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Facts & Logic About the Middle East

May 23, 2017

Can Mr. Trump Seize the Right Opportunity During His Visit to Saudi Arabia and Israel?

Dear Friend of FLAME:

President Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia last week and to Israel this week could be momentous— if he has a firm grasp of what the opportunities really are. However, given Mr. Trump’s strategic flightiness, we can’t always be sure.

As you know, the President has already proven inconstant regarding his “unwavering commitment” to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem—which it now seems may never happen. What’s worse, several mid-level U.S. diplomats in our Jerusalem consulate recently ruled out Prime Minister Netanyahu accompanying Mr. Trump to pray at the Kotel (Western Wall) because, outrageously, that site “is part of the West Bank.” If the President doesn’t fire those diplomats, we will know the reason why.

On the strategy front, let’s start with the President’s growing obsession about crafting a peace between Israel and the Palestinians. In a briefing I attended last week, Jonathan Schanzer, VP at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, outlined well-known reasons such a peace is nothing more than a fantasy at this point.

First, the Palestinian political arena is in utter chaos, with 82-year-old President Mahmoud Abbas disfavored by a majority of Palestinians, were there ever to be a vote—which seems unlikely, given the fact that Abbas is now in the 12th year of a four-year term. Any peace deal Abbas could reach would have zero legitimacy. *Above all, most Palestinians don’t want it.*

Second, the bitter split between Abbas’ Fatah party in the West Bank and the Gaza-ruling Hamas terror group has proven intractable for nearly 10 years now—and only grown worse—with

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YOU DESERVE TO KNOW THE TRUTH...

Israel's Settlements: Obstacle to Peace?

Arabs opposed the State of Israel before there were settlements—and they oppose it still today. It's time to clear up 5 false myths about settlements.

The U.S., as well as some American media and politicians, claim Israel doesn't want peace, since Jews build houses in disputed territories of Judea and Samaria (i.e. the West Bank). But the facts reveal settlements to be a misconception. What, such a gross distortion is preventing peace.

What are the facts?

Palestinian Arabs have violently fought Israel's existence since the Jewish state's founding and only much later cited Israel's settlements as an obstacle to peace. When Israel relinquished its settlements in Gaza in 2005, it was rewarded with a mushroom war by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas. Five major misconceptions underlie criticism of Israeli settlements.

Myth #1: Palestinians "own" these lands. In fact, Jews are indisputably the indigenous people of Palestine (including Israel, Judea and Samaria), who have lived in the region for millennia and ruled it as a state, producing Arab settlements by a 1000-year "Palestinians have never had a state nor possessed public land in the region. Thus, the idea of "Palestinian lands" is false. In fact, both people can live claim in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). It is a disputed territory.

Myth #2: Jews have no right to live in the disputed territories. Jews and Arabs have lived together for hundreds of years in Palestine. The only exception is during 49 years of British rule, when Jews were evicted from the West Bank. Today, some two million Arabs live on full citizens of Israel, and some 400,000 Jews live in Judea and Samaria. Yet Palestinians insist that no peace with Israel is possible so long as Jews live among them. In 2013, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas stated that "in the final resolution, we would not see the presence of a single Israeli—civilian or soldier—on our lands." Why should Abbas, who accuses Israel of "apartheid," issue a racist ban of Jews? Why should Arabs be welcomed in Israel society—as they are—where Jews would be forbidden from living with Palestinians in the West Bank?

Myth #3: Israel is increasing new settlements in Judea and Samaria. In December 2014, President Obama's signed national security adviser Ben Rhodes complained to FOX's Kelly Rowland of "tens of thousands of settlements being constructed" by Israel. *But just no new settlements are under construction in Israel, and Israel has created no new settlements in over 20 years.* The number of settlements, plus illegal outposts, now stands just 220. While the number of settlers on living in established settlements has increased by 355,000 since 2013, the number of settlers living out of Israel's anti-Arabian separation barrier has since 2009 increased by only 20,000. Less than 1% of the population in the disputed territories, Judea, Israeli communities take up only 2% of the land of the West Bank. *Almost all the settlements are located on land not previously occupied, used or primarily owned by individual Palestinians.*

Myth #4: Israel's settlements are illegal under international law. Most who assert Israeli settlements are illegal cite the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." However, Britain has settled its people into the Baltic region. Turkey has settled Turks into Turkish-occupied Cyprus, and China has settled Chinese into occupied Tibet. *The Israel has never transferred any of its people into the West Bank. All settlements in Judea and Samaria have been voluntary, undertaken by private Israeli citizens. Why does the world focus on Israel—which has not broken this—while allowing other nations to violate it liberally?*

Myth #5: The Palestinians would make peace if settlement building stopped. "Israel has created no new settlements in some 20 years." *But in 2009, Israel stopped new settlement activity for 10 months to allow the Palestinians to negotiations sponsored by the U.S. The Palestinians refused. Instead, Israel has made numerous land-for-peace offers to the Palestinians, most recently in 2009 and in 2016, in which the Palestinians would have received more than 90 percent of the disputed territories, rights land swap—plus a capital in Jerusalem. But the Arabs turned these down. They refuse to accept Israel as a Jewish state and insist on "rights" of five million descendants of Arab-refugees from 1948 to "resettle" in Israel, which would swamp Israel demographically.*

Israel has a standing offer to resume negotiations with the Palestinians with preconditions. *But the Arabs refuse, citing Israeli settlements as an obstacle. One thing is certain: Settlements are not an obstacle to peace in 2017—what Israel was aware and there were none—and they're not the obstacle today.*

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East

PO Box 5000, Columbia, SC 29202
James Horowitz, President
Shirley Wolf, Executive and President Emerita

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hope for reconciliation not even a glimmer of possibility.

A third factor that Mr. Trump—and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson—should be aware of is the rapidly eroding connection between achieving an Israel-Palestinian peace and reestablishing strong relations between the U.S. and its other Middle East allies, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Indeed, as the threat of an increasing aggressive, soon-to-be-nuclearized Iran looms larger for the Sunni Arab states, the hostility between those states and Israel is also beginning to moderate—without the slightest movement toward peace between Israel and the hapless Palestinians.

Our advice to Mr. Trump: The opportunity here is not an Israel-Palestinian peace. (*Fuhgeddaboutit.*) The real opportunity is to build a coalition—or at least paths of cooperation—between the Sunni Arabs, the U.S. and Israel. If the President could achieve this—or move it a few steps closer to reality—he would be wildly successful.

As for the Palestinians, Mr. Trump needs to convince them 1) to stop fomenting hate and terrorist violence against Jews, 2) to accept the Jewish state in word (Arabic) and deed (in his media and schools), and finally 3) to increase their cooperation with Israel—if not to accomplish statehood at this point, then at least to implement strategic economic development with the U.S. and Israel, which could guide the Palestinian people along a path of coexistence to a prosperous, peaceful new tomorrow.

This week's featured FLAME *Hotline* article, below, gives you solid background on the sea change occurring between Israel and its Arab neighbors. While Mideast commentator Evelyn Gordon makes clear that we're a long way from truly friendly relations among the parties, the level of tolerance and business dealings among them has increased *miraculously* compared with the bitter hate that has heretofore characterized those relations.

Ms. Gordon reviews reasons the Gulf states are considering normalization with Israel, the chances these discussions could bear fruit, and why an Israel-Palestinian deal is no longer a linchpin for so-called Middle East peace.

Finally, I hope Evelyn Gordon's article helps you articulate to friends, colleagues and your elected officials where the President should put his energies—namely on matters that stand a chance of success—and not on an issue that has proven decades on now, for compelling reasons, to be a colossal fool's errand.

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Finally, I hope you'll also quickly review the P.S. immediately below, which describes FLAME's recent *hasbarah* campaign to expose the Palestinians' funding of Islamic terrorists using U.S. taxpayer dollars.

Best regards,

Jim Sinkinson
President, Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

P.S. Did you know: By subsidizing the corrupt Palestinian Authority (P.A.) with aid of some \$400 million taxpayer dollars a year, the U.S. is also funding the P.A.'s program of paying salaries to Palestinian terrorists who have killed innocent Americans and Israelis? In order to make Americans—especially college and university students—aware of this Palestinian practice of rewarding jihadi assailants and murderers with U.S. funds, FLAME has recently been publishing a new position paper: "[U.S. Funds Palestinian Terrorism](#)" This paid editorial has appeared in magazines and newspapers, including college newspapers, with a combined readership of some 10 million people. In addition, it is being sent to every member of the U.S. Congress and President Trump. If you agree that this kind of public relations effort on Israel's behalf is critical, I urge you to support us. Remember: FLAME's powerful ability to influence public opinion—and U.S. support of Israel—comes from individuals like you, one by one. I hope you'll consider giving a donation now, as you're able—with \$500, \$250, \$100, or even \$18. (Remember, your donation to FLAME is tax deductible.) To donate online, just go to [donate now](#). Now more than ever we need your support to ensure that the American people and the U.S. Congress end our support of blatantly anti-Semitic, global jihadist organizations.

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Arab-Israeli Ties: Hostage No More?

The reality is changing faster than "expert" preconceptions.

By Evelyn Gordon, Commentary, May 17, 2017

By all accounts, US President Donald Trump is a friend of the Jewish state.

On any other day, the *Wall Street Journal's* report on Tuesday would have been a major bombshell. Instead, it was unjustly overshadowed by the news that Donald Trump had shared sensitive third-party intelligence (apparently provided by Israel) with Russia. Granted, the intelligence story reveals something important about the U.S. president. But the *WSJ* story revealed something important about long-term trends in the Middle East—and for once, it's unabashedly good news. Major Arab states have grown tired of having their relationship with Israel held hostage to the Palestinian problem, and they're actually seeking to do something about it.

The *Journal* reported that the Gulf States are discussing a proposal to normalize certain types of commercial relations with Israel in exchange for Israeli gestures toward the Palestinians (the report is behind a paywall, but the *Times of Israel* helpfully provided a detailed account of what the *WSJ* article said). Two countries, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have already told both America and Israel that they're willing to adopt it, the *Journal* added.

But the real bombshell—actually, several bombshells—lay in the proposal's details: In exchange for Israel freezing settlement construction in "certain areas" of the West Bank and relaxing its blockade of Gaza, the Arabs would establish direct telecommunication links with Israel, let Israeli aircraft overfly their countries, lift certain trade restrictions and perhaps grant visas to Israeli athletes and businessmen. All these details are significant even in the likely event that the proposal goes nowhere.

First, they show that Arab leaders—unlike Trump—understand that Israeli-Palestinian peace is nowhere on the horizon. They didn't merely say so to the *Journal*; it's clear from the proposal itself. All it asks of Israel are gestures that would leave the status quo essentially unchanged, not concessions on any final-status issue. Granted, many of these same Arab leaders have told Trump that solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should be a high priority, but that merely proves the old truism that what Arab leaders say to their Western counterparts shouldn't be taken at face value.

Second, and more importantly, Arab leaders are no longer willing

to give the Palestinians (or Syria) a veto over their relations with Israel. The last time Arab states proposed normalization with Israel (in the Saudi-sponsored Arab Peace Initiative of 2002), they conditioned it on Israel signing final-status agreements with both the Palestinians and Syria and withdrawing completely to the 1949 armistice lines (also known, wrongly, as the pre-1967 border). Even eight years ago, when President Barack Obama urged Arab states to make gestures toward Israel in exchange for an Israeli settlement freeze, they unanimously refused, saying steps toward normalization were impossible until an Israeli-Palestinian final-status deal was signed. Now, they're seriously discussing partial normalization even without a final-status deal.

Third, unlike the Palestinians, Arab states have abandoned the fantasy of an Israeli retreat to the 1949 armistice lines. Their decision to demand a settlement freeze only in "certain areas" of the West Bank clearly implies that they see no reason for a freeze in other areas. They would remain Israeli under any final-status deal. This, incidentally, is something the Obama Administration never grasped. It treated construction in major settlement blocs or Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem as identical to construction in isolated outposts.

Fourth, after decades of spearheading boycotts of Israel, Arab states are now keen to do business with it. That's clear from the fact that, aside from visas for athletes, all the Arab gestures under consideration are aimed at facilitating business. As a senior Arab official involved in discussions of the proposal told the *Journal*, "We no longer see Israel as an enemy, but a potential opportunity."

In one sense, this is no surprise. In February, Bloomberg reported that Israeli high-tech firms were already doing booming business with the Gulf States via pass-through companies. What is surprising, however, is that then, just three months ago, the "experts" Bloomberg consulted were still insisting that open trade between Israel and the Gulf would be impossible without Israeli-Palestinian peace. Now, leading Arab countries are proposing open business ties without a peace deal.

Thus, even though the proposal doesn't include formal diplomatic ties, it's a huge step forward over any previous Arab offer.

Admittedly, it might well go nowhere at this stage. First, Saudi Arabia and the UAE won't do it alone, and it's not yet clear whether a critical mass of other Arab states will join them. Indeed, the WSJ report makes that less likely, since it will give

opponents of normalization a chance to mobilize public opinion against the idea.

Second, it's not clear what the Arab states will ultimately demand in exchange. By the time they finish negotiating among themselves, the proposal may be significantly worse, just as the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Arab League in 2002 was significantly worse than the initial Saudi proposal (for instance, the Arab League version included language which Arabs interpret as requiring Israel to absorb millions of Palestinian refugees).

Finally, even if this doesn't happen, the demands as stated could be unacceptable to Israel, depending on how the Arabs interpret them. For instance, Israel has long been willing to take some steps to help Gaza, but it would not agree to end the blockade entirely, as that would enable Hamas to import masses of lethal weaponry. Similarly, while Israel could agree to freeze construction in isolated settlements, it couldn't accept a public freeze on construction in Jerusalem, its capital, which Arabs consider part of the West Bank.

Nevertheless, the very fact that this proposal is being openly discussed shows that Arab-Israeli relations are thawing at a faster pace than anyone would have predicted a few years ago. The credit for that goes primarily to changing geopolitical circumstances, but secondarily to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He has worked hard and successfully to expand Israel's foreign relations precisely because he never accepted the "expert" consensus that this was impossible without progress toward Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Just last summer, Israeli pundits from across the political spectrum were united in asserting that normalization with the Arab states would require an Israeli-Palestinian deal. At the time, I termed this assertion "sheer folly," given how fast things were already changing; today, it looks even more ridiculous. And that's good news not just for Israel, but for the entire Middle East.

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PO Box 3460

Berkeley, CA 94703

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