

The European Union Does Not Win the Yellow Jersey Prize

In the Tour de France, the annual multiple bicycle race, riders are classified according to their performance in the various categories of the race. The overall winner gains the coveted yellow jersey. The last rider to finish is affectionately termed the *lanterne rouge*, the red lantern.

The political *lanterne rouge* this year goes to the European Council of the European Union, while Tony Blair should be given the yellow jersey.

The Council is a seemingly distinguished group composed of the representatives of the countries of the EU, the numbers varying depending on the issue being discussed. Decisions are made mostly by qualified majority voting but sometimes by unanimity. The Council deserves its award for its July 20, 2015 Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process.

Everyone, especially the Palestinian Authority, which is pursuing what it calls “diplomatic warfare,” will be pleased if not euphoric that the EU has reaffirmed its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Equally, everyone will understand that the Council deserves its award for its first conclusion that the resolution will be based on a two-state solution with the State of Israel and “an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign, and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition.”

The Council recognizes that the ongoing radicalization and spread of terrorism make it even more urgent to end the conflict. The viability of the solution is constantly being eroded by new facts on the ground.

The essential reason for the award is the Council’s curious

version of the facts on the ground. Does it really envisage the democratic nature of a hoped-for Palestinian state that includes Mahmoud Abbas, now in the eleventh year of his four-year term as president of the Palestinian Authority? It remains unlikely that democracy or peace will exist while the PA continues to honor terrorists.

As recently as May 2015, Issa Karake, the minister of prisoners' affairs of the PA, honored the notorious terrorist Abdallah Barghouti, who is serving 67 life sentences and is responsible by preparing explosives from 2000 to 2005 for the deaths of 67 Israelis in suicide terror attacks, in three restaurants in Jerusalem, an attack in the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall in Jerusalem, one at the Hebrew University, and another on Bus 4 in Tel Aviv.

At the same time, two others were similarly honored: Ibrahim Hamed, who is serving 54 life sentences, and Abbas al-Sayid, who has only 35 life sentences. Sayid planned two suicide bombings, one in 2002 at a Passover dinner, killing 30 Israelis. Hamed's interest in the educational process was by, among other acts, a suicide bombing at the Hebrew University, which killed nine people. If these are "heroes" and role models for Palestinians, the outlook for peace, even in the eyes of the European Council, is bleak, and the environment of trust necessary to engage in meaningful negotiations lies beyond the horizon.

The EU does not provide information about its "new facts on the ground." It says nothing about some of the facts that do exist, such the war crimes committed by the terrorist Hamas group in its violations of human rights and misuse of civilians, especially children, during Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip in summer 2014. Nor is there more than a hint of the bitter feud and fighting between the two supposed peaceful Palestinian groups, Fatah and Hamas – an animosity that, among other things, makes reconciliation, let alone peace, with Israel impossible.

Instead of focusing on the real existing factors and outstanding issues, the EU states that the immediate priority must be to address the grave situation in Gaza. It is concerned not only about the humanitarian and economic problems in the area, but also, in what is really astonishing, about UNWRA's severe lack of funds. If there were ever a moment to address the improper use by Hamas of the UNWRA facilities, schools, and clinics for launching its thousands of rockets and missiles against Israel, this would be it. The EU Council is silent about the refusal of Hamas to comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

On the contrary, the EU is vocal in calling for the end of the closure and restrictions in Gaza by Israel and the full opening of the crossing points.

While paying lip service to its commitment to working with all sides, the EU strongly emphasizes a whole host of Israeli faults. It recalls that Israeli settlements are illegal under international law and is strongly opposed to Israel's settlement policy, to the building of a separation "barrier" beyond the 1967 line, and to demolitions, confiscation, and evictions. Even the Israeli measures taken to upgrade the condition of the Bedouins by providing better housing and utilities is seen as forced transfer. In view of this unfriendly posture, the EU regards settlement activity in East Jerusalem as "seriously jeopardizing the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both states."

It should come as no surprise that Saeb Erakat, officially the Chief Palestinian negotiator, but one who never negotiates, should immediately welcome the conclusions of the Council.

For him, the conclusions gave priority to issues such as Jerusalem, the illegality of Israeli settlements and what he calls "Israel's Wall," the movement and access for Palestinians, and the unacceptable suffering caused by Israel's ongoing siege over Gaza.

In June 2015, former British prime minister Tony Blair stepped down as the envoy of the Quartet on the Middle East to chair the European Council on Tolerance and Reconciliation. The organization is notable for campaigning against anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination. Now that Blair is an overall leader in this activity, he should wear the yellow jersey.

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