



## **Analysis: US decision could be key to ending 'soft-power attacks' on Israel**

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Gerald Steinberg , THE JERUSALEM POST

The Obama administration's decision not to attend the Durban Review Conference, scheduled to open in Geneva on April 21, is a very significant step toward ending the obsessive "soft-power attacks" against Israel and restoring the moral foundations of human rights.

If Washington's conclusion leads the Europeans to a similar move, the conference might be cancelled, or, if it is held, it will be seen as a farce, with participants limited to Iran, Libya, their Muslim allies and some marginal states.

At first, the announcement that the US would send Felice Gaer and Betty King to Geneva to negotiate the draft declaration led to fears of an unlimited commitment to engagement - red lines would become pink, and then disappear entirely.

However, their harsh encounter with the reality of anti-Semitism and the singling out of Israel in the Durban process resulted in the realization that the Canadian and Israeli evaluations were correct, and that non-participation was the only moral option.

The way has now been cleared for Europe to follow the US. At the recent London Interparliamentary Conference on Anti-Semitism, officials from Italy and Britain declared that their governments were considering a pullout, but would await the results of the American delegation's talks in Geneva.

Over a year ago, French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced that France would not participate in an anti-Semitic conference, and if he acts on this promise, momentum will grow for full-fledged European disengagement.

The Czech Republic, which holds the presidency of the European Union, would be an appropriate leader in this process and could also help restore Europe's image in the eyes of many Israelis.

For President Barack Obama and US officials dealing with human rights and international organizations, ending the racist nature of the UN's anti-racism machinery is particularly important.

To achieve this change, the abusive focus on Israel in the Human Rights Council needs to end, and resources need to be turned to real issues of racism and discrimination in other parts of the world.

This will require close cooperation among democracies - including Canada (which has been the world leader under the Harper government), Australia and New Zealand, as well as the nations of Europe. Denunciation of the Durban process is the first important step in what will be a difficult path.

For Israel, a failed Review Conference would mark the defeat of the strategy adopted at the original Durban conference on racism, which took place in September 2001.

Most of the damage there took place at the NGO Forum, in which over 4,000 officials from non-governmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, participated.

Many of these groups were funded by the Ford Foundation and European governments. The final declaration referred to Israel repeatedly as an "apartheid" and "racist" state, called for boycotts, sanctions and harassment through legal processes, known as "lawfare," and made no mention of Palestinian mass terror attacks.

Building on this foundation and working closely with Iran, Libya and others in the Human Rights Council, the NGO network exploited the language of human rights and international law to pursue this strategy.

Although the UN has blocked another NGO Forum and the Ford Foundation has refused funding, the leaders of the Durban Review Conference and their NGO-based allies plan to further amplify this activity, the goal being the total isolation of Israel. Without US or European participation, this is unlikely to happen.

In a wider political framework, the ability of the Obama administration to quickly recognize the limits of engagement in this case has important implications for dealing with Iran's nuclear weapons program. The Iranian government has been put on notice - American officials will not participate in infinite negotiations that do not produce results.

Coupled with the restoration of America's moral and strategic leadership, these are very positive developments for cooperation between Jerusalem and Washington.

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