

Biden's Plans Constitute a Setback for Israel

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Years ago, when Joe Biden served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Menachem Begin was being questioned by the committee. It was, Begin later recalled, a “lively discussion” in which Biden “hinted – more than hinted – that if we continue with this [settlements] policy, it is possible that he will propose cutting our financial aid. And to this I gave him a clear answer: Sir, do not threaten us with cutting aid... If at any time you demand of us to yield on a principle in which we believe, while threatening to cut aid, we will not abandon the principle in which we believe.” That made a deep impression on the Senator from Delaware. Since that encounter, Biden has always maintained that he would never cut aid to Israel in order to pressure it to change its policies. Here is more on his meeting with Begin: “Biden a veteran friend of

Israel, settlement critic, may be at odds over Iran," by Raphael Ahren, [Times of Israel](#), November 7, 2020:

There are various versions of that meeting. According to one telling, Biden had not only raised his voice but also banged his fist on the table twice. "This desk is designed for writing, not for fists," Begin was quoted as telling the senator.

And in his rebuttal of Biden's apparent threat to withhold aid, Begin said, according to some versions: "I am a proud Jew. Three thousand years of culture are behind me, and you will not frighten me with threats."

Maybe it was Begin's forceful reaction that caused Biden to forever abandon the idea of threatening to cut assistance to the Jewish state. He has since been one of Washington's most outspoken advocates for US aid to Israel.

"It's about time we stop apologizing for our support for Israel. There's no apology to be made, none," he said in the Senate in June 1986. "It is the best \$3 billion investment we make. If there weren't an Israel, the United States of America would have to invent an Israel to protect her interests in the region."

During the 2020 campaign, Biden was one of the few Democratic candidates who said that they would not use American aid to Israel as a means of pressuring Israel for concessions. (Another one was his eventual running mate, California Senator Kamala Harris).

"Israel is absolutely essential – absolutely essential – [for the] security of Jews around the world. And that's why you have never farmed out your security. You've accepted all the help we could give," he said at an Israeli Independence Day party in 2015. "The most admirable thing about you is you've never asked us to fight for you. But I promise you, if you were attacked and overwhelmed, we would fight for you, in my

view.

But Israel will not be “overwhelmed,” will not need to call on America, if it is supported in its settlement building, that helps to strengthen its hold on the West Bank so critical for its defense. The Israelis will accept American weapons, but do not want to ever have to depend on the Americans – or anyone else – to fight for them. Israel does not ever want to have to depend on others, including the Americans, to fight for it. It will accept military aid, and financial aid, too, but does not want American soldiers to fight and die for it. It’s part of Israel’s essential identity: at long last, there is a Jewish state that can offer refuge to those Jews who need it, and as that Jewish state by itself defend the rights, and lives, of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland.

But over the years, as his exchange with Begin had shown, Biden’s warm feelings and staunch support for the Jewish state didn’t mean he was not at times bitterly critical of some of its policies, especially on the Palestinian question.

“I firmly believe that the actions that Israel’s government has taken over the past several years – the steady and systematic expansion of settlements, the legalization of outposts, land seizures – are moving Israel in the wrong direction. They are moving us toward a one-state reality, and that reality is dangerous,” he declared in a 2016 address to the dovish pro-Israel lobby J-Street.

If one accepts that Israel has a legal right to build and expand its settlements on land that was always meant, according to the Palestine Mandate, to be part of the Jewish state, then the question becomes: even if it is permitted, is it a wise policy to build these settlements? Yes. For those settlements tighten Israel’s territorial grip on land necessary to its security; they make it harder for Israel to be dislodged from that land, harder for left-wing Israeli

politicians of the Peace-Now persuasion to surrender that territory. It was hard enough for the Israeli government to remove 6,000 Israelis in Gaza in 2005; it would be politically impossible to uproot the nearly half-million Israelis now living in the West Bank.

Biden says this settlement building is “moving us toward a one-state reality, and that reality is dangerous.” No, it isn’t. The settlement building is moving Israel in the direction of two states, just not the “two states” that the Palestinian Arabs have been scheming for, with the Jewish state squeezed back within the 1949 armistice lines, while the Palestinian Arabs take all the rest – the entire West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights – for their own state. These “two states” would look a lot like those presented as part of the Trump Peace-To-Prosperity Plan, with Israel surrendering fully 70% of the “West Bank” – land that belongs to it by right – along with two large enclaves of Israeli territory in the Negev, meant to compensate the Arabs for the 30% of the West Bank deemed essential to its security that Israel will retain, to form the Palestinian state. Could Biden summon the courage not to abandon the Trump Plan – the best chance of maintaining the peace between Israel and the Palestinians – or will he simply walk away from that carefully-conceived effort, the crafting of which was, along with the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran, the greatest foreign policy achievement of the Trump Administration? We can all guess the answer to that.

“So we have an overwhelming obligation, notwithstanding our sometimes overwhelming frustration with the Israeli government, we have an obligation to push them as hard as we can toward what they know in their gut is the only ultimate solution – a two-state solution.”

To repeat: there is a two-state “solution.” It’s the one on offer in the Trump Plan, the fruit of several years of intensive work. Israel has declared its willingness to give up

70% of the West Bank, that is part of its birthright, to the Palestinian Arabs, while retaining only 30%, chiefly the Jordan Valley, that it needs for security reasons, and the five largest settlement blocs. The Palestinian state would have to be disarmed. And the Palestinians would receive – though they have done nothing to deserve it – the largest aid package for a single country in history, \$50 billion. Only the Marshall Plan was larger – \$60 billion in 2020 dollars – but that was divided among 16 countries; this \$50 billion would be for the state of “Palestine” alone. Why doesn’t Biden surprise us all, enrage The Squad, Bernie Sanders, and J Street, and give the Trump Plan his support? Or is that a forlorn hope, given those foreign policy experts he’s assembled, who want to return to the futile peace-processing of the last two decades?

Biden’s opposition to the settlements has led him to oppose Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s intended unilateral annexation of parts of the West Bank. The plan has since been suspended to allow for the normalization agreement with the United Arab Emirates, but Biden made plain that he would not allow it to happen under his watch.

On the one hand, when running in the Democratic primary, Biden insisted (and Kamala Harris agreed) that he would never deny Israel security assistance – military and financial – to force it to comply with American policy. This was a welcome contrast to several of the other candidates, most conspicuously Bernie Sanders, who spoke enthusiastically of applying such pressure to the Israeli government he considers “racist.” On the other hand, Biden would “not allow it [Israel’s extension of its sovereignty to part of the West Bank] to happen under his watch.” What will he do if Prime Minister Netanyahu, or a new Prime Minister to the right of Netanyahu – very likely Naftali Bennett of the Yamina Party – ends Netanyahu’s temporary “suspension” and proceeds to extend Israel’s sovereignty in the West Bank over the most important area for security purposes, the Jordan Valley?

Would Biden remain true to his promise not to ever condition aid to Israel on its curbing its settlement policy or, as an obvious corollary, on its giving up its “extension of sovereignty” to parts of the West Bank?

Rather, Biden “will urge Israel’s government and the Palestinian Authority to take steps to keep the prospect of a negotiated two-state outcome alive and avoid actions, such as unilateral annexation of territory and settlement activity, or support for incitement and violence, that undercut prospects for peace between the parties,” according to his campaign website.

When Biden talks about “unilateral annexation of territory and settlement activity” by Israel as undercutting “prospects for peace,” he is doing several disturbing things. First, he is denying that Israel has a right to build settlements, and annex territory, all over the West Bank. See, please, Joe, the Mandate for Palestine. Read it, study it, memorize the Preamble and Articles 4 and 6. Then read U.N. Resolution 242, together with the explanation of its meaning that its author, Lord Caradon, has supplied.

Joe Biden needs to understand some home truths. First, putting Israel’s exercise of its right to the West Bank on the same level as “support for incitement and violence” – that is, Palestinian terrorism – is a morally intolerable equivalence. Second, Biden is refusing to consider the proposition that the only way to ensure “peace” between Israelis and Palestinians is through a policy of deterrence by Israel. That “peace” will not be maintained through treaties with Muslim states or peoples, whose ideal of treaty-making with Infidels is the Treaty of Hudaibiyya, which Muhammad made with the Meccans in 628 A.D. That was a hudna, a truce treaty, designed to last 10 years, but after only 18 months, feeling that his forces had become sufficiently strong, Muhammad broke the treaty and attacked the Meccans. Biden needs to learn about Hudaibiyya,

that model of Muslim treaty-making; only thus will he come to understand that deterrence, based on Israel's superior military power, is the only sure keeper of the peace between Arabs and Israelis. And part of that deterrence depends on Israel continuing to retain a significant part of the West Bank – the 30% envisioned under the carefully-crafted Trump Plan.

He [Biden] further vowed to reverse the outgoing administration's "destructive cutoff of diplomatic ties with the Palestinian Authority and cancellation of assistance programs that support Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation, economic development, and humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza."

The cutting off of all ties between the PA and the U.S. was a decision of Mahmoud Abbas, not Donald Trump (as Biden seems to think), made in January 2020 as part of the PA's rejection of the Trump Peace Plan. It was also Abbas who ended the PA's security cooperation with Israel. Biden can offer assistance – that is, money – to "support Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation," but that won't make much difference if Abbas remains unwilling to restart that security cooperation he had ended. As for financial aid to improve the lives of the Palestinian Arabs ("economic development and humanitarian aid"), shouldn't Biden make mention of how colossal amounts of such aid have been siphoned off in the past by corrupt leaders, both in the PA and Hamas – amounting to at least six or seven billion dollars – and to avoid that happening again, all future American aid will be dispensed through programs run by American technocrats, instead of going to the offices of Mahmoud Abbas and Ismail Haniyeh, where so much of that aid has been known to disappear.

His administration also plans to reopen the US Consulate in East Jerusalem and Palestine Liberation Organization's mission in Washington, which the Trump administration had

closed.

This is a big win for the PA, and for the PLO. Does Biden really want to provide a terror group, the PLO, with an office in Washington? Has he forgotten the PLO's bloody history since 1964? The PLO pledged to give up terrorism in 1988. Has it in fact done so, or haven't various splinter groups, allied to, and some coming from, the PLO, continued intermittently to engage in terrorist acts without "claiming responsibility"? And what conceivable advantage does America derive from having the PLO reopen an office in Washington, from which it can conduct fundraising, recruitment, and above all, propaganda, on American soil?

As for reopening an American consulate in East Jerusalem, the effect of that will only be to hearten the Palestinian Authority, without Washington having asked anything of the PA by way of a quid pro quo. Israel will rightly be alarmed, seeing this move as a kind of recognition of the Palestinian claim to establishing their "eternal capital in Jerusalem." Taken all in all, these plans by Biden to win the Palestinians over, to "reestablish dialogue" (or treacly sentiments to that effect) with them, constitute a setback for Israel. And it is all so unnecessary. For the Palestinians, let down by the disinterest of their Arab brothers, have nowhere else to go.

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