball' look at relations with one of our most important allies.

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... Oren describes Netanyahu as "one of the world's most complex, seasoned, divisive, and hounded leaders, and perhaps its loneliest." And he draws Netanyahu's personality as "part commando, part politico, and thoroughly predatory." Those words are not as nasty as they might appear, given the context of Israel's rough-and-tumble politics—and Israel's own history and current security challenges. Netanyahu rejected, on several occasions, Oren's advice "to conciliate rather than confront Obama," but on the evidence Oren himself provides in this book, Netanyahu had the better of the argument between them. After all, selecting Oren was itself a conciliatory gesture, as were the decisions to apologize to Turkey at Obama's insistence, and to impose a 10-month (partial) moratorium on construction in settlements. From these it seems Netanyahu learned that conciliation would gain him little in the Obama White House, which had fixed and unalterable views on Israel—and on its prime minister.

In truth, it is not all that uncommon for individual leaders to dislike each other. What is striking in Oren's book is that the Obama team did not view this mutual aversion as a problem to be alleviated but as a license to further the assault on Netanyahu, his government, and his country. When I was an official in the George W. Bush White House, we found that the president and French President Jacques Chirac cordially despised each other. So we worked around that to maintain the alliance and solve any problems our nations faced. The French national-security adviser flew over to Washington every few weeks, and he and the French ambassador in Washington would meet with the secretary of state, the national-security adviser, and several of us handling key issues. We managed despite the hostility at the top. But Obama's and Netanyahu's dislike for each other was exacerbated, not alleviated, by Obama's staff, who happily cursed out Netanyahu to the press and threw around threats about how this or that move would permanently damage the bilateral relationship.

This phenomenon was worsened by matters of style that are frankly shocking to someone like me, who worked in previous administrations. White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel called Oren before dawn about some development and began the call by saying: "I don't like this fucking shit." At a reception following a Netanyahu visit to the White House, Emanuel poked his finger into Oren's chest and said, "You do not fucking come to the White House and fucking lecture the president of the United States." Deputy Secretary of State Tom Nides, worried about legislation that would call for defunding any UN agency that recognizes Palestine as a state, told Oren, "You don't want the fucking UN to collapse because of your fucking conflict with the Palestinians." Oren went into the State Department to see Deputy Secretary Jim Steinberg, and was dressed down and read a list of demands (including, of course, a total construction freeze in East Jerusalem as well as the West Bank) in a tone Oren describes as "furious." But Oren adds that he later heard that this was less of a private conversation than an anti-Israel rally: Via an open phone line or hidden microphone, "department staffers listened in on our conversation and cheered."

These matters of language and comportment could be viewed as trivial, but they are not. They suggest an attitude toward Israel's government that is quite simply contemptuous, disrespectful, and hostile. It is unlikely that such treatment was accorded to the British or French ambassadors, even by people like Emanuel who appear to equate vulgarity with strength or

persuasiveness. Nor, as we have been seeing week after week, was such treatment ever accorded to the vicious Communist dictatorship in Cuba or to the brutal theocracy in Iran. ...

The mess created by Obama in foreign affairs has a carbon copy in domestic affairs. **Phil Gramm** describes how the "transformation" has a foundation of sand.

... The Obama transformation was achieved by laws granting unparalleled discretionary power to the executive branch—but where the law gave no discretion Mr. Obama refused to abide by the law. Whether the law mandated action, such as income verification for ObamaCare, or inaction, such as immigration reform without congressional support, Mr. Obama willfully overrode the law. Stretching executive powers beyond their historic limits, he claimed the Federal Communications Commission had authority over the Internet and exerted Environmental Protection Agency control over power plants to reduce carbon emissions.

When Obama empowered himself to declare Congress in “recess” to make illegal appointments that the courts later ruled unconstitutional, he was undeterred. In an action that Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon would have never undertaken, Mr. Obama pushed Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid to “nuke” the rights of minority Senators to filibuster judicial nominees and executive appointments by changing the long-standing 60-vote supermajority needed for cloture to a simple majority.

American democracy has historically relied on three basic constraints: a shared commitment to the primacy of the constitutional process over any political agenda, the general necessity to achieve bipartisan support to make significant policy changes, and the natural desire of leaders to be popular by delivering peace and prosperity. Mr. Obama has transformed America by refusing to accept these constraints. The lock-step support of the Democrats’ supermajority in the 111th Congress freed him from having to compromise as other presidents, including Reagan and Mr. Clinton, have had to do.

While the Obama program has transformed America, no one is singing “Happy Days Are Here Again” or claiming it’s “morning in America.” Despite a doubling of the national debt and the most massive monetary expansion since the Civil War, America’s powerhouse economy has withered along with the rule of law.

The means by which Mr. Obama wrought his transformation imperil its ability to stand the test of time. All of his executive orders can be overturned by a new president. ObamaCare and Dodd-Frank can be largely circumvented using exactly the same discretionary powers Mr. Obama used to implement them in the first place. Republicans, who never supported his program, are now united in their commitment to repeal it.

Most important, the American people, who came to embrace the Roosevelt and Reagan transformations, have yet to buy into the Obama transformation. For all of these reasons it appears that the Obama legacy rests on a foundation of sand.

Commentary

The Ally That Wasn't

by Elliott Abrams

It was a political and historical anomaly for Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to dispatch the historian Michael Oren to Washington D.C. to represent him and his country in 2009. Oren was not a member of Netanyahu's Likud party; he had no political involvement inside Israel; he had no foreign-policy or diplomatic experience; and he was not an intimate of the prime minister's. In all these ways he differed from his predecessors. When Netanyahu first served as prime minister of Israel from 1996 to 1999, his ambassadors were Eliyahu Ben-Elissar and Zalman Shoval—both old hands of his Likud party and familiar diplomatic and political figures. Ben-Elissar had been chief of staff to Menachem Begin and then Israel's ambassador to Egypt, and had chaired the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Knesset. Shoval had been the country's U.S. ambassador from 1990 to 1993. Later, Ariel Sharon sent his personal diplomatic adviser Daniel Ayalon to Washington; Sharon's successor, Ehud Olmert, selected Sallai Meridor, a former chairman of the Jewish Agency and head of the World Zionist Organization. Today Netanyahu's man in Washington is one of his closest advisers, Ron Dermer, who spent the first Obama term in an office 20 feet from Netanyahu's.

Oren, by contrast, is a mildly right-of-center academic with a Ph.D. from Princeton whose politics, he rightly explains in his new memoir, were "difficult to pigeonhole." An American from New Jersey who made aliyah when he was 17, Oren was known for his authorship of two excellent and well-received books, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (2002) and *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: The United States in the Middle East, 1776 to 2006*, which came out in 2007.

Presumably Netanyahu decided not to send a Likudnik to Washington in 2009 because in the newly elected Congress, both houses had strong Democratic majorities and the new president was a liberal Democrat himself. The choice of Oren was a gesture and a hope: Dispatch an academic, an intellectual, who might develop better relationships with Democratic politicians in Congress, with Obama and his new team, with the liberals (many of them liberal Jews) in the media, and with the overwhelmingly liberal American Jewish community.

Oren has now told the tale of his four years in Washington in *Ally: My Journey Across the American-Israeli Divide*. (Random House, 432 pages) The first thing to say about the book is that it should not have been published—not before January 2017, that is. Oren writes about Netanyahu, Obama, and many other people who are still in power, and he writes about issues and problems over which they are still fighting. Revealing such matters while Netanyahu and Obama are still in office complicates their relationship. Doing so might have helped the commercial success of Oren's book, but it is harmful to the prime minister for whom he worked and the interests of the country he was representing. To be sure, such conduct is not without precedent: Robert Gates, who (after succeeding Donald Rumsfeld in 2006) stayed on to serve Obama as secretary of defense for two-and-a-half years, until mid-2011, published his memoir, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, in January 2014. Obama then had three years left to serve as president. Presumably Gates did not feel his "duty" included keeping his mouth shut at least until his former boss and colleagues left office. Oren also felt no such obligation, and he is as wrong as Gates was.

Oren has argued in various interviews that he rushed the book into print because he needed to address the Iran issue, so serious is it for Israeli-American relations and the future security of Israel, and he needed to do it immediately. This is a silly argument. Of the many factors that will

influence and might possibly change American policy on Iran, Michael Oren's memoir is not high on the list. The early publication of this memoir seemed more calculated to affect sales than centrifuges, and with some justice, given its success.

But to judge it on its own terms, *Ally* is very well written, engaging, and enormously interesting. Beginning with his own youth in New Jersey, and going chronologically through his aliyah to Israel, education, military service, and writing career, Oren then takes us almost day by day through his four years as ambassador. What emerges is an absolutely devastating portrait of Barack Obama and his minions, whose distaste for Israel infects the president's thinking, his diplomatic activities, and by the end even his willingness to send Israel badly needed military supplies.

Oren began his posting by reading everything by and about Obama he could get his hands on. What he read alarmed him, and that included the portrait of the United States in Obama's memoir: "Vainly, I scoured *Dreams From My Father* for some expression of reverence, even respect, for the country its author would someday lead." When it came to Israel, Oren found that among Obama's few gut causes were creating a Palestinian state and reconciling with Islam, which, as Oren says, "intersected with Israel's interests, and in potentially abrasive ways."

Oren says he concluded that "Barack Obama was about ideology," and in his book he returns repeatedly to Obama's June 2009 Cairo speech as the manifestation of a worldview that "identified American interests with the Palestinians." This led to "the Obama administration's quenchless demand for Israeli concessions," none of which was ever viewed as adequate and none of which ever evoked real gratitude or reward. Meanwhile, as Oren recounts accurately, no action on the part of the Palestinian Authority aroused much reaction from the administration. When the Palestinian Authority announced a reconciliation agreement with Hamas just days after Hamas terrorists had shot an anti-tank missile at an Israeli school and killed a student there, Oren reports that "Obama's reaction was subdued."

When it came to Iran, Oren watched a recurring pattern "in which the White House pushed back on sanctions bills and then, once they passed, took credit for them." He argued unsuccessfully against a White House that increasingly saw Iran as a potential partner and concluded early on that while Obama said "all options are on the table" to stop Iran's nuclear program, in fact "the United States would not use force against Iran." What is more, he writes, "Washington quietly quashed any military option for Israel." And he was "brusquely" told at the Pentagon to "make no mistake about it, the way Israel handles the Iranian issue will determine the future course of your relations with the United States."

Adding insults to the injury of serious policy disagreements over Iran, Israel was handled shabbily month after month. Oren cites one small incident as revelatory of the Obama treatment: Haiti. When a terrible earthquake struck there in January 2010, Israel was—as usual after natural disasters around the globe—first on the scene with assistance, sending a field hospital. The day after the quake, 220 Israeli doctors, nurses, and rescue workers landed. Three days later, President Obama issued a statement: "Help continues to flow in, not just from the United States but from Brazil, Mexico, Canada, France, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic." Can anyone believe this omission of Israel, which had already made a far larger contribution, is anything but a deliberate slight?

More seriously, Oren recounts how "administration sources leaked the news" when Israel bombed convoys in Syria delivering weapons to Hezbollah, leaks that occurred repeatedly. There was absolutely no benefit to the United States in these revelations and considerable danger of drawing some Syrian, Iranian, or Hezbollah response against Israel—yet

“administration sources??.?.?continued leaking reports of IDF air strikes in Syria.” After the *Mavi Marmara* incident in 2010, when a Turkish ship tried to break through Israel’s naval blockade of Gaza and armed militants attacked Israeli commandos seeking to take control of the ship, Obama pressed over and over again for an Israeli apology. When Netanyahu finally and reluctantly did apologize to Turkey to propitiate the United States, he and Israel got no thanks from the Obama White House whatsoever.

To take an Iran-related example of the Obama treatment, the United States engaged in nuclear talks with Iran that were kept secret from Israel. As Oren rightly says: “Our closest ally had entreated with our deadliest enemy on an existential issue without so much as informing us.” On the Palestinian front, Oren recounts that when Israel finally reacted to the attacks from Hamas in Gaza with Operation Protective Edge in late 2014 (after Oren’s tenure in Washington had ended), Obama condemned Israel for doing “appalling” damage in Gaza. And far worse, during those weeks of war, Obama “delayed the delivery of munitions needed by the IDF.” So much for the claim that whatever the nature of the diplomatic disputes between the U.S. and Israel, the military and security relations between the two countries have been perfect.

Oren also describes the unprecedented personal attacks on Netanyahu, which clearly amazed him. These culminated in Netanyahu’s being called a “chickenshit” by an administration official who was speaking to *Atlantic* correspondent Jeffrey Goldberg. He does not note, but it is important to remember, that that comment was not made off the record. It was meant for publication (as long as the reporter kept the speaker’s name out of the story). This was not only a shocking breach of elementary protocol on the part of the administration, but also a blow to the foreign-policy purposes of the United States. “An America that slanders the democratically elected leader of its ally,” Oren writes wisely, “is one that is respected neither by its friends nor its enemies.”

Oren covers U.S. policy on Israeli–Palestinian matters in great detail, and here the story reflects just as badly on Obama and his administration. As Oren recounts, the administration was absolutely determined “to pressure Israel into accepting a settlement freeze.” The Bush administration had had lengthy discussions with Israel over the issue and had reached an agreement with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2004 to limit settlement growth. (I was intimately involved in these discussions.) No new settlements were to be made, and no additional land was to be taken in the West Bank for settlement expansion. The financial inducements to Israelis to move to settlements were to be ended, and new construction within settlements was to occur only in already built-up areas. Settlements would grow in population but not in territory, and the so-called peace map would not change.

This agreement was immediately discarded by the Obama administration in 2009. It demanded instead an absolute freeze on all construction in all settlements—even those Israel was quite obviously going to keep in any eventual peace deal—and in East Jerusalem as a *precondition for Israeli–Palestinian peace talks*. No Israeli prime minister, not even in a Labor Party government, would have agreed to this, and Netanyahu did not. As Oren states: “America’s new policies set conditions for talks that Israel could never meet and that Palestinians could not ignore.” In fact, this “total freeze” precondition made talks between Israel and the Palestinians impossible, which is why none were held during Obama’s entire first term. But the administration cast all the blame on Netanyahu.

What is perhaps most striking is that this precondition was imposed not by the Palestinians, who actually understood that it killed off the possibility of negotiations, but by the Americans. The Palestinian leaders understood that once the new U.S. position had been stated, they had to support it: They could not allow the Americans to seem tougher than they themselves in

protecting Palestinian interests. And finally, they understood that sooner or later the Americans would abandon this precondition in an effort to get talks, any talks, started, and would leave them holding the bag. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told *Newsweek* in 2011 that “it was Obama who suggested a full settlement freeze,” and that he had told Obama, “OK, I accept.” Then “we both went up the tree,” Abbas recounted. “After that, he came down with a ladder and he removed the ladder and said to me, jump. Three times he did it.” This story is a reminder that while Obama might have had Palestinian interests in mind in all his actions, his policies actually produced nothing for the Palestinians—among whom he is almost as unpopular as he is among Israelis.

For his part, “Obama was fixated on the freeze,” Oren writes. The U.S. ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro, told Oren that “the dignity and credibility of the president—and his relationship with the prime minister—hinges on the freeze.” Obama’s national-security adviser, General Jim Jones, told visiting Israeli officials that Israel’s “willingness to implement a settlement freeze would determine the future of U.S.-Israel relations.” When Israel announced some housing project in its capital, Jerusalem, Tony Blinken (then Vice President Biden’s national-security adviser) “icily” warned Oren that “it’s your decision to build in Jerusalem, but you should know that it will have strategic implications for our relationship.” When the vicious and mendacious “Goldstone Report” about the Gaza War of December 2008–January 2009 was issued by the United Nations, White House officials told Oren that “Israel could not expect a more rigorous American stand against the report until we made more concessions in the peace process.”

Susan Rice, now national-security adviser but then ambassador to the United Nations, expanded on this theme: “Israel must freeze all settlement activity. Otherwise the United States will not be able to protect Israel from Palestinian actions at the UN.” This threat was repeated time after time, and even by the president himself. Sometimes, of course, it was presented as sad and friendly advice: What could the poor United States do if Israel became more and more isolated, and boycotts spread? Needless to say, the Israelis understood the implicit threat to their most important external relationship, but the hard fact is that the administration’s demands would have been impossible for any prime minister, much less one who headed a right-of-center coalition, to accept. The Israelis knew from bitter experience, moreover, that a settlement freeze would achieve little, because they knew that a new round of negotiations with the Palestinians would achieve little. In 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak had made Yasir Arafat a peace offer, and in 2008 Prime Minister Olmert had made an even more generous offer. Both had been rejected by the Palestinian leadership. A new round of talks would end in stalemate, most Israelis believed, both because the Palestinians would not get a deal better than the 2008 Olmert offer and because in the end Abbas was not going to take the risk of doing any deal at all.

But that was not the view in Washington. Though the Palestinians, including under Arafat, had negotiated for years without a settlement freeze, it became an absolute article of faith to the Obama team that a settlement freeze was the key to Israeli–Palestinian conflict—and that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict was the key to Middle East peace, if not world peace. After leaving his White House post, Jones told an Israeli audience that “I’m of the belief that had God appeared in front of President Obama in 2009 and said if he could do one thing on the face of the planet, and one thing only, to make the world a better place and give people more hope and opportunity for the future, I would venture that it would have something to do with finding the two-state solution to the Middle East.” Jones spoke on February 8, 2011, a week after a million people had gathered in Tahrir Square in Cairo, and three days before Hosni Mubarak resigned as president of Egypt. The government of Tunisia had already been overthrown, and massive protests were building in Benghazi, Libya. But Obama and his team never abandoned their view

that the number of apartments Israel built in East Jerusalem and parts of the West Bank would have a fateful impact on the future of mankind.

Oren's portrait of Obama is extremely tough. The president "seemed to prefer contemplation to leadership" and "ideas to hands-on action." Even worse was his "coldness" and "insularity," and Oren says that "a similar chill distanced him from traditional American allies—not only Israel—whose ambassadors complained to me of the administration's unprecedented aloofness." In fact, Oren quotes an unnamed European ambassador as saying "Obama's problem is not a tin ear, it's a tin heart."

It is also clear from Oren's account that the tensions in the relationship between the United States and Israel did not arise from diplomatic misconduct on Prime Minister Netanyahu's part, from inadequate Israeli efforts to seek compromise, or even from mere policy disagreements. Oren writes that "the strain was palpable from my initial days in the job" in 2009, and he clearly attributes that strain to the Obama administration—the president, his team, and their worldview.

Oren is loyal to the man who appointed him throughout the book, even if he does record some serious policy differences. At the very end of the story—on the penultimate page, in fact—Oren explains that he would not himself wish to build in "isolated settlements" and would "respect American Jewish pluralism," meaning that if he had his way, he would compel Israel's official Orthodox rabbinate to treat non-Orthodox American Jews better. He was opposed to the controversial Netanyahu speech to Congress in March 2015. But he states flatly that Netanyahu was ready and "willing to make far-reaching concessions" in serious peace talks with the Palestinians and "sincerely wanted to engage in negotiations."

Oren describes Netanyahu as "one of the world's most complex, seasoned, divisive, and hounded leaders, and perhaps its loneliest." And he draws Netanyahu's personality as "part commando, part politico, and thoroughly predatory." Those words are not as nasty as they might appear, given the context of Israel's rough-and-tumble politics—and Israel's own history and current security challenges. Netanyahu rejected, on several occasions, Oren's advice "to conciliate rather than confront Obama," but on the evidence Oren himself provides in this book, Netanyahu had the better of the argument between them. After all, selecting Oren was itself a conciliatory gesture, as were the decisions to apologize to Turkey at Obama's insistence, and to impose a 10-month (partial) moratorium on construction in settlements. From these it seems Netanyahu learned that conciliation would gain him little in the Obama White House, which had fixed and unalterable views on Israel—and on its prime minister.

In truth, it is not all that uncommon for individual leaders to dislike each other. What is striking in Oren's book is that the Obama team did not view this mutual aversion as a problem to be alleviated but as a license to further the assault on Netanyahu, his government, and his country. When I was an official in the George W. Bush White House, we found that the president and French President Jacques Chirac cordially despised each other. So we worked around that to maintain the alliance and solve any problems our nations faced. The French national-security adviser flew over to Washington every few weeks, and he and the French ambassador in Washington would meet with the secretary of state, the national-security adviser, and several of us handling key issues. We managed despite the hostility at the top. But Obama's and Netanyahu's dislike for each other was exacerbated, not alleviated, by Obama's staff, who happily cursed out Netanyahu to the press and threw around threats about how this or that move would permanently damage the bilateral relationship.

This phenomenon was worsened by matters of style that are frankly shocking to someone like me, who worked in previous administrations. White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel called

Oren before dawn about some development and began the call by saying: “I don’t like this fucking shit.” At a reception following a Netanyahu visit to the White House, Emanuel poked his finger into Oren’s chest and said, “You do not fucking come to the White House and fucking lecture the president of the United States.” Deputy Secretary of State Tom Nides, worried about legislation that would call for defunding any UN agency that recognizes Palestine as a state, told Oren, “You don’t want the fucking UN to collapse because of your fucking conflict with the Palestinians.” Oren went into the State Department to see Deputy Secretary Jim Steinberg, and was dressed down and read a list of demands (including, of course, a total construction freeze in East Jerusalem as well as the West Bank) in a tone Oren describes as “furious.” But Oren adds that he later heard that this was less of a private conversation than an anti-Israel rally: Via an open phone line or hidden microphone, “department staffers listened in on our conversation and cheered.”

These matters of language and comportment could be viewed as trivial, but they are not. They suggest an attitude toward Israel’s government that is quite simply contemptuous, disrespectful, and hostile. It is unlikely that such treatment was accorded to the British or French ambassadors, even by people like Emanuel who appear to equate vulgarity with strength or persuasiveness. Nor, as we have been seeing week after week, was such treatment ever accorded to the vicious Communist dictatorship in Cuba or to the brutal theocracy in Iran.

While all the events Oren the memoirist describes were occurring—from denying Israel important information about negotiations with Iran to ugly attacks on Netanyahu personally, from withholding needed military supplies during wartime to leaking military information about Israeli strikes on Syria—Oren the ambassador denied they were happening. As he writes, “I had to swear that American and Israeli leaders were on the same page regarding Iran when, in reality, they often worked from different books.” The Obama team thought that “daylight” between the United States and Israel on political issues was a good thing, as long as there was no such gap on security issues. But Oren explains that even in principle this does not work: In the Middle East, security “is largely a product of impressions. . . . In a region infamous for its unforgiving sun, any daylight is searing. By illuminating the gaps in the political positions, the administration cast shadows over Israel’s deterrence power.” Nevertheless, his job was to make believe this was not occurring and that all was well between the two governments. Oren quotes the old line that “an ambassador is a man of virtue sent abroad to lie for his country” but ruefully adds that “an ambassador sometimes lies for two countries.”

While Oren was “lying for two countries” and in public making believe that all was well in U.S. policy toward Israel, Americans were divided essentially along partisan lines over that very question. Republicans and conservatives drew a picture identical in all its aspects to the one Oren now delivers. Democrats and liberals argued that all was well, that there might be some marginal political or diplomatic disputes, but that the security relationship was the key and was superb and that Obama was, in his heart, an absolutely firm supporter of Israel.

Therefore, one would expect that in his memoir, Oren might settle some scores with the latter group, especially the Jews among them, who must have driven him crazy. One might expect that even though he himself had publicly been saying that relations were peachy, he would now offer searing criticism of them for ignoring the facts, ignoring what they could hear privately in visits to top officials in Jerusalem, ignoring the deep and dangerous differences over Iran, and choosing party loyalty over a balanced assessment of the threats Israel faced.

One would be wrong.

Throughout Oren's four and a half years as ambassador, a variety of voices spoke out repeatedly in defense of Netanyahu and of Israel, supporting Israel's view of the Iranian threat, and decrying Obama's treatment of Israel—this magazine, Fox News, and the *Wall Street Journal*, not to mention a large number of members of Congress and former officials. But these voices are almost always on the right. Democrats who stood up against the Obama assault on Israel publicly, such as New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez, were relatively rare. Several of the major American Jewish organizations and a raft of Jewish leaders began and ended Oren's years silent or complaining only behind closed doors.

Indeed, in a lengthy interview with the *Times of Israel* at the time of his book's release, Oren said that his "biggest fear is not the Obama administration. I am deeply concerned about the future of the Democratic Party, with the progressive wing in the background." But that "deep concern" is rarely evident in *Ally*, and in fact Oren appears to go out of his way to avoid criticizing liberal or "progressive" Democrats. He mentions "prominent American Jews publicly dissociating themselves from the democratically approved policies of the Israeli government," but those words are used to describe the situation in the 1980s—not under Obama. He reports that many American Jewish leaders emerged from a very early meeting with President Obama "concerned about Obama's departure from the long-standing principle of 'no daylight' in U.S.-Israel relations," but that concern led them during Oren's years in Washington to mumble and grumble rather than to organize opposition. Next to nothing is said of this.

He recounts his first meeting with Jewish members of Congress, 29 Democrats and Eric Cantor, and likens it to "stumbl[ing] into a blizzard." His own remarks at that meeting "generated little sympathy" and several members "accused Netanyahu of showing ingratitude toward the United States." But his summary of what he calls "my most troubling experience on the Hill" refers to "Jewish legislators," and there is no further discussion of the failure of these Democrats to show support for Israel when the Democrat in the White House was sailing in a different direction.

His portrait of Hillary Clinton suffers from the same unwillingness to draw the conclusions to which his own evidence clearly points. He tells us that when he met her (initially in 1995, when she was first lady) he was struck by "the keenness of her mind" and the "cobalt-blue color of her eyes." Then he came to Washington as ambassador and of course asked for a private, introductory meeting with Secretary of State Clinton. This is normal for a country that is a close and important friend. But she refused to see him and in fact made him wait nearly a full year for a private session. Such treatment of an ally is astonishing, but Oren reports the fact without comment.

He does mention the way she browbeat and pushed Netanyahu to apologize to Turkey over the *Mavi Marmara*, as well as the time she "excoriated Netanyahu for 45 minutes over the phone" over an announcement of new construction in settlements while Biden visited Israel. But again, he mentions these incidents without comment—and on other occasions Oren seems to go out of his way to protect Clinton. When discussing the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, for example, he notes that in late January Mubarak's "military regime, deemed 'stable' by the State Department only two weeks earlier, tottered." But it was not "the State Department" that showed complete ignorance of the situation in Egypt. It was Hillary Clinton herself—who so embarrassingly said "the Egyptian government is stable" only 16 days before Mubarak would be gone. Oren calls Clinton's resignation at the end of Obama's first term "another loss" because she had a "warm place in her heart for Israel." He writes: "I believed she understood us even when we disagreed"—after 233 pages that suggest the contrary.

When Oren speculates about why some American Jews—and especially journalists such as Thomas Friedman, Roger Cohen, Paul Krugman, and Frank Rich, whom he singles out by

name—are so critical of Israel, his answer is not politics and ideology but insecurity. “I could not help questioning whether American Jews really felt as secure as they claimed,” he writes. “Perhaps persistent fears of anti-Semitism impelled them to distance themselves from Israel and its so often controversial policies.” But nothing in the book substantiates this opinion, while a great deal that Oren writes about Obama and his entourage—from Jeremiah Wright to Rashid Khalidi in the past, to those who have manned his White House staff in the present—points to a very simple answer: Around the world, the Left has turned against Israel. Are American Jews on the Left really afraid of pogroms, or are they afraid instead of disloyalty to the Democratic Party and accusations that they are “moving Right”?

Poll after poll reveals a deepening partisan gap on Israel: Democrats and the Left are far more likely than Republicans and conservatives to view Israel as aggressive, racist, and uninterested in peace. Oren’s portrait of the Obama administration and of the president himself fits easily within these trends, but he is oddly reluctant to place them there. It was Oren’s job as ambassador to avoid toppling into what he calls “the partisan fissure between American Jews,” but he left that post nearly two years ago. *Ally* would have been strengthened by a greater degree of candor about where Israel’s allies were to be found, and where they were missing, during his years as Israel’s man in Washington.

WSJ

How Obama Transformed America

His progressive legacy won’t last because he passed vague laws and abused his executive power to impose policies that are unpopular.

by Phil Gramm

How did [Barack Obama](#) join Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan to become one of the three most transformative presidents in the past century? He was greatly aided by the financial crisis that erupted during the 2008 campaign. This gave the new president a mandate and a large Democratic congressional majority that fully embraced his progressive agenda.

Having learned from previous progressive failures, President Obama embarked on a strategy of minimizing controversial details that could doom his legislative efforts. But no factor was more decisive than his unshakable determination not to let Congress, the courts, the Constitution or a failed presidency—as America has traditionally defined it—stand in his way.

Americans have always found progressivism appealing in the abstract, but they have revolted when they saw the details. President Clinton’s very progressive agenda—to nationalize health care and use private pensions to promote social goals—was hardly controversial during the 1992 election. But once the debate turned to the details, Americans quickly understood that his health-care plan would take away their freedom. Even Mr. Clinton’s most reliable allies, the labor unions, rebelled when they understood that under his pension plan their pensions would serve “social goals” instead of maximizing their retirement benefits.

In its major legislative successes, the Obama administration routinely proposed not program details but simply the structure that would be used to determine program details in the future. Unlike the Clinton administration’s ill-fated HillaryCare, which contained a detailed plan to control costs through Regional Healthcare Purchasing Cooperatives and strictly enforced

penalties, ObamaCare established an independent payment advisory board to deal with rising costs. The 2009 stimulus package was unencumbered by a projects list like the one provided by the Clinton administration, which doomed the 1993 Clinton stimulus with ice-skating warming huts in Connecticut and alpine slides in Puerto Rico.

The Obama stimulus offered “transparency” in reporting on the projects funded but only after the money had been spent. Similarly the 2010 Dodd-Frank financial law defined almost nothing, including the basis for designating “systemically important financial institutions” that would be subject to onerous regulation, what bank “stress tests” tested, what an acceptable “living will” for a financial institution looked like or what the “Volcker rule” required.

In addition to a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, Mr. Obama benefited from unprecedented Democratic support in Congress. Congressional Quarterly reported that “Obama’s 98.7% Senate success score in 2009 was the highest ever,” surpassing LBJ’s 93%, Clinton’s 85% and Reagan’s 88%. Reagan’s budget, tax cuts, Social Security reform and tax reform programs all had significant bipartisan input and garnered the strong Democratic support they needed to become law. But ObamaCare had no bipartisan input and did not receive a single Republican vote in Congress. The Obama stimulus package received no Republican votes in the House and only three Republican votes in the Senate. Dodd-Frank received three Republican votes in the House and three in the Senate.

Voters used the first off-year election of the Obama presidency to express the same disapproval that they had expressed in the Clinton presidency. Democrats lost 54 House and eight Senate seats in 1994, and 63 House and six Senate seats in 2010.

Mr. Clinton reacted to the congressional defeat by “triangulating” to ultimately support a bipartisan budget and tax compromise that fostered broad-based prosperity and earned for him the distinction of being one of the most successful modern presidents. Mr. Obama never wavered. When the recovery continued to disappoint for six long years he never changed course. Mr. Clinton sacrificed his political agenda for the good of the country. Mr. Obama sacrificed the good of the country for his political agenda.

The Obama transformation was achieved by laws granting unparalleled discretionary power to the executive branch—but where the law gave no discretion Mr. Obama refused to abide by the law. Whether the law mandated action, such as income verification for ObamaCare, or inaction, such as immigration reform without congressional support, Mr. Obama willfully overrode the law. Stretching executive powers beyond their historic limits, he claimed the Federal Communications Commission had authority over the Internet and exerted Environmental Protection Agency control over power plants to reduce carbon emissions.

When Obama empowered himself to declare Congress in “recess” to make illegal appointments that the courts later ruled unconstitutional, he was undeterred. In an action that Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon would have never undertaken, Mr. Obama pushed Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid to “nuke” the rights of minority Senators to filibuster judicial nominees and executive appointments by changing the long-standing 60-vote supermajority needed for cloture to a simple majority.

American democracy has historically relied on three basic constraints: a shared commitment to the primacy of the constitutional process over any political agenda, the general necessity to achieve bipartisan support to make significant policy changes, and the natural desire of leaders to be popular by delivering peace and prosperity. Mr. Obama has transformed America by refusing to accept these constraints. The lock-step support of the Democrats’ supermajority in

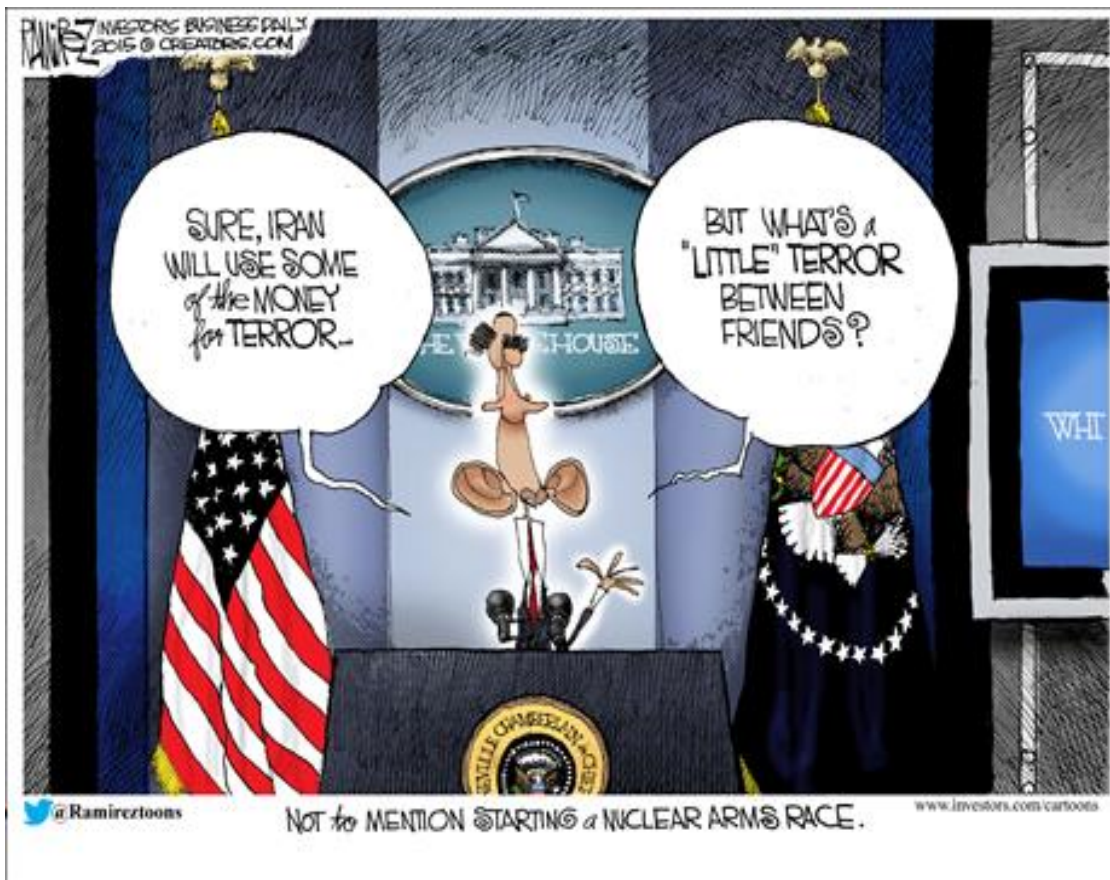
the 111th Congress freed him from having to compromise as other presidents, including Reagan and Mr. Clinton, have had to do.

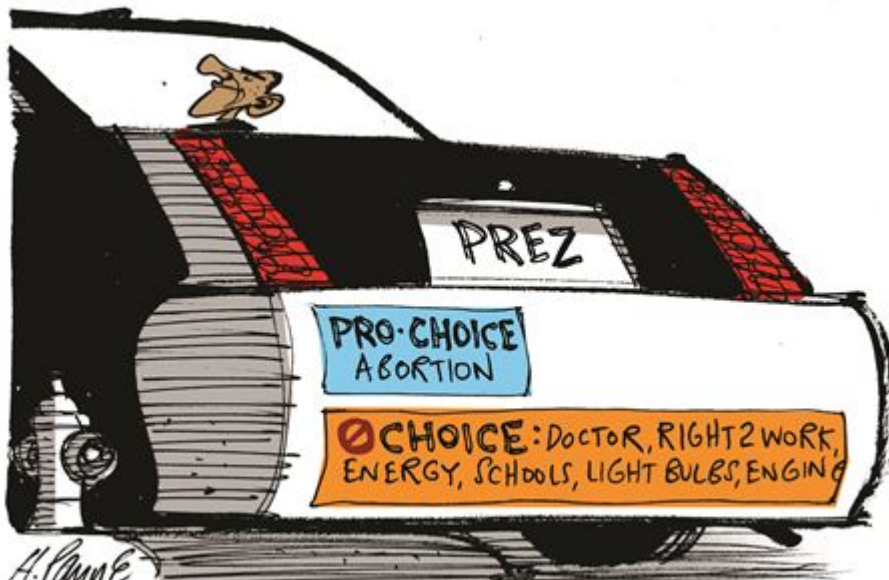
While the Obama program has transformed America, no one is singing “Happy Days Are Here Again” or claiming it’s “morning in America.” Despite a doubling of the national debt and the most massive monetary expansion since the Civil War, America’s powerhouse economy has withered along with the rule of law.

The means by which Mr. Obama wrought his transformation imperil its ability to stand the test of time. All of his executive orders can be overturned by a new president. ObamaCare and Dodd-Frank can be largely circumvented using exactly the same discretionary powers Mr. Obama used to implement them in the first place. Republicans, who never supported his program, are now united in their commitment to repeal it.

Most important, the American people, who came to embrace the Roosevelt and Reagan transformations, have yet to buy into the Obama transformation. For all of these reasons it appears that the Obama legacy rests on a foundation of sand.

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I Know Nothing!!



RETWEETS
160

FAVORITES
145



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