

Israel At A Crossroads?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Caroline Glick has taken note of the major events affecting Israel in just one week of mid-November. Her analysis is here: “At a diplomatic crossroad, it’s time for Israel to act,” by Caroline B. Glick, [Israel Hayom](#), November 20, 2020:

Three diplomatic events transpired this week. Together they describe the crossroads before which Israel now stands following the US presidential elections.

First, on Tuesday, the Palestinian Authority announced it is renewing its security coordination with the IDF after suspending it six months ago. The PA also expressed willingness to accept tax revenues that Israel collects on its behalf. The PA has refused to accept the tax revenues since June because, in accordance with Israeli law, the government announced that it would deduct the sums the PA pays monthly to terrorists from the tax revenues it

transfers.

The PA's sudden willingness to renew security coordination and accept money from Israel is clearly intended as a gesture of goodwill towards presumptive president-elect Joe Biden and his team. Over the past two weeks, the members of Biden's team have made it clear in open and closed forums that they intend to reinstate the Obama administration's Palestinian-centric Middle East policies immediately after taking office.

I don't think the PA's announcement that it will renew security coordination with the IDF was a "gesture of goodwill" to the Biden Administration. After the collapse of the latest Hamas-Fatah agreement, Mahmoud Abbas realized he would again face security threats coming from Hamas and PIJ (Palestinian Islamic Jihad) operatives in the West Bank; his own security forces no doubt warned him that it would be a good idea to again cooperate with Israel against their common enemies. The Israelis, after all, have the most comprehensive intelligence on Hamas of any state, and in the past have shown just how valuable that intelligence can be, in helping the PA prevent Hamas challenges to the PA's leaders, including even a possible coup. Mahmoud Abbas has not forgotten the spectacle of Hamas fighters throwing Fatah members off the roofs of high buildings in Gaza in 2007. The PA has its own networks of informers reporting on Hamas operatives – and those of the PIJ – throughout the PA-ruled parts of the West Bank, complementing Israeli intelligence. Abbas renewed security ties for the obvious reason: he again fears Hamas and needs Israel's intelligence on the terror group. No "gesture of goodwill" to the Biden team was involved.

Similarly, Abbas' willingness to now accept the import taxes that Israel collects for the PA is prompted not by a desire to win favor with the new administration, but for the simplest of reasons: the PA is flat broke and desperate for money. At this point Israel has \$890 million it stands ready to hand over to

the PA, which until now has refused to take the money as long as Israel continues to deduct from the amount to be transferred the precise sum that the PA is providing to terrorists and their families in the infamous "Pay For Slay" program. Now Abbas has given in; he'll yield and accept the tax money, reduced by the Pay-For-Slay amount, from Israel. He's had to get down from his high horse in order to pick up the \$890 million. For the raging *rais* in Ramallah, a lesson has been learned.

Speaking of the Biden team's messaging, a Palestinian official explained earlier in the week, "We have received many positive messages from the Biden team in the past few days. We are looking forward to opening a new page with the Biden administration after the damage caused by the Trump administration."

Yes, the Biden team seems determined to go back to the failed policies of the Obama administration. The whole group of peace-processors – Dennis Ross, Aaron David Miller, Martin Indyk – have reappeared, ready once again to insist that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the focus of Arab interest. Never mind about the civil wars in Yemen, Syria, and Libya, or about the Sunni-Shi'a rivalry in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, never mind about the Muslim Brotherhood's threat to the monarchies of the Gulf and to Egypt, forget about Hezbollah's takeover of much of Lebanon or that country's economic collapse, pay no attention to Iran's nuclear program or to Tehran's building of a "Shi'a crescent" from the Gulf to the Mediterranean, through a network of proxies and allies, including the Houthis in Yemen, Shi'a militias in Iraq, Bashar Assad's army in Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Pay no attention to Turkey's military bases in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Somalia, or the neo-Ottoman schemes of the anti-Ataturk, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. What matters most in the Middle East – keep repeating it as an article of faith – is the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. And keep repeating, too,

that the conflict can only be “solved” with a “two-state solution” that is based on squeezing Israel back within the 1949 armistice lines, which Abba Eban once described as the “lines of Auschwitz,” giving Israel a nine-mile-wide waist from Qalqilya to the sea, where an invader from the east could cut the country in two within 30 minutes.

According to Israeli political sources, Biden’s team intends to reinstate negotiations between Israel and the PLO on the basis of the long-mordant [sic for “moribund”] Oslo accords. The sources claim Biden is even taking Oslo mediator Dennis Ross out of cold storage for that purpose. Ross’s longtime deputy Aaron David Miller penned an op-ed in Canada’s National Post this week where he argued that President Donald Trump has been bad for Israel and good for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Biden, Miller insisted, would be good for Israel (and by extension, bad for the democratically elected prime minister). Miller argued that Israel is better off when the US places the Palestinians center stage and joins the Europeans in genuflecting before Iran and its nuclear weapons program under the guise of nuclear diplomacy.

President Trump has been the most pro-Israel President in history. It is hard to see how Aaron David Miller can argue, with a straight face, that Trump has been “bad for Israel.” President Trump has recognized Israel’s sovereignty in the Golan Heights; he has taken the position that the settlements are not illegal, rejecting the Hansell Memorandum of 1978 (that did not even mention the Mandate for Palestine or U.N. Resolution 242); he has moved the American Embassy to Jerusalem; he has insisted that goods from the West Bank should be labelled “Made in Israel” or “Product of Israel,” enraging SDSers everywhere. And Trump’s administration came up with a detailed and viable “two-state solution” that would give the Palestinians a state for the first time, but also

take account of Israel's security needs by leaving it with 30% of Judea and Samaria (a/k/a "the West Bank") that it needs if it is to have, as U.N. Resolution 242 insists it has a right to, "secure [i.e. defensible] and recognized boundaries." President Trump has helped to bring about the astonishing normalization of ties between Israel and three Arab states – the U.A.E., Bahrain, and Sudan, with more likely to follow suit – thus upending the belief, expressed by many, including most embarrassingly, by John Kerry, that there could not possibly be a real peace, much less "normalization of ties," between Israel and any Arab state until the Palestinian issue had first been solved. Here is how Kerry saw things in 2016:

"There will be no separate peace between Israel and the Arab world," Kerry began at a speaking engagement. "I want to make that very clear with all of you. I've heard several prominent politicians in Israel sometimes saying, 'Well, the Arab world is in a different place now. We just have to reach out to them. We can work some things with the Arab world and we'll deal with the Palestinians.' No. No, no, and no."

He continued, "I can tell you that, reaffirmed within the last week because I've talked to the leaders of the Arab community, there will be no advanced and separate peace with the Arab world without the Palestinian process and Palestinian peace. Everybody needs to understand that. That is a hard reality."

But what Kerry was sure would never happen did happen. Israel made an "advanced and separate peace with the Arab world – that is, with the U.A.E., Bahrain, and Sudan – "without the Palestinian process and Palestinian peace." What, according to the imperious and self-assured Lord of Louisburg Square John Kerry, "everyone needs to understand," and what, he insisted, was "a hard reality," turned out to be the very opposite of what happened. It is the "Palestinian process and Palestinian peace" that has been pushed way down the list of Arab

priorities; ties with Israel are now at the top of the list, reflecting Arab fears of Iranian ambitions and a desire to improve their economies by collaborating with, and learning from, Israeli businesses.

Every time you are tempted to take Kerry or his fellow peace-processing prognosticators seriously, reread the two paragraphs just above. That exercise should curb your enthusiasm.

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