

UAE Foreign Affairs Adviser and Pundit: Arab Support For Palestinians Is Waning

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Exiled chief of Hamas' political bureau Khaled Meshaal (2nd-R) speaks with Hamas deputy leader Musa Abu Marzuk (L)

There are many reasons for the Arabs to be tired of the Palestinians.

In the first place, the constant demands for Arab financial support – in recent times seldom met – come with ill grace from Hamas, just two of whose leaders, Khaled Meshaal and Mousa Ibn Marzouk, have each amassed fortunes of at least \$2.5 billion, and from the PA, whose leader Mahmoud Abbas has not done badly, either, sharing with his two sons Tareq and Nasser the tidy sum of \$400 million.

There is also the maddening fact that the Palestinians have refused to negotiate in good faith with the Israelis, turning down the most generous of proposals. Both Yassir Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas walked away from offers made to them by Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert, respectively, which would have given them 95% of the West Bank. They wouldn't accept anything less than Israel's return to the 1949 armistice lines, within which Israel at its narrowest was only nine miles wide. Abba Eban called the 1949 borders – which the Arabs refused to recognize – the “lines of Auschwitz.”

The Palestinians fail to realize that they are no longer the cynosure of Arab eyes. The Arab states are consumed with a multitude of problems that now require their attention. There are ongoing civil wars in Yemen, Libya, and Syria. There are Sunni and Shi'a conflicts in Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria. There is the threat posed to Egypt by Al-Qaeda and Islamic State forces that have regrouped in the Sinai. There is the Muslim Brotherhood, that threatens both the regime of General El-Sisi in Egypt and the Gulf Arab monarchies. There is the terror group Hezbollah, that has gradually taken power as a state-within-a state in Lebanon, where it continues to support the rule of those who, like President Michel Aoun, through their mismanagement and corruption have helped to bring the country to financial ruin. And hanging over the Sunni Arab in the Middle East is the threat from Iran which, through its proxies and allies – the Houthi rebels in Yemen, the pro-Iranian Shi'a militias in Iraq, Bashar Assad's army in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon – is waging an aggressive campaign to establish what alarmed Sunnis describe as a “Shi'a crescent” extending from the Persian Gulf to Lebanon and the Mediterranean.

Finally, there is Israel, which is now seen by the three most important Arab states – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – as an ally rather than an enemy. With Egypt, Israel collaborates on fighting the Jihadists in the Sinai. With the UAE and Saudi

Arabia, Israel collaborates on intelligence about Iran, and on foiling Iran at every turn. When Israel destroyed a new centrifuge plant at Natanz, which set Iran's nuclear ambitions back by two years, it was helping not only itself, but the Gulf Arab states whom Tehran similarly threatens.

Amjad Taha, an adviser to the UAE on foreign affairs and a well-known pundit on social media, has also been discussing the waning of Arab support for the Palestinians. That story is [here](#).

A report on Tuesday that Washington intends a "giant" sale of F-35 fighter jets and drones to the United Arab Emirates, in the wake of its rapprochement with Israel, was met with deafening silence by UAE officials on Wednesday.

In the wake of the report, Intelligence Services Minister Eli Cohen said there was "no change in Israeli policy opposing US sales of advanced weaponry to Arab states that could diminish Israel's military superiority."

Last week, the UAE and Israel announced a historic peace deal, which made the UAE the first Persian Gulf state to forge official diplomatic relations with Israel and the third Arab country overall to normalize relations with the Jewish state, following Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

The US Embassy in Jerusalem had no immediate comment on the report. According to understandings dating back decades, Washington has refrained from Middle East arms sales that may diminish Israel's "qualitative military edge."

Meanwhile, Amjad Taha, an international affairs expert, a confidant of UAE government officials and a popular social media pundit in the Persian Gulf, said it was Iran, not Israel, which should be worried by such an arms deal.

Members of the Iranian regime are the Nazis of the Middle East," Taha told Israel Hayom. "The Iranians have a problem

with Arab countries. Since the 1970s, the Iranians have held three islands belonging to the UAE. They killed millions of Arabs in the war with Iraq, in Syria, and Yemen," he said.

The seizure by Iran of three tiny Islands in the Persian Gulf – Greater and Lesser Tunb Islands, and Abu Musa – from the Emirates in 1971, still sticks in the craw of the Emirati people. Even before Khomeini arrived, even before the creation of a “Shi’a Crescent” was being attempted, Iran’s territorial ambitions were making the Gulf Arabs nervous. They carefully waged a campaign to rebrand the “Persian Gulf” as the “Arabian Gulf” (with the same political intent as Jordan, when it renamed parts of Judea and Samaria “the West Bank” in 1950); “Arabian Gulf” hasn’t quite caught on, but some (including those who do business in the Arab world) are reluctant to use the toponym “Persian Gulf.” Many people now avoid the choice by referring to the waterway simply as “the Gulf.”

It’s true that many Arabs have been killed by the Iranians, though not “millions,” as Taha claims. In the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), nearly 250,000 Iraqi Arabs died. And would it be impolitic to remind Amjad Taha that that war was started by Saddam Hussein? In Syria, Iranian forces have backed Assad, but they were never out to “kill Arabs.” They were supporting Assad, an Arab, and his Arab army, and only making war on those Syrian Arabs who opposed Assad’s despotism. The total number of those killed to date in Syria – civilians and combatants on both sides – are 600,000. The Iranians have been assisting the Syrian army, which has been doing most of the killing. Assuming an equal number of casualties on both sides, that would mean Assad and the Iranians and the Russians together had killed 300,000 of the opposition forces and civilians. Of those, the Iranians may have killed, at the very most, 100,000. And in Yemen the total number of dead on both sides to date is 100,000; the Iranians provide weapons and other aid to the Shi’a Houthis, but have not taken part directly in the Yemeni civil war. That means the Iranians have

killed not “millions of Arabs,” but at most 350,000 Arabs in the Iran-Iraq War, and in the civil wars in Iraq and Syria. But if Amjad Taha wants to construct a narrative about Iranians murdering millions of (innocent) Arabs, let’s not try to correct him. His narrative is broadly accurate, even if inaccurate on the exact numbers; it can only help garner Arab support for the struggle to constrain a malevolent Iran.

They are brutally oppressing the Arab minority in the Ahvaz region, which Iran has occupied for some 100 years – some 11 million people, living under Nazi occupation conditions. They don’t have the right to learn Arabic, unlike the Arabs in Israel, who also have representatives in the parliament. The Arabs in Iran have no rights whatsoever. They are killed in the streets,” Taha told Israel Hayom.

Again Amjad Taha grossly inflates his numbers. Ahvaz is the capital of Khuzestan Province, where most of Iran’s Arabs live. The total Arab population of Iran is now believed to be – at most – two million. How Taha arrives at “11 million Arabs” is simple: when the vivid Oriental imagination is at work, you simply pluck from the air a figure that suits you. Statistics are not the strong suit of Middle Eastern Muslims. One might also interpret the claim as reflecting Muhammad’s insistence that “war is deceit.” It is true that the Arabs in Iran are treated roughly, but not true to say they “have no rights whatsoever” and “are killed in the streets.” Again, we should nonetheless prefer that Arabs believe what Taha claims he does; it makes their determination to confront and foil Iran – and to collaborate in that task with Israel – that much greater.

*Taha, who believes Iran will try torpedoing the historic diplomatic initiative via its proxy agents across the Middle East, mainly in the Gaza Strip, issued strong advice to Israel: **“I assume the Palestinian [terrorist] organizations will try attacking civilian targets in Israel with missiles.***

But, the support for them and for the PLO in the Arab world is waning. Many Palestinians in the Emirates and other Gulf states are calling for the downfall of the Palestinian Authority because of the corruption in it and its inability to achieving anything at all for the Palestinians."

The PA is indeed a swamp of corruption. While ordinary Palestinians struggle to survive, the PA leaders help themselves to large amounts of the aid money given by foreign donors. Not content with that, they also pay themselves salaries that are ten times the average wage in the PA territories. They also hire members of their extended families, who are given government sinecures at inflated salaries; the PA leaders make little attempt to hide this nepotism on steroids. And it is true, too, as Amjad Taha claims, that the PA has achieved nothing for the Palestinians. The PA's Mahmoud Abbas, like the PLO's Yassir Arafat before him, turned down an offer from Ehud Olmert that would have given him 95% of the West Bank. And ever since then Abbas has refused to engage in negotiations. He would not even appear at a meeting in Manama, Bahrain earlier this year where the most generous aid package in history – \$50 billion – for the Palestinians was supposed to have been discussed. Abbas has been throwing a continuous tantrum ever since the U.A.E. announced it was normalizing relations with Israel.

Taha continued: "We hope to see a revolution among the Palestinians against the PA. The Palestinian leadership has no other choice than to go back to war to try to garner any support whatsoever or to return to any form of negotiations with Israel. We hope Israel will not negotiate again with terrorists. We need to return to the principle of no negotiating with terrorists."

Taha is here suggesting that the PA – not Hamas, which has long been recognized as a terror group, but the supposedly

“moderate” PA – consists of terrorists with whom the Israelis should not be negotiating. Taha is hoping that the PA itself – corrupt, ineffectual – will be overthrown, driven out, and that new leaders will emerge, willing to jettison the past playbook, and ready to make the territorial compromises necessary for a deal with Israel. He sounds ready to advise the Palestinians to give up their fantasy about squeezing Israel back within the 1949 armistice lines, and to make a deal that will look something like the Trump Plan. After all, that deal would finally bring about the creation of a Palestinian state, consisting of 70% of the West Bank, 100% of Gaza, and two large enclaves of territory carved out of Israel’s Negev to compensate for the 30% of the West Bank that Israel would retain for security reasons.

Taha also went on to describe the significant change in attitudes in the Middle East toward the Palestinians.

“There have been several Israeli attacks in Gaza in recent days. People started rallying support on social media sites under the slogan ‘Gaza is under attack.’ In the past, such a campaign would have quickly gained steam. Now people are saying: ‘ Hamas, the militias, and the terrorists are under attack.’

“We see Hamas using children, schools, hospitals, to shoot missiles [at Israel]. When the Palestinians lamented the assassination of [former Iranian general] Qassem Soleimani, a commander in Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – and the most loathed individual in Iraq, Syria, and the Gulf States – it was the final straw from our perspective. They called this man a ‘martyr of Jerusalem.’ This was the breaking point in Arab support for them,” Taha said.

According to Amjad Taha, the Arabs, and most especially the Emiratis, now understand that the terror group Hamas holds the Gazans in thrall. It is that group that Israel is attacking,

not the whole population of Gaza. And that distinction is being made by many Arabs who, he claims, no longer say that "Gaza is under attack" but, rather, that " Hamas, the terrorists, are under attack."

Like Israel, the Arabs – according to Taha – are now willing to distinguish "the terrorists" from "the people" in Gaza. Amjad Taha claims that the Arabs now understand that Hamas deliberately hides its weapons in schools, residences, hospitals, and then "uses children" to "shoot missiles" from those same "schools and hospitals." While Israel must perforce attack those sites, the IDF does what it can to minimize civilian casualties. The Israelis invented for this purpose the "knock-on-the-roof" technique, which is the practice of dropping non-explosive or low-yield devices on the roofs of targeted civilian homes, or other buildings, as a prior warning of imminent bombing attacks to give the inhabitants time to escape.

Taha ends as he began: with an expression of his hatred for the Iranians, those "killers of millions of Arabs." What made him, and other Emiratis, finally break with the Palestinians, and stop supporting them, he says, was their behavior when the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani was assassinated. While the Sunni Arab world cheered the death of this man who had indeed been involved in "killing Arabs"—that is, Sunni Arabs – in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, the Palestinians alone lamented. They called this mass killer of Sunni Arabs a "martyr of Jerusalem," celebrating him posthumously as one of their own, a warrior against Israel. For Amjad Taha, that spelled the end of whatever residual sympathy for the Palestinians he may once have had. And judging by the latest news from Abu Dhabi about "normalization" of relations and a "warm peace" with Israel, he is not the only one in the Gulf who has decided he's had it with the Palestinians.

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