

A Geopolitical Earthquake Just Hit the Mideast**By Thomas L. Friedman****The Israel-United Arab Emirates deal will be felt throughout the region.**

For once, I am going to agree with President Trump in his use of his favorite adjective: “huge.”

The agreement brokered by the Trump administration for the United Arab Emirates to establish full normalization of relations with Israel, in return for the Jewish state forgoing, for now, any annexation of the West Bank, was exactly what Trump said it was in his tweet: a “HUGE breakthrough.”

It is not Anwar el-Sadat going to Jerusalem — nothing could match that first big opening between Arabs and Israelis. It is not Yasir Arafat shaking Yitzhak Rabin’s hand on the White House lawn — nothing could match that first moment of public reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

But it is close. Just go down the scorecard, and you see how this deal affects every major party in the region — with those in the pro-American, pro-moderate Islam, pro-ending-the-conflict-with-Israel-once-and-for-all camp benefiting the most and those in the radical pro-Iran, anti-American, pro-Islamist permanent-struggle-with-Israel camp all becoming more isolated and left behind.

It’s a geopolitical earthquake.

To fully appreciate why, you need to start with the internal dynamics of the deal. It was Trump’s peace plan drawn up by Jared Kushner, and their willingness to stick with it, that actually created the raw material for this breakthrough. Here is how.

The Kushner plan basically called for Israel and the Palestinians to make peace, with Israel being able to annex some 30 percent of the West Bank, where most of its settlers were, and the Palestinians getting to establish a demilitarized, patchwork state on the other 70 percent, along with some land swaps from Israel.

The Palestinians rejected the deal outright as unbalanced and unjust. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who basically helped to write the very pro-Israel plan, said he intended to proceed with the annexation part of the plan by July 1 — without agreeing to the part that his political base of Jewish settlers rejected: Palestinians later getting a state on the other 70 percent. (I wonder if Trump’s ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, a pro-settler extremist himself, encouraged Bibi to think he could get away with this.)

It didn’t work, because Kushner, who was hearing regularly from Egypt, Jordan and the gulf Arabs that such a unilateral Israeli annexation would be a total deal-breaker for them, told Bibi, “Not so fast.” Kushner persuaded

nytimes.com

August 13, 2020

Trump to block Bibi’s cherry-picking of the plan by taking annexation now.

This was causing Netanyahu to lose support from the settlers — and, at a time when he is on trial on corruption charges and facing daily protests outside his home over his poor performance in leading Israel out of the coronavirus epidemic, left him sinking in the polls.

So what Trump, Kushner, Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, the de facto leader of the Emirates, and Netanyahu did was turn lemons into lemonade, explained Itamar Rabinovich, one of Israel’s leading Middle East historians and a former ambassador to Washington.

“Instead of Israeli annexation for a Palestinian state, they made it Israeli non-annexation in return for peace with the U.A.E.,” said Rabinovich in an interview. Kushner, he added, “basically generated an asset out of nothing, which Israel could then trade for peace with the U.A.E. It was peace for peace, not land for peace.”

This process apparently started after the U.A.E.’s ambassador to Washington, Yousef al-Otaiba, published a letter in Hebrew in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Ahronot in June directly warning that Israeli annexation of the West Bank would undermine the quiet progress Israel had made with the gulf Arabs.

The U.A.E. had been mulling going for more open diplomatic ties with Israel for a while, but it was the discussions over how to stop annexation that created a framework where the U.A.E. could be seen as getting something for the Palestinians in return for its normalization with Israel.

The Netanyahu dynamics here are fascinating, or as Israeli writer Ari Shavit remarked to me: “Netanyahu is trying to get out of his own personal Watergate by going to China. He’s like Nixon in reverse.”

What he meant was that Netanyahu had been doing everything he could to appease the right-wing forces in Israel — with shiny objects like annexation — so they would side with him in his corruption trial against Israel’s court system and attorney general.

By taking this deal, Netanyahu, as Nixon did with China, abandoned his natural ideological allies — the settlers who supported him because they thought he would deliver annexation — “and this will force Netanyahu to become more dependent on the center and center-right in Israel going forward,” said Shavit. “This deal may help save Israeli democracy by now depriving Bibi” of the full army of right-wing forces “he needed to destroy the Israeli Supreme Court.”

The Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas, was also stripped of something by this deal, which may

force him to the negotiating table. It stripped him of his biggest ace in the hole — the idea that the gulf Arabs would normalize with Israel only after the Israelis satisfied the demands of the Palestinian Authority with a state to its liking.

(Free advice for Abbas: Come back to the table now and say you view the Trump plan as a “floor,” not a “ceiling” for Palestinian aspirations. You will find a lot of support from Trump, the Europeans and the Arabs for that position. You still have leverage. Israel still has to deal with you, because your people in the West Bank are not going to just disappear, no matter what happens with the U.A.E. and Israel.)

This deal will certainly encourage the other gulf sheikhdoms — Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia — all of which have had covert and overt business and intelligence dealings with Israel, to follow the Emirates’ lead. They will not want to let the U.A.E. have a leg up in being able to marry its financial capital with Israel’s cybertechnology, agriculture technology and health care technology, with the potential to make both countries stronger and more prosperous.

Three other big winners here are: 1) King Abdullah of Jordan. He feared that Israeli annexation would energize efforts to turn Jordan into the Palestinian state. That threat is for the moment defused. 2) The American Jewish community. If Israel had annexed part of the West Bank, it would have divided every synagogue and Jewish community in America, between hard-line annexationists and liberal anti-annexationists. This was a looming disaster. Gone for now. And 3) Joe Biden. Biden, if he succeeds Trump, will not have to worry about the thorny issue of annexation, and he should have a much stronger pro-American alliance in the region to work with.

The big geopolitical losers are Iran and all of its proxies: Hezbollah, the Iraqi militias, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Houthis in Yemen and Turkey. This is for a number of reasons. Up to now, the U.A.E. has kept up a delicate balance between Iran and Israel, not looking to provoke Iran, and dealing with Israel covertly.

But this deal is right in Iran’s face. The tacit message is: “We now have Israel on our side, so don’t mess with

Saudi Arabia Opens Airspace to Israeli Flights for First Time

By Megan Specia

nytimes.com

The Saudis said the decision came in response to “a request by the U.A.E.,” which had recently begun normalizing relations with Israel.

Saudi Arabia announced Wednesday that it would allow any flights going to and from the United Arab Emirates to fly over its territory, a move that would give Israel access to some of the kingdom’s airspace for the first time.

The announcement, made at the request of the United Arab Emirates, came days after the first direct flight from Israel to the emirates — a symbolic move as the two nations begin normalizing relations.

us.” The vast damage Israel inflicted on Iran through apparent cyberwarfare in recent months may have even given the U.A.E. more breathing room to do this deal.

But there is another message, deeper, more psychological. This was the U.A.E. telling the Iranians and all their proxies: There are really two coalitions in the region today — those who want to let the future bury the past and those who want to let the past keep burying the future. The U.A.E. is taking the helm of the first, and it is leaving Iran to be the leader of the second.

When the Trump administration assassinated Qassim Suleimani, the head of Iran’s Quds Force, the foreign-operations branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in January, I wrote a column saying that America had just killed “the dumbest man in Iran.”

Why? Because what was Suleimani’s business model, which became Shiite Iran’s business model? It was to hire Arab and other Shiites to fight Arab Sunnis in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Syria — to project Iran’s power. And what was the result of all this? Iran has helped to turn all four into failed states. Iran’s clerical leadership has become the largest facilitator of state failure in the Middle East — including its own — which is why so many Lebanese blame it and Hezbollah for their country’s mismanagement that led to the devastating explosion last week in Beirut’s port.

I have followed the Middle East for too long to ever write the sentence “the region will never be the same again.” The forces of sectarianism, tribalism, corruption and anti-pluralism run deep there. But there are other currents — young men and women who are just so tired of the old game, the old fights, the old wounds being stoked over and over again. You could see them demonstrating all over the streets of Beirut last week demanding good governance and a chance to realize their full potential.

The U.A.E. and Israel and the U.S. on Thursday showed — at least for one brief shining moment — that the past does not always have to bury the future, that the haters and dividers don’t always have to win.

It was a breath of fresh air. May it one day soon turn into a howling wind of change that spreads across the whole region.

September 2, 2020

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, in a video statement delivered while standing in front of a map of the region, called the announcement a “tremendous breakthrough.”

“Flights will be cheaper and shorter, and it will lead to robust tourism and develop our economy,” Mr. Netanyahu said, while tracing the route between Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi with his finger on the map. He also said the route would allow Israelis to save time and money when traveling east to Asia.

“These are the benefits of a peace that is genuine,” he said.

The flight from Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi on Monday passed through Saudi airspace, the first time the kingdom had explicitly allowed an Israeli commercial jet to pass over its territory. Air India had earlier received approval to fly directly to Israel, and in 2018 established a direct route from New Delhi to Tel Aviv that passed over the kingdom.

Saudi Arabia's decision to officially allow flights to and from Israel from the United Arab Emirates makes the route more commercially viable, cutting a nearly seven-hour journey in half.

Monday's flight was the latest sign of growing diplomatic and commercial ties between Israel and the United Arab Emirates that some hope will lead to similar moves in other Arab nations that have long refused to recognize the Jewish state. A landmark agreement came after six weeks of indirect talks between Israel and the emirates, with Jared Kushner, President Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, playing a central role.

The two nations announced the accord last month after decades of stalemate. The United Arab Emirates is only the third Arab nation to establish normalized relations with Israel. Egypt signed a peace agreement with the country in 1979, and Jordan signed a treaty in 1994.

Mr. Netanyahu thanked Mr. Kushner and Mohammed bin Zayed, the crown prince of the emirate of Abu Dhabi, for the "important contribution" toward opening up the

Sudan Isn't Making Peace with Israel—Yet

By Benny Avni

The beginning of a beautiful friendship?

Ignore the political noise accompanying Secretary of State Pompeo's Mideast trip. Watch Khartoum instead.

The Sudanese capital is the most intriguing leg of Mr. Pompeo's swing through the region. The press will focus on legal niceties involving an address to the Republican convention, recorded Monday on the roof of Jerusalem's King David hotel. Yet, by making, on Tuesday, the first known direct flight from Israel to Sudan, once one of the most rogue of rogue states, Mr. Pompeo may well culminate a diplomatic coup.

Will Sudan join a quiet but significant political trend in the Middle East and Africa, where wide-spread yearning for modernity threatens traditional Soviet-inspired revolutionary ideology, strong-arm rule, and Islamism? Will it be next to establish relations with Israel? Will it be removed from America's list of terror-sponsoring states?

Or will Sudan become prey to China, which competes with America in the region?

Omar Al-Bashir, Sudan's strongman from 1989 to last spring, might follow Mr. Pompeo's visit from his current residence at Khartoum Kobar prison. He's been incarcerated there since last year, after a Sudanese court conviction on corruption-related charges. That jail cell is quite a spot for a former strongman long wanted by a hapless international justice system.

airspace, adding that there would "be a great deal more good news to come."

The Saudi announcement in the country's official press agency refers to allowing "all flights" to pass through its airspace, but makes no direct reference to Iran or Qatar, two nations currently banned from flying over the kingdom. The announcement appears to refer only to the commencement of commercial flights between Israel and the emirates, and said the decision was a response to a "request by the U.A.E."

Saudi officials were quick to affirm that the change in rules in its airspace did not signal any departure from its current stance on the Israel-Palestinian issue.

"The Kingdom's positions regarding the Palestinian cause and people are fixed and firm," Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said in a post on Twitter. He said that giving permission to "flights arriving in the United Arab Emirates as well as those departing from it to all countries" to use the kingdom's airspace did not change that.

Palestinian officials, wary of provoking tensions with Saudi Arabia, declined to comment, but analysts contended that the Ramallah-based Palestinian leadership was likely angry about the decision.

"I believe Palestinian officials see this move as another indication of the increasingly weak Arab position vis-a-vis the Palestinian cause," said Jihad Harb, an analyst of Palestinian politics.

nysun.com

August 25, 2020

In 2008 the International Criminal Court at The Hague issued an arrest warrant for al-Bashir, charging him with orchestrating the mass murder in Darfur. Sudan's heavy handed war against an ethnic minority in the western part of the country was defined by some as genocide and made the country a global pariah.

Or did it?

Al Bashir, a record holder as the longest-serving president of the Arab League, kept popping up in world capitals. Rather than arresting him, as The Hague sought, leaders as far flung as Moscow and Pretoria feted their Sudanese guest and treated him as a head of state.

In the end, the military coup that ended al-Bashir's 30 year reign of terror had little to do with the well-documented Darfur atrocities. Instead, he was overthrown in June 2019 after the Sudanese, sick of his self-enrichment and cavalier attitude toward them, took to the streets in large scale protests. The military saw the writing on the wall.

Since the coup, Sudan has been ruled by a hybrid military-civilian council. The new government is far from well-organized as generals and civilian leaders, including Islamist zealots, at times pull in opposite directions. The country is in flux.

In February, the general currently heading the council, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, secretly met with Prime Minister

Netanyahu at Uganda. After the Israeli press widely reported on the meeting, it was disavowed by the general's civilian counterpart, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

The country's military has long maintained clandestine ties with the Israelis and, even before the United Arab Emirates made the move, Khartoum's new rulers seemed like natural candidates to formalize relations with Jerusalem.

Sure enough, soon after the UAE announced its intention to do just that, a Sudanese official all but confirmed that Sudan's next.

A spokesman for the Sudanese foreign ministry, Haidar Badawi Sadiq, told Sky News Arabic that his country was ready to make the move. "It's a matter of time, we are finalizing everything," an unnamed official told the Associated press at the time. "The Emirati move encouraged us and helped calm some voices within the government who were afraid of backlash from the Sudanese public."

On verra. One day after making that sentiment public, Mr. Sadiq was unceremoniously fired for speaking out of turn. In several appearances afterward, including for Israeli broadcaster Kan, Mr. Sadiq expressed no regret over spilling the beans on the badly-kept secret. Talks at the highest levels of Sudan following the UAE are still on, he insisted.

Why Pakistan Won't Be Next to Make Peace with Israel

By Hussain Nadim

Anti-Semitism and inertia.

With the Arab world opening up to Israel, shock waves are being felt deeply around the Muslim world, especially in Pakistan, the only nuclear power in the Muslim world. Will Pakistan also get on the bandwagon and open up ties with Israel for a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue?

The short answer is no. The long answer is that it possibly cannot. This is for a few reasons rooted in Pakistan's mismanagement of its foreign policy regarding the issue.

Pakistan's policy on the Arab-Israel conflict is a product of the late 1940s and early '50s when the country was trying to establish itself as an eastern fortress of the Islamic world to mobilize Muslim support against India. This required solidarity with the Arab states that were foremost parties to a conflict with Israel.

The hope in Pakistan was that the Islamic world would reciprocate Pakistan's support over the Palestine issue by supporting Pakistan's stand on Kashmir against India. This, however, never happened because, for the Arab world, Palestine was an Arab-Israel conflict not a Muslim-Jewish one, and Kashmir was a Pakistan-India conflict not a Hindu-Muslim one.

It is this fundamental difference in the approach toward the conflict that Pakistan has become for the last few decades a prisoner to its own policy. While the Arab-Israel conflict after the 1967 Six Day War and 1973 Yom

That's why adding Khartoum to Mr. Pompeo's itinerary is so intriguing.

True, on Tuesday the premier, Mr. Hamdok, said that the current government has no authority to make peace with Israel before an election. Yet, as American and Israeli officials broadly hint that the UAE will be joined by others, Sudan keeps popping up as top candidate. Its location on the shores of the Red Sea would certainly make it a strategic ally for Israel and America.

Sudan, meanwhile, is desperate for foreign aid and Western investment. To start getting that, it needs to be off the State Department's terror list, where it was placed in 1993 for harboring top terrorists, including Osama Bin Laden. Several America-based terror-related lawsuits against Sudan remain pending, while others have been resolved.

Delisting in respect of terrorism goes beyond technicalities. It's a political issue with wider implication than ties with Israel. As everywhere else in the world, China's influence in the Middle East is growing. Unless America competes in this new Cold War-like struggle, countries like Sudan will fall under Beijing's spell.

The Khartoum visit is a good opportunity for Mr. Pompeo to declare Washington's intentions to make Sudan, once a cruel terrorist state, into an American ally. Delisting and relations with Israel can mark the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

jpost.com

August 20, 2020

Kippur War got reduced to the Israel-Palestine conflict with Arab partners opening up to Israel, Pakistan's foreign policy never really changed, despite the context around it having been entirely transformed. Some 72 years on, Pakistan's policy on the Israel-Palestine conflict is dictated neither by principles nor by interests. It is dictated by inertia.

A key reason for this inertia is how Pakistan sold the entire Palestine issue domestically through a deeply religious sentiment, backing it up with out-of-context Koranic verses framing it only a Jewish vs. Muslim problem rather than a territorial and human-rights problem.

Not only did this end up creating an unknown enemy out of the Jewish people, it also gave rise to conspiracies of all sorts inside the country that helped the ruling elite sway public opinion in whichever direction it benefited their politics. For instance, when the current Prime Minister Imran Khan launched his political career in 1995, he was targeted for being a "Jewish agent" by the ex-PM Nawaz Sharif's right-wing political party, which saw him as a political threat.

This was because Khan had married a Jewish socialite during his time in London. Similarly, the "Jewish conspiracy" has also been used to discredit any dissent against the ruling powers and marginalize minority communities inside the country.

Therefore, the radicalization of the Arab-Israel conflict along the religious and nationalist lines meant that no political party or institution in Pakistan would then be able to even discuss, let alone revisit, Pakistan's policy on the issue.

This inertia is also maintained through a deliberate devolution of the foreign policy on this subject to the public and opinion makers who lack the sensitivities of that foreign policy. Therefore, whenever there is a debate on the Israel-Palestine conflict, it draws an emotionally charged public into the discourse that clings on to the argument that Pakistan's Palestine policy is based on its founding father MA Jinnah's wishes, and hence cannot be changed.

Not only is this line of argument divorced from the common sense of policymaking, it also essentially stunts Pakistan from going against Jinnah's policy, despite that the entire context and issue around it has changed. Therefore, to argue on the subject with a public that is fed misinformation is like hitting a dead end.

Despite all the emotions and professed love for the Palestinian cause, the problem is that Pakistan has so far only provided rhetorical support, mere lip service to the Palestinian cause, and because it fits its narrative on the Kashmir issue. Therefore, if Pakistan aims to really stand up for the Palestinian cause at a time when there is a diplomatic shift in the region, it will require an equal shift in its approach.

There doesn't have to be a change in Pakistan's principles on the issue or "recognition" of Israel, but the country can definitely not continue to pursue a "look

What the Emerging Greco-Egyptian Alliance Means for Israel

By Gallia Lindenstrauß & Ofir Winter
Fossil fuels and restraining Turkey.

inss.org.il

August 25, 2020

Increased tensions over the last few months between Turkey and Greece over disagreements regarding maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean have increased the risk of violent flare-ups in the region. Over the last few years the "Blue Homeland" doctrine has become dominant in Turkish public discourse. This doctrine regards defense of Turkey's maritime borders (as defined in Turkish – not Greek – eyes) as no less important than defense of its land borders. In February 2019, the Turkish fleet conducted the largest naval exercise in its history, codenamed Blue Homeland. The exercise was in part a response to the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) one month prior; Turkey is not a member of this forum.

In late 2019, after Turkey signed the agreement with the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya, it released a plan for drilling gas and oil in areas Greece regards as its economic waters, and in July this year announced that it intended to send a research vessel in order to conduct seismic research. Turkish battleships prepared to travel alongside the research vessel, and in response, the Greeks raised their military preparedness level. After German mediation efforts, the Turks

away" policy that has thus far neither helped Palestinians nor Pakistanis. A good place to start would be re-educating the people on the Israel-Palestinian conflict and addressing how Pakistan can be a party to a solution rather than remaining a simple bystander stuck in a policy loop.

Unfortunately, Pakistan's Palestine policy is less to do with Palestinian rights and more to do with Pakistan's domestic politics. In the changing circumstances of the Arab world, this may become more intensified instead of loosening up, given that Pakistan's growing closeness with Turkey and Iran, along with divisive domestic politics, might radicalize the Israel-Palestine issue even more, to a point of no return.

The only silver lining in an otherwise hopeless policy situation is that there is clear recognition within the Pakistani security establishment on the need to revisit its Israel-Palestine policy. For the military officials, the goal is to have one less enemy in a region where Pakistan is trapped on both sides.

The only problem is inertia. It is maintained because of consistent politics from the actors who are short on vision and see more domestic political benefit from the status quo than they do from a genuine desire to help the Palestinian people achieve their human and fundamental rights.

Mr. Nadim is a policy specialist working in the national security and foreign policy domain in Pakistan. He was previously a senior Pakistan expert at the United States Institute of Peace and the Wilson Center in Washington, DC.

Visit suburbanorthodox.org for the current issue.

suspended the dispatch of the research ship. In the wake of the signing of the maritime border agreement between Egypt and Greece on August 6, 2020, which the Turkish Foreign Ministry condemned as "null and void," Ankara decided again to send the research vessel accompanied by battleships, while Greece sent its own battleships to the area. On August 12, a Greek battleship accidentally collided with a Turkish battleship accompanying the research boat, and limited damaged was caused to the Turkish ship, which was compelled to return to its base for repairs.

An additional volatile arena in the Eastern Mediterranean is Libya, where there is also potential for Turkish- Egyptian military clash. In the Libyan civil war the anti-Turkish axis supports the troops of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, while GNA troops led by Fayeze al-Sarraj are aided by militias and mercenaries coordinated by Turkey. Egypt has economic and security interests in Libya; its principal interest is preventing Islamist forces from building up along its long western border. Achievements by pro-Turkish forces in Libya led Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to define the cities of Sirte and Jufra as a "red line" regarding Turkey's eastward advance. The Libyan eastern-based Parliament urged el-Sisi

to send troops into Libya, and thus gave Egypt legitimacy to intervene militarily in the event that Turkey ignores its warning.

Motivations for Demarcating the Maritime Border

How and why Greece and Egypt were now able to agree on the demarcation of their maritime border is instructive, as previous negotiations between them did not produce an agreement. Greece has struggled and sometimes hesitated to reach official agreements with other states to demarcate its economic waters, due to its dispute with Turkey about its sovereignty over some Greek islands and the demarcation of the economic waters between the states. The heart of the Greek-Turkish dispute concerns the question of whether populated islands deserve the same radius of economic waters around them as do continental territories. The Convention on the Law of the Sea from 1982 supports the Greek position, but accepting Greek demands fully would be very problematic for the Turks, as this would leave them with relatively limited economic waters. Athens was concerned that concessions to Egypt would later be used by Turkey against it.

Even before reaching the agreement with Egypt, Greece managed in June 2020 to reach an agreement to demarcate its maritime border with Italy, and is in talks with Albania about signing a similar agreement (the Albanian Supreme Court struck down a 2009 agreement between Athens and Tirana to demarcate the continental shelf, due to "fundamental legal violations"). Although Cyprus reached agreements over the years about demarcating its economic waters with Egypt (2003), Lebanon (2007), and Israel (2010), Greece avoided signing a similar agreement with Nicosia based on concerns of deterioration of the conflict in Cyprus. It seems that in light of Turkey's assertive policy and the need to act against the Libyan-Turkish agreement, Greece's position changed and now Greece and Cyprus are reconsidering signing a mutual agreement.

Egypt sees the demarcation of its maritime boundary with Greece as an additional boost to the flourishing strategic ties between the two states. It seeks to define a red line for Turkish activity in the Eastern Mediterranean, after setting a red line in Libya. The agreement also seeks to allow the two states to develop energy resources in their

economic waters and promote the tripartite agreement for connecting the power grids of Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus, in light of Turkish-Libyan attempts to draw a maritime border that creates a buffer between them. An additional advantage of the agreement from Cairo's perspective is that any Turkish attempt to challenge it will now put Ankara in direct conflict with the European Union. The agreement with Greece gives Egypt more limited economic waters than it would have had it recognized the Turkish-Libyan agreement. It thus symbolizes

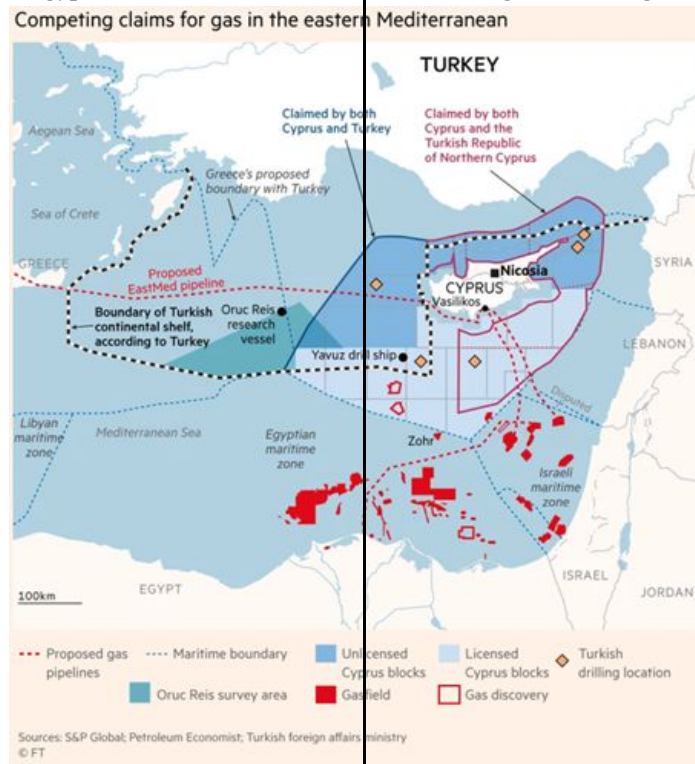
Egypt's commitment to international law, as well as its loyalty to the anti-Turkish axis and Ankara's failure to put a wedge between Cairo and its Hellenic allies.

Greece and Egypt see the new agreement as an additional layer in the consolidation of the EMGF, which is expected to become an international organization soon and include France as a full member and the United States as an observer, in

addition to its seven founding members. The agreement will also enhance the prospects for the EastMed pipeline project to export natural gas from Israel via Cyprus and Greece to Europe, which was approved by all three countries over the past few months in spite of the collapse of energy prices; this, despite increased doubts about the economic viability of the project. The normalization agreement between Israel and the UAE further strengthens the anti-Turkish axis, which is developing from an economic axis focused mainly on gas into a regional alliance that integrates economic, political, and security interests.

Greece and Egypt are not keen on a military confrontation with Turkey, and Ankara also has its reservations about a confrontation with a NATO member state. Egypt is currently dealing with severe economic challenges, with the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam crisis and with terror threats in the Sinai Peninsula, and thus sees being drawn into a direct military conflict with Turkey – which would obscure domestic development efforts that are its highest priority – as an undesirable last resort. At the same time, Cairo and Athens do not have high hopes for a political resolution that would calm relations with Ankara, especially while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan holds the reigns of power tightly and sticks to a political strategy that exudes neo-Ottomanism.

After the gas deal between Egypt and Israel was signed



in 2018, el-Sisi stated that Egypt "scored a big goal," implying against the Turks; when the Greek-Egyptian agreement was signed Egyptian newspapers celebrated "a second goal." The demarcation of the maritime border is seen in Egypt and Greece as a key move in the diplomatic campaign against Turkey. In addition to demarcating their economic waters – and threatening to use force if these are penetrated – this campaign includes international pressure from NATO and the EU; exposure of the ties between Turkey and Islamist and Salafi-jihadist terror elements; and institutionalization of the gas forum, with the surrounding anti-Turkish axis around it. The overall objective of these moves is to contain Turkish influence in the region.

Implications for Israel

Israel must prepare for a variety of potential scenarios in the Greek-Egyptian confrontation with Turkey, from a military confrontation between Turkey and its rivals, continuing with an ongoing diplomatic campaign, and to pragmatic understandings between the parties. While it is clear which side Israel supports, the wider consequences of inclusion in the anti-Turkish axis in the Eastern Mediterranean have yet to be properly assessed. There are prices for Israel being drawn into the Greek-Turkish conflict and into the conflict in Libya, including the need to dedicate increasing attention to the region at a time of multiple domestic challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside the already existing external challenges, which are not erased by the pandemic. While most Turkish activity in the region is viewed by Jerusalem as negative, only a portion of it actually represents a direct

threat to Israel and requires its response.

Israel attributes increasing importance to the Eastern Mediterranean due to gas resources and due to its multidimensional strategic significance, and thus has an interest in preventing crises in the region and maintaining it as a peaceful space. The creation of hard blocs in the Eastern Mediterranean will further aggravate the rivalry between Turkey and Israel. Deeper rifts between the competing camps, which will lead to an accelerated arms race by regional naval and air forces and challenge the existing balance of power, are also not desirable for Israel. While German mediation in the Libyan and Turkish-Greek conflicts can serve Israeli interests, Jerusalem should also encourage Washington to increase its involvement in the mediation efforts and play a leading role.

In light of the contradiction between the Greek-Egyptian agreement and Turkish-GNA agreement, the sides must come to an understanding between them on this issue in order to head off the danger of deterioration to an armed conflict. The ceasefire that was declared in Libya on August 21 represents a positive sign of comprehension among the different players of the need for compromise, in spite of existing difficulties. It may be that the discovery of gas in the Black Sea announced by Erdogan, also on August 21, which represents the first discovery of a significant source of fossil fuel in Turkish territory, will allow an opening for certain Turkish flexibility. At the same time, the ongoing hardening of the blocs is cause for concern that such an opening will remain narrow and insufficient.

The Geopolitics and Ideology behind Iranian and Turkish Opposition to the Israel-UAE Deal

By Behnam Ben Taleblu & Aykan Erdemir

thehill.com

August 21, 2020

One of many "tectonic shifts."

"The bowl that's hotter than the soup" is a popular Persian expression describing a person more invested in others' affairs than a source of authority on those affairs. It is also a fitting idiom for today's Middle East, particularly Turkey and Iran, which are two majority Muslim but non-Arab powers that strongly condemned the latest iteration of Arab-Israeli peace: a U.S.-brokered agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

What makes their condemnation ironic, is that while in 2020 the UAE became the third Arab country to recognize Israel — after Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) — Turkey and Iran were, long ago, the first (1949) and second (1950) majority Muslim nations, respectively, to establish relations with the Jewish state. Ankara's convergence with Tehran, both in terms of policy and rhetoric, is a reflection of the tectonic shifts that are reconfiguring alliances in the broader Middle East by bringing Israel and select Arab states closer together.

Although Turkey and Iran have competed over regional hegemony for centuries, more recently, they have exhibited a willingness to "compartmentalize" their rivalry and make the most of any tactical convergence — be it

through sanctions-busting or anti-Kurdish policies, for example. The engine behind this convergence has been the same: Islamist state capture, first via a popular revolution in Iran (1979) and then using the ballot box in Turkey (2002). Its results have led to a more robust assault against the U.S.-led world order, as well as a nosedive in relations with Israel and other U.S. partners in the Middle East. The ascendancy of political Islam in Iran and Turkey also helps explain why their leaders champion rivals to the United States and its regional partners, and in effect, style themselves as "supporters" of the Palestinian and other rejectionist causes.

On cue, Iranian officials framed the agreement as "a betrayal to the Islamic Ummah [nation]," and as a "treacherous action." But while military support for Palestinian rejectionist groups animates political elites, it appears to have little support among the population. Slogans from protests dating back to 2009 (and until present) reveal a desire for a foreign policy less obsessed with Israel and a government more attentive to domestic needs. A 36-year-old Iranian single-mother whom Reuters recently quoted best encapsulates this sentiment: "I don't

care about the Palestinian cause, I don't care about regional politics. I care about my family," she said.

Such sentiment matters not, though, for the Kayhan newspaper, whose editor-in-chief is reportedly a confidant of Iran's Supreme Leader and a cheerleader for hardline policies. In response to the deal, Kayhan's front-page headline claimed that the UAE was now, "a legitimate target for the Resistance." Further elaborating that this was the third Arab "betrayal" of the Palestinians (noting Egypt and Jordan's accords with Israel), Kayhan worryingly noted that the Emirates was the "first Arab state in the Persian Gulf area" to make peace.

Iran has always seen the UAE and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as jurisdictions ripe for hedging against America. For instance, despite the centrality of the Gulf to Washington's maximum pressure campaign, Tehran continued to use front companies located in the Emirates to help bust sanctions, sometimes even openly, as in the case of petrochemical sales. Another example was the escalation on full display last summer by Iran, first in the maritime domain, and then against a U.S. drone. The recipient of these signals? The UAE, which as noted in *The Washington Post*, despite being called "little Sparta," was withdrawing troops in Yemen (where Iran-backed Houthis are fighting) and commencing a maritime security dialogue with Tehran. The cherry on the sundae was Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's use of an Arabic proverb at the UN General Assembly last year to warn the GCC against seeking external security guarantees.

Seen in this light, the peace agreement reads as a failure of Iran's intimidation policy. Nevertheless, the regime is doubling down. Its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has warned of "a dangerous future for... the residents of the glass palace," alluding to Emirati security as fragile, while a hardline clerical association cautioned that the UAE would bear the "cost" of this move. Tehran has not been afraid to back these words with deeds, and recently detained a UAE vessel.

For Ankara's part, their foreign ministry issued a statement condemning the deal, using a tone reminiscent of the Islamic Republic. Ankara accused the UAE of attempting "to present its betrayal to the Palestinian cause as an act of altruism" and vowed, "The history and the

Israel Should Use Information Warfare against Hizballah

By Nitsana Darshan-Leitner

israelhayom.com

A crippling blow without firing a single bullet.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, the man who has turned psychological warfare into an art form, is facing perhaps his darkest hour in the wake of the massive explosion that decimated the Port of Beirut on Aug. 4. But that is still not enough to spell his downfall.

At this point, Israel should deviate from its policy of not intervening in the waves of unrest rattling the Arab world and it should make public – to the world in general but particularly to the Lebanese people – intelligence it has about additional Hezbollah weapons depots hidden under residential neighborhoods, mosques, schools, and the

conscience of the people in the region will never forget or forgive this hypocritical act." Three days later Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced his intention of "suspending diplomatic ties with the Abu Dhabi leadership or pulling back our ambassador."

Although the Palestinian cause was central to the Turkish government's rhetoric, Ankara's reaction to the UAE has more to do with Erdogan's deepening rivalry with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ), who has emerged as the leader of the anti-Muslim Brotherhood camp in the region. A columnist in Turkey's pro-government *Daily Sabah* claimed that Abu Dhabi's "decision to normalize relations with Israel is not directed at Iran" but stems from the UAE's desire "to build a concrete axis against Turkey and Qatar."

Indeed, Erdogan, who acts as the leading patron of the Muslim Brotherhood globally, sees MBZ as the key culprit for the Brotherhood's reversal of fortunes across the Arab world. Turkey's Islamists believe that an MBZ-led alliance in the Gulf has been behind all calamities befalling Turkey from the failed coup attempt in 2016 and the devaluation of the Turkish currency to the armed insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Analysts have often pointed a finger to political Islam as a culprit for the lack of relations between Israel and majority Muslim states. Ironically, the respective Islamist ambitions of majority-Sunni Turkey and majority-Shiite Iran, and their growing ability to act in unison to simultaneously challenge the U.S.-led world order, traditional Arab monarchies, and Israel, has complicated that analysis.

It is true that the promise of win-win relations in business, technology, intelligence, and security continues to pull Israel and Arab states towards one another. But the push factor from Islamists in Ankara and Tehran appear to have been the magic touch with the UAE — and possibly others waiting to happen.

Mr. Ben Taleblu is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) think-tank in Washington, D.C., where Mr. Erdemir, a former Turkish Parliamentarian, is the senior director of the Turkey program.

August 25, 2020

Beirut airport. Israel must urge the Lebanese people to demand the immediate expulsion of Hezbollah from their country. Otherwise, the blast that reduced the Beirut harbor into rubble is just the beginning.

Israel's intelligence capabilities can shed light on the residential areas where the Iranian-backed Shiite terrorist group has been concealing its missiles. This will also debunk Nasrallah's assertion that Hezbollah "has no weapons" stored in the Lebanese capital.

The fact of the matter is that Hezbollah has literally turned Lebanon as a whole into a powder keg, and Israeli

military intelligence can pinpoint those locations, something the Lebanese people can't do.

Hezbollah was directly involved in the explosion in Beirut. The 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate that all but wiped out the port were stored there so Hezbollah could use them in its next war with Israel. The fact that this arsenal was hidden in a civilian area and endangered the population meant nothing to Hezbollah, which is all too keen to employ the strategy of using human shields to protect its interest.

Senior Hezbollah officials know that the Israeli Air Force's moral and ethical guidelines would make it hesitate to target missile silos nestled in residential areas. They also know that the United Nations, the European Union, and the International Criminal Court in The Hague will not hesitate to accuse Israel of committing war crimes.

One must ask: Where do the UN, EU, and ICC stand on what was surely a catastrophe foretold in Beirut?

Hezbollah has been consistently involved in attempts to obtain and store ammonium nitrate for the purpose of carrying out terrorist attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets. From the 1994 terrorist attack on the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, to ammonium nitrate repositories discovered in London and Cyprus, to the Mossad intelligence agency's warnings to the German

government about three tons of ammonium nitrate hidden in a warehouse in Berlin, – information that led Germany to outlaw Hezbollah.

If anything, the UN-backed tribunal's decision on convict only one Hezbollah operatives in the 2005 assassination of beloved Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri has enhanced the Lebanese people's understanding that this is a brutal terrorist group that, despite professing to be "the defender of Lebanon," is actually hurting it.

The verdict infuriated many in Lebanon, who know that Hezbollah planned and executed Hariri's murder on the behest of Iran and Syria. The tribunal, served with thousands of documents and pieces of evidence, was wary of setting that fact in stone.

Israel must use the simmering unrest in Lebanon to deal Hezbollah a crippling blow in terms of psychological warfare. Not one bullet needs to be fired. This is also our moral duty vis-à-vis civilians being used as human shields by living in very close proximity to chemical warehouses and missile depots.

Militarily speaking, the value of the intelligence Israel holds is lower than the impact it could have on Lebanese public opinion, especially when the voices asserting that Hezbollah is dooming the Lebanese people to death and destruction are growing louder.

How Competition with the Palestinian Authority Led Hamas to Start, and End, Attacks on Israel

By Noa Shusterman & Udi Dekel

inss.org.il

August 23, 2020

Along with the terrorist group's internal politics.

With the ongoing struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic and societal consequences dominating the headlines in Israel, a public opinion survey conducted by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in August 2020 found that the public was less worried about security threats than threats to healthcare and the economy. Recently, however, the Gaza Strip has reminded Israel that the security threats still exist. The significant security escalation in the Gaza arena in recent weeks is liable to develop into a military conflict, even though neither Israel nor Hamas wants this outcome. At the same time, the parties deem it necessary to respond to each other's actions. The Israeli government and military leadership are attempting to maneuver between the need to use force to maintain deterrence against Hamas and deny the organization any achievement on the one hand, and on the other hand, the goal to achieve calm in the area bordering the Gaza Strip and improve the sense of security among the population. The only way to achieve calm is by returning to the understandings reached with Hamas in late 2019 and the principle of a large-scale easing of the closure and development of infrastructure projects for improving conditions in the Gaza Strip.

The current escalation in the Gaza arena evolved following a period of relative quiet, which included Hamas's focus on containing the coronavirus. The latest developments began on August 6, 2020, with a report of fires in the area bordering the Gaza Strip. Fragments of

incendiary balloons were found in the area, as well as an explosive balloon. The IDF responded the same night with an attack on Hamas's underground infrastructure in the northern Gaza Strip. Encouragement from Hamas, combined with reports in the Israeli media of the fear caused by the balloons and the damage caused by the fires, increased the motivation among Palestinian factions to continue such activity. The IDF responded with aerial attacks and tank fire at Hamas installations. Hamas spokesmen portrayed the incendiary and explosive balloons as a "nonviolent means of popular resistance," and claimed that the Israeli attacks were disproportionate and part of Israeli aggression. Hamas is therefore allowing smaller factions that it operates under the Joint Armed Factions Committee (allegedly not subject to its authority) to launch rockets against the communities near the Gaza Strip as a response to Israeli attacks, without an incriminating signature.

Hamas initiated a limited campaign and is conducting measured and calculated escalation in order to attain its goals, but is mindful to maintain intensity below the threshold that would lead to an Israeli military campaign. Hamas does not want to jeopardize the achievements of its military buildup, especially its infrastructure for manufacturing rockets, unmanned aerial vehicles, and other weapons. Hamas is therefore using rogue groups as its proxies in order to evade responsibility for this activity. Israel also prefers to postpone a military operation, and has attacked Hamas military infrastructure targets in

response, taking care not to cause fatalities. At the same time, Israel has imposed restrictions on the Gaza Strip, including the closing of the Kerem Shalom border crossing, except for the entry of humanitarian supplies; a halt in fuel deliveries to the Gaza Strip (the availability of electricity has fallen from 10-12 hours a day to only four hours, while the summer heat exacerbates the problems caused by prolonged power outages); and cancellation of fishing areas.

Causes of the Escalation

The global focus on halting the spread of the coronavirus, including in Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the Gaza Strip - which the Hamas government sealed off almost completely to the entry of people from outside - arrested any progress in projects designed to improve living conditions in the Gaza Strip. Hamas believed that it contained the spread of the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip, but in the absence of any substantial improvement in civilian infrastructure, it concluded that applying measured pressure on Israel and the relevant international agencies is the only way to resume progress on the long-term projects that were agreed on, including construction of a desalination facility and industrial zones. The Hamas leadership is worried about the economic deterioration in the Gaza Strip, which was aggravated by the pandemic, and about soaring unemployment. Hamas believes that Israel is deliberately procrastinating as to fulfillment of its obligations and seeking to ignite a wave of protest in the Gaza Strip against the Hamas rule. Hamas, therefore, is demanding immediate and substantive relief in the closure and improvement in civilian lives. It aims to engage the IDF with a limited level of friction along the Gaza Strip border in order to let off steam, mainly among unemployed young people, by directing their rage and frustration against Israel.

At the same time, the Hamas leadership believes that the time is ripe to strengthen its status internally, following the developments in the Israeli-Palestinian arena in recent months: President Trump's plan (which has not yet been taken off the agenda); the planned Israeli annexation of territory in the West Bank (which according to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is only suspended, and remains relevant); and the normalization agreement between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel. Hamas's guiding strategic goal is to make it clear that PA President Mahmoud Abbas's political platform has failed, and that the challenging Israel with resistance led by Hamas is what will score points for the Palestinian people. Gaining achievements by escalation on the Gaza Strip front is Hamas's way of making this point.

In Hamas's view, as time passes without achievements, the organization loses its relevance, and its status and governmental stability are undermined. An unrealized achievement was the initiative of the Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar: a limited deal for the release of Palestinian prisoners (mainly older people) in exchange for

information about Israeli prisoners and kidnapped soldiers held by Hamas, as a preliminary step on the way to a large-scale deal. The initiative failed because of unbridgeable differences between the two sides and the political crisis in Israel, which made it difficult to reach decisions in the matter.

Another problem worrying Hamas is the expiration of Qatar's commitment to transfer funds to the Gaza Strip. In the past, controlled escalation against Israel has proven to be an effective means to pressure Israel to persuade Qatar to extend its commitment. On August 16, 2020, Qatar announced that it would extend the grant to the end of the year, and perhaps even longer. Nonetheless, Hamas is not satisfied with the humanitarian package, and is demanding the extension and enlargement of the package beyond aid for the Gaza population, so that development of the infrastructure projects in the Gaza Strip can be expedited and the Hamas rule can be consolidated.

Sinwar's assertive and aggressive actions and willingness to go to the edge of war can also be attributed to the internal elections process in Hamas scheduled for the end of the year, and the need to fortify his status as leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Sinwar is in dire need to showcase his achievements.

The Permanent Intermediary

Similar to previous events, the mediators between Israel and Hamas are Egypt and Qatar. In mid-August, an Egyptian mediation delegation visited Ramallah, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Egyptian and Palestinian sources reported that Hamas demanded the following concessions in exchange for calm: (1) the opening of the Kerem Shalom border crossing continuously, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and an increase in the number of trucks and dual-use materials allowed into the Gaza Strip; (2) an increase in the number of permits to enter Israel for trade-related activity; (3) expansion of the permits for Gaza's imports and exports; (4) extension of the fishing zone to 20 nautical miles; (5) progress in water infrastructure projects and construction of Power Line 161 from Israel to the Gaza Strip, which is designed to increase power capacity in the Gaza Strip by 30 percent; (6) progress in employment projects for academics and workers in the Gaza Strip; (7) an increase in the Qatari grant and doubling the number of people eligible for support. At the same time sources close to Hamas confirmed that the organization would be willing to compromise on some of its demands, realizing that it is unrealistic to expect that all would be met. Israel warned Hamas that a resumption of the Israeli policy of targeted killings of the organization's leaders responsible for fanning escalation was possible.

On August 19, Minister of Defense Benny Gantz met in central Israel with heads of local authorities from southern Israel. He stated that Israel "had changed the equation" in the Gaza Strip, and that it would respond to any violation of its sovereignty. Moreover, "we don't just know how to strike buildings and targets, but also those

operating within them. The State of Israel has no interest in the Gaza Strip besides the return of the boys [two soldiers' remains and two captive citizens] and complete quiet." If these objectives are attained, he added, "we can develop Gaza."

Conclusion and Recommendations

Hamas does not accept the equation cited by Benny Gantz; it demands substantive easing of the closure and progress in infrastructure projects, with a subsequent end to provocative aggression in areas bordering the Gaza Strip. Hamas can therefore be expected to continue launching incendiary balloons, using sporadic rocket fire, and dispatching squads to arouse disturbances at the border fence, unless a real chance emerges of improving the situation in the Gaza Strip.

The current government in Israel is busy with internal problems and the effect of the pandemic, which renders it incapable of devoting time to address the Gaza Strip problem in full. Furthermore, there is no readily available option that can solve the problem, even if pursued with determination. The strategy guiding Israel's handling of the Gaza Strip is to treat it as a chronic illness requiring a pain reliever from time to time. For Israel, Hamas bears sole responsibility for what happens in the Gaza Strip. Even though there are no direct contacts with the organization, in effect it is a partner for arranging "understandings," not "agreements," through mediators. Israel is managing the conflict with Hamas in an effort to gain time, in the hope that something will change in the future. In practice, Israel is recycling what was agreed on in previous rounds of fighting, while sharing the burden with other players (Egypt, Qatar, and the UN). As of now, Israel has no creative cards, although it might dabble with the idea of enlisting help from its new friend, UAE, in an investment of resources in improving living conditions in the Gaza Strip, possibly at the expense of Qatar's involvement,

which is extremely bothersome to the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

The current escalatory dynamic in the Gaza arena is likely leading toward limited combat activity, and later even to a large-scale military operation, unless the two sides are able to reach a compromise. In order to put a stop to the escalation process, there seems to be no alternative to a return to implementation of the understandings in the arrangement reached in December 2019 with UN intervention – a major relaxation of the closure and progress with essential civilian infrastructure projects in the Gaza Strip.

However, with the discovery of multiple cases of Covid-19 inside the Gaza Strip, Hamas has lost a major playing card and cannot hold out under Israel's sanctions for much longer. When the escalation first ignited, Hamas leaders believed they had an advantage - Israel was beset by a government crisis and the number of coronavirus cases did not seem to be declining. Hamas reasoned that it can continue escalating until it reaches its desired achievements, as Israel will eventually compromise. Currently, as the number of cases in Gaza is spiking and seems to be quickly getting out of hand, Hamas is pressured by the civilian demand to resume the regular supply of fuel and products. Although under these new circumstances the equation seems bent against Hamas, the organization is unlikely to retreat fully without some achievements, and it will continue its activities, albeit on lower flames and with extra caution to avoid an Israeli military campaign. Nevertheless, its willingness to compromise has increased. Israel can, as an act of goodwill, expand its medical and humanitarian aid to the Gaza population, in the realization that without improvement of the domestic plight and what appears as gains for Hamas at Israel's expense, the organization will continue the current escalation. This story is the same tale as what was previously told.

At the UN, Europe Sided with Iran against the United States

By Bobby Ghosh

Tyrants the world over rejoice.

Like a schoolyard bully faced down by those he used to torment, Mike Pompeo went into a sulk. The Secretary of State said America's European allies "chose to side with the ayatollahs" by rejecting his attempt to force the reimposition — or "snapback" — of United Nations sanctions on Iran.

Pompeo's petulance didn't end there. Germany, France and Britain had put their own citizens at risk, he said. But the U.S. wouldn't "join in this failure of leadership," he added. "America will not appease, America will lead." It was the diplomatic equivalent of the defeated bully shaking his fists and vowing, "I'll show you all."

The failure of leadership is mostly American. The Trump administration's double humiliation in the UN — Thursday's snub from the Europeans came only days after

bloomberg.com

August 21, 2020

the failure to extend an arms embargo on the Islamic Republic — was, as I have argued, mostly self-inflicted.

It was also entirely predictable: The European signatories of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran had made it clear months ago that they would not support an American attempt to invoke the snapback of sanctions. They claimed this was because the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran outweighed all other considerations, including Pompeo's crude effort at blackmail, the threat of a 25% tariff on European automobiles.

But the Europeans have failed, too. For all the schadenfreude in Berlin, Paris and London this weekend, they chose the greater of two evils in siding with the Iranian bully over the American one.

Germany, France and Britain, known collectively as E3, said in a statement they were "preserving the processes and institutions which constitute the foundation of

multilateralism.” That is to miss the wood for the trees. The institutions they claim to be defending are meant to make the world a safer place. Yet despite concurring that giving Iran access to more sophisticated weapons will make the world less safe, the E3 in effect voted to do just that.

This could have gone another way. The Europeans might have thrown their weight behind the American proposal to extend the arms embargo. At the very least, they might have dragged out the snapback discussion, letting the theocrats in Tehran sweat a little. The Trump administration may not value the symbolic power of a united Western front against tyranny, but the E3 should.

Instead, in their haste to punish Trump’s reckless disregard for international norms, they have recklessly disregarded the wellbeing of tens of millions in the Middle East for whom the Islamic Republic represents a clear and constant danger. Iranians, the regime’s longest-suffering victims, make up the largest proportion of those millions. Their Arab neighbors, from Syria and Iraq to those on the opposite shore of the Persian Gulf, are more menaced today than they were yesterday.

The E3 decision will comfort not only Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, but also his many agents of

Called Sacrilegious & Unpatriotic by Detractors, Popular Israeli Comedy Offers Loving, if Biting, Satire

By Lazar Berman

blogs.timesofisrael.com

August 21, 2020

The Jews Are Coming.

Hundreds of Israelis took to the streets this week to protest the satirical Israeli TV show “The Jews are Coming” — or “HaYehudim Baim” — calling it “blasphemous” for its humorous depiction of famous figures from the Bible and Jewish history. The demonstration came on the heels of calls by parliamentarians to open investigations into the show for harming “sensibilities of millions in Israel, Jews and non-Jews, religious and secular,” in the words of Shas MK Moshe Arbel. “It is appropriate that the serious damage to the religious feelings of the masses, funded by the Israeli public, cease,” he continued.

It seems that the protests and sympathetic journalists are starting to have some effect. Education Minister Yoav Gallant on Thursday ordered the ministry to remove clips of the show from its website.

As a religious and Zionist Jew, it is troubling to see members of my community and prominent political personalities so grossly misrepresent the essence of Israeli democracy, the program itself, and our shared religion they have taken it upon themselves to defend from television satire.

The utter inappropriateness of calls for investigations into artistic expression within a democracy is patently obvious to most Israelis. If freedom of speech means anything in this country, it must extend to creators and artists, who will sometimes say things that some Israelis object to. No segment of the public can demand that artists self-censor, if freedom of expression exists. That

mayhem: the dictator Bashar al-Assad, Hezbollah’s Hassan Nasrallah, the leaders of Hamas, the commanders of Shiite militias in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen. In turn, Arab rulers will use the Iranian bogeyman, now more frightening, to reinforce their autocratic regimes.

Perhaps Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Boris Johnson will be abashed by the toasts raised in their direction by this gang of mass murderers, who can now look forward to more money and weapons from Tehran. They may also want to duck the shameful pats on the back from Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, who can look forward to selling Iran jet fighters, tanks and missiles. Of course, such pangs of European conscience may well be assuaged by the prospect of billions of dollars in business deals with the Islamic Republic.

The E3 may yet discover that the bully they bested at the UN has some punches left to land. The threat of American unilateral sanctions will deny the Europeans any remuneration for selling out the millions menaced by Iran. The E3 must now hope Trump loses on Nov. 3, and that a Biden administration looks more kindly on their eagerness to trade with the theocrats in Tehran. Until then, schadenfreude will have to suffice.

same freedom allows the protesters to legally gather and express their displeasure, misguided though they may be.

The extent to which the protesters totally misunderstand the show itself might be less obvious to some. Sympathetic writers and politicians — some of whom have not even seen the show, I’m sure — describe a mean-spirited program whose goal is to insult religious Jews and their faith.

Nothing could be further from the truth. First of all, “The Jews Are Coming” aims at much more than just biblical stories. It portrays characters from Jewish history in Israel and the Diaspora, key episodes in the pre-State era, and memorable, even painful, chapters in Israel’s history. It comments on the giants, the stories, and national myths of the collective memory of Israeli Jews, religious and secular. The show is created entirely for the audience at which it takes aim. It is a real and enjoyable conversation within the family. Only those who are steeped in Tanach and Jewish history will appreciate the sophistication of the sketches; it is hard to imagine someone who is not both Jewish and Israeli gaining anything beyond a shallow understanding of most of the episodes.

This is not the nasty work of anti-religious secularists. The script and acting show a love for the details of the stories, the nuances of the characters, and yes, the humorous and even uncomfortable aspects of the tales our people has preserved through the generations.

makes it so popular. Through the vehicle of Jewish history, “The Jews Are Coming” makes profound statements about contemporary Israeli society and politics.

Does anything think the sketch about Deborah trying to prophesy to the people — only to have them grill her about her personal life and her choice not to have children — is about anything other than women in today's workplaces in Israel? And when the strangers' criticism turns to her failure to produce for the security of the state — “There's the demographic threat, don't forget.” “Right, the Jebusites and Girgashites are multiplying like rabbits.” — everyone knows who the Jebusites and Girgashites represent. The sketch about King David raising taxes so he could build a golden diving board from which to urinate on the adoring public — who are desperate to feel even a single drop — is a statement about Israel's current leadership.

Through this method, the show is able to at times to make us laugh, at other times to make us uncomfortable as it forces us to confront the difficult episodes in Israel's past. It was hard to watch the first “meeting” of the Ministry of Aliyah and Absorption, as the (extremely) Ashkenazi officials tried to figure out why the minister proposed bringing the Jews of North Africa to Israel, until one thought she finally understood the plan: “I actually think its a great idea...We will travel to Africa. We will bring all the Jews here in boats. And then we will let them work in the cotton fields.” Another official objects that its not their place to tell the Jews of Africa what to do once they arrive. “We'll let their owners decide,” he offers proudly. The episode makes the viewer squirm, as it uses exaggeration to force him to reflect on the very real racism Mizrahi Jews faced when they arrived to Israel. “The Jews are Coming” returns to this issue repeatedly, and is able to speak to us in ways that only satire can.

And the show manages to poke Israeli Jews right in the eye as it deals with other important issues in a similar fashion. Jewish passersby who burn Maimonides's landmark work *The Guide for the Perplexed* because it is a “blasphemous book” for proposing a synthesis of Greek and Jewish philosophy are obvious stand-ins for closed-minded segments of contemporary Israeli society (the ones who do things like calling for satirical TV shows to be investigated, let's say). The useless and casually cruel Kohanim characters of the Second Temple are explicitly used to criticize the Israeli Rabbinate.

Some might assume that the show unfairly targets the Israeli Right, but it hits left-wing Israel just as hard. The sketch featuring Jews from the tribe of Dan who moved to the rural north and their tribesmen visiting from the center of the country mocks conversations we've all heard between secular Israelis from Tel Aviv and their friends who tried to get away from it all by fleeing to the Galilee. The national heroes of the Israeli left — including Ben-Gurion, Peres, and Rabin — are all fair game in the show.

“The Jews are Coming” even manages to elicit profound sadness. A sketch about Yaffa Yarkoni, a singer identified with the wars of Israel's first decades, trying to sing children's songs, but inevitably finding herself singing

about death and bloodshed, drives home our inability to get beyond the traumas of our founding. Episodes about German Jews voting for Hitler because he is both a patriot and an author — and worst case, if he's no good they can just replace him in four years — succeeds in both evoking the tragedy of the Jews of Europe and criticizing the careless attitude toward our own democracy today.

And of course, there is the deeply touching sketch about Druze Border Policeman Madhat Yousef, who slowly bled to death during a Palestinian attack on Joseph's Tomb in October 2000, while the Israeli chain of command simply relied on the Palestinian Authority to evacuate him. The episode begins with the ghost of flamboyant and arrogant Joseph emerging and being his flamboyant and arrogant self. As Yousef begins to drift out of consciousness while he waits for his “brothers” from his company to come save him, Joseph's softer side emerges. The ghost of Joseph — or is he just Yousef's consciousness trying to tell him what he doesn't want to see? — holds the dying soldier, and tries to give the naive Yousef a hard reality check about being abandoned by ones brothers. In the end, Yousef holds on to his heartbreakingly innocent belief that he will be saved by his Jewish comrades as he dies alone, his head resting on the mirage of a character who knows all too well what it is like to be betrayed by one's own brothers.

This extremely sophisticated artistic treatment of a difficult episode in our recent past forces us to re-examine the IDF ethos of leaving no soldiers behind, and the blood pact between Jews and Druze in Israel.

Finally, the protesters' objection to the show pointing out the flaws of biblical heroes flies in the face of the Jewish approach to the great figures of the Tanach. The Torah is quite explicit about the flaws of our forefathers. Abraham sent his own son off to die in the desert and was ready to kill his other son. Jacob deceived his own blind father and stole his brother's blessings, then endangered his son Joseph by showing clear favoritism. Moses neglected to circumcise his son and later hit the rock, Aaron oversaw the building of the Golden Calf, and Miriam mocked Moses behind his back. David — among his myriad sins — joined the Philistines against his own people, murdered Saul's sons, and sent a husband to his death to steal the man's wife. We are not expected to see our heroes as flawless. Jewish tradition holds that there are only four figures in the Bible unblemished by sin — Benjamin son of Jacob, Amram father of Moses, Yishai father of David, and Kil'av son of David. These relatively minor characters are described in the Gemara by their relationship to their more consequential relatives to emphasize that in order to be a significant figure in the Jewish story, you must have the will and the capacity to sin. It is actually Christians who see their most important biblical characters as flawless and without sin.

If the Torah did not want us to discuss our forefathers' human flaws, it simply would not have

included them in the text.

“The Jews Are Coming” is an expression of love for our history and faith, and of concern for our state today. It does exactly what art is supposed to do — make us laugh, squirm, and cry. It leaves us uncomfortable, reflective, and sometimes even angry. It is Israeli Jews speaking to other

The F-35 Tempest in a Teapot

By Ariel Kahana

What’s the current fuss about?

In an attempt to spoil the celebrations about peace with the United Arab Emirates, opponents of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made up a new story last week, and are claiming that Bibi has given the Americans a nod to sell F-35 fighter jets to the UAE. In effect, we are to understand, he hasn't secured any historic achievement, but once again sold off Israel's security.

Well, you can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.

Let's start with a little background. The American weapons industry is one of the strongest, richest, and most powerful lobbies in the world. It is so strong that American administrations are afraid of it, and cover up its failures. Because it is so critical to the US economy, presidents and legislators have always helped sell advanced weaponry to the world, including Arab countries. Israel has objected, to no avail.

In 1980, for example, the US sold Egypt the F-16 fighter jet, the most advanced in the world at the time. Egypt was our biggest enemy. Only seven years earlier, in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, it had done serious damage to our air force. Israel had signed a peace treaty with Egypt only a year before the sale, and it hadn't even been implemented. Still, it was clear to leaders in Israel and Washington that the risk – which was much greater than the case of the UAE – was worth it. So what is all the current fuss about?

Let's move on. Saudi Arabia, which is even closer geographically to Israel than the UAE is, has been operating F-15s for 40 years already, even though the Saudis led the vanguard of hatred for Israel in the Arab world. Israel knew about those planes and ignored them because there was nothing to be done. None of the people clutching their pearls now expressed any worry about the Saudi planes back then.

Again, in the 1980s, the US sold Saudi Arabia its AWACS early warning aircraft. With our supporters in Washington, Israel campaigned to stop the deal but failed miserably. Not only did the Saudis receive the aircraft, which controls the skies of the Middle East, but Israel – who had also requested it – was turned down. Where were commentators Nahum Barnea and Amnon Abramovich?

And now we arrive at the present day. While it was still in the design stage, the US intends to export the F-35

Israeli Jews about our national traumas, our hopes, and our illusions.

I can think of some in my community who would do well to watch a few episodes.

Mr. Berman, a former Times of Israel journalist, holds a Masters degree in Security Studies from Georgetown University.

israelhayom.com

August 24, 2020

around the world. Thus far, it has been sold to many of the US's friends, such as Turkey. It was former President Barack Obama who approved the sale of the little stealth fighter to the sultan. President Trump, who along with Netanyahu is being accused of being so greedy that he is willing to sell off Israel's security, stopped continued sales of the F-35 to Turkey. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was also buying S-400 missiles from Russia. We're lucky that only four of the F-35s out of the planned 120 were actually delivered to Turkey.

The fuss over the sale of the planes to the UAE? The bottom line is that the US hasn't even decided whether or not to sell the advanced aircraft to the Emiratis, so any claims that the deal was "shady" are debunked. Second, even if the UAE eventually gets the sought-after stealth fighter, it won't set any precedent. Worse enemies of Israel, who lie closer to our borders, have received more advanced aircraft, and no one here was affected. Therefore, we should keep things in proportion this time as well.

Third, the evidence dispels any base for claims about "stealth fighters in exchange for peace." Prime Minister Netanyahu had made public all the steps he and his people took to oppose the sale of this aircraft to the UAE. They still object to it. Moreover, a conversation between the head of Israel's National Security Council and the commander of the Israeli Air Force about the possibility that the Emiratis might purchase the F-35 took place before any possibility of a peace deal with the UAE was even on the table. Meir Ben-Shabbat spoke with Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin on June 2, and the "sovereignty in exchange for peace" deal was presented to the Emirati envoy only 10 days later, on June 12.

Later, at the end of June, White House envoy Avi Berkowitz visited Israel to look into what could be done about the matter of Israel applying sovereignty to settlements in Judea and Samaria. In other words, when Netanyahu supposedly dispatched Ben-Shabbat to "send out feelers" with the head of the air force, none of this was happening yet. So we have multiple layers of falsehood.

There is no deal for the US to sell the Emiratis the F-35. If one is reached, it will have nothing to do with Israel, and in any case, it would present little risk in comparison to the deals of the past. So we can turn off the alarm.

**Current issue also available at suburbanorthodox.org.
If you see something, send something –editor**