

Bernie Sanders On Iran and Saudi Arabia: “They’re Gonna Have to Get Their Act Together”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Bernie Sanders believes that for too long America has been “just pro-Israel”; he appears not to know of the many episodes when America was not in Israel’s camp, from President Eisenhower threatening in 1956 to cut aid to Israel unless it withdrew – it did – from the Sinai, to Carter and Brzezinski cruelly bullying Menachem Begin during the negotiations over the Camp David Accords, to Samantha Power, Obama’s UN Ambassador, abstaining rather than vetoing a Security Council Resolution that claimed Israeli settlements were illegal. He also claims that we have been unfair to the Palestinians, and

that he would change all that. Sanders has apparently forgotten the billions of dollars in American aid that has been given to those Palestinians, who have been most ungrateful, and the many efforts made by American presidents to promote peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians that ended in failure because Arafat and the other Palestinian leaders were not satisfied with an Israeli offer of 95%, or even 97%, of the West Bank.

Bernie continued in his remarks at a town hall in Nevada:

“We’ve got to pay attention to both [Israel and the Palestinians] and by the way, it’s not a dissimilar situation with regard to Iran and Saudi Arabia. For years, we have loved Saudi Arabia, our wonderful ally. Only problem is the people run that country are murderous thugs,” he said.

The social democrat senator said instead of “being really cosy” with “the billionaire dictator”, Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Washington should facilitate a dialogue between Iran and the kingdom to end their proxy wars in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia has not been treated as “our wonderful ally” for some time. But there is a recognition that the Saudi Crown Prince, however ruthless he has been in disposing of perceived enemies of the regime, such as Jamal Khashoggi, has also instituted some far-reaching social reforms. The most important have been those that allow Saudi women to leave their houses without a male escort, and to drive by themselves, again without a male guardian. MBS has also clamped down on the powers of the religious police, the *Mutaween*, a move which angered some powerful clerics – Mohammed bin Salman managed to face them down. He helped organize a boycott of Qatar by other Gulf Arab states, because of that country’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood – an organization that the Saudi rulers fear and detest – and

because of Qatar's ties to Iran.

Iran poses the greatest threat to America and to its interests in the Middle East. In this great contest with Iran, Saudi Arabia has been the closest Arab ally of the U.S. Sanders is unwilling to recognize this. Saudi intervention in Yemen has so far prevented a takeover by the Shi'a Houthi, who are proxies for Iran. Were the Houthis to prevail, Iran would be able to establish bases in Yemen, as it has tried to do in Syria (though the Israelis keep bombing those bases, and so far have foiled Iran's plans). Such bases belonging to a hostile Iran would threaten Saudi Arabia, which lies just to Yemen's immediate north, including its oil facilities, as well as shipping – especially that of Israel – through the Red Sea. The Saudi Crown Prince has also been clear that he views Israel as an ally against Iran, and has been collaborating on intelligence matters with the Jewish state. Saudi papers have been printing the work of journalists who are noticeably pro-Israel in their orientation, with some even urging the government to recognize the Jewish state. So Sander's sarcasm about "our wonderful ally" is wrongheaded; Saudi Arabia may not be "wonderful," but it has been, and continues to be, a useful ally in the Middle East, far more useful, for example, than NATO member Turkey.

"We can bring the Saudis and the Iranians together. Tell them that we're sick and tired as a nation, spending trillions of dollars on endless wars, they're gonna have to get their act together, and we have the resources to help bring that about," Sanders said.

How in god's name does Bernie Sanders think he can "bring the Saudis and the Iranians together"? The conflict between Shi'a and Sunnis is more than 1,300 years old. How does Sanders, not just a kuffar but also a Jew, propose to heal this deep rift based, as it is, both on a historical quarrel over the line of succession to Muhammad, and on differences in theology?

Does Sanders think that Iran and Saudi Arabia are equally to be deplored? It is Iran that has extended its tentacles throughout the Middle East, into Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. It is Iran, not Saudi Arabia, that holds endless "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" rallies. It is Iran, not Saudi Arabia, that is working to acquire nuclear weapons, for possible use against Israel, against America, or against the Saudi oilfields.

Sanders says "they're gonna have to get their act together." What does that mean? Does Sanders expect that Iran will change its ways, and become a lion now willing to lie down with the putative Saudi lamb, in a Middle Eastern version of "The Peaceable Kingdom"? Exactly how would he bring this about? What would it mean for the Saudis to "get their act together"? Would they do this by easing to defend their own interests in Yemen, that is, ending their fight against the Houthis? By stopping their support for Sunnis in Iraq who have been put on the defensive by Iranian-backed Shi'a militias? By no longer trying to halt the terrorist group, Hezbollah, from taking over Lebanon? By ceasing to collaborate with the government in Israel? Does Sanders think it a good or a bad thing that Saudi Arabia and what he calls that "right wing" and "racist" Israeli government have come to an understanding on common security threats?

And what would it mean for Iran "to get [its] act together"? Would the Islamic Republic rulers, suddenly prodded by the likes of Bernie Sanders, decide to pull back from supporting with guns and money Shi'a proxies in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon? Would it shut down its entire nuclear project, into which it has already poured billions of dollars? Would Iran's rulers agree to give the Iranian people the liberties that so many have been demanding in their anti-government protests? Would Iran stop inciting its own people to hate the Great Satan, America, and the Little Satan, Israel? If Iran did all those things, in getting "its act together," how long, do you

think, the Tehran regime would last? Sanders likes the idea – he’s mentioned it before – of just putting representatives of Saudi Arabia and Iran in a room, and then Bernie Sanders, would tell them “to get their act together,” then shut the door and let the two parties out only once they had come to an agreement. 1,300 years of Sunni-Shia strife would end, all because he, Bernie Sanders, told the Iranians and the Saudis “to get their act together.” He apparently thinks America has that kind of influence over both Iran and Saudi Arabia, sufficient to make them make peace with one another, like refractory schoolboys finally brought to heel by a stern schoolmaster. That view is palpably absurd.

We have no real idea what Bernie Sanders means when he says, so offhandedly, “they’re gonna have to get their act together.” But that is not the worst. The worst is that he has no idea either, of what his own words could or should mean.

He did recognize that the American government had spent trillions of dollars in “endless wars” in Iraq and Afghanistan. That’s the one element in his foreign policy that is to be applauded: that he is keenly aware of the huge sums we have wasted in Iraq and Afghanistan, in our vain attempt to turn Muslim lands into Western-style advanced democracies. He obliquely recognizes that almost all Muslim states are run by despots, but does not understand why despotism is the default position for governments in Muslim lands. Here’s why: we in the non-Muslim West judge the legitimacy of our government by how well they reflect the will of the people, as expressed in free elections. Islamic jurisprudence is quite different. In Islamic countries, a ruler is to be obeyed if he reflects the will of Allah, as expressed in the Qur’an. He *may* be a despot, but he *must* be a good Muslim.

Sanders owes it to himself, and to voters, to take some time to study the Arab-Israeli conflict. He should read the Mandate for Palestine (especially the Preamble, and Articles 4 and 6), look at the Mandate maps to see what territory was assigned to

the Jewish National Home, and consider how, in Article 80 of its Charter, the U.N. accepted responsibility for carrying out the Mandate's provisions. He should also look at U.N. Resolution 242, with its insistence that Israel be allowed to create "secure [i.e. defensible] and recognized boundaries" for itself. Then he might delve into the question of when, and why, the "Palestinian people" were created. Finally, he must recognize his own need to engage in the study of the Qur'an and Hadith, in order to comprehend how Muslims regard non-Muslims. He would soon realize, to his no doubt unspeakable dismay, that the Qur'an is full of verses expressing contempt and hatred for Jews and other non-Muslims. He would come across verses commanding Muslims to engage in violent Jihad, until the entire world becomes subject to Islam, and Muslims rule, everywhere. If he reads the Qur'an – it's not an easy read, but a necessary one – he will find more than 100 verses telling the Muslim faithful that they should "fight" and "kill" and "smite at the necks of" and "strike terror in the hearts of" the Infidels. Such study should provide him with a much grimmer, and more realistic, view of the conflict, one which has no end – for Muslims must continue to fight Infidels wherever they are, but most especially, must fight them wherever they are living on land that Muslims once possessed, and so are highest on Islam's To-Do List of lands to be reconquered. He might even read two books Robert Spencer has recently written, [*The History of Jihad From Muhammad to ISIS*](#) and [*The Palestinian Delusion*](#), to save himself further confusion and disappointment.

That's Bernie's homework assignment: the Qur'an and a selection of the most important Hadith. It will do him a world of good.

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