



Kerry's Antagonism Unmasked

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: John Kerry has abandoned America's honest broker stance in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. His warnings about the coming isolation of Israel and of a third Intifada – unless Israel quickly allows the emergence of a “whole Palestine” and ends its “perpetual military occupation” of Judea and Samaria – effectively tell the Palestinians that they should make sure the talks fail, and then Israel's “gonna get it.” Kerry laid out the consequences for Israel of disobeying America (no safety and no prosperity), but laid out no similar consequences for the Palestinians if they remain intransigent.

Up until last Thursday night, most Israelis related to US Secretary of State John Kerry as a naïve nice guy. His ardent enthusiasm for basically-impossible peace talks with the Palestinians was viewed as stop-gap diplomacy at best and a fool's errand at worst.

But in a November 7 joint interview to Israeli and Palestinian television, Israel discovered a different Kerry: nasty, threatening, one-sided, blind to the malfeasance and unreliability of Palestinian leaders, and dangerously oblique to the explosive situation he himself is creating.

Channeling the Palestinian line, Kerry showed no appreciation whatsoever for Israel's positions and concerns, aside from the usual, throw-away, vague protestations of concern for Israel's security.

His warnings about the coming isolation of Israel and of a third Intifada – unless Israel quickly allows the emergence of a “whole Palestine” and ends its “perpetual military occupation” of Judea and Samaria – amount to unfriendly

pressure. Worse still, Kerry is trading treacherously in ugly self-fulfilling prophecy.

There was always a high probability that the Palestinians would eventually use the predictable collapse of the talks as an excuse for more violence and renewal of their “lawfare” against Israel in international forums. Now they have John Kerry’s seal of approval for doing so.

Kerry has basically laid out the Obama administration’s understanding of the campaign to delegitimize and isolate Israel – unless Israel succumbs to Palestinian and international dictates for almost complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Kerry is effectively telling the Palestinians that they should make sure the talks fail, and then Israel’s “gonna get it.”

So now the Palestinians know clearly what to do. They don’t really want a circumscribed, hemmed-in, mini-state of the like that Israel could agree to. They have never wanted the “sovereign cage” of a Palestinian state that Israel can contemplate (as Ahmad Khalidi and Saeb Erekat have categorized the generous Barak and Olmert proposals). What they have always wanted is “runaway” statehood and the total delegitimization of Israel, alongside an ongoing campaign to swamp Israel demographically and overwhelm Israel diplomatically.

Strategically then, there is no good reason for Palestinian leader Abbas to agree to any negotiated accord with Israel. An accord will hem-in Palestinian ambitions. An accord will grant Israel the legitimacy that Kerry warns we are losing. An accord will grant Israel the legitimacy “to act in order to protect its security needs,” as Tzipi Livni keeps on plaiting.

Obviously then, Abbas knows what to do. By stiffing Israel and holding to his maximalist demands, Abbas pushes Israel into Kerry’s punishment corner. He spurs on the isolation of Israel that Mr. Kerry is oh-so-worried-about. He creates ever-greater pressure on Israel to concede ever-more to Palestinian ambitions.

In short, Kerry’s onslaught last night only encourages Palestinian stubbornness, and strips the peace process of any realism.

Over the past thirty years, Israelis have shifted their views tremendously. They’ve gone from denying the existence of a Palestinian people to recognition of Palestinian peoplehood and national aspirations, and from

insisting on exclusive Israeli sovereignty and control of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza to acceptance of a demilitarized Palestinian state in these areas. Israel has even withdrawn all-together from Gaza, and allowed a Palestinian government to assume authority over 95 percent of West Bank residents. Israel has made the Palestinian Authority three concrete offers for Palestinian statehood over more than 90 percent of West Bank territory plus Gaza.

Palestinians have made no even-remotely-comparable moves towards Israel.

What Kerry should be doing, therefore, is disabusing the Palestinians of the notion that they can fall back on bogus, maximalist demands as their uncompromising bottom line. He should be dialing-down Palestinian expectations and bringing Palestinians towards compromise no less than Israelis. He should be pressing them to close the “peace gap” by accepting the historic ties of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and the legitimacy of Israel’s existence in the Middle East as a Jewish state – which, in principle, includes Judea and Samaria.

He should be calling on them to renounce the resettlement of Palestinian refugees in pre-1967 Israel, and to end their support for and glorification of Palestinian suicide-bombers and missile launchers against Israel’s civilian population, and to end the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel war-like propaganda that fills the Palestinian airwaves.

Kerry should be making clear to the Palestinians that if they don’t compromise with Israel, the world will stand by Israel, will not isolate Israel, and will not tolerate Palestinian violence against Israel.

Instead, Kerry chose to launch a full-bore attack on Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, and on all Israelis who – in Kerry’s words – pigheadedly “feel safe today” and “feel they’re doing pretty well economically.” He laid out the consequences for Israel of disobeying America – no safety and no prosperity. He laid out no similar consequences for the Palestinians if they remain intransigent.

So much for the notion of an honest broker.

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