



Israeli-Saudi Normalization Won't Solve The Palestinian Problem

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European Jews are not real Jews, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas declared the other day, and Hitler killed Jews not because of their religion but because of their "social role" in lending money.

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, didn't want Jews from Arab countries to immigrate to Israel, according to Abbas, and he attacked Jewish institutions in Arab countries to convince them not to come.

Abbas' comments — the latest of his many antisemitic tropes and historical absurdities over the years — provide a telling backdrop to U.S. President Joe Biden's view that "normalization" between Israel and Saudi Arabia should be accompanied by significant progress on an Israeli-Palestinian "two-state solution."

Senior U.S. diplomats plan to meet with top Palestinian officials in the coming days to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian part of a normalization agreement. Washington is pressuring Jerusalem to make significant concessions to Palestinians, suggesting Washington and Riyadh won't move forward with normalization unless it does so.

Biden and his team reportedly think they can more easily sell Congress on an Israeli-Saudi normalization agreement, which will likely provide for closer U.S.-Saudi defense ties, if it includes Israeli concessions that make a two-state solution more viable.

That's because while lawmakers of both parties deplore Riyadh's human rights record, Democrats might be more inclined to go along with an agreement if they think it will advance Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Thomas Friedman, the New York Times' influential columnist, caused a stir in Washington, Jerusalem, and surely elsewhere by urging U.S. and Saudi leaders not to let Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu make them "useful idiots" by cutting a deal on normalization.

"You cannot have normalization with an Israeli government that is not normal," he wrote, referring to Netanyahu's far-right coalition, because it won't be "a stable U.S. ally or Saudi partner."

Fine. But what's true in Jerusalem is true in Ramallah, and what's true of Israeli-Saudi "normalization" is true of Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Explaining how "Israel's government is not normal" (his italics), Friedman notes that it includes what a former Mossad head called "horrible racist parties" and is trying to build ties with "far-right European parties."

Fine. But, as the musings of Abbas and activities of his government remind us, the Palestinian Authority is far less of a "normal" government than the one in Jerusalem: It rules in classic authoritarian fashion, brooking no dissent, and it has no credibility to serve as a true partner for peace with this or any other Israeli government.

Two days before Abbas' speech in late August, his spokesman accused Israel of "murdering" an innocent teen boy in the West Bank town of Al-Zababdeh. The terrorist group Palestinian Islamic Jihad, however, acknowledged that the teen was a "martyred jihad fighter" who "stood with his colleagues in the Al-Quds Brigades." Normal?

The same thing occurred on Aug. 25 and Aug. 30, with Abbas' mouthpieces accusing Israel of murdering an innocent boy in cold blood. In each case, Palestinian militants praised that boy as a "knight" or "jihad fighter" and detailed the terrorist operation in which he participated. Normal?

Palestinian leaders have rejected several serious — indeed, generous — peace offers over the last quarter-century that would have enacted the very two-state solution that Washington and the West continue to chase. Normal?

Palestinian textbooks incite hatred of and violence against Israel. Palestinian students participate in school plays in which they pretend to point guns at religious Jews, who are blindfolded and on their knees. Muslim sheiks urge violence at mosques. Palestinian political and terror groups praise violence and call for more through their social media sites. And the Palestinian Authority pays the families of terrorists who are killed or jailed after committing acts of terror — payments that rise as attacks grow more deadly and that, together, total 8 percent of the authority's annual budget. Is all of this normal?

In his memoir, Bill Clinton wrote bitterly of Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat's refusal to make peace with Israel when Arafat rejected a U.S. proposal that would have given Palestinians a state on 97 percent of the West Bank, all of Gaza, and Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem.

"Perhaps," Clinton wrote, Arafat "simply couldn't make the final jump from revolutionary to statesman."

No, he could not. Based on all the evidence to date, neither can Abbas. The 87-year-old president is doing nothing to lay the groundwork for peace by condemning the incitement that pervades Palestinian society. Quite the contrary, he mouths the tropes that reinforce Palestinian hatred.

Israeli-Saudi normalization would be good for Jerusalem, good for Riyadh, and good for Washington. Perhaps Israeli concessions to Palestinians are a price that, for political reasons, Jerusalem must pay.

But don't expect Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to produce an actual two-state solution any time soon. Neither Abbas nor any other top Palestinian official is ready to make that final jump from revolutionary to statesman.

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