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## Obama's High-Risk Engagement at 'Durban II'

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The Obama Administration's decision to jump into the preparations for the UN's Durban Review Conference, scheduled for Geneva in April 2009, is a bold but also a risky move. Beyond the specific results in this case, the results will set the tone for relations with Iran, the challenge of radical Islam, chances for progress in George Mitchell's peace efforts, and the policy based on engagement and dialogue.

Iran, Cuba, Libya, the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and other paragons of human rights have used this framework for antisemitism and to demonize Israel, advance Holocaust denial and make a mockery of human rights. They have also attempted to legislate against free speech, using allegations of "Islamophobia" to block criticism of extremism and violence. Canada and Israel have lost hope and pulled out, and some European officials have spoken about not participating, but are now waiting for the results of the US policy.

If the Americans succeed in reversing this agenda in the brief time that remains, it would mark a major success and set the stage for restoring US influence and values. Proponents of engagement argue that the Obama Administration can help steer this UN conference so that it actually focuses on discrimination against minorities around the world, and is not another platform for anti-Israel obsession.

Alternatively, if this strategy fails, and the text remains poisonous, an American-led walkout with the 27 members of the European Union and some others would delegitimize the Durban process.

HOWEVER, IF Washington hesitates and compromises, allowing the OIC and like-minded NGOs to control the agenda, the participation of the world's democracies will

do immense damage. It will amplify the impact of the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism, including the NGO Forum which used terms like "apartheid" and "racism" to isolate Israel.

Using the Durban strategy, Palestinians launched terror attacks with the knowledge that the Israeli responses would be condemned as "war crimes", which, in turn, would justify boycotts on the South African model. Instead of negotiations based on acceptance of Israel, the goal of annihilation was reinforced. In parallel, Durban has advanced the radical Islamist agenda, justifying violent attacks against critics, and further narrowing free speech, including in Europe. The preparations for the April 2009 conference all point to the same agenda.

In parallel, the obstacles to hopes of reversing the course of the Review Conference were highlighted by the exploitation of human rights rhetoric, double standards, and legal processes initiated against Israeli officials in Spain and elsewhere, stemming from the IDF's Gaza operation. NGO superpowers such as Human Rights, Amnesty International, Paris-based FIDH, and Oxfam, along with Palestinian NGOs (such as PCHR, which is funded by European governments), Libyan-backed groups, and many others are central in this form of deadly warfare, and will be active in Geneva.

With such high stakes, the failure to defeat the Durban strategy will intensify hatred, and carry a major cost for the Obama Administration's policy of dialogue and engagement with opponents. In 2001, the American and Israeli delegations went to Durban expecting that reason and decency would prevail; but when this proved futile, their walkout came too late. To avoid a repetition, the US needs to show moral leadership and, if necessary, readiness to admit that dialogue has failed.

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