

Why Bahrain's Move to Make Peace Is Especially Courageous

By Oded Granot

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Defying Iran.

Bahraini King Hamad al-Khalifa surprised no one by following in the footsteps of the United Arab Emirates, exposing his country's long-standing clandestine relations with Israel, and establishing diplomatic ties with direct flights between Israel and Manama.

And yet, this was a courageous move on his part, no less daring and perhaps even more so than the UAE leader's trailblazing move last month to normalize relations with Israel. This is because Bahrain, a tiny island nation off the Saudi coast, is more susceptible than the UAE to national security threats posed by Iran. Tehran has made territorial claims in Bahrain in the past, and the fact that over 70% of Bahrain's slightly more than one million residents are Shiite, ruled by a Sunni minority, makes it easier for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to try establishing terrorist cells inside the country to destabilize the regime.

At the onset of the Arab Spring, Tehran encouraged Shiite activists in Bahrain to take to the streets against the regime, protests that were only subdued with the help of Saudi military forces dispatched to the kingdom. In their efforts to fend off the Iranian threat, the Bahrainis lean on support from Saudi Arabia, the presence of the US Navy Fifth Fleet stationed there, and now their burgeoning ties with Israel, which undoubtedly received Riyadh's silent blessing. Iran harshly condemned the development after it was announced on Friday, but there's no assurance it will suffice with mere words.

There's a great deal of importance to the public alliance between Bahrain and Israel, and not just because of its security implications. Bahrain is a very small country,

but has a free market economy that doesn't rely just on oil. The Bahraini economy is the fastest growing in the Arab world and opens up a plethora of opportunities for broad commercial ties between the countries. On social issues, too, such as women's rights, Bahrain is ahead of many Arab countries. In the cultural realm, meanwhile, more books are published there than any other Arab country.

Beyond all this, Bahrain, similar to the UAE, is an exemplary model of religious moderation, as a counterweight to the radical political Islam spearheaded by Iran, Turkey and Qatar. Mohammad Bin Zayed, the crown prince and acting ruler of the UAE, intends to build, in the wake of the "Abraham Accord" with Israel, a complex with a mosque, synagogue and church as an expression of interfaith equality. The ruler of Bahrain, meanwhile, who in the past appointed a Jewish attorney, Houada Ezra Ebrahim Nonoo, as his country's ambassador to the United States, makes sure the tiny Jewish community (which once numbered in the thousands and now comprises less than 40 people) has permanent representation in parliament.

How ironic that as these Gulf states normalize relations with Israel and emphasize equality between the religions, the Palestinian Authority is signaling it will not allow Muslims who enter Israel through Ben-Gurion International Airport to pray at Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. The tables have turned: Israel, which has regularly been accused of infringing on freedom of worship on the Temple Mount, is opening its gates to all Muslim worshippers who arrive from the Gulf – while the PA is threatening to forbid them from praying there.

A Rare Middle East Triumph

By Hanna Gerber

nytimes.com

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And — yes — a triumph for Trump, too.

For years, the Trump administration's peacemaking efforts in the Middle East have been the object of relentless derision in elite foreign-policy circles, some of it justified. Yet with Friday's announcement that Bahrain would join the United Arab Emirates as the second Arab state in 30 days to normalize ties with Israel, the administration has done more for regional peace than most of its predecessors, including an Obama administration that tried hard and failed badly.

There are lessons in this, at least for anyone prepared to consider just how wrong a half-century's worth of conventional wisdom has been.

At the heart of that conventional wisdom is the view, succinctly put by U.N. Secretary General António

Guterres in February, that "resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains key to sustainable peace in the Middle East." Untie that Gordian knot, so the thinking goes, and the region's many problems become easier to solve, whether it's other regional conflicts or the anti-Americanism that feeds international terrorism.

That thinking was always dubious — what, for instance, did the Iran-Iraq War, in which a million people or more died, have to do with Israelis and Palestinians? — though it had the convenience of giving Arab regimes a good way of deflecting blame for their own bad governance. But since the (misnamed) Arab Spring began nearly a decade ago, the view has become absurd.

The rise and fall of ISIS, civil war in Syria and anarchy in Libya, Turkey's aggression against Kurds, proxy battles

and hunger in Yemen, political turmoil and repression in Egypt and Iran, the bankruptcy of the Lebanese state, the plight of Middle Eastern refugees — if any of these catastrophes have something in common, it's that they have next to nothing to do with the Jewish state or its policies. One may still hope for a Palestinian state, but it won't save the region from itself.

What would? The best option is an alliance of moderates and modernizers — anyone in power (or seeking power) who wants to move his country in the direction of greater religious and social tolerance, broader (that is, beyond energy) economic development, less preoccupation with ancient disputes, more interest in future opportunities. Such an alliance is the only hope for a region being sucked into the maw of religious fanaticism, economic stagnation, environmental degradation and perpetual misrule.

Now this alliance may finally be coming into being. Unlike Israel's peace with Egypt and Jordan — both based on strategic necessity and geographic proximity — the peace with the Emirates and Bahrain has no obvious rationale, even if a shared fear of Iran played a role.

The larger factor is shared aspiration. Israel is the most advanced country in the region because for seven decades it invested in human, not mineral, potential, and because it didn't let its wounds (whether with respect to Germany in the 1950s or Egypt in the 1970s) get the better of its judgment.

The choice for the Arab world is stark. It can follow a similar path as Israel; be swallowed by Iran, China, Russia, Turkey or some other outsider; or otherwise continue as before until, Libya-like, it implodes.

What We Learned From Week 1 of the N.F.L. Season

As consequential as the peace deals themselves is the Arab League's refusal to condemn them, eliciting a furious Palestinian reaction. That's not surprising: It means the Palestinian grip over the league's diplomatic agenda may finally be loosening.

Perhaps it also means that the grievance-driven politics

that have dominated the Palestinian issue for decades are finally over, too. If so, it's bad news for those Palestinian leaders and activists who think that, with unflagging obstinacy, they can somehow restore the status quo ante 1948, when Israel didn't exist.

What's bad news for some Palestinian leaders may be good news for ordinary Palestinians. Peace between Israelis and Arabs will not come from the inside out — that is, from a deal between Jerusalem and Ramallah that wins over the rest of the Arab world. Decades of diplomatic failure, culminating in John Kerry's failed mediation efforts in 2014, should put an end to that fantasy.

Yet it isn't crazy to think that peace might come from the outside in: from an Arab world that encircles Israel with recognition and partnership rather than enmity, and which thereby shores up Israel's security while moderating Palestinian behavior. If that's right — and if states like Oman, Morocco, Kuwait, Sudan and especially Saudi Arabia follow suit — then this summer's peace deals might finally create the conditions of viable Palestinian statehood.

A final point about these deals: This wasn't supposed to happen. Not under the leadership of Israel's supposedly bellicose Benjamin Netanyahu; certainly not through the diplomatic offices of the usually crazy/amateurish/perverse Trump administration. Luck and timing played a part, as they always do.

But it behooves those of us who are so frequently hostile to Netanyahu and Trump to maintain the capacity to be pleasantly surprised — that is, to be honest. What's happened between Israel and two former enemies is an honest triumph in a region, and a year, that's known precious few.

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Kashrut in the United Arab Emirates Is a Sign of a Warm Peace

By Jeremy Sharon

jpost.com

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Abu Dhabi instructs its hotels to carry kosher food.

Hotels in Abu Dhabi, one of seven emirates that constitute the United Arab Emirates, have been instructed to provide kosher food to their guests. The UAE expects a surge in Israeli and Jewish visitors following normalization of ties with Israel.

Hotels have been "advised" to adopt the measure to cater to their guests' needs, the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism said Tuesday in a statement.

The department was "instructing all hotel establishments" to seek kosher certifications for the handling of kosher meals, designate an area in all kitchens for the preparation of kosher food and to label kosher

menu items with a visible reference and recognizable symbol denoting the item is kosher, it said.

It was not clear whether the department's message to hotels was a mandatory regulation or a recommendation. The UAE is ranked as a "not free" authoritarian country by the Freedom House democracy watchdog.

"Based on the commitment of the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi to ensure certain foods are available for all visitors and tourists in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, please note that all hotel establishments are advised to include kosher food options on room service menus and at all food & beverage outlets in their establishments," the statement said.

The tourism department is taking “extraordinary steps to welcome Jews and Israelis,” Sarah Besnainou, a member of Abu Dhabi’s Jewish community, said following the recent agreement to normalize relations between Israel and the UAE.

Having kosher food in hotels was entirely at the initiative of the Abu Dhabi authorities, who had not consulted with the local Jewish community on the issue, she said.

“The Emiratis have a lot of respect for religion and want Jews to feel comfortable in the country and to be able to find the food they need,” Besnainou said.

There are two kosher caterers in the UAE, one supervised by the Orthodox Union and one by Chabad.

When asked whether all Abu Dhabi hotels would be required to provide kosher food, a government official did not immediately respond.

The U.S. Ought Not Allow a Nuclear Saudi Arabia

By Andrea Stricker and Behnam Ben Taleblu

fdd.org

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The bitter fruit of the Iran deal, harvested by China.

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is building two clandestine facilities with Chinese assistance, which Western intelligence agencies suspect may have nuclear applications. The secretive construction of these sites raises questions about Riyadh’s nuclear intentions, as well as concerns about Beijing’s role in supplying sensitive nuclear technology abroad.

The two facilities may be part of a Saudi attempt to develop fuel cycle capabilities, which in turn would enable the kingdom to enrich uranium domestically. Enrichment could give the Saudis the option to produce nuclear weapons, if paired later with nuclear weaponization efforts and a missile delivery system.

Saudi Arabia’s incremental nuclear advances run counter to U.S. interests in the Middle East, particularly regarding Washington’s efforts to cease Iran’s uranium enrichment program and verifiably end Tehran’s work on nuclear weapons. Were Saudi Arabia able to enrich uranium, Iran would be less likely to agree to future restrictions on its own nuclear program. Saudi enrichment could also beget a cascade of regional proliferation, with countries seeing value in procuring nuclear know-how or material to offset gains made by Tehran or Riyadh.

Obscure Nuclear Sites and Activities

The Wall Street Journal and the New York Times broke stories on August 4 and 5, about the two suspicious Saudi sites. A U.S. intelligence report leaked to the media appears to be their main source of information.

The Wall Street Journal report alleges that one facility is for the production of uranium ore concentrate. The plant is located in a remote desert near the Saudi city of al-Ula. Chemical refinement of natural uranium ore, a raw material mined from the earth produces uranium ore concentrate (U₃O₈), also known as yellowcake. This refinement is an early step in the nuclear fuel cycle.

The second site, described by the New York Times, is also located in an isolated area, near the town of al-Uyaynah. According to the Washington, DC-based Institute for Science and International Security, which was cited in the New York Times report, the facility appears to have signatures of a uranium conversion plant.

If Saudi technicians produced uranium ore concentrate at the first site, then they could send the material to the

second site to undergo chemical processing for conversion to uranium hexafluoride (UF₆). Such natural UF₆, which can be used to fabricate fuel for reactors, is also a prerequisite for enrichment—the process that can be used either to purify uranium to levels needed for certain reactors or to create fissile material for nuclear weapons.

Saudi Arabia has no operating reactors, but in the past made plans to construct more than a dozen. At least two will be large-scale units for electricity generation. If Riyadh successfully carries out such plans and inaugurates reactors requiring enriched uranium fuel, then it still would not require domestic uranium enrichment. Enriched uranium is widely available on the international market at a low cost.

The kingdom is not currently known to be working with foreign partners to develop gas centrifuges, the most common means of enriching uranium. Nor have the Saudis disclosed concrete plans for enrichment. However, in 2010, the Lebanon-based Daily Star reported that a Finnish consultancy, on behalf of the Saudis, investigated the feasibility of Riyadh developing enrichment under a “national vision and high-level strategy in the area of nuclear and renewable energy.”

China could theoretically supply Saudi Arabia with uranium enrichment technology. Riyadh is also suspected of having bankrolled Pakistan’s nuclear weapons development and could seek technical expertise or supplies from Islamabad.

If the kingdom sought nuclear weapons, absent significant turn-key assistance, it would still require work on learning to weaponize the fissile material and assemble it in a nuclear device, and then mounting it on a delivery vehicle such as a ballistic missile. Coincidentally, Saudi Arabia twice purchased surface-to-surface missiles from Beijing, once in the late 1980s, and again in the mid-2000s.

In 2014, the Saudis publicly paraded the initial batch of missiles, likely sending a message about its concerns over nuclear diplomacy between Iran and America. Moreover, in 2019, multiple outlets revealed that Saudi Arabia was receiving assistance from China to grow its missile capabilities, assistance which could include technology used in an alleged ballistic missile production facility.

Matching Iran

With its clandestine facilities, Saudi Arabia is likely hedging against a future nuclear weapons-equipped Iran. In 2018, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman stated that Saudi Arabia would emulate its regional rival if it developed nuclear weapons. Thus, it is probable that the Saudis are gradually laying the technical infrastructure to match Iran's advanced fuel cycle capabilities.

Saudi Arabia's official rationales for nuclear power are entirely civil in nature, yet questionable given the existence of vast domestic oil supplies. Riyadh states that it seeks to diversify energy sources, conserve oil, and desalinate seawater.

The kingdom has inked nuclear-related agreements or memoranda of understandings with multiple countries that cover everything from reactor purchases to nuclear waste management, radioisotope production to development of national nuclear regulatory legislation, and consultancy assistance. Potential and current partners include France, Argentina, China, South Korea, Hungary, Finland, Russia, Kazakhstan, Jordan, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, and even the United States.

Domestic nuclear power is also part of the kingdom's widely advertised "Vision 2030" program. For example, in 2017, the nation's atomic energy establishment, King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy, highlighted three important components of the country's nuclear program: development of the nuclear fuel cycle; construction of large nuclear power plants; and building of Small Modular Reactors, involving both "joint IP ownership with [South] Korea on SMART technology" for a three-year period and a "long-term strategic partnership with China" related to High-Temperature Gas Reactors.

In April 2019, Bloomberg News published satellite images showing that the Saudis were nearing completion of a small, thirty kilowatt-thermal power research reactor, built with the assistance of an Argentinian company, INVAP. The reactor would not generate electricity but would be used to study scientific applications of nuclear energy. Saudi Arabia denied that the facility would be misused for proliferation purposes.

As noted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the global nuclear proliferation watchdog, Argentina will not be able to supply the reactor with fuel until the kingdom concludes comprehensive safeguards and subsidiary arrangements with the IAEA and submits the facility to inspections. The reactor unit would not be of concern for the production of plutonium, since it would produce only small quantities annually.

The negotiation of the Iran nuclear deal—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—in 2015 was widely perceived in the region, including by Riyadh, as abandoning precedent set by previous UN resolutions that demanded a halt to Iran's uranium enrichment program. The JCPOA provided temporary constraints on Iran's enrichment capabilities while permitting their medium-term expansion, and ultimately, international legitimization of the program. In 2014, former intelligence chief Prince

Turki bin Faisal al-Saud publicly stated that the Saudis would want enrichment if a nuclear deal were to acquiesce to the continuation of Iran's enrichment program.

Weak Safeguards

Saudi Arabia does not yet have adequate safeguards in place to ensure the peaceful use of nuclear material and peaceful nature of nuclear activities on its territory. The absence of such safeguards, despite the reports about the existence of new and significant nuclear activities, is a worrying sign that Riyadh intends to obscure the nature of its nuclear activities for as long as possible.

Saudi Arabia has ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and as such, Riyadh is required to have a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (CSA) with the IAEA. In 2005, the Saudis concluded a CSA, but also an IAEA agreement called a "Small Quantities Protocol," or SQP. An SQP holds in abeyance several vital provisions of the CSA. According to the IAEA, SQPs are typically implemented by countries with "minimal or no nuclear material and no nuclear material in a 'facility.'"

There are immediate issues with the Saudi approach to safeguards. The version of the SQP signed by Riyadh is outdated and pauses implementation of many more provisions of the CSA than does a revised SQP, such as notifying the IAEA as soon as a decision is made to build a nuclear facility and enabling it to carry out initial verification activities that would permit a deeper understanding of a country's plans. Ideally, Riyadh should already have its CSA in force to adequately safeguard the newly-discovered facilities, the Argentinian reactor, and any other nuclear facility.

A trigger for the CSA will be if Saudi Arabia soon plans to inaugurate the Argentinian reactor. If the kingdom introduces or produces nuclear material on its territory, then it must bring into force the CSA and conclude subsidiary arrangements for all related facilities. It also must notify the IAEA six months before the introduction of nuclear material.

In addition, unlike its neighbor the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United States has not been able to convince Saudi Arabia to conclude a "123 Agreement" with the United States for civil nuclear supply under which it forswears domestic uranium enrichment or reprocessing of plutonium—two key processes that can make fissile material for nuclear weapons. A forswearing of enrichment and reprocessing is known as the "gold standard" of non-proliferation agreements.

Despite this lack of an agreement, Washington reportedly green-lit deals with Riyadh for seven U.S. firms to engage in "preliminary work on nuclear power ahead of any deal but not [to] ship equipment that would go into a plant," Reuters reported. The names of the firms remain secret, a controversy that has led to whistleblowing and congressional accusations that the administration is not enforcing nonproliferation norms.

Also in contrast to the UAE, Riyadh has not signed an IAEA Additional Protocol (AP), which it could bring into

force to rescind its SQP, even if the CSA is not yet in force. An AP provides the IAEA with enhanced verification authorities. Currently, U.S. nuclear assistance is rendered overwhelmingly to countries with additional protocols.

A failure to implement the IAEA's strongest suite of safeguards at a time when Saudi nuclear capabilities appear to have jumped ahead could allow the Saudis to initially hide certain nuclear activities without them being subject to IAEA inspections.

Enter Beijing

Beijing's involvement in Riyadh's nuclear program raises multiple challenges. In the past, China has not been a trustworthy partner in preventing proliferation of nuclear technology. As strategic competition intensifies between the United States and China, Washington may find that Beijing may show even less concern for existing nonproliferation and nuclear supply norms.

Prior to 2004, when China joined the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)—a group of states that is committed to preventing proliferation of sensitive nuclear technologies—Beijing sold problematic nuclear facilities and materials to Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, India, South Africa, Algeria, and Argentina. It has also failed to adequately prevent the supply of nuclear-related equipment and commodities by Chinese companies or foreign-owned companies operating on its soil.

The Institute for Science and International Security assesses that the second site under watch by intelligence agencies in Saudi Arabia closely resembles the Iranian uranium conversion site at Esfahan, which China provided. In the past, China also provided uranium mining, milling, fuel fabrication, and other nuclear-related assistance to the Islamic Republic.

Seen in this light, China's nuclear cooperation with Saudi Arabia is likely commercial in nature, rather than the result of a strategic preference for regional supremacy by either Riyadh or Tehran. But such mercantilist considerations can create long-term opportunities for China to tempt states like Saudi Arabia out of the American orbit. In the short-to-medium term, however, Chinese assistance to Riyadh complicates Washington's efforts to rein in Tehran's nuclear program.

Policy Recommendations

Washington has vast challenges ahead in stemming additional nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.

The situation in Saudi Arabia recalls the recent past with Iran: intelligence agencies leaking concerns about nuclear proliferation to the media, and experts identifying covert nuclear sites in the desert. The U.S. intelligence community's expressions of concern about Saudi nuclear proliferation are likely intended to gain broad support for collective international efforts to prevent it.

The stakes are high. If the United States fails in convincing Saudi Arabia, a regional partner, not to opt for domestic enrichment, then it will face greater hurdles getting Iran to accept limits on its own program. If the two become locked in a race for nuclear supremacy, then both countries could claim a security-based need to make nuclear weapons that might garner less outrage from the international community than if only one had developed nuclear weapons. This, in turn, would not only undercut the non-proliferation regime but trigger a cascade of regional proliferation likely beginning with Turkey or Egypt.

Washington should encourage and incentivize Riyadh to immediately bring into force its CSA, conclude an AP, and forswear enrichment and reprocessing. The United States should further underscore that close bilateral military relations and other strategic partnerships could be threatened if Riyadh seeks nuclear weapons. In so doing, the United States should not hesitate to reference how Iran's nuclear ambitions made it into an international target.

America should also work closely with allies and partners to convince Beijing to halt its nuclear assistance to Saudi Arabia and work within the NSG to urge other nations not to supply advanced fuel cycle capabilities to Riyadh. As a backstop, Washington could consider sanctions against China if it chooses to assist the Saudis, given the current opaque status of the kingdom's nuclear intentions.

U.S. foreign policy need not pit regional efforts such as countering Iran against functional ones such as countering the spread of nuclear weapons in the region. Uniform rather than select enforcement of non-proliferation-related norms and rules will benefit Washington in the long-run and stem a wave of proliferation backed by America's near peer-competitors.

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The Torture and Execution of a Wrestler Undermines the Islamic Republic at Home and Abroad

By Michael Rubin

nationalinterest.org

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The death of Navid Afkari.

Early on the morning of September 12, 2020, Iranian authorities in Shiraz hanged Navid Afkari, a twenty-seven-year-old wrestling champion whom a security court had sentenced to death for allegedly stabbing a man during unrest two years ago. Few believe there was merit to his conviction. Security forces detained and tortured Afkari,

his brothers, and hundreds of others for participating in the 2018 anti-government protests. Exculpatory evidence existed. While his captors broadcast a forced confession, Afkari was able to smuggle out a recording professing his innocence. Ordinary Iranians are outraged not only by the brutality of Afkari's execution, but by its speed. Iranian

authorities killed Afkari before his family could visit him to say goodbye.

Over the course of its forty-one-year existence, the Islamic Republic has executed tens of thousands of prisoners and dissidents. The late Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri revealed in memoirs smuggled out of the country by his son that, in 1988 alone, his regime executed several thousand prisoners. Amnesty International recorded the names of at least 2,000 victims, but Iranian dissidents say that when peripheral provinces are counted, the number could be an order of magnitude higher. While some diplomats and politicians counseling outreach to Iran may place hope in the Islamic Republic's so-called reformers, a sad irony of Iranian political culture is that execution rates are higher under reformist or moderate administrations than under the so-called hardliners. While security agencies (rather than elected leaders) govern death squads and the penal system, Western officials tend to let their guard down and relieve pressure when trying to engage with their Iranian counterparts. Many of those killed have just become statistics given the sheer scale of Iranian human rights abuse, but Afkari's murder may haunt the regime more than most.

The two most popular sports in Iran are wrestling and soccer. Both are widely followed across society but a class difference exists: Soccer is favored by the educated and the elite, while wrestling is embraced more by the working class. Like all reactionary revolutionary regimes, the Islamic Republic dismisses those with a more internationalist outlook but bases its claims to legitimacy on the support of the poor and the working class. Indeed, from the Islamic Revolution to the present day, Iran's revolutionary authorities have infused their rhetoric with calls for social justice and addressing the have-nots and working class within society. Afkari's execution suggests, however, that the regime has abandoned the effort to win the hearts of minds of its core constituency, and instead believe it must rely on brute force.

On an international level, Afkari's death will also have ramifications: International anti-Israel animus may have undercut past pressure on the International Olympics Committee and other sporting bodies to investigate or punish Iran for ordering their sportsmen to forfeit matches against athletes from the Jewish state. But executing a star athlete on such flimsy grounds is harder to ignore and may lead to Iran's ban from international forums once the coronavirus pause is over.

Many diplomats, dignitaries, and athletes also had asked Iran to put aside its death sentence, only to be ignored. Here, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's disdain for these entreaties is reminiscent of the case of Farzad Bazoft. Bazoft was a thirty-one-year-old Iranian-British journalist whose work had appeared on the BBC and in London's Observer. Arrested in September 1989 at a time many Western diplomats continued to court Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as a moderate, Iraqi authorities subjected Bazoft to a show trial and sentenced him to death. Pleas poured into Baghdad to spare Bazoft, but Saddam ignored them all. The Iraqi leader refused to even take phone calls from British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. On March 15, 1990, Iraqi authorities executed Bazoft. To add insult to injury, the Iraqi government shipped Bazoft's body back to Heathrow Airport with a terse statement, "Mrs. Thatcher wanted him. We've sent him in a box." It was only then that the media which had generally treated the Iraqi regime with kid gloves definitively turned. U.S. News and World Report, for example, branded Saddam "The Most Dangerous Man in the World."

Within Europe and the United States, on college campuses and in news rooms and foreign ministries, academics, journalists, and diplomats have embraced the idea that its critics fundamentally misunderstood Iran. They believed that reformers were both sincere and able to affect change. Afkari's execution should put that notion to rest. The regime response to the 2018 protests showed its fear of reform and accountability. Its execution of Afkari, meanwhile, shows it fears the Iranian people and any living heroes around which they might rally. As Khamenei ages and transition looms, the Iranian regime rightly assumes that the next generation of Iranian leaders may arise from Iran's prisons, much as they once did when transitions came to Chile, Czechoslovakia, India, and South Africa. Khamenei may believe killing Afkari will intimidate those willing to take to the streets, but they instead show just how weak, fearful, detached, and dismissive Iran's leaders have become. Afkari may be gone, but historians will look at his execution as the day Khamenei ended the Iranian and Western hope for internal reform and instead signed the death warrant for the Islamic Republic.

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The U.S. Should Punish Iranian Nuclear Violations with the Full Force of Sanctions

By Richard Goldberg

washingtonexaminer.com

September 13, 2020

The Americans are not as isolated as some think.

President Trump recently demanded the indefinite restoration of the United Nations's sanctions on Iran that were terminated by the Obama-Biden nuclear deal — including an arms embargo that was scheduled to expire in October. Russia and China will contest Trump's assertion

and threaten sales of advanced conventional weapons to the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism.

To defend America's security, Trump should use his own sanctions toolbox to enforce disputed multilateral restrictions, whether Moscow and Beijing like it or not.

Last month, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo notified the U.N. Security Council that Washington was triggering a 30-day process known as a “snapback” to restore international sanctions on Iran — a move that effectively delivers last rites to the nuclear deal and denies Iran its remaining strategic benefits.

In addition to billions of dollars in sanctions relief, Iran had won important changes at the Security Council in 2015: an expiration on the arms embargo in 2020, an expiration on the prohibition of foreign support to its missile program in 2023, removal of prohibitions on uranium enrichment and missile testing, and future legitimate pathways to an industrial-sized nuclear program. Under the snapback, all of these concessions disappear. Instead, older Security Council resolutions return to life, eliminating sunsets on key restrictions while demanding that Iran immediately halt all enrichment and missile-related activities.

Russia, China, and European countries that support the nuclear deal are contesting the U.S. snapback, arguing that America forfeited its standing to trigger the mechanism when it left the deal in 2018. Russia and China’s interests are apparent. The Defense Department reported that both countries want to sell fighter jets, tanks, and naval platforms to Iran when the arms embargo ends.

Supporters of the nuclear deal in London, Paris, and Berlin, on the other hand, know that a snapback is their last stand. If the snapback occurs, the deal is finally dead. They are willing to undermine their own security interests in letting the arms embargo on Iran expire just to preserve a more politically expedient appeasement foreign policy. According to senior advisers, former Vice President Joe Biden falls into this camp too.

Detractors claim that the refusal of most Security Council members to recognize America’s triggering of the snapback leaves the United States more isolated, ignoring widespread support from across the Middle East. These claims dismiss a more fundamental truth: Doing nothing would give Iran uncontested international legitimacy in developing its conventional, missile, and nuclear capabilities. By triggering the snapback, Trump puts a cloud of uncertainty and illegitimacy over any U.N. member state that considers breaching binding Security Council resolutions -- a cloud he can turn into a thunderstorm of deterrence by enforcing the snapback with the threat of U.S. sanctions.

Trump is scheduled to address the U.N. General Assembly just hours after the U.S. completes the snapback. He should use this speech to announce an executive order threatening the full range of financial sanctions against any

firm connected to the transfer of conventional arms, ballistic and cruise missiles, drones, and related components to Iran. Though not covered by the U.N. embargo, transfers of air defense systems like the Russian S-400 should be included.

If a Russian or Chinese defense firm tries to sell weapons to Iran, that firm and all the supporting institutions involved in a transaction would face secondary U.S. sanctions. Sanctions would apply not just to new sales but also to maintenance and modernization of existing equipment. Banks, underwriters, shippers, ports, freight forwarders, and other logistics firms would have to choose: involvement in Russian and Chinese military sales or a cutoff from the U.S. financial system and market.

Congress inserted a similar provision in a 2017 sanctions law, but that legislation failed to address the broadest range of possible military-related transfers and potential sanctions to deter them. Trump has an opportunity to take this bipartisan legislation and greatly expand its impact.

For a firm like Rosoboronexport, Russia’s state organization in charge of defense exports, a designation under this executive order could disrupt billions of dollars in global sales. While Rosoboronexport is already blacklisted by the U.S. for its activities in Ukraine, secondary sanctions have not been enforced.

China, whose arms export industry has grown in recent years, would face the same risks. Beijing uses several state-owned enterprises — NORINCO, Aviation Industry Corporation of China, China Electronics Technology Group Corporation, and China South Industries Group Corporation — to sell military products.

Recent examples demonstrate that state-owned enterprises with global business behave just like other multinational corporations when it comes to U.S. sanctions compliance. China has gone to great lengths to distance its state-owned energy companies and banks from illicit oil transactions with Iran. Last November, a Russian state-owned nuclear fuel company suspended its work at an Iranian facility after U.S. sanctions were reinstated. Russian and Chinese diplomats can make all the speeches they want; their state-owned enterprises, nonetheless, typically make financially prudent decisions.

America may stand alone at the Security Council in recognizing the snapback of U.N. sanctions on Iran. But Trump can send a powerful message to a corrupt and dysfunctional multilateral system by unilaterally enforcing that snapback with the deterrent power of U.S. sanctions. *Mr. Goldberg is a senior adviser at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.*

Britain Should Recognize Israel for the Ally It Is, and Act Accordingly

By Stephen Daisley

spectator.co.uk

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Why is there no British embassy in Jerusalem?

Boris Johnson has described himself as ‘a passionate defender of Israel’ and, what’s more, ‘a life-long friend,

admirer and supporter of Israel’. He says the UK ‘has always stood by Israel and its right to live, as any nation should be able to, in peace and security’. That recognition

that the Jewish state should be treated like every other does not, however, extend to a very basic courtesy: we refuse to recognise its capital and place our embassy there.

There is a UK embassy in the capital of China, inflicter of coronavirus and mass incarcerator of Uyghurs. There is a UK embassy in the capital of Iran, one of the world's leading state sponsors of terrorism. There is even a UK embassy in the capital of North Korea, a slave state and the closest thing to hell on earth. In Israel, however, the Foreign Office maintains the fiction that Tel Aviv is the capital and hides away our embassy there because admitting the truth would be too painful for the activist-diplomats of King Charles Street.

Israel, it is worth reminding those diplomats and the Prime Minister they nominally serve, is a steadfast ally. It sells us plastics and minerals and buys our machinery and vehicles. Just one of its pharmaceutical companies supplies one in seven NHS prescriptions. It signed a continuity trade deal with us a year before we left the EU. It trains our police to detect and stop 'lone wolf' Islamist attacks. It furnishes us with vital intelligence. If you don't remember Hezbollah bombing London in 2015, it is because the Mossad tipped off MI5 about a terror cell in the north-west London where the Met went on to find three tonnes of ammonium nitrate stockpiled. This faithful friend we reward by calling it an occupier in its own capital city.

The mindset that compels us to punish our friends while rewarding our enemies is leaving the UK behind in a changing Middle East. As a result of the Kosovo-Serbia deal, the former will establish diplomatic relations with Israel and open an embassy in Jerusalem — the first Muslim-majority nation to do so — while the latter will relocate its embassy from Tel Aviv to Israel's capital. Meanwhile, Malawi has announced its intention to open a diplomatic office in the city, the first African nation to do so. This is how countries of the future think about Israel, but the UK seems bent on thinking like a country of the past. (We are not alone. The EU, a supremely bad faith actor in these matters, has fired a warning shot at Kosovo and Serbia in response.)

I asked the Foreign Office what, in light of these announcements, was the UK's position on Jerusalem. (Since I asked, Chad has reportedly signalled that it too will open a diplomatic mission in the city.) They pointed me to an answer Middle East minister James Cleverly gave in the Commons in May:

“Our position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: The UK recognises Israel's 'de facto authority' over West Jerusalem. But in line with Security Council Resolution 242 and subsequent Council resolutions, we regard East Jerusalem as under Israeli military occupation. The UK believes that Jerusalem's final status must be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states.

The UK's embassy in Tel Aviv will not be moving.

I have noted before that the UK has a Conservative government but a Labour foreign policy. Once Brexit has been completed, there will be no major issue in international affairs that divides the two parties. This is particularly the case when it comes to Israel. I am always bemused when some conspiracy-minded anti-Israel columnist or activist points to the number of Tory MPs who are members of Conservative Friends of Israel (CFOI), typically portrayed as a wielder of awesome institutional power and influence within the Tory party. They are a good bunch and throw a cracking conference booze-up, so I don't want to beat up on them too much, but the reason they manage to sign up so many MPs is that their agenda is so anodyne. The only aspect of Conservative Friends of Israel that Labour Friends of Israel would object to (and vice versa) is the first word of its name.

If CFOI commanded one-tenth of the sway its demonisers insinuate, the UK's embassy would be in Jerusalem, not Tel Aviv. The Conservative government would not refer to East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza as 'Occupied Palestinian Territories' and would not scold Israel for allowing Jews to live in Judea. Our UN delegation would not abstain on something as basic as extending the arms embargo on Iran, whose Supreme Leader has called for 'eliminating Israel'. We would not have a prime minister who hits all the right rhetorical notes but remains wedded to the cobwebbed dogma of a world since passed.

There are many ways to be pro-Israel and it ought not to be confused with being on board with the political agenda of the Likud party, but it should involve a Tory government having a position substantively distinguishable from that of the European Commission and the UN Human Rights Council. Boris Johnson is, I believe, instinctively and sincerely sympathetic to Israel and the Jewish people but his policies do not reflect the warmth of his feelings. Maybe he believes his course is wise and right. Fair enough; people like me can bang on in hopes of changing the terms of debate and nudging him out of his wrongheadedness. However, it could as easily be that the Foreign Office, the world's leading exporter of certainty and paternalism, has defeated another prime minister who would like to have his own foreign policy but doesn't have the time or energy to challenge the rule of Sir Humphrey. The latter would reflect a fundamental weakness in the Prime Minister, and that is harder to remedy.

Whatever the reason, Boris Johnson is allowing the UK to become irrelevant in a Middle East that doesn't work the way it used to but in which we still have strategic interests. If the Conservatives are friends of Israel, rather than polite acquaintances, the Prime Minister would, at a minimum, recognise its capital and put our embassy there.

No, the U.S. Hasn't Kept Satellite Imagery Classified Because of the "Occupation"

By Gerald Steinberg

blogs.timesofisrael.com

September 7, 2020

Palestinian propaganda in space.

Hype about a small administrative change to a 1996 US federal regulation illustrates the ways in which the Palestinian propaganda (and disinformation) machine works. This public relations campaign, which turned prudent security measures into nefarious censorship cabals, was enabled by large contributions from "progressive" political donors (including US-based foundations and the governments of Switzerland and Germany).

To unravel the process, I go back to 1994, when, as an Israeli participant in an academic conference on space and security (based on my doctoral dissertation), I attended a presentation on the Clinton Administration's post-Cold War plans to remove restrictions related to high-resolution images taken by commercial satellites. I wrote an analysis of the security implications, which was circulated among American and Israeli officials. This was the beginning of the Kyl-Bingaman Amendment (1996) to the Defense Authorization Act, which placed limits on commercial satellite imaging of Israel.

As I noted in a series of academic publications and conference presentations, on issues related to sensitive space-based strategic intelligence, Israel is an exceptional case. A very small country under threat of massive attack from conventional and unconventional forces (particularly Iraq and Syria, at the time) is severely limited in deploying defensive and deterrent capabilities, making Israel vulnerable to a surprise first strike. With the addition of very high-resolution space images available for purchase by potential attackers, including Palestinian and other terror groups, and in real-time (unlike systems operated by Russia and others, which took months to fill orders), the threat to Israel would have been much higher.

Furthermore, following negotiations with the White House in the late 1960s, Israel had agreed not to test or reveal any details about its ambiguous nuclear deterrent capability ("don't ask, don't tell".) As part of this very successful effort to avoid a chain of nuclear proliferators in the Middle East, space-based images of Israeli nuclear facilities were highly restricted. If detailed photos of the Dimona nuclear complex were routinely publicized, this would have changed the essential conditions to this contribution to stability. Understanding these concerns, the regulations were adopted, and served the purposes for which they were intended.

Now skip forward 24 years — to July 2020 — when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration revised the limitations regarding imaging of Israel (from a minimum 2 meters to 40 centimeters), based on the

improvements in technology, new Middle East strategic realities, and greater availability from non-US suppliers. Additionally, Israel now operates its own advanced reconnaissance satellites, giving it a major advantage over Iran, Hezbollah, and Palestinian terror groups.

In sharp contrast, according to the propagandists, this minor change was turned a great political victory for the Palestinian cause. Foreign Policy's headline screamed "Israel Can't Hide Evidence of Its Occupation Anymore", as if the questions of territorial control and construction over the pre- and post-1967 armistice lines, and similar issues were involved. As the record shows, these were entirely irrelevant to limits including in US licensing for commercial imaging satellites. For those whose main objective in life is to measure Israeli, Palestinian and (unauthorized) European government construction in the West Bank, there are numerous other and less costly sources. The same is true regarding claims related to the surveying of ancient sites, as promoted by archeologists who awkwardly disguised their anti-Israel ideological campaigning in the form of academic analysis in the Space Policy journal. Repeated references to "censorship" made good fodder for political warfare, but have no basis in fact.

This disinformation campaign was led by a well-financed US-based non-government organization (NGO) known as Al Shabaka. Zena Agha, the author of the tendentious Foreign Policy opinion piece, is employed by Al Shabaka, and has a long list of publications that promote anti-Israeli disinformation. (According to the NGO's website, "Her areas of expertise include Israeli settlement-building in the occupied Palestinian territory with a special focus on Jerusalem, modern Middle Eastern history, and spatial practices.") Her triumphalist propaganda piece on satellite imaging and censorship was also pushed intensively on Al Shabaka's social media accounts.

Al Shabaka has an annual budget of over \$500,000 — a mid-sized member in the long list of NGOs dedicated to demonizing Israel. Their 2018 donors include the governments of Switzerland and Germany (through one of the country's taxpayer funded left-wing and anti-Israel "political foundations"), as well as the US-based Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Open Society Foundation. The donors all claim to be promoting peace, transparency, and democratic values, but in reality, the funds they provide fuel ongoing and ideological warfare and specious "victories".

Surely there are better ways to spend the money. *Mr. Steinberg's latest book is "Menachem Begin and the Israel-Egypt Peace Process: Between Ideology and Political Realism."*

No, Israel Doesn't Prefer Undemocratic Regimes in the Middle East

By Seth Frantzman

meforum.org

September 14, 2020

Switzerland can embrace Iran, but Jerusalem can't embrace Abu Dhabi?

There is a talking point going around that claims Israel not only prefers peace with dictatorships but that Israel's

peace with the UAE and Bahrain actually encourages authoritarianism and is some kind of plot to push for more dictatorships in the Middle East.

The argument stresses that if "the people" could choose in these countries they would vote against normalization.

This nonsensical, but seemingly inviting, argument is deeply flawed. It was the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East in the 1950s that led the drive against relations with Israel. Based variously on theocratic extremist views and also anti-Semitism, these countries sought to pretend Israel didn't exist, a classic irredentist nationalist drive. These dictatorships enflamed a generation and brainwashed people against Israel, even as these countries tended to normalize with other states that they didn't agree with (i.e. despite the India-Pakistan conflict, no one suggested not recognizing India forever).

So, first of all it is primarily dictatorships that don't recognize Israel. Israel always had relations with democracies.

The argument that average citizens in the Middle East oppose Israel is flawed.

Second the argument that average citizens in the Middle East oppose Israel, and therefore Israel "needs" dictatorships is flawed. The public that was propagandized against Israel is sometimes hostile. However this is mostly a historical aberration. Israel had relationships with democracies like Turkey and Iranians would make peace with Israel if not for the regime. Kurds would also be open to Israel if not for Saddam and then Iran occupying Baghdad. Today the MAIN reason that Israel wasn't able to come to terms with Iraq, Syria and Lebanon is Iran.

Why is Israel singled out for relations with authoritarian regimes?

Next, we need to ask about why Israel is singled out for being responsible for "authoritarianism" in the Middle East when every single other country in the world has relations with countries like Saudi Arabia. Only Israel is made to seem like it is a problem to have relations with the UAE. But when the US or France has relations with the UAE or when Switzerland embraces Iran, it's fine? This makes no sense. Israel shouldn't have to eschew relations with Bahrain while all of Europe has relations, as if only when Israel has relations it is due to "authoritarianism."

Lastly, most of the voices who condemn these deals all embrace authoritarian regimes in places like Gaza, Qatar, Ankara or Tehran. They just don't want Israel having relations with countries they don't like.

They need to explain who is really holding back relations between Israel and Lebanon and Syria and Iran and Iraq. It isn't Israel, it is the intolerance of the regime. Consider Malaysia. Why doesn't Malaysia have relations? Not because of Israel, but because of the intolerance and antisemitism of the regime.

Authoritarian regimes have led the drive against relations with Israel.

Make a map of the world. Israel has relations with the democracies, it is the dictatorships that for years disliked Israel. To twist it around and make Israel responsible for the authoritarians reverses reality.

And Israel is not at fault just because some of the public in far away places like Pakistan or even in nearby Egypt dislike Israel. Often that dislike is irrational, not because of weighing the merits.

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Turkey Has Become a Regional Bully. Israel Must Stand Up to It, or Face Consequences

By Yossi Kuperwasser and Lenny Ben-David

jcpa.org

September 10, 2020

Erdogan's grand ambitions.

In recent months, Turkey has increased its efforts to enhance its position as a regional power following in the path of the Ottoman Empire, adopting daring measures that border on megalomania at home, in the region, and internationally. These steps reflect President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's worldview that sees himself – all at the same time – as the sultan of a resurgent empire, the leader of a modern and powerful Turkish nation, and an Islamic leader according to the "correct" theological interpretation, which he sees as that of the Muslim Brotherhood. He views himself as the pillar of the Brotherhood in the region.

This weltanschauung places Erdoğan as the leader of the return to the Ottoman Empire's glory days and protector of Muslims against the plots of local and regional enemies (such as the Turkish dissident leader Fethullah Gülen, pragmatic Muslims led by the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Saudi Arabia), and foreign foes (Greece, Israel, Europe, and the United States).

A video with distinct nationalistic themes was recently broadcast by the Turkish Ministry of Information.² The film is entitled, "The Red Apple [kizil elma]," which is a Turkish cultural concept describing Turkey's ambition to achieve superpower status or some far-reaching goal no matter the sacrifice. Turkish policies reflect the official interpretation of the "Red Apple" and its implementation on a broad range of fronts.

Playing to Turkish and Islamic audiences, Erdoğan's crowning moment in the video was the transformation of the historic Hagia Sophia church (built in 537 CE in Constantinople/Istanbul) from a museum to a mosque on July 10, 2020, and his arrival for Friday prayers there on July 24. It was a show of power domestically and to the Christian world. The move was also to serve as a boost for Turkish patriotism and Islamic adherence.

Beyond the context of Turkey's religious battles in Istanbul, the Turkish video also displays a troubling appetite for Jerusalem and Saudi Arabia's holy sites in Mecca and Medina. The first screenshot below shows the

holy Kaaba in Mecca; the second shows the green dome over Muhammed's grave in Medina, and the last shot of the video shows the Temple Mount with al-Aqsa Mosque on it. Indeed, Erdoğan ended a speech on July 10, 2020, saying that the "revival of the Hagia Sophia as a mosque is ushering the news for the liberation of al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem."³

Erdoğan's Adventures

The following are some of the bold steps Turkey has recently taken:

Facing growing economic hardships, Turkey announced the discovery of a massive gas field in the Black Sea, which will ensure a bright and independent economic future and a robust international standing economically.

Turkey continues to project its power to its Arab neighbors, particularly Syria and Iraq, in order to restrain the Kurds and strengthen radical Islamic forces who are battling against opponents supported by Iran and Russia, or the United States.

Regionally, Erdoğan's alliance with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), headed by Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj, stands out. This places Erdoğan in a confrontation with parties of the pragmatic Islamic camp, headed by Egypt and the Emirates, and indirectly with Russia, which supports his rival Marshal Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army.

Turkey's alliance with Libya's Sarraj comes at a time of conflict over energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean that Erdoğan launched against Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt, who are supported by France, Italy, and the Emirates. Erdoğan's agreement with Sarraj on the division of the economic zones of the sea between Turkey and Libya, ostensibly in reaction to an Israeli-Greece-Cyprus agreement on a gas pipeline from Israel to Europe, has led to growing military tensions. France, Italy, the Emirates, and Israel have rallied to assist Greece.

In the Persian Gulf, where Qatar is at odds with the Emirates and other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Turkey has allied itself with Qatar. Some 5,000 Turkish soldiers are stationed in Qatar to help Doha protect itself and deter enemies. A sizeable Turkish base is being built in the state. In 2019, Erdoğan named the base after one of Mohammed's famous military commanders in the seventh century, Khalid bin Walid.⁴ In an account in the Persian press, a new base will be "inaugurated" for the Qatar-Turkey Combined Joint Force Command adjacent to the "Tariq ibn Ziyad" camp. [Tariq was a 7th-century Islamic general who captured Gibraltar, originally called Jabal Tariq, "Tariq's mountain."]

Turkey has sent forces to the Horn of Africa region as well, particularly to Somalia, and to a lesser degree, to Djibouti. Some 200 Turkish sailors/soldiers are in Mogadishu. Turkey has also leased the Sudanese port of Suakin on the Red Sea, once a major Ottoman Port.

For the United States, Turkey's military acquisitions present a problem. Erdoğan's determination to acquire Russia's advanced S-400 anti-aircraft missile system forced the United States to cancel a deal to supply F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft to Turkey. Turkey also keeps close relations with Iran in a way that undermines the U.S. economic sanctions. On September 8, 2020, Erdoğan and Rouhani led a joint leadership meeting aimed at widening the economic relations between the two countries.

Turkey also displays considerable hyper-activity in Palestinian and Israeli issues. Turkey stands in solidarity with Hamas, Turkey's partner and protégé in the Muslim Brotherhood camp. Erdoğan met on August 23, 2020, with Hamas' leadership and granted Turkish citizenship and passports to a "dozen" Hamas activists, including convicted terrorists.⁷

At the same time, Turkey is happy to provide support for the entire Palestinian governance. It is making its presence known in Jerusalem, both in the Islamic and economic sense, thereby challenging the traditional positions of Jordan and Saudi Arabia in the city. Turkish activities center on the al-Aqsa Mosque. The bellicose Turkish video mentioned above ends with a photo of the Temple Mount. (The Ottomans, of course, lost control of Jerusalem to the British in 1917.)

The American peace plan and the peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, which both weaken the Palestinians' bargaining ability, drew rage in Ankara. Turkey leveled fierce criticism even though it maintains diplomatic relations and a very extensive financial relationship with Israel, all the while trying to present itself as the Palestinians' greatest supporter.

Erdoğan's Strategic Advantages

Turkish policies are under criticism for creating instability, for their pretentiousness and presumptuousness that do not always match Turkey's real power or its few accomplishments, which actually show the limits of Erdoğan's power. But one should not underestimate President Erdoğan's ability to utilize Turkey's strategic assets to advance his challenging strategy. Erdoğan recognizes these assets at his disposal:

Turkey's unique geo-strategic position as the link between Europe and the Middle East and as the bridge over which a large part of the Middle East refugees reach Europe. The European nations' fear of waves of more refugees makes them vulnerable and potential extortion targets; it weakens their bargaining ability with Turkey, despite the growing criticism of Erdoğan's policies.

A large population of Turkish ex-pats in Europe has dual Turkish-European citizenship and is located in key countries in Europe, particularly Germany. It is clear to Erdoğan that even if European countries increase their criticism of Turkey's provocation of Greece, a member of the EU, Turkey can presume that Germany will prevent the imposition of any significant sanctions on Ankara.

Turkey's situation as a member of NATO, especially the only Muslim and Middle Eastern country in the alliance, requires the West's vigilance in reacting to Erdoğan's whims.

Turkey's military strength gives it an advantage against any of its neighbors and in any course of action. Turkey, for instance, has a clear advantage in the naval order of battle against Greece.

Turkey has the political boldness and the readiness to invest military and economic assets to further its policies against other countries and players, many of whom are reluctant and hesitant to set clear limits on Turkey's actions – for various reasons. Notable examples are Europe and the Christian world, who barely responded to the change of the status of the Hagia Sophia shrine, and Israel, who refused to respond to Turkish provocations and agreed to solve the Mavi Marmara ship crisis by acceding to most of Turkey's demands, to placate the United States and prevent harm to economic ties with the Turks.

The apparent American interest expressed in both political parties to minimize military commitments in conflicts of secondary importance to the United States and the need to preserve freedom of action for U.S. aircraft based in the Turkish Incirlik airbase restrains American ability to act against Turkey.

Limited Achievements

Despite these strategic advantages, the data and statistics of the global and regional arena do not indicate Turkish achievements; rather, they reflect Ankara's limited and accurate weight:

At home, the regime is facing acute economic difficulties that have led to a significant drop in the value of the Turkish lira. With the continuing pressures created by the coronavirus, major damage hit the tourism sector. In addition, although Erdoğan's status is solid, the political situation is uncomfortable for him, as his opponents have won in some of the local elections.

In the regional arena, the pragmatic camp has been strengthened because of the agreement between Israel and the Emirates. This allows Israel to back this camp more significantly than in the past. At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood continues to weaken, both due to the agreement and because the parties representing the movement in Jordan and Egypt were outlawed.

Turkey's allies in the region are suffering from weakness. This can be said both about the Palestinians who are at an unprecedented nadir and about the Government of National Accord in Libya that almost disintegrated recently and remained alive only because of Turkish intervention. Turkish pretensions in the Palestinian context, including the attempt to gain status in Jerusalem and in the al-Aqsa Mosque, currently have produced no tangible results.

In the face of the mobilization of Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Russia to halt Turkish moves in

Libya, and with France, Italy, and the UAE mobilizing to defend Greece from Turkish threats, Erdoğan must recalculate his steps and recognize the limitations of his power.

The United States is willing to deal with the Turkish provocations only to a certain extent, and the cancellation of the F-35 deal was evidence of that. In addition, against the background of Moscow's sharp reaction to the downing of the Russian plane by Turkey in 2015, Russia also restricts Turkey's freedom to act in northern Syria, given Moscow's commitment to the survival of its ally, Assad.

So what is Turkey's next step? The "Red Apple" video exposes the depth and roots of Erdoğan's aspirations for hegemony in the region. As any regional bully, Erdogan will not hesitate to expand his control and influence vis-à-vis those who are willing to bow down to him or those who, out of their weakness and ideological affinity to the Muslim Brotherhood, are ready to ask for his support in promoting their interests and are ready to pay by allowing Erdogan to gain a foothold and economic benefits.

On the other hand, when Erdoğan is met with determination and willingness to set clear boundaries, he will try to avoid confrontation because, deep in his heart, he is aware of the limitations of his power. Thus, the policy that the EU will adopt towards Turkey at the expected meeting of the EU heads of states on September 23, 2020, will determine to a large extent how Turkey will act in regard to Greece in the conflict over oil exploration rights. The same is true for the other friction areas in which Turkey is involved.

Israel is perceived by Erdoğan as a powerful rival that threatens Turkish and Islamic interests and promotes an ideology opposite to that of Turkey. This can be seen, among other things, through Israel joining the pragmatic Sunni camp in the region, led by the Emirates, Turkey's sworn rival that does not hesitate to confront Turkey in every arena, including Libya, the eastern Mediterranean, Qatar, the Palestinian camp, and Saudi Arabia – the ultimate destination of Turkish hegemonic aspirations. That can also be seen in the video, which presents images of the Kaaba in Mecca, Mohammed's grave in Medina, and the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

The Turkish provocation against Israel is unrestrained and is reflected in the Turkish opposition to Israel's normalization of ties with the Arab world, its attempts to thwart the plan to lay a gas pipeline from Israel to Europe, and, of course, in its championing the Palestinians' cause including that of the radical and murderous Hamas.

At the same time, Erdoğan recognizes Israel's military and political power (especially its relations with the United States, Europe, and Russia) and realizes that without relations with Israel, its ability to intervene in the Palestinian system would diminish. Turkey also recognizes the importance of diplomatic and economic ties with

Israel. That is why Erdoğan avoided irreversible moves that would damage his country's diplomatic relations.

To prevent Erdoğan from provocations against Israel, it must be made clear to him the limits to the actions that Israel is willing to tolerate. Legitimate criticism and

political disagreements are certainly within the allowable limit, while harming Israel's vital interests and aiding terrorist organizations may lead to a determined Israeli response.

Misunderstanding AIPAC by Listening to Its Greatest Detractors

By David E. Bernstein

blogs.timesofisrael.com

September 8, 2020 Switzerland

The Kings of Capitol Hill.

The Times of Israel Monday carried an interview with Mor Loushy, director of The Kings of Capitol Hill, a new documentary critical of Israel.

I have not seen the film, but in the interview Loushy presents a one-sided and wrong-headed perspective on AIPAC and American politics.

First, she points out that "AIPAC's aims do not mirror those of the bulk of American Jewry." Not to put too fine a point on it, but most American Jews are fairly indifferent to Israel, and on average are politically much more left-leaning than the population as a whole. Obviously, AIPAC, dedicated to being a bipartisan pro-Israel lobby, is not going to mirror that indifference and that strong bias to the left, but is going to make Israeli-American relations a priority over other political issues and will try to be centrist in political orientation. To someone on the left, centrism will seem right-wing; conversely, right-wing Jews frequently accuse AIPAC of being too soft on Democrats and the left. AIPAC's role is to serve as a pro-Israel conduit that can appeal to the broad middle of pro-Israel Americans, not to represent American Jews writ large.

Next, the interviewer explains, and Loushy agrees, that "Christians — many of them, anyway — support Israel not so much because of a love of the Jews, but it fulfills an end-of-days scenario in which, surprise, all the Jews ultimately get left behind." Serious people have written entire books about this, and have come to the conclusion that this claim is false. For example, see *Evangelicals and Israel* by Stephen Spector, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* by Yaakov Ariel, and the recent *Covenant Brothers* by Daniel Hummel.

Loushy relies on New York Times writer Jonathan Weisman for her contrary perspective. Weisman, however, has no particular expertise on the perspective of Christian Zionists, and his writings on antisemitism focus solely on what he perceives as a threat from the "right-wing" while entirely ignoring anti-Semitism from the anti-Zionist left. He seems to also believe that pro-Israel activism is a distraction from the left-wing agenda he wishes American Jewry to pursue, which hardly makes him a neutral source on pro-Israel activism in the USA.

Loushy also relies on M.J. Rosenberg for her understanding of AIPAC and American politics. M.J. Rosenberg worked for AIPAC long ago, but has long since become a leftist gadfly who is far from a reliable source on anything AIPAC-related. For example, he helped popularize the use on the left of the anti-semitic term "Israel-firsters" to refer to American Jews who support Israel. Note that this calumny goes beyond accusing Jews of dual loyalty, and into accusing (some) American Jews of having primary loyalty to Israel. Not surprisingly, the phrase originated on the antisemitic far right, and eventually migrated to the anti-Semitic far left.

I have my own criticisms of AIPAC (e.g. "AIPAC demands that you not just be pro-Israel, but pro-Israel in a way that comports with AIPAC's particular agenda"), but Rouchy's interview suggests that her criticisms are apiece with the standard, wrong-headed critique AIPAC and other groups get from the left: any organization that isn't explicitly left-wing is the right-wing enemy.

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More than a missed opportunity for Palestinians

By Jonathan S. Tobin

jns.org

September 9, 2020

The Arab League's rejection of their rejectionism should have forced them to rethink their strategy, rather than double down on it. Joe Biden should take note.

If you had any doubt that the era in which the Arab world would continue to grant a veto over Middle East peace to the Palestinians was over, this week's drama in Cairo put an end to it. In a meeting in the Egyptian capital, the Arab League, an entity that was founded in 1945 in order to help coordinate the war on Zionism, has made it

clear that it is opting out of the Palestinian's century-old battle against the idea of a Jewish state.

The Arab League's rejection of Palestinian efforts to condemn the United Arab Emirates' decision to normalize relations with Israel is almost as much of a milestone as the agreement that was pushed by the Trump administration. The Palestinian Authority and their Hamas rivals raged against the UAE's decision as a "betrayal." But the Arab states will no longer be dragged into supporting such a pointless conflict.

Predictably, the Palestinians are reacting to their defeat not by drawing conclusions from events and rethinking their approach. Instead, they are doubling down on rejectionism and damning their one-time allies.

But they aren't the only ones who should be assessing whether their ideas have been rendered obsolete. Americans who have spent decades trying to pressure Israel to enable a two-state solution that would end the conflict should also recognize that the reaction to the normalization agreement demonstrates that their assumptions about the Palestinians' willingness to make peace have also been finally demolished.

That means that the establishment figures who hope to return to the helm of American foreign policy should former Vice President Joe Biden defeat President Donald Trump in November would also be well-advised to reconsider their plans to revive former President Barack Obama's Middle East policies. The spectacle that unfolded in Cairo isn't just a reaffirmation of Trump's successful effort to bring Israel and the Sunni Arab states together. It's a wake-up call for those who haven't yet recognized that the boat has sailed on efforts to persuade the Palestinians to finally take "yes" or an answer when it comes to peace.

The quest for a two-state solution was the centerpiece of U.S. diplomacy for several administrations run by both Republicans and Democrats. Even Trump, whose "Peace to Prosperity" proposal changed the emphasis of the effort from pressure on Israel to an "outside-in" approach in which Arab states would persuade/bribe the Palestinians to give up their war on the Jewish state, had as its end goal two states.

The Palestinians rejected multiple offers of an independent state made by past administrations and wouldn't cooperate even with Obama's efforts to tilt the diplomatic playing field in their direction. So their refusal to work with Trump's foreign-policy team was unsurprising.

But the kleptocracy that runs the P.A. and its leader, Mahmoud Abbas, were slow to realize the impact of Obama's tilt towards Iran on Arab states that were more afraid of Tehran's aggressive Islamist regime than they ever were of the Zionists. That led the Arab states to acknowledge that Israel was a strategic ally in their effort to repel Iran's quest for regional hegemony, as well as a lucrative trading partner. That realization led not just to closer under-the-table ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, but to Trump's successful effort to persuade the UAE to make the decision to normalize relations with the Jewish state.

That led to this week's Palestinian fiasco in which the

same Arab League that voted the "three no's" in Khartoum following the 1967 Six-Day War—no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations with it—made clear it no longer has any use for a Palestinian national movement that is unable to make peace.

If the Palestinians were more interested in advancing their interests than in reaffirming their ideological opposition to the legitimacy of a Jewish state—no matter where its borders are drawn—they could have bargained with Trump. They could have taken advantage of the offers of aid that Arab states were prepared to make in order to subsidize peace efforts. That might have given them a state, as well as chance at a prosperous future.

But they were no more interested in peace in 2020 than they were in 2000, 2001 and 2008, when they rejected even more generous offers, or in any of the opportunities for peace they passed up over the years. Israeli statesman Abba Eban's quip that the Palestinians "never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity" has never been more relevant. The only difference between now and 1973 when Eban first spoke those words is that it is now Arab states that are saying it, not Israelis.

The Palestinians think they still have some allies. The European Union may be irrelevant to Middle East security issues, yet it can still help subsidize the corruption in Ramallah. And Palestinians can always turn to Iran and perhaps to Qatar, which has helped bankroll Hamas in the Gaza Strip. But a drift towards the radicals will only further damage a cause that most of the Arab world now recognizes is hopelessly out of touch with reality and modernity.

The question now is whether the U.S. presidential election will lead to a return to policies that have long enabled Palestinian rejectionism. There's little doubt that Biden's foreign-policy team would be staffed by those who cling to the myth that Palestinians want a state alongside Israel, rather than one instead of it.

Yet even the most dedicated believers in pressure on Israel to make suicidal concessions must now recognize that the Palestinians are incapable of making peace. Palestinian national identity is still inextricably tied to a futile war on Zionism in which they must concede defeat.

It remains to be seen if Democrats are as stuck in the past as the Palestinians. If American voters give them the chance, will they be so blinded by hatred of Trump that they will try to wreck the progress that he has achieved? If so, Arabs and Israelis, as well as the Palestinians who know their leaders are failing them, will be the ones to pay the price of such folly.

Mr. Tobin is editor in chief of JNS—Jewish News Syndicate.

I'm an Orthodox Jewish Woman Who Worked at the UAE Embassy. Peace Is Easier Than You Think

By Hanna Gerber

algemeiner.com

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Israeli and American officials arrived last week in the United Arab Emirates on the first commercial flight

from the Jewish state to the Gulf kingdom. The historic bilateral normalization agreement announced last month

surprised many but not me, a young Orthodox Jewish woman the UAE embassy in Washington, DC, hired last year.

As a high school student with a passion for international affairs, I applied and was accepted for an internship at the embassy last summer. Securing the internship was a dream come true. However, a small part of me was nervous. Would I be prejudged by the embassy staff because of my Orthodox Jewish identity? My internship was met with shock and perplexity by many within my community. Indeed, I myself did not know what to expect when walking into the embassy.

Yet within the first hour of my internship, I realized just how misplaced my concerns had been. The individuals I encountered at the embassy, from Ambassador Yousef al-Otaiba on down, were not merely neutral toward Israel and Jews, as I had thought, but were all exceedingly hospitable and excited to work with someone who cared so much about their Jewish heritage. Many showed true curiosity in learning more about the Jewish people, to the extent that I even began teaching an Emirati diplomat conversational Hebrew -- in exchange, of course, for lessons in Arabic!

At the embassy, there was a profound cultural respect for Israeli and Jewish society. I was constantly approached

with questions about Israeli politics and Jewish customs and laws. In my summer at the UAE embassy, I encountered dozens of Emiratis from all sorts of backgrounds, but not a single one had anything negative to say to me about Israel or the Jewish people.

With that kind of respect, tolerance, and genuine openness in Emirati culture, is it any wonder that a peace deal came to be? Many see the Israel-UAE accord as an outcome of realpolitik interests stemming from tensions with Iran, shared technological capabilities, or the fight against radical Islam. What I saw at my internship at the embassy, however, went beyond practical considerations. It was genuine warmth and a desire for peace, which the recent "advisement" by the Emirate of Abu Dhabi instructing hotels to provide kosher food options clearly reflects.

For years, the media has portrayed Muslim-Jewish relations as strained and tenuous. This historic normalization agreement between Israel and the UAE proves that both sides are eager to move forward. The time has come to cement the reunion of estranged cousins, once and for all, and the UAE has taken bold steps to do so.

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If you see something, send something" –editor**