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The Saudi “Peace Initiative”

Is it meant to lead to peace or to Israel’s destruction?

Early in 2002, Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia granted an interview to Thomas Friedman of *The New York Times*, in which he declared that if Israel were to withdraw from the “occupied territories,” full normalization of relations with the Arab countries would ensue. That interview was published in *The New York Times* on February 17, 2002. It became known as the Saudi “Peace Initiative” and was considered a “breakthrough” on the road to peace in the Middle East.

What are the facts?

An Arab ultimatum. By the time the dust settled and the Saudi “Peace Initiative” was formalized, its demands were substantially expanded. It called for 1) full Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied since 1967, including the “Syrian Golan Heights;” 2) achievement of a “just solution” to the Palestinian refugee problem; 3) acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The most unacceptable of those three conditions is the second. As best can be determined, there were about 650,000 refugees during the 1948 War of Independence. It can be assumed that virtually all of them are by now deceased. But the claim for “repatriation” has been extended to their descendants, who are by now said to have increased to 5 million. These “refugees” have been kept in “refugee camps” for sixty years, for the purpose of keeping the sore festering and to overwhelm Israel when the time came. The twentieth century, with its wars and dislocations, has produced millions upon millions of refugees. The Palestinian “refugees” are the only ones who are being taken care of by UNWRA, an agency of the United Nations created especially for them. No other refugees have similar consideration. The maintenance cost of the “Palestinian refugees” is billions of dollars a year. Who pays for most of this? You guessed it: the United States, of course.

The clear reason that the “repatriation” of these “refugees” (or rather their descendants) into Israel is unacceptable is that, besides their absorption and integration being an economic impossibility, their influx would immediately destroy Israel as a Jewish state and as the last refuge for all persecuted Jews in the world. Some believe that the concept of Israel as a Jewish state is an anachronism and should be done away with. But the reality is that Israel was created as just that, the state of the Jews, by mandate of the League of

Nations, by the Balfour Declaration and by the decision of the United Nations.

Saudi Arabia and the other Arab states that have adopted the Saudi “Peace Initiative” as their own, will not accept any discussion or any modification of their proposal. It is “take it or leave it.” It is an ultimatum. They threatened that, if Israel did not accept the plan in its entirety – it will have renounced peace and will face the “lords of war.”

“The Arabs...must teach their children...that their future and their welfare are inextricably bound up with the future, welfare and prosperity of Israel.”

What about the other two conditions of the “peace initiative”?

Full withdrawal from the “occupied territories” is impossible, given the virulent hatred of the Arabs against the Jews, their bizarre unwillingness to even acknowledge Israel’s existence

and their declared intention of destroying it by any means. Israel committed the foolishness of returning the vast Sinai – an invaluable strategic buffer zone and source of all its potential petroleum needs – to Egypt. It committed the further folly of withdrawing from the south Lebanon buffer zone and the even greater folly of turning Gaza over to the Arabs. It is true that Israel and Egypt have been at peace – the coldest peace conceivable – but mortars and rockets are almost daily launched against Israeli cities from both Gaza and from southern Lebanon. One can imagine what incredible destruction would be wreaked on Israel if it were to commit the ultimate folly of turning the so-called “occupied territories” over to its deadly enemies, sworn to its destruction. The entire country – its population centers, its industrial infrastructure, its utility installations, and its international airport – would be subject to daily barrages from the Judean Heights. The most advanced weaponry, including fighter planes and tanks, and quite likely even Syrian and Iranian troops, would be stationed in the “West Bank.” Without the Judean Heights and without the strategic Jordan Valley in its control, Israel would be utterly indefensible and an easy victim of those who ceaselessly dream of its destruction.

If the Saudi “Peace Initiative” is not the solution to the apparently interminable Arab-Israel conflict, what then is? The first step is for the Arabs (and for the Iranians) to accept the reality of Israel’s existence and permanence, not to teach their children that the Jews are the sons of monkeys and pigs, and not to educate them to become suicide bombers and martyrs. They must teach them that Israel is here to stay and that their future and their welfare are inextricably bound up with the future, welfare and prosperity of Israel. That may be a long time in coming, but no real peace is possible without it.

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