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Facts & Logic About the Middle East

August 8, 2017

President Trump's Middle East Envoys Grow Weary—and Wary—of Palestinian Shenanigans

Dear Friend of FLAME:

While this White House is becoming famous for its leaks, one of its plans has remained relatively secretive—its Middle East strategy for an Israeli-Palestinian peace. But the leak last week of comments by envoy Jared Kushner, who is chartered to explore options for peace negotiations, sheds new light on the Trump administration's assessment of those options—and *it's not good for the Palestinians.*

In short, Kushner admitted that there may be no solution currently to the conflict. He also noted that Palestinian riots ignited last week due to the placement of security metal detectors at the entrance to al Aqsa Mosque showed that "you have some people who don't want to see and achieve an outcome of peace." And other people sometimes thrive on chaos."

Indeed, the violent response of the Palestinians to those metal detectors—put there after Palestinians smuggled automatic weapons into al Aqsa and used them to murder two Israeli police—was just one more Arab excuse to refuse to negotiate. After all, many Muslim holy sites, including the Kaaba in Mecca, use metal detectors for security, as do all shopping centers in Israel (and all international airports).

To heighten the absurdity of these protests, the Palestinians continued to object even when Israel removed the metal detectors, allegedly because Israeli authorities said they intended to replace them with high-resolution cameras in the al Aqsa area.

In other words, the Palestinians reject all security measures on or around the al Aqsa grounds. Really, guys? That's your position? No security?

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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 greater obstacles are 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 withdrew its settlements in Gaza in 2005, it was rewarded with a massacre now by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas. Five major misconceptions underlie criticism of Israeli settlements.

Myth #1: Palestinians "own" these lands. In fact, Jews are indigenous to the indigenous people of Palestine (including Israel, Judea and Samaria), who have lived in the region for millennia and ruled it as a state, providing Arab settlements by 1,000 years. 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 Jordanian 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 on Jews? Why should Arabs be welcome in Israeli 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 dispute neutral committee advised Ben Netanyahu to limit the number of new settlements to 20,000. The number of new settlements in Israel, and Israel has created no new settlements in over 20 years. The number of settlements, plus illegal outposts, now stands at 220. While the number of settlers on living in established settlements has increased by 355,000 since 2005, the number of settlers living east of Israel's anti-Arab 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 privately 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, Russia 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 Jewish 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 law—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." In 2009, Israel froze new settlement activity for 10 months to allow the Palestinians to negotiations sponsored by the U.S. The Palestinians refused. Indeed, Israel has made numerous land-for-peace offers to the Palestinians, most recently in 2009 and in 2010, in which the Palestinians would have received more than 90 percent of the disputed territories, rights land sovereignty—a capital in Jerusalem—but the Arabs turned them down. They refuse to accept Israel as a Jewish state and insist on "right" 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. In the Arabic region, citing Israeli settlements as an excuse. One thing is certain: Settlements are necessary to peace in 2017—what Israel was aware of three years ago—and they're not the obstacle today.

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East
 CEO: Dan Sattler, Chairman, CLM/FLC
 James Sternman, President
 Shoshie Wolf, Executive and President Emerita

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In general, Kushner expressed frustration and a note of sympathy with Israel's trying to keep its people safe, while bending over backwards to mollify the Palestinian street and leadership.

Unfortunately, but predictably, when Kushner and his fellow diplomatic envoy, Jason Greenblatt, respond like normal, rational people to obvious Palestinian perfidy—that is, with confusion and pushback—the Palestinians accuse them of "taking Israel's side" or "acting as Israel's lawyer."

This disconnect comes from decades of American diplomats who have refused to call the Palestinians out on their fake objections to negotiations and their nonsensical and unrealistic demands.

We recommend that Kushner and Greenblatt sit the Palestinians down and explain the facts of life to them—as good lawyers *for the Palestinians* should do—something like this:

"Look guys, let's be realistic. The Arabs lost the wars in 1948 and 1967, Israel has become an economic powerhouse, Israel has become the region's most powerful military force and Israel has successfully repulsed every wave of terrorism the Palestinians have mounted. In other words, the Arabs have lost, and Israel has won. That's the reality we're dealing with here."

Mssrs. Kushner and Greenblatt should conclude their lesson by informing the Palestinians that their negotiating leverage deteriorates with every passing day. If the Arabs *truly* want independence and the *opportunity* to build a state, they should take hat in hand and negotiate the best possible peace now—which for many reasons will be less, much less, than they were offered in 2000 and in 2008.

To help you as a pro-Israel advocate understand what appears to be an erosion of support by the Trump administration for the Palestinians—and the Palestinians' corresponding disillusionment with the Trump team—I hope you'll read the excellent FLAME *Hotline* featured article, below, by diplomatic correspondent Raphael Ahren.

We can only hope that Trump's disillusionment with the Palestinians soon frees him up to increasing support of Israel by moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Israel's capital in Jerusalem, as he many times so dramatically promised to do while running for office.

Above all, I hope you find this week's hard-hitting FLAME

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Hotline encouraging in terms of the future of U.S.-Israel relations and U.S. adoption of a more realistic strategy for dealing with the Palestinians.

Speaking of the Palestinians' manifestly unreasonable positions, I hope you'll also quickly review the P.S. immediately below, which describes FLAME's long-running *hasbarah* campaign to promote a Congressional bill that withdraws U.S. funding to the Palestinians as long as they use \$300 million a year of foreign aid to pay salaries as an incentive to terrorists.

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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The Temple Crisis Ended Trump's Palestinian Honeymoon. The Kushner Tape Made Things Worse

By Raphael Ahren, *Times of Israel*, August 3, 2017

In Washington three months ago, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas praised US President Donald Trump's "wisdom," "courageous stewardship" and "great negotiating ability." Speaking in the White House's Roosevelt Room, where he and Trump were addressing the media, Abbas switched from Arabic to English. "Now, Mr. President," he declared, "with you we have hope."

Twenty days later, the two men met again, this time in the Presidential Palace in Bethlehem. "Your Excellency," Abbas told his prominent guest, "meeting you in the White House early this month has given us and our Palestinian people ... so much hope and optimism of the possibility to make true a dream, a long-awaited dream and ambition, and that is lasting and justice-based peace."

But in recent days, the Palestinians' relationship with the Trump administration, which started off so surprisingly amicably, has soured—largely in the wake of last month's tensions over the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. And Ramallah's mounting frustration with what it increasingly sees as an American pro-Israel bias - underlined by leaked comments from Trump's Middle East point man, Jared Kushner, in which he seems sympathetic to Israel's position—could cripple Trump's ability to be seen as an honest broker.

Although Trump was known as a longtime staunch supporter of Israel, after his election in November, the Palestinians were encouraged by his expressed desire to mediate a final-status peace deal. They were relieved when he slowly but surely walked back some of his previous pro-Israel positions—for instance when he urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "hold back on settlements for a little bit" and when he delayed indefinitely the relocation of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The Palestinians' strategy seemed to be a mix of magnanimity and flattery. Recognizing that his special envoy, Jason Greenblatt, was going to great lengths to show the administration's intention to approach the conflict evenhandedly, Ramallah opted to go along with Trump. On his visit to Israel, moreover, Trump openly contradicted Netanyahu's assertion that Abbas was no peace partner, going off-script in his final speech at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem to assert, "I am telling you ... the Palestinians are ready to reach for peace."

In that spirit of trying to stay on the administration's good side, the Palestinians largely kept quiet as Trump became the first sitting US president to visit the Western Wall, and even, subsequently, when the White House allowed Israel to start work on the first new West Bank settlement in decades.

The first clear sign of Palestinian bitterness appeared in early July, when senior Palestine Liberation Organization official Hanan Ashrawi accused Nikki Haley, Trump's envoy to the United Nations, of an "obsessive and targeted campaign of

intimidation and threats" against Palestinians and their supporters.

Since then, the Palestinians appear to have abandoned their initial praise-the-president-and-hope-for-the-best strategy, and increasingly unvarnished criticism of the administration is being expressed.

"The fact the US administration did not declare the final goal of the peace process is to achieve two states on the basis of the 1967 borders, and its silence regarding the intensification of Israeli colonial settlement activities, are interpreted by the Israeli government as an opportunity to destroy the two-state solution and replace it with one state with two systems," top Palestinian peace negotiator Saeb Erekat charged Tuesday.

By tolerating Israel's policies, the White House would give Israel the green light to erect an "apartheid" system, Erekat charged, urging the president to come out in support of a two-state solution based on the 1967 lines.

"We're not saying that Trump is the most pro-Israel president in history. We're not blaming him for anything," a senior official in the Palestinian leadership told *The Times of Israel* on Wednesday. "But if he wants to have a peace process, we need to know what we're talking about."

Ramallah was dismayed, and starting to show it, at Washington's positions during the two-week crisis over the Temple Mount, which started when Israel erected metal detectors at the flashpoint holy site after two Israeli policemen were killed by three Arab Israelis using firearms that had been smuggled into the compound.

Palestinians demanded Israel remove all security measures installed at the Temple Mount following the July 14 shooting. Greenblatt and Trump's senior adviser (and son-in-law) Kushner made behind-the-scenes efforts to defuse the crisis. The Palestinians argue that the administration backed the Israeli government's position while dismissing the Palestinian point of view.

"Greenblatt picked a side and represented Netanyahu throughout the crisis," an unnamed senior Palestinian source told the *Al-Monitor* website this week.

A senior US official told *The Times of Israel* last week that throughout the crisis, Netanyahu "acted with a clear sense of

responsibility not just for Israel's security, but also for regional stability." No such praise, it might be noted, was forthcoming regarding Palestinian leaders.

A leaked conversation Kushner had this week with Congressional interns appeared to confirm where his sympathies lay during the Temple Mount tensions. He defended Israel's decision to erect metal detectors following the terror attack as "not an irrational thing to do," noting that two Israelis had been killed with guns brought into the site.

The next thing that happened is that the Palestinians "start inciting" and claiming Israel wanted to change the status quo, said Kushner. "And Israel was saying we don't want anything to do with that, we just want to make sure people are safe. And that really incited a lot of tension in the streets."

In his leaked remarks, Kushner went on to bash Palestinian clergymen who told worshipers their prayers wouldn't be accepted if they passed through the Israeli metal detector gates. He also lamented the "absolutely terrible" killing of three Israeli civilians in the West Bank settlement of Halamish on July 21, mentioning that their murder—by a Palestinian terrorist who stabbed them to death at their Shabbat table—was explicitly committed for the sake of the Temple Mount's Al-Aqsa Mosque.

But perhaps worst of all, from a Palestinian perspective, Kushner appeared to express sympathy for Netanyahu when he noted that the prime minister "was getting beaten up by the press in Israel, because [finally removing the metal detectors] was very politically unpopular for him to do."

Kushner "clearly adopted every single Israeli position," a Palestinian official told *The Times of Israel* on Wednesday.

Trump's son-in-law obviously "has a fondness for Israel and Netanyahu, through longstanding family connections and early childhood memories, that outweighs his regard and affection for the Palestinians," veteran US peace negotiator Aaron David Miller observed in Politico after dissecting the senior Trump's adviser's leaked speech.

Kushner's sympathies for the Jewish state do not necessarily doom the White House's effort to broker a deal, but he must not allow himself to be seen as Israel's lawyer, Miller warned. "If he's not prepared to push both sides hard, he might as well close up for the season."

Apparently eager to salvage American credibility among Palestinians, the White House has kept mostly quiet as the Temple Mount crisis faded. In private conversations, US officials say the president was involved in the efforts to restore calm and continues to be fully committed to bringing peace to Israelis and Palestinians.

But given the deep rift that has developed over the last few weeks, some are already predicting the speedy demise of Trump's much-touted plan to broker the "ultimate deal."

"As of now, Trump's peace initiative looks like it is completely bogged down," a senior Israeli political figure told Al-Monitor.

Kushner, in his leaked speech, did little to inspire hope in Trump's ability to succeed where all of his predecessors failed.

"So, what do we offer that's unique? I don't know," he said.

"We're thinking about what the right end state is, and we're trying to work with the parties very quietly to see if there's a solution. And there may be no solution, but it's one of the problem sets that the president asked us to focus on."

Apparently, Trump's point man on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict knows that his mission might be impossible. But, he admitted, he's giving it a shot anyway, simply because his father-in-law asked him to.

"My sense is that Kushner realizes that the peace process isn't ready for prime time, and isn't quite sure what to do about it," Miller wrote.

Israel's perspective

Where does the Israeli government stand regarding the ending of the Palestinian-American honeymoon and Kushner's quasi-recognition that peace may in fact remain unattainable?

A senior official in Jerusalem on Wednesday declined to discuss Abbas's strategy, saying only that the Palestinians "are seeking every excuse not to engage in genuine direct peace negotiations." Discussions between Jerusalem and Washington about key issues of the peace process "haven't stopped for a moment," the official said, insisting on anonymity. Israel continues to make its positions clear to the administration, he added.

Deputy Minister for Diplomacy Michael Oren said Israel was interested in the Americans taking a "highly proactive stance" in the peace process. "But they need to have goals that reflect Middle East realities and not the conventional wisdoms of Washington think tanks and elite universities."

Kushner's leaked comments appear to reflect his realization that past efforts to bring peace had failed because they were divorced from the reality on the ground, said Oren, a former Israeli ambassador to the US.

"Washington should realize that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not about territory but has "deep religious roots," Oren told *The Times of Israel* Wednesday. Furthermore, the administration needs to ask itself whether the Palestinian leadership "has the power to sign and enforce a deal, and if we create a Palestinian state, if it could cohere for more than a few days, or a few hours, before falling to Hamas at best and ISIS at worst."

Do the Palestinian-American tensions and Kushner's pessimistic leaked musings mean that the administration will soon drop its bid to broker peace and let Jerusalem do as it pleases in the West Bank? If he were going to be put off by a tense political climate and the apparent unfeasibility of a final-status deal, you'd think the president would never have announced his intention to give it a shot in the first place. You'd think. But with Trump, you couldn't be sure.

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Facts and Logic
About the Middle East
PO Box 3460
Berkeley, CA 94703

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