



Soothing words in Israel won't pull peace from Mideast flames

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"Put yourself in their shoes," President Obama said of the Palestinians, imploring his Israeli audience in Jerusalem to work for peace. "Look at the world through their eyes."

A fine sentiment, smoothly expressed. But if, on his recent swing through Israel, the West Bank and Jordan, Obama hoped to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, he will soon look back with disappointment.

That's clear both from the reaction that his statements and activities in Israel garnered from Palestinian leaders, as well as from the larger concerns that currently occupy the minds of Israeli leaders.

On this trip, Obama clearly sought to strengthen U.S.-Israeli relations, which have wobbled since, early in his presidency, he pressured Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to freeze settlement activity in hopes of narrowing Israeli-Palestinian difference and also slighted him on a personal level.

This time, not only did Obama embrace the Zionist cause, tying the Jewish "return home" to "centuries of suffering and exile, prejudice and pogroms and even genocide." He visited the symbolically important Mount Herzl - Israel's national cemetery named for modern Zionism's founder, Theodore Herzl - along with the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial and the Iron Dome missile defense system that's protecting Israel from rocket attacks.

Moreover, Obama reversed course on settlements, urging Palestinians not to make a freeze a precondition for negotiations, and, even more significantly, he became the first U.S. president to call on Palestinians to recognize Israel "as a Jewish state."

But, in the ying-yang of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Obama's trust-building with Jerusalem raised alarms in Ramallah. Palestinian leaders won't recognize Israel's inherent Jewishness. They'll continue to dismiss the narrative of a Jewish return home, question the Holocaust, glorify terrorism, and feed their people false hopes of replacing Israel with their own state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

Salah Bardawil, a top leader of the terrorist group Hamas that rules Gaza and remains committed to Israel's destruction, termed Obama's call for Palestinians to recognize a Jewish Israel "the most dangerous statement by an American president regarding the Palestinian issue."

From London, high-profile Palestinian publicist Abdel Bari Atwan labeled Obama an "Uncle Tom" who "flattered the Israelis and begged for their satisfaction."

Any serious Israeli-Palestinian negotiation will be long and arduous, forcing top-level officials on both sides to devote serious time to the effort. While Palestinian leaders don't seem interested, Israeli leaders surely must feel that, at the moment, larger threats to their state require their attention.

In Iran, the radical regime continues its progress on the nuclear weaponry that would make its genocidal threats to Israel all-too real. In recent global talks, Western offers of concessions did not entice Tehran to reverse course.

Syria is disintegrating into chaos, raising threats not only that its chemical weapons will fall into the hands of Hezbollah, another genocide-seeking enemy of Jerusalem, but that the conflict will spill across Israel's border.

That Israel recently fired a missile into Syria in response to fire from across the Golan Heights, from government or rebel forces, does not bode well. Nor does the growing role of Islamists within the Syrian opposition bode well - for, after Bashar al-Assad falls, they could re-direct their fire to Israel.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan continues to stoke anti-Israeli sentiment across the region - don't let his recent rapprochement with Netanyahu fool you - depriving Israel of a once-reliable ally.

The story's much the same in Egypt, where Islamist President Mohamed Morsi sits where Israeli ally Hosni Mubarak once did.

Obama deserves kudos for his efforts to restore warm relations between Washington and its most important Middle East ally. Unfortunately, due to disdain on the Palestinian side and preoccupation with greater problems on the Israeli side, his calls for both to recommit to Israeli-Palestinian peace almost surely will go unheeded.

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