

62, under a US cloud (April 18, Jerusalem Post)

A new and largely unexpected diplomatic danger casts a shadow on Israel's 62nd independence day.

Israel turns 62 on a high in many areas. Prudent fiscal policies spared our economy many of the ravages of the global crisis. Time, that ultimate healer, seems to be mitigating some societal rifts, whether they be religious-secular, Sephardi-Ashkenazi, or newcomer-veteran. An IDF bolstered by the successful tenure of chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi has improved day-to-day security as well as military preparedness.

Less encouragingly, a succession of demoralizing corruption scandals is rocking our nation, undermining faith in our public servants. Looking ahead, our internal cohesiveness is by no means assured. Arabs and haredim largely resist full integration, do not subscribe to the state's Zionist ideals, and do not contribute sufficiently to the economy. Our dysfunctional electoral system, granting inordinate power to tiny parties, still goes unreformed. As we today make the abrupt annual shift from mourning our fallen soldiers to celebrating the independence for which they gave their lives, however, internal challenges are complicated by a new and largely unexpected diplomatic danger: our blighted relations with the US.

Israel at 62, aware of the demographic threat to our democracy of retaining the entire West Bank, is consensually supportive of a Palestinian state, provided this historically unprecedented entity does not threaten us militarily, or require our withdrawal to the vulnerable pre-1967 borders, or flood us with refugees. To advance these vital terms, we need the US at our side. Israel at 62 lives in the shadow of an Iranian regime that seeks our demise; that arms, trains, funds and inspires Hamas in Gaza and Hizbullah in Lebanon; and that is speeding serenely ahead toward nuclear weapons. Here, too, we look to America to marshal sufficient economic – and if all else fails, military – pressure to deter the mullahs from this path or force them from power.

And Israel at 62 suffers growing pariah status, singled out for demonization in diplomatic forums, in legal arenas and in the media – its historic legitimacy undermined, its defensive measures assailed, its very right to survive questioned. Iran is central to this assault, bolstered by the bizarre partnership of the radical Left and the fascist Right in much of Western Europe and beyond. Here, once more, we depend on the US's upright moral compass and the fundamental ethics of its citizens to counterbalance the United Nations and other skewed forums.

BUT AFTER a year in office, the Obama administration has placed our strategic partnership under a shadow. By coldly escalating the Ramat Shlomo-housing dispute into an ongoing, full-scale crisis, Washington has diverged from the tone of previous administrations on the status of Jerusalem, and it has damagingly publicly questioned fundamental aspects of our alliance. When conflicts break out in our region, President Obama noted last week, America tends to get pulled in, and that costs "American blood

and treasure.” Thus, the US had to constantly make plain “to both sides” that reducing these conflicts was not only in their interests, but was “a vital national security interest of the United States.” Those sounded like the words of a president who has taken insufficient account of Israel’s history of peace-making overtures to the Palestinians, and of the history of Palestinian rejection.

On the Iranian front, meanwhile, time is running out. The president seeks the widest possible international support for sanctions, but that means delay and less biting measures. The US military option is barely on the table. Concern grows that Washington is seeking to deny Israel the capacity to protect itself, even if all else fails.

In terms of battling delegitimization, the US has stood by Israel at the key diplomatic moments of the past year. Nonetheless, Obama’s failure, in his Muslim-outreach speech in Cairo last June, to highlight the historic Jewish connection to our land was a troubling omission. Healing the relationship with the US is a vital priority in our 63rd year. It requires improving dialogue and enhancing mutual sensitivity to policy differences. From Israel, it requires a proper ordering of priorities, and wider unity and cohesion behind them; hence our longstanding plea to Kadima to join the coalition.

From the US, it requires a more profound appreciation of Israel’s numerous sincere attempts to resolve the conflict: At 62, thriving, modern Israel is still resented and rejected by most of the Arab world, not because of this or that policy, or this or that territorial presence, but because of the very fact of our existence here.