

# The Man with the Uzi

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**T**HERE WAS THIS young Israeli who was captured by cannibals. They put him in the cooking pot and were about to light the fire, when he expressed one last wish: *“Please box my ears!”*

When the cannibal chief obliged, the Israeli jumped up, leveled his Uzi and mowed down his captors.

*“If you had the Uzi all the time, why didn’t you use it before?”* he was asked.

*“I can’t do this unless I am angry,”* he replied.

BARACK OBAMA’s debating performance reminds me of this joke. At the first confrontation he was listless and lifeless. He just wanted the silly thing to end.

During the second debate, he was a changed man. Energetic. Aggressive. Decisive. In short: angry.

When the confrontation started, it was 3 a.m. in Israel. I could have recorded it and watched it later. But I was unable to wait. My curiosity got the better of me.

Of course, this whole performance is silly. There is no connection at all between talent as a debater and the ability to lead a nation. You can be an outstanding polemicist and unable to conduct a rational policy. Israelis have only to look at Binyamin Netanyahu. You can be a purposeful leader, and fail utterly at expressing yourself. Yitzhak Rabin, for example.

Yet Americans insist that their leaders demonstrate their prowess as debaters as a condition for being elected. It somehow reminds one of the single combats of antiquity, when each side chose a champion and the two tried to kill each other, in place of mutual mass slaughter. David and Goliath spring to mind. It’s certainly more humane.

THE RHETORIC was not directed at the mass of voters. As has been said before, it was aimed at the “Undecideds”, a special class of people. The title is supposed to confer some kind of distinction. For me it makes more sense as an expression of contempt. If you haven’t decided yet, three weeks before the gong sounds, is that something to brag about?

At this stage of the game, both candidates must be very careful not to antagonize anyone. Which means, of course, that they cannot afford to present any definite, clear cut, opinion on anything, except motherhood and apple pie – or, in Israel, Zionism and gefilte fish.

You must beware of any new idea. God forbid. New

ideas create enemies. You may impress a few voters, but most likely you will drive away many more. The trick is to express generalities forcefully.

Gun ownership, for example. Guns kill. In strictest confidence, I might disclose to you that guns are produced for this very purpose. Since you are not likely to be kidnapped by cannibals, why for God’s sake keep an Uzi in your cupboard? To keep the Bad Injuns away?

Yet even Obama skirted the issue. He did not dare to come out with an unqualified demand to put an end to this nuisance altogether. You don’t mess with the gun lobby. Almost like the pro-Israel lobby. Mitt Romney cited his experience in bringing pro-gun and anti-gun people together to work out a compromise. Like: instead of ten children with assault rifles shooting up their schoolmates, only five per year.

I MUST admit that I didn’t quite understand the bitter quarrel about the Benghazi incident. Perhaps you need an American mind to grasp it. My primitive Israeli head just doesn’t get it.

Was it a simple terrorist attack, or did the terrorists use a protest gathering for cover? Why the hell does that matter? Why should the President have bothered to falsify the picture this or that way? Israelis know from long experience that after a botched rescue attempt, security services always lie. It’s in their nature. No president can change that.

The idea that any country can protect its hundreds of embassies and consulates around the world against all possible types of attack is childish. Especially if you cut their security budget.

Apart from these particular issues, both candidates spoke in generalities. Drill, baby, drill! But don’t forget the sun and the wind. Young people must be able to go to college. And get a well-paid job afterwards. The devious Chinese must be shown who’s boss. Unemployment is bad and should be abolished. The Middle Class must be saved.

Seems the Middle Class (both in the US and in Israel) makes up the entire population. One may wonder what they are the middle of. One hardly hears of anyone lower or higher on the scale.

In short, both candidates made much of the enormous differences between them, but looked suspiciously alike.

EXCEPT FOR the color of their skin, of course. But do we dare mention that? Not if we want to be politically correct. The most obvious fact of the campaign is also its deepest secret.

I can't prove it, but my feeling is that race plays a much bigger role in these elections than anyone is ready to admit.

In the presidential debates, one cannot get away from the fact that one candidate is white and the other black. One is a WASP (are Mormons protestants?), the other is half black. The difference is even more striking with the two wives. One cannot be whiter than Ann, or blacker than Michelle.

Not mentioning these facts does not make them disappear. They are there. They surely play a role in the minds of many people, perhaps unconsciously.

One can only wonder that Barack Hussein Obama was elected in the first place. It shows the American people in the best light. But will there be a backlash this time? I don't know.

RIGHT FROM the beginning, I felt that Obama would win this debate. And win he did.

In a previous article, I mentioned that I have many misgivings about Obama. An irate reader asked me what they were. Well, Obama has been giving in to the anti-peace agenda of Netanyahu. After some feeble attempts to get Netanyahu to stop the building of settlements, Obama shut up.

Obama must take his share of the blame for the waste of four precious years, during which grievous damage, perhaps irreversible, has been done to Israeli-Palestinian peace. Settlements have been expanded at a frantic pace, the occupation has struck even deeper roots, the Two-State solution – the only one there is – has been seriously undermined.

The Arab Spring, which could so easily have been

a new beginning for peace in the Middle East, has been squandered. The Arab peace initiative, which has been lying on the table for years, is still lying there, like a wilted flower.

American inactivity on this problem has deepened the despair of the Israeli peace forces on the eve of our own elections, removing the idea of peace altogether from public discourse.

On the other hand, Obama has prevented Netanyahu from starting a disastrous war. He may have saved the lives of hundreds, even thousands of human beings, Israelis and Iranians, and perhaps in the end Americans. For that alone, we must be profoundly grateful.

I HOPE that Obama wins the elections. Or, rather, that the other guy does not. As we say in Hebrew, drawing on the Book of Esther: "Not for the love of Mordecai, but for the hatred of Haman".<sup>1</sup>

This is, of course, a wild exaggeration. I have a lot of real sympathy for Obama. I think that he is basically a decent, well-meaning person. I wish for his re-election, and not only because the opposing ticket is so worrisome.

IF OBAMA is elected, what will his second term look like, as far as we are concerned?

There is always the lurking hope that a President in his second term will be less subservient to the "pro-Israel" lobby – which is in effect an anti-Israel lobby, driving us on towards national disaster.

After being re-elected, the second-term President will be relieved of his worry about the lobby, its voters and its money. Not entirely, of course. He will still have to worry about the mid-term congressional elections and about the fate of his party in the next presidential round.

Still, he will have much more leeway. He will be able to do much more for peace and change the face of the Middle East.

As our Arab cousins say: Inshallah – God willing.

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<sup>1</sup>I am tempted to quote again the old Jewish joke about the mean rich man in the shtetl, whom no one wanted to eulogize as required on the occasion of his death. In the end, someone stood up and said: "We all know that he was mean-spirited, vicious and avaricious, but compared to his son he was an angel."