

# What Would a Biden Presidency Mean For Israel?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



**Let's be charitable.** Let's consider the best case to be made for Biden "as a friend of Israel," which just appeared from a veteran Israeli journalist, Raphael Ahren: "Biden a veteran friend of Israel, settlement critic, may be at odds over Iran," by Raphael Ahren, [Times of Israel](#), November 7, 2020:

*...“He has a deep feeling for Israel,” said Michael Oren, who served as Israel’s ambassador to the US when Biden was vice president. Oren opposed almost all of the Middle East policies championed by Biden and his boss, Barack Obama, especially on Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian question. Still, he annually attended Biden’s Rosh Hashanah party, and asserts that the former Delaware senator is genuinely concerned about Israel’s well-being.*

According to former Israeli ambassador Michael Oren, Biden has a “deep feeling for Israel” and is “genuinely concerned about Israel’s well-being.” That’s good to know, but along with that “deep feeling” and “genuine concern,” a lot more intellect needs to be applied – that is, Biden needs to acquire a detailed knowledge of Israel’s history, its legal rights, the security threats the Jewish state has beaten back but will always have to confront, whatever agreements it reaches with Arab states. It’s nice that he has a warm feeling for Israel, but it would be even nicer if Biden knew why Israeli settlements are legal, built on land – Judea and Samaria, a.k.a. the West Bank – that by right belongs entirely to Israel. Read the Mandate for Palestine, Joe, especially Article 6, where the U.K., as the holder of the Mandate, is instructed “to facilitate Jewish immigration” and “close settlement by Jews on the land, including State lands and waste lands not required for public purposes.”

The U.K. was, as the holder of the Mandate, duty-bound to “facilitate Jewish immigration” and “close settlement by Jews on the land.” What land is that? Look at, study, commit to memory, Joe – you can do it! – the Mandate maps, that show that land which was set aside to become the future Jewish state. It extends from (roughly) just beyond the Golan Heights in the north, to the Red Sea in the south, and from the Jordan River in the east, to the Mediterranean in the west. The West Bank (a.k.a. Judea and Samaria) is entirely within that Jewish state.

It would be heartening, too, if Joe Biden fully understood the meaning of U.N. Resolution 242, which offers an independent basis – beyond that conferred by the Mandate for Palestine – for Israel’s right to retain territory that it won in the Six-Day War, territory that it needs to hold onto in order to have, in the language of the resolution, “secure [i.e. defensible] and recognized boundaries.” I suspect that in Biden’s nearly fifty years in Washington, despite the hundreds

of times he must have spoken feelingly about Israel, he has never read either the Mandate for Palestine or U.N. Resolution 242, as explicated by its author, Lord Caradon. Now is the time for him to do both.

*“Biden is from a generation that remembers 1967 and 1973,” Oren said, referring to the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, respectively. “He has Israel in his heart. He actually gets it. He gets Israel.”...*

Oren opposed almost all of the Middle East policies of Obama and Biden, which were dangerous to Israel, including the Iran deal, attempts behind the scenes to persuade Israel to stop settlement building, and even the shameful abstention – the first time for the U.S. – on a U.N. vote condemning Israel’s settlements as “illegal.” So why does he insist that Biden “has Israel in his heart. He actually gets it, He gets Israel”? What does that mean? Does he “get” that Israel has a legal right, superior to all other claims, to the entire West Bank? Does he “get” that Israel cannot possibly return to the 1949 armistice lines, with that nine-mile-wide waist from Qalqilya to the sea, which Abba Eban once described as the “lines of Auschwitz”? Does he “get” that instead of seeking, in vain, for a “solution” to the Arab Muslim war on Israel, as generations of peace-processors have tried, we should recognize that this Jihad against Israel is not a problem to be solved but, rather, a situation to be managed? Does Biden understand that the best way for Israel to manage this situation is through a strategy of deterrence, which requires that Israel continue to control, at a minimum, the Jordan Valley and the five large settlement blocs in the West Bank (a.k.a. Judea and Samaria)?

*“Biden has known every Israeli prime minister since Golda Meir, “and more than just casually,” he [Ambassador Oren] noted.*

*“He has retold many times the story of his meeting with Meir in the summer of 1973, during his first overseas trip as a young senator: The Israeli premier showed him maps and told him about the militarily precarious situation her country found itself in. Biden looked depressed, but Meir cheered him up, telling him that Israelis have a secret weapon against the Arabs: They have nowhere else to go.*”

*“During his decades in politics Biden – who has Jewish grandchildren, as two of his three children married Jews – met countless world leaders. But he still describes his interaction with Golda Meir as “one of the most consequential meetings I’ve ever had in my life.”*”

*“Less known is a meeting with her successor Menachem Begin a few years later, which The New York Times at the time described as a “highly emotional confrontation.”*”

*In June 1982, a few days after the start of the Lebanon War, known as Operation Peace for the Galilee, Begin met with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Washington. Several lawmakers grilled him over Israel’s alleged disproportionate use of force.*

*“A young senator rose and delivered a very impassioned speech – I must say that it’s been a while since I’ve heard such a talented speaker – and he actually supported Operation Peace for the Galilee,” Begin told Israeli reporters after he returned to Jerusalem.*

*The senator – Biden – said he would go even further than Israel, adding that he’d forcefully fend off anyone who sought to invade his country, even if that meant killing women or children.*

*“I disassociated myself from these remarks,” Begin said. “I said to him: No, sir; attention must be paid. According to our values, it is forbidden to hurt women and children, even in war... Sometimes there are casualties among the civilian*

*population as well. But it is forbidden to aspire to this. This is a yardstick of human civilization, not to hurt civilians."*

*"But while Biden had sympathy for Jerusalem's actions in Lebanon, he let it be known that he opposed Israel's West Bank settlement enterprise. He warned Begin that Israel "was losing support in this country because of the settlements policy," according to The Times.*

Biden was right. Israel has been "losing support" because of its "settlements policy." But that doesn't make that policy wrong. The decline in support is merely testimony to the deficiencies of Israel's hasbara, and the success of Palestinian and other Arab propaganda efforts. "War is deceit," Muhammad said, and the Palestinians are past masters at this kind of warfare. Apparently those efforts won over Biden himself. Instead of accepting what he has been fed by those propagandists, he owes it to the Jewish state that he keeps insisting he feels so deeply about, to investigate the moral, historic, and legal claims of Jews to the West Bank (a.k.a. Judea and Samaria) on which those settlements have been built.

*"He hinted – more than hinted – that if we continue with this policy, it is possible that he will propose cutting our financial aid," Begin recalled. "And to this I gave him a clear answer: Sir, do not threaten us with cutting aid. First of all, you should know that this is not a one-way street. You help us, and we are very grateful for your help; but this is a two-way street: We do a lot for you. And also in recent battles we did a lot for the United States."*

*Begin, in his own telling, warned the young Delaware senator that "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."*

*It was "a lively discussion" that he thought was "very helpful," Begin concluded.*

Begin, a noble and also tragic figure (for the way he was treated with such hostility and contempt by Jimmy Carter at Camp David, while Anwar Sadat, who was getting back the entire Sinai, was seen by Carter as a veritable Prince of Peace) stood his ground at Biden's implied threat of a cut in aid. And his performance likely made a deep impression on Biden, for since that exchange with Begin, Biden has always said that he would never cut aid to Israel to force a change in its policy. We'll soon have a chance to see if he still means it.

First published in