

Thomas Friedman: Saudi-Israeli normalization should happen only when pigs fly.



by Lev Tsitrin

“This Israeli coalition has to be stopped. And, even more important, a bad deal – one that enables Netanyahu to crush the Israeli Supreme Court and win normalization from Saudi Arabia and pay such a small price to the Palestinians that the right-wing zealots in his cabinet can continue driving Israel over a cliff – absolutely has to be stopped.”

Sounds hysterical? Well, this is the [primordial cry of Thomas Friedman](#) of the *New York Times* as he bemoans the dire prospect of President Biden’s success at matchmaking between Israelis and Saudis. Horror of horrors! What would happen to Palestinians? What would happen to the two-state solution? What would happen to the peace process? What would happen to Israel?

Alas! Unbeknownst to both the Americans and the Israelis (and for that matter, the Saudis), there can be no happiness in the Middle East until Palestinians are happy, according to Mr. Friedman – and alas! the incipient deal is not likely to make them happy. “The deal ... should stipulate that in return for normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, Israel must freeze all settlement building in the West Bank in the areas earmarked for a Palestinian state, if it can one day be negotiated; not legalize any more illegal wildcat Israeli settlements; and, most important, insist that Israel transfer territory from Area C in the West Bank, as defined by the Oslo accords, to Areas B and A under more Palestinian control.”

This is half-confusing and half-delusional. Let’s start with the confusing part: what exactly does Mr. Friedman mean by “the areas earmarked for a Palestinian state, if it can one day be negotiated”? Shouldn’t borders of a state be determined during negotiations on creating this state – and absent such negotiations (or even an agreement to have them), there of necessity can be no agreed-to “areas earmarked for a Palestinian state”? And in the light of this, isn’t it absurd to “insist that Israel transfer territory from Area C in the West Bank, as defined by the Oslo accords, to Areas B and A under more Palestinian control”? This is plainly bonkers; Mr. Friedman does not understand causality – an agreement to create a state must come first, and only then the haggling over which areas are to be earmarked for it can happen.

Which, incidentally, brings us to the delusional part in Mr. Friedman’s thinking. Mr Friedman is deluding himself when he thinks that Palestinians do want a state. Have they wanted a state, they could have had it in 1936, and 1948, and 1967, and 1999, and 2009 – but no, they invariably kept rejecting it, for a simple reason: they want to destroy Israel. Accept a state – and say goodbye to that glorious dream! And, Mr. Friedman, Palestinians have proven time and again that they would rather live in a dream than in a state. Perhaps Mr.

Friedman's cryptically self-contradictory reference to a potential Palestinian state ("if it can one day be negotiated") is his subconscious, Freudian acknowledgment of this basic fact – that unfortunately does not percolate into his waking mind?

But the worst bugaboo for Mr. Friedman is Netanyahu himself, and the government he leads. So Mr. Friedman's mission, undertaken with a messianic zeal in his op-ed is – no less! – to let "U.S. diplomats, the U.S. military, U.S. citizens and U.S. Jewish organizations to grasp that their role now is to save Israel from an internal Israeli Jewish threat, manifested by the government itself."

Why so? Because, oh, ah! – "the current Israeli ruling coalition ... is led by far-right Jewish supremacists the likes of which have never held national security powers in Israel before." This is why Mr. Friedman dares in his op-ed "to appeal directly to President Biden and the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman: Do not let Netanyahu make you his useful idiots." Mr. Friedman wants to bravely speak truth to power! He is fired by a prophetic zeal!

Sure, his bravery should be duly noted, for undoubtedly neither Mr. Biden, nor MBS like to be called "idiots," whether useful or not – but it is not the truth that Mr. Friedman speaks to power via the good offices of the *New York Times*, but garbage. Palestinian goals of destroying Israel are known to all who wish to see them (though the *New York Times* and Mr. Friedman are unfortunately not on that list) – and neither Mr. Biden nor MBS are likely to be swayed by Mr. Friedman's shrill shrieks. And the present Israeli government is by no means "not normal," as Mr. Friedman would have us believe. It simply dares to say aloud what everyone knows, but diplomatically keeps unsaid: that Palestinian state is anathema to Palestinians as long as it leaves Israel in place; that for Palestinians, the existence of Israel is too high of a price to pay for it (especially given that they are pampered by the

world community with hundreds of millions in aid that is used to shelter and feed them, and their leadership is welcomed and feted in high places around the globe) – and so waiting for Palestinians to agree to negotiate a state is to wait for pigs to fly.

Mr. Friedman, blinded by his hate of Netanyahu, is willing to wait for that momentous zoological event – but not, I suspect, the practical people like Biden or Mohammed bin Salman. I hope all three of them will be able to find an amicable formula for Israeli-Saudi normalization – even if it causes Mr. Friedman to choke on his blind hate.

Keep dreaming of flying pigs, Mr. Friedman. Sensible people have other, more important things to do.