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Who Is Right?

Trump and the Kurds in Syria

Caroline B. Glick

The near consensus view of President Donald Trump's decision to remove US special forces from the Syrian border with Turkey is that Trump is enabling a Turkish invasion and double crossing the Syrian Kurds who have fought with the Americans for five years against ISIS. Trump's move, the thinking goes, harms US credibility and undermines US power in the region and throughout the world.

There are several problems with this narrative. The first is that it assumes that until this week, the US had power and influence in Syria when in fact, by design, the US went to great lengths to limit its ability to influence events in Syria.

The war in Syria broke out in 2011 as a popular insurrection by Syrian Sunnis against the Iranian-sponsored regime of President Bashar al Assad. The Obama administration responded by declaring US support for Assad's overthrow. But the declaration was empty. The administration sat on its thumbs as the regime's atrocities mounted. They supported a feckless Turkish effort to raise a resistance army dominated by jihadist elements aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Obama infamously issued his "redline" regarding the use of chemical weapons against civilians by Assad, which he repudiated the moment it was crossed.

As ISIS forces gathered in Iraq and Syria, Obama shrugged them off as a "jayvee squad." When the jayvees in ISIS took over a third of Iraqi and Syrian territory, Obama did nothing.

As Lee Smith recalled in January in the New York Post, Obama only decided to do something about ISIS in late 2014 after the group beheaded a number of American journalists and posted their decapitations on social media.

The timing was problematic for Obama.

In 2014 Obama was negotiating his nuclear deal with Iran. The deal, falsely presented as a non-proliferation pact, actually enabled Iran -- the world's greatest state sponsor of terrorism -- to develop both nuclear weapons and the missile systems required to deliver them. The true purpose of the deal was not to block Iran's nuclear aspirations but to realign US Middle East policy away from the Sunnis and Israel and towards Iran.

Given its goal of embracing Iran, the Obama administration had no interest in harming Assad, Iran's Syrian factotum. It had no interest in blocking Iran's ally Russia from using the war in Syria as a means to reassert Moscow's power in the Middle East.

As both Michael Doran, a former national security advisor in the George W. Bush administration and Smith argue, when Obama was finally compelled to act against ISIS, he structured the US campaign in a manner than would align it with Iran's interests.

Obama's decided to work with the Kurdish-YPG militia in northern Syria because it was the only significant armed force outside the Iranian axis that enjoyed congenial relations with both Assad and Iran.

Obama deployed around a thousand forces to Syria. Their limited numbers and radically constrained mandate made it impossible for the Americans to have a major effect on events in the country. They weren't allowed to act against Assad or Iran. They were tasked solely with fighting ISIS. Obama instituted draconian rules of engagement that made achieving even that limited goal all but impossible.

During his tenure as Trump's national security advisor John Bolton hoped to revise the US mandate to enable US forces to be used against Iran in Syria. Bolton's plan was strategically sound. Trump rejected it largely because it was a recipe for

widening US involvement in Syria far beyond what the American public -- and Trump himself -- are willing to countenance.

In other words, the claim that the US has major influence in Syria is wrong. It does not have such influence and is unwilling to pay the price of developing such influence.

This brings us to the second flaw in the narrative about Trump's removal of US forces from the Syrian border with Turkey. The underlying assumption of the criticism is that America has an interest in confronting Turkey to protect the Kurds.

This misconception, like the misconception regarding US power and influence in Syria, is borne of a misunderstanding of Obama's Middle East policies. Aside from ISIS's direct victims, the major casualty of Obama's deliberately feckless anti-ISIS campaign was the US alliance with Turkey. Whereas the US chose to work with the Kurds because they were supportive of Assad and Iran, the Turks view the Syrian Kurdish YPG as a sister militia to the Turkish PKK. The Marxist PKK has been fighting a guerilla war against Turkey for decades. The State Department designates the PKK as a terrorist organization responsible for the death of thousands of Turkish nationals. Not surprisingly then, the Turks viewed the US-Kurdish collaboration against ISIS as an anti-Turkish campaign.

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Throughout the years of US-Kurdish cooperation, many have made the case that the Kurds are a better ally to the US than Turkey. The case is compelling not merely because the Kurds have fought well.

Under Erdogan, Turkey has stood against the US and its interests far more often than it has stood with it. Across a spectrum of issues, from Israel to human rights, Hamas and ISIS to Turkish aggression against Cyprus, Greece and Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean, to upholding US economic sanctions against Iran and beyond, for nearly twenty years, Erdogan's Turkey has distinguished itself as a strategic threat to America's core interests and policies and those of its closest allies in the Middle East.

Despite the compelling, ever growing body of evidence that the time has come to reassess US-Turkish ties, the Pentagon refuses to engage the issue. The Pentagon has rejected the suggestion that the US remove its nuclear weapons from Incirlik air base in Turkey or diminish Incirlik's centrality to US air operations in Central Asia and the Middle East. The same is true of US dependence on Turkish naval bases.

Given the Pentagon's position, there is no chance that US would consider entering an armed conflict with Turkey on behalf of the Kurds.

The Kurds are a tragic people. The Kurds, who live as persecuted minorities in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran have been denied the right of self-determination for the past hundred years. But then, the Kurds have squandered every opportunity they have had to assert independence. The closest they came to achieving self-determination was in Iraq in 2017. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurds have governed themselves effectively since 1992. In 2017, they overwhelmingly passed a referendum calling for Iraqi Kurdistan to secede from Iraq and form an independent state. Instead of joining forces to achieve their long-held dream, the Kurdish leaders in Iraq worked against one another. One faction, in alliance with Iran, blocked implementation of the referendum and then did nothing as Kurdish-controlled Kirkuk was overrun by Iraqi government forces.

The Kurds in Iraq are far more capable of defending

themselves than the Kurds of Syria. Taking on the defense of Syria's Kurds would commit the US to an open-ended presence in Syria and justify Turkish antagonism. America's interests would not be advanced. They would be harmed, particularly in light of the YPG's selling trait for Obama -- its warm ties to Assad and Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The hard truth is that the fifty US soldiers along the Syrian-Turkish border were a fake trip wire. Neither Trump nor the US military had any intention of sacrificing US forces to either block a Turkish invasion of Syria or foment deeper US involvement in the event of a Turkish invasion.

Apparently in the course of his phone call with Trump on Sunday, Erdogan called Trump's bluff. Trump's announcement following the call made clear that the US would not sacrifice its soldiers to stop Erdogan's planned invasion of the border zone.

But Trump also made clear that the US did not support the Turkish move. In subsequent statements, Trump repeatedly pledged to destroy the Turkish economy if Turkey commits atrocities against the Kurds.

If the Pentagon can be brought on board, Trump's threats can easily be used as a means to formally diminish the long hollow US alliance with Turkey.

Here it is critical to note that Trump did not remove US forces from Syria. They are still deployed along the border crossing between Jordan, Iraq and Syria to block Iran from moving forces and materiel to Syria and Lebanon. They are still blocking Russian and Syrian forces from taking over the oil fields along the eastern bank of the Euphrates. Aside from defeating ISIS, these missions are the principle strategic achievements of the US forces in Syria. For now, they are being maintained. Will Turkey's invasion enable ISIS to reassert itself in Syria and beyond? Perhaps. But here too, as Trump made clear this week, it is not America's job to serve as the permanent jailor of ISIS. European forces are just as capable of serving as guards as Americans are. America's role is not to stay in Syria forever. It is to beat down threats to US and world security as they emerge and then let others -- Turks, Kurds, Europeans, Russians, UN peacekeepers -- maintain the new, safer status quo.

The final assumption of the narrative regarding Trump's moves in Syria is that by moving its forces away from the border ahead of the Turkish invasion, Trump harmed regional stability and America's reputation as a trustworthy ally.

On the latter issue, Trump has spent the better part of his term in office rebuilding America's credibility as an ally after Obama effectively abandoned the Sunnis and Israel in favor of Iran. To the extent that Trump has harmed US credibility, he didn't do it in Syria this week by rejecting war with Turkey. He did it last month by failing to retaliate militarily against Iran's brazen military attack on Saudi Arabia's oil installations. Whereas the US has no commitment to protect the Kurds, the US's central commitment in the Middle East for the past 70 years has been the protection of Saudi oil installations and maintaining the safety of maritime routes in and around the Persian Gulf.

The best move Trump can make now in light of the fake narrative of his treachery towards the Kurds is to finally retaliate against Iran. A well-conceived, and limited US strike against Iranian missile and drone installations would restore America's posture as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf and prevent the further destabilization of the Saudi regime and the backsliding of the UAE towards Iran.

As for Syria, it is impossible to know what the future holds for the Kurds, the Turks, the Iranians, Assad or anyone else. But what is clear enough is that Trump avoided war with Turkey this week. And he began extracting America from an open-ended commitment to the Kurds it never made and never intended to fulfill.

A Dismal Outcome

Seth Frantzman

Recent U.S. policy in Syria, from the moment that former U.S. ambassador Robert Ford showed support for Syrian protesters in 2011, has been one of good intentions that were mismanaged through conflicting policies. This week it led to the decision to withdraw. A new crisis will unfold in eastern Syria, an area that, liberated from ISIS, has seen too much war and where the people are just beginning to reconstruct their lives.

Many are expressing feelings that the U.S. betrayed its partners, the Syrian Democratic Forces, who are mostly Kurdish. The larger context is that the U.S. has been seen as abandoning one group after another in Syria, reducing American influence in Syria and the region.

It is at least the third time that President Donald Trump has sought to leave Syria. In March 2018, he said that the U.S. was leaving "very soon." In December 2018, he wrote that the U.S. was bringing the troops home after defeating ISIS.

In fact, ISIS was not defeated on the ground until March 23, 2019, in its last pocket near the Euphrates river. ISIS sleeper cells are still active, and there are thousands of ISIS detainees in eastern Syria. However, Trump now says that Turkey or other countries will need to deal with the remnants of ISIS and the detainees in Syria.

How did the U.S. get here? In 2011, Americans were outraged by scenes of Bashar al-Assad's regime cracking down on protests. There was bipartisan support for backing the Syrian protesters and then the Syrian rebels. At the time, the Obama administration had a vast spectrum of options, from giving them anti-tank missiles to carrying out airstrikes against Assad and punishing him for using chemical weapons. But Obama walked back from his 2012 red line on the use of chemical weapons.

Washington shifted from directly opposing Assad to training and equipping Syrian rebels, a program that cost up to \$1 billion and was largely seen as a failure by 2015. By this time, the U.S. was working on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the "Iran deal," and the overthrow of Assad, who is backed by Iran, was no longer a priority. ISIS had exploited the Syrian conflict to take over a third of Syria and Iraq, controlling the lives of 12 million people and committing genocide. The U.S. began anti-ISIS operations in Syria in September 2014 and helped the Kurdish fighters in Kobane resist ISIS. From there grew a unique partnership between the U.S. and these leftist Kurdish fighters, whom Turkey accused of being linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which the U.S. views as terrorists. The U.S. supported the creation of the Syrian Democratic Forces in 2015 in eastern Syria, as a way to rebrand the Kurdish fighters and distance them from the PKK, so that Washington could train and equip them without appearing to support the party.

The Obama administration had moved from opposing Assad, to arming rebel fighters, to fighting ISIS and signing the Iran deal. At each juncture it narrowed its goals. By the time Trump was elected, the U.S. mission in eastern Syria, encapsulated in Operation Inherent Resolve, was to defeat ISIS on the ground and diplomatically oppose Assad through lip service in Geneva.

Trump vowed during his campaign to defeat ISIS, but he also wanted to show that there was a red line with respect to Assad's crimes. He ordered airstrikes against the regime in April 2017 and April 2018 but was reluctant to do more. He ended support for the rebels in July 2017, and a year later Damascus took back rebel areas that had previously enjoyed some U.S. support. By this time, Russia and Iran were deeply involved in Syria, supporting Assad, and Turkey had launched an operation in northern Syria to prevent the U.S.-backed SDF from expanding its areas of control.

At each juncture, the U.S. found its choices narrowed in Syria, and America was isolated from having a say in the future of Syria as Russia, Turkey, and Iran excluded Washington from peace discussions they held at Astana. Nevertheless, by 2018, the U.S. and its SDF partners controlled a huge area in eastern Syria. National Security Adviser John Bolton sought to push a strategy whereby America would hold on to eastern Syria until Iran left. The

goal was to roll back Iranian influence and reduce Israel's fears about Iran using Syria to attack. Bolton never got his way.

Trump's decision in December 2018 to leave Syria led to the resignation of defense secretary James Mattis and anti-ISIS envoy Brett McGurk. Bolton was gone by September 2019. Jettisoning these key officials, the White House narrowed its role in Syria even more, no longer seeing a way to use it as leverage against Iran. Since Trump didn't want to do nation-building in Syria, and wanted Europe or the Gulf states to foot the bill to keep ISIS detainees locked up, he saw the area as a sunk cost. As for Iran, he said the U.S. would use Iraq to "watch" it.

All that was left of U.S. policy in Syria was the question of what to do about the U.S. partners, the mostly Kurdish forces that had been trained and that had done a phenomenal job defeating ISIS. The problem was that Turkey, sensing that Trump wanted to leave, kept threatening to launch an invasion of eastern Syria to attack the SDF. Turkey says it will resettle 2 million Syrians, mostly Arabs from elsewhere in Syria, in the Kurdish areas of eastern Syria.

U.S. policy in Syria has been one of shutting one door after another to close off U.S. influence, at the same time that Iran, Russia, and Turkey are opening those doors to partition Syria for their own interests. The risks of U.S. withdrawal are clear. Not only will ISIS make some inroads, but Washington will lose influence in Syria, and America's image will be tarnished for appearing to abandon friends and being bullied into leaving. Iran is already calling the US an "irrelevant occupier" and saying that it's ready to help take over eastern Syria.

Unfortunately, as the U.S. seeks to narrow its footprint and get out of the nation-building-humanitarian-intervention business that was a hallmark of the 1990s and early 2000s, Washington has chosen such a narrow goal that its allies are wondering whether there is a future for the U.S. in the Middle East. The U.S. had good intentions — the road to hell is paved with them — in Syria but badly mismanaged them.

The result is that Iran, Russia, and Turkey got something and that all the U.S. got was a damaged reputation. It's a far cry from 2011 when Syrian protesters all across the country, including Kurds and Arabs, looked to Washington for leadership and support.

Seth Frantzman, a writing fellow at the Middle East Forum

Erased: Judeo-Christian Heritage

Raymond Ibrahim

The Muslim world is at war with history. It needs to be, if it hopes to change the narrative concerning how it came into being and, more importantly, how no one but Muslims has any right to any land claimed by Islam.

Most recently, the Palestinian Authority's minister of culture, 'Atif Abu Sayf, stated on official PA TV that "Our struggle is with this State [of Israel] that came out of nowhere, without a history and without geography, stole our land, and wants to put an end to our existence... There is nothing in history that proves this presence. They have not found one stone... [Israel knows] that they have no connection to this city [Jerusalem], that they have no connection to this history, and that they have no connection to the geography, just as they have no connection to the future."

Days later, in early September 2019, the minister of culture made similar assertions: "Our struggle with the occupying entity is a struggle over the narrative. We are the legal inheritors of all that is on the land... The occupier's narrative is false, and all of its attempts to find justification for its presence here have failed."

Abu Sayf's views are standard among Palestinians. As a September 15, 2019 report notes, "One of the central elements of the Palestinian narrative is the negation of the entire Jewish history in the Land of Israel in general and in Jerusalem in particular. Despite numerous sources and archeological finds proving the opposite, the Palestinian Authority regularly repeats this claim because it is the basis for the PA's denial of Israel's right to exist."

The irony is that, although Judaism has a millennia-old history and presence in Jerusalem, Muslims from

Arabia brutally conquered, colonized, and Arabized that ancient city beginning in the year 637.

This is the "philosophical" problem confronting not just Palestinians but much of the Muslim world: most of the territory Islam claims was seized from non-Muslims through violent conquest and colonization.

As such, if conquerors and their descendants base right on might—as Islam has always done—it would seem that they have few rights to claim once their might wanes. Hence the Muslim tendency to rewrite history, particularly when dealing with non-Muslims—to present themselves not as conquerors but as "rightful" claimants of this or that land.

While such revisionism is evident in the aforementioned PA quotes concerning Israel, it is especially ubiquitous in Islam's attempts to erase evidence of Christianity from the lands it conquered. This is unsurprising considering that the heart of the Muslim world—including all of North Africa (from Morocco to Egypt) and the Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Turkey, etc.)—was Christian centuries before the scimitar of Islam came.

As Dr. Hena al-Kaldani once said during a conference in Amman, Jordan, hosted by the Jerusalem Center for Political Studies: "There is a complete cancelation of Arab Christian history in the pre-Islamic era," "many historical mistakes," and "unjustifiable historic leaps in our Jordanian curriculum." "Tenth grade textbooks omit any mention of any Christian or church history in the region." Wherever Christianity is mentioned, omissions and mischaracterizations proliferate, including the portrayal of Christianity as a Western (that is, "foreign") source of colonization, said al-Kaldani.

"It's the same situation in Iraq," said Sharara Yousif Zara, a politician involved in the Iraqi Ministry of Education: "There's almost nothing about us [Christians] in our history books, and what there is, is totally wrong. There's nothing about us being here before Islam. The only Christians mentioned are from the West. Many Iraqis believe we moved here. From the West. That we are guests in this country."

"It sounds absurd, but Muslims more or less know nothing about Christians, even though they make up a large part of the population and are in fact the original Egyptians," said Kamal Mougheeth, a retired teacher in Egypt: "Egypt was Christian for six or seven centuries [before the Muslim invasion around 640]. The sad thing is that for many years the history books skipped from Cleopatra to the Muslim conquest of Egypt. The Christian era was gone. Disappeared. An enormous black hole."

This comports with what Copts have told me concerning their Egyptian classroom experiences: there was virtually no mention of Hellenism, Christianity, or the Coptic Church—one thousand years of Egypt's pre-Islamic history. History began with the pharaohs before jumping to the seventh century when Arabian Muslims "opened" Egypt to Islam. (Wherever Muslims conquer non-Muslim territories, Islamic hagiography euphemistically refers to the event as an "opening," fath, never a "conquest.")

As with its treatment of Judaism, the Muslim world's expunging of Christianity from Middle Eastern history has for generations successfully indoctrinated Muslim students to suspect and hate the Christian minorities living among them, who are presented as non-organic parasitic remnants supposedly left by Western colonialists (though as seen, Christianity precedes Islam in the region by some six centuries).

This also explains one of Islam's bitterest ironies: the ancestors of those many Muslims currently persecuting Christians throughout the Middle East—including in PA territory—were themselves persecuted Christians who over the centuries converted to Islam to end their own sufferings. In other words, Muslim descendants of persecuted Christians are today slaughtering their Christian cousins, without any clue of their common origins.

Such is the tragedy caused by Islam's rewriting of history—a rewriting that is required whenever Muslims try to portray themselves as the "rightful" claimants of this or that land.

Raymond Ibrahim, a Middle East and Islam specialist
pjmedia.com / Middle East Forum (meforum.org)

Distorting Ben-Gurion

Prof. Efraim Karsh

It is only recently that David Ben-Gurion ceased to be, for the sake of the official record books, Israel's longest-serving prime minister. That honor now belongs to Benjamin Netanyahu, even as his political future becomes ever more uncertain. Ben-Gurion's stature as Israel's founding father, however, would seem to be eminently secure, given his crucial, perhaps indispensable, role in salvaging the Jewish people from political oblivion and reinstating it in its ancestral homeland.

A host of biographies over the years—largely complimentary though by no means uncritical—have recorded the details of Ben-Gurion's busy life without diminishing his almost-mythological status. Still, a group of “revisionist” Israeli academics and journalists seem determined to tarnish his reputation as part of their decades-long project to reinterpret Israel's founding period. Tom Segev's *A State at Any Cost* is the latest such effort.

David Ben-Gurion was born in 1886 to a Zionist family in the small Polish town of Płońsk and in 1906 moved to the Ottoman district of Jerusalem (Palestine didn't exist as a unified territory at the time), where he combined political activity with work as a farmer. Deported after the outbreak of World War I alongside many Zionist leaders, Ben-Gurion spent most of the war years in New York, where he met and married his wife, before returning to Palestine at the end of the war. By then, Britain had defeated the Ottoman Empire and issued the Balfour Declaration pledging a Jewish national home in Palestine, and Ben-Gurion immersed himself in laying the groundwork to expedite this goal. In 1920, he played the key role in establishing the Histadrut—the foremost trade union in mandatory Palestine, which also oversaw the Hagana underground military organization. Ten years later, he played a similar role in the creation of Mapai, the Land of Israel Workers Party, which, in one form or another, was to dominate Zionist/Israeli politics until 1977.

In 1935 he became the head of the world Zionist movement, steering it through the tumultuous World War II years and the struggle for independence in their wake. On May 14, 1948, he proclaimed the establishment of the state of Israel, becoming its first prime minister and defense minister, posts he held until 1963 (with a brief retirement from office in 1953-55). Two years later, he established a new political party only to be defeated in the general elections. He retired from politics in 1970 and spent his last years in his modest home in a Negev kibbutz before dying on Dec. 1, 1973, at age 87.

Segev lays out some of this detail in a straightforward fashion, adding little to what has already been told by earlier biographers. But at the core of his chronicle is a desire to cast Israel's founding father as the destroyer of Palestinian Arab society—that is, as a leader deeply implicated in what Segev and his fellow revisionists see as the “original sin” of Israel's creation: the supposedly deliberate and aggressive dispossession of the Palestinian Arab population.

The lens through which Segev views his subject is generally polemical. For instance, he says that, as late as mid-1942, Ben-Gurion had yet “to internalize the unique nature of Nazi racial anti-Semitism”—though his evidence is a misleadingly brief quote from a Ben-Gurion speech in which, as any fair-minded reader would conclude, it is clear that he did fully grasp Hitler's “campaign of extermination of the whole of the Jewish people” (as Ben-Gurion put it elsewhere in the speech). But the book's main distortive effort is aimed at Ben-Gurion's ideological outlook—and, more generally, at the outlook of the Zionist movement—toward the Palestinian Arabs.

Segev traces the alleged “hope of emptying Palestine of its Arab inhabitants” to the father of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, yet bases his indictment on a single truncated quote from Herzl's June 12, 1895, diary entry, which supposedly implied this intention. But this quote, which has been a regular feature of Palestinian propaganda for decades, makes no mention of either Arabs or Palestine for the simple reason that at the time Herzl was not yet a Zionist. He didn't seek to re-establish the Jews in their ancestral homeland but to salvage European Jewry from the ravages of anti-Semitism by relocating it as far as possible from the Continent. As he recorded in his diary on June 13, 1895: “I am assuming that we shall go to Argentina. . . . [It] would

have a lot in its favor on account of its distance from militarized and seedy Europe.”

Nor did Herzl show the slightest interest in expelling the Palestinian Arabs once he dropped his Argentine ruminations and embraced the Zionist cause: not in his famous political treatise, *The Jewish State* (1896), and not in his 1902 Zionist novel *Altneuland* (Old-New Land), where he painted an idyllic picture of Arab-Jewish co-existence in a future Palestine. Nor for that matter is there any allusion to the expulsion of Arabs in Herzl's public writings, his private correspondence, or his speeches.

The truth is that, far from seeking to dispossess the Palestinian Arabs as claimed by Segev, the Zionist movement had always been amenable to the existence of a substantial Arab minority in the prospective Jewish state. No less than Ze'ev Jabotinsky, founder of the faction that was the forebear of today's Likud Party, voiced his readiness (in a famous 1923 essay) “to take an oath binding ourselves and our descendants that we shall never do anything contrary to the principle of equal rights, and that we shall never try to eject anyone.” And if this was the position of the more “militant” faction of the Jewish national movement, small wonder that mainstream Zionism took for granted the full equality of the Arab minority in the prospective Jewish state.

Ben-Gurion himself argued as early as 1918 that “had Zionism desired to evict the inhabitants of Palestine it would have been a dangerous utopia and a harmful, reactionary mirage.” And as late as December 1947, shortly after Palestinian Arabs had unleashed wholesale violence to subvert the newly passed United Nations partition resolution, he told his Labor Party that “in our state there will be non-Jews as well—and all of them will be equal citizens; equal in everything without any exception; that is: the state will be their state as well.” In line with this conception, committees laying the groundwork for the nascent Jewish state discussed the establishment of an Arabic-language press, the incorporation of Arab officials in the administration, and Arab-Jewish cultural interaction.

Ignoring these facts altogether, Segev accuses Ben-Gurion of using the partition resolution as a springboard for implementing the age-old “Zionist dream” of “maximum territory, minimum Arabs,” though he brings no evidence for this supposed behavior beyond a small number of statements that are either taken out of context or simply distorted or misrepresented. To take one representative example: “Ben-Gurion jotted down [in his diary] a long list of questions that awaited his decision, among which was ‘Should the Arabs be expelled?’” Segev writes. Dated May 8, 1948, just under a week before Ben-Gurion proclaimed the state of Israel, the citation seeks to show that he actively entertained the expulsion of the country's Arab population.

The diary entry, however, doesn't read “Should the Arabs be expelled?” but rather “Should Arabs be expelled?” And this question was posed in relation not to the Palestinian Arab community as a whole but to the small number of Arabs caught in the fighting. According to the Hagana's operational plan—adopted in mid-March 1948, two months ahead of statehood, to reverse then-current Palestinian Arab aggression and rebuff the anticipated invasion by the Arab states—Arab villages that served as bases for attacks on Jewish targets could be destroyed and their residents expelled.

Yet this was an exclusively tactical measure dictated by ad hoc military considerations, notably the need to deny strategic sites to the enemy if there were no available Jewish forces to hold them. Not only did it not reflect any political intention to expel Arabs, but the plan's overarching rationale was predicated, in the explicit instructions of the Hagana's commander in chief, on the Hebrew state without any discrimination, and a desire for coexistence on the basis of mutual freedom and dignity.

There are many more such lost subtleties and distinctions in *A State at Any Cost*. But Segev, like his fellow revisionists, is not bothered with mere facts in his endeavor to rewrite Ben-Gurion and, by extension, Israel's history in an image of his own making. The late Shabtai Tevet's seminal four-volume biography of Ben-Gurion—published between 1976 and 2004—remains the work to consult for a full and fair treatment of Israel's founding father.

Prof. Efraim Karsh is Director of the Begin-Sadat Center BESA Center Perspectives Papers (besacenter.org)

Dopey Doves

Martin Sherman

The most righteous of men cannot live in peace if his evil neighbor will not let him be

—Wilhelm Tell Act IV, Friedrich von Schiller, 1804.
It is useless for the sheep to pass resolutions in favor of vegetarianism, while the wolf remains of a different opinion.

—R. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, 1915.
He who comes to kill you, rise up early and kill him first

—The Talmud

The Oslo process that resulted in the signature of the “Declaration of Principles” on the White House Lawns on September 13, 1993, was in many ways a point of singularity in the history of Zionism, after which everything was qualitatively different from that which it was before. It was a point of inflection in the time-line of the evolution of Jewish political independence, at which what were once vaunted values became vilified vices.

Metamorphosis: From deterrence to appeasement?

Thus, almost at a stroke, Jewish settlement and attachment to land, once the essence of the Zionist ethos, were branded as the epitome of egregious extremism. Jewish military might, once exalted as a symbol of national resurgence and self-reliance, was excoriated as the instrument of repression and subjugation.

This metamorphosis is decidedly perplexing. After all, even by the early 1990s, Zionism had proved to be one of the most successful—arguably, the most successful—movement of national liberation that arose from the dissolution of the great Empires—providing political independence, economic prosperity and personal liberties to a degree unrivalled by other such movements.

Moreover, despite the manifest justice on which it was founded, Zionism was always territorial and only prevailed, progressed and prospered because it was reinforced by force of arms. Without either of these two components—the land and the sword—it would be no more than an historical footnote today.

The staggering metamorphosis that took place in the Israeli leadership's approach was aptly described by Daniel Pipes, who—almost two decades ago—wrote: the policy of deterrence dominated Israeli thinking during the country's first 45 years, 1948-93, and it worked well. . . . Eventually, Israelis became impatient for a quicker and more active approach. . . . That impatience brought on the Oslo accords in 1993, in which Israelis initiated more creative and active steps to end the conflict. So totally did deterrence disappear from the Israeli vocabulary, it is today not even considered when policy options are discussed.”

“...Historians will be baffled...”

Presciently, he summed up the consequences of this ill-advised change:

“In retrospect, the 1990s will be seen as Israel's lost decade, the time when the fruits of earlier years were squandered, when the country's security regressed. The history books will portray Israel at this time, like Britain and France in the 1930s, as a place under the sway of illusion, where dreams of avoiding war in fact sowed the seeds of the next conflict.”

His dour prediction was starkly borne out.

Indeed, since then Israel has been compelled to wage four major military campaigns to quell Palestinian-Arab carnage against its citizens and its cities—one in Judea-Samaria, Operation Defensive Shield (2002); Operations Cast Lead (2008-9), Pillar of Defense (2012) and Protective Edge (2014) in Gaza—with a fourth round of fighting in Gaza widely considered only a matter of time.

Pipes's caveat is eerily reminiscent of Winston Churchill's stern address to the House of Commons barely a year before the outbreak of World War II:

“...historians a thousand years hence will still be baffled by the mystery of our affairs. They will never understand how it was that a victorious nation, with everything in hand, suffered themselves to be brought low, and to cast away all that they had gained by measureless sacrifice and absolute victory. . . .”

It is difficult not to see much of the same pattern reflected in Israel's behavior after its sweeping victory in the 1967 Six Day War. For it has frittered away nearly all the fruits of that great triumph.

How terrorist nuisances evolved into strategic threats

It relinquished the vast expanses of the Sinai

Peninsula for a grudging peace agreement with Egypt—which resembles an uneasy state of non-belligerence far more than harmonious set of relationships between the two signatories. The one major achievement of the agreement—the demilitarization of Sinai—is being eroded away, even without Israeli consent, as Cairo bolsters its military presence on the peninsula in a (less than successful) effort to deal with sustained and stubborn Jihadist insurgency. Concern over this is two-fold. Firstly, this could permanently undermine the demilitarization of the Sinai—especially if a more inimical regime than the present Sisi one is (re)installed in Cairo. Secondly, it is an open question whether the Egyptian military will have the resolve and the resources in the long run to impose law and order in Sinai, and much of its weaponry will fall into the hands of the Jihadist militants it is meant to subdue—as has happened in the past on a thankfully small scale.

In Gaza, the dovish doctrine of political appeasement and territorial withdrawal lead to the razing of Jewish communities, the uninterment of Jewish graves and the desecration and destruction of Jewish places of worship. With the IDF gone, the extremist Hamas ejected the somewhat less extreme Fatah and exploited the freedom of action the evacuation provided it to transform itself from being a terrorist nuisance into a quasi-strategic threat.

On Israel's northern front, territorial retreat (or rather flight) from South Lebanon and the dishonorable desertion of local allies there, abandoned the area to the Islamist Hezbollah, who amassed a formidable arsenal, bristling with rockets and missiles, trained on Israel's population centers and strategic installations. Here again, the concept of concessions allowed—indeed, induced—a terrorist nuisance to evolve into a genuine strategic threat.

"Destroying peace; promoting violence..."

On Israel's eastern flank, Osloian concessions allowed armed militia to deploy within mortar range of the nation's parliament, the Prime Minister's office and the Supreme Court; and gave the Palestinian-Arab terror groups free access to military grade explosives and automatic weapons that brought tragedy and trauma to Israel's streets, sidewalks and shopping malls. In trying to coax the Palestinian-Arabs into an agreed resolution of conflict, Israel made perilous, gut-wrenching concessions and in return, received not only waves of gory terror, but a flood of Judeophobic indoctrination and Judeocidal incitement from the official Palestinian Authority (PA) media and education system.

Indeed, recently, the PA changed the content of schoolbooks used from "first grade through [out] high school", in which virtually any reference to peace, the peace process and any agreement concluded with Israel has been erased. Likewise, removed from the new curriculum was any information, previously taught to Palestinian pupils, relating to ancient Jewish history in "Palestine" and the Jewish presence and connection to Jerusalem. Indeed, according to Marcus Sheff, CEO of IMPACT-se (the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education) that conducted the study of the new Palestinian school books: "The new curriculum destroys any possibility for peace with Israel, enhances and promotes violence and hatred more than ever."

"I trust Obama to get a good deal."

Further afield, the application of concession rather than coercion continued to bear bitter fruits for Israel. Instead of being brought to its knees by the Obama administration in 2015, the tyrannical theocracy in Tehran was given much needed relief that allowed it to continue its mischief far and wide, sowing murder and mayhem across the Middle East.

By the terms of the scandalous JCPOA signed between Iran and the p5+1 nations, the "Islamic Republic" was given free rein to promote terror and enhance its military power (especially its missile capabilities) with relative impunity and considerably more cash.

True, the decision regarding the Iranian deal was not an Israeli one, but domestic rivals of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu strongly criticized his rigorous opposition to the Obama approach to Iran and its nuclear ambitions, and chastised him for publicly clashing with the US president—this despite the fact

"...that Netanyahu [had] tried to impact the president's stance in years of one-on-one conversations and in the endless top-level contacts between his officials and the Obama administration...indicated that private argument and entreaty...failed."

Indeed, during the high profile 2015 Saban Forum, just months before the conclusion of the Iran nuclear accord, then-head of the opposition, the dovish Isaac Herzog, declared: "I trust the Obama administration to get a good deal." Just how unfounded that trust proved to be is now a matter of historical record.

There, of course, can be little doubt that domestic division in Israel on the Iranian issue, or at least on the approach to it, helped accentuate the bipartisan rift in the US and facilitated the Democratic majority that approved the deal.

Today, almost five years and billions of dollars later, Iran's recent attack on Saudi oil installations has demonstrated how it has upgraded its prowess, leaving Israel to confront a new and deadly menace, within the appalling parameters of the JCPOA!

Imagine the dread

But not only have continued concessions, withdrawal and retreat precipitated continued conflict and violence, but the converse seems true as well.

Indeed, one can only shudder with dread at the thought of the perilous predicament the country would be facing, had it heeded the call from the allegedly "enlightened and progressive" voices, who – right up until the gory events of the Syrian civil war that erupted in 2011—hailed the British trained doctor, Bashar al-Assad, as a moderate reformer, with whom a durable peace deal could be cut - if only an intransigent Israel would yield the Golan to his regime.

For, as ominous as the current Iranian military deployment in Syria is, it might well have been far more menacing. After all, the fact that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard is not perched on the Golan Heights, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, is solely because Israel did not fall prey to the seductive temptation of the land-for-peace formula, as urged by many, in both the international community and in its own security establishment—and did not cede the strategic plateau that commands the approaches to the entire north of the country.

The lessons of what transpired when Israel made concessions and when it did not, when it favored diplomacy and when it relied on deterrence, are lessons Israel can ill afford to ignore.

Real reasons & recalcitrant realities

Yet despite decades of proven failure, Israel's doves still cling doggedly to their fatally flawed dogma, insisting if only Israel would make additional concessions, a new epoch of Judeo-Arab peace and prosperity would dawn.

Thus, impervious to reality and oblivious to reason, they refuse to acknowledge error, no matter how blatant. Undeterred by catastrophe, unmoved by disaster, they persist in urging Israel toward ever greater perils.

Just how different things once were, before the doves began to dominate the discourse, is starkly underscored by an address by Yitzhak Rabin before a joint session of the US Congress (28 January 1976).

In it, he pointed out that, "Until 1967, Israel did not hold an inch of the Sinai Peninsula and the West Bank, the Gaza Strip or the Golan Heights. Israel held not an acre of what is now considered disputed territory. And yet we enjoyed no peace. Year after year Israel called for - pleaded for - a negotiated peace with the Arab governments. Their answer was a blank refusal and more war."

He then went on to identify the causes of conflict: "The reason was not a conflict over territorial claims. The reason was, and remains, the fact that a Free Jewish State sits on territory at all."

Although Rabin later diverged from his diagnosis, the subsequent chain of death and destruction proved its validity. The real reason for the conflict is "the fact that a Free Jewish State sits on [any] territory at all!"

The unpalatable, but unavoidable, conclusion, for doves and hawks alike, that arises from this is that:

The maximum Israel can hope for is to be grudgingly accepted. The minimum it must strive for is to greatly be feared. Its very survival depends on it.

Martin Sherman is the executive director of the Israel Institute for Strategic Studies

In Other News...

Tax-Exempt Status: A Political Weapon in the Race to the Bottom

Tyler O'Neil

Beto to Obama: Hold my beer. Barack Obama's IRS may have targeted conservative groups for extra scrutiny, but Obama never pledged to strip tax-exempt status from organizations that disagreed with his position on an issue.

Yet on Thursday, former Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D-Texas) said he would strip tax-exempt status from any religious organization that supports traditional marriage, defined as one man and one woman. In fact, his position essentially amounts to a government preference for pro-gay marriage religious bodies that likely violates the Establishment Clause.

CNN's Don Lemon quoted O'Rourke's policy on LGBT issues, which states: "Freedom of religion is a fundamental right but it should not be used to discriminate."

"Do you think religious institutions — like colleges, churches, charities — should they lose their tax-exempt status if they oppose same-sex marriage?" Lemon asked.

"Yes," O'Rourke replied — to loud applause from the audience. With just one word, Beto O'Rourke announced he would target every single religious institution that upholds the traditional definition of marriage. That's not just the traditional definition in Christianity, but also in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so many other religions across time and space. Naturally, the Democrat went on to support his extreme position.

"There can be no reward, no benefit, no tax break, for anyone, any institution, any organization in America that denies the full human rights and the full civil rights of every single one of us," O'Rourke said. "And so, as president, we are going to make that a priority. And we are going to stop those who are infringing upon the human rights of our fellow Americans."

Leave aside Beto's absurd use of the royal "we" to refer to himself as president. Leave aside the absurdity of his totalizing language ("the full civil rights of every single one of us." Does that apply, for instance, to religious conservatives who also have the right of association just like any LGBT group, perhaps? No?). Look at the substance of what he said.

O'Rourke suggested that conservative religious institutions are denying "the full human rights and the full civil rights" of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals to marry people of the same sex or multiple people.

These institutions are not necessarily advocating for a change in the legal definition of marriage — they are merely following their traditions and holy texts in defining marriage a certain way. Organizations like the Salvation Army do not lobby the government to "take away the rights" of LGBT people. They merely ask their members to adhere to traditional Christian morality, reserving sex for traditional marriage. Similarly, groups like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship require a similar moral standard from their leaders, and they recently won a long legal battle for that basic free-association right.

Beto's pledge would amount to blatant viewpoint discrimination at the federal level, with money attached. Removing tax-exempt status from religious schools, charities, and churches on the basis of their beliefs on marriage would violate their free speech, free association, and religious freedom. But it would also involve violating the Establishment Clause.

At the time of the founding, different states had established churches. That means tax revenue went directly to support religious bodies, and only those of one denomination. The First Amendment forbade Congress from making any law "regarding an establishment of religion." By providing tax breaks to pro-LGBT churches and revoking tax breaks from pro-traditional marriage churches, Beto's policy would endorse pro-LGBT religion.

While few of the other candidates may go quite so far as O'Rourke did on Thursday, this is the logical conclusion of much LGBT rhetoric branding any dissent as "hate" or "wicked."

Beto O'Rourke is rather unlikely to be the next president of the United States. But his position may push the other Democrats in this terrifying direction. After all, the DNC recently adopted a campaign platform warning against "religious liberty."

Tyler O'Neil is a Senior Editor of PJ Media (pjmedia.com)