



PERSPECTIVES

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Trump Should Aid Czech President Zeman in Fighting the “Munich Attitude”

by Jiri Valenta and Leni Friedman Valenta

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In a December 6, 2016 telephone conversation, then President-Elect Donald Trump and Czech President Milos Zeman agreed to meet in April 2017 – but the visit appears to have been indefinitely postponed. This is unwise. Zeman, like Trump, is a staunch supporter of Israel, opposes Europe’s “Munich attitude” of appeasement, and is a foe of Islamic terrorists. He should be treated by the White House as the ally he is.

The sidelining of President Trump’s planned meeting with Czech President Milos Zeman suggests a lack of awareness among Trump’s NSC aides regarding the unique triangular relationship connecting America, Israel, and the Czech Republic. They do not appear to have considered the potential benefits of a closer relationship between Trump and Zeman, who are like-minded and misunderstood.

“Israel has no better friend in Europe than the Czech Republic,” said Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu in 2014. At that time, Milos Zeman, as Czech president, was already at the forefront of the struggle against ISIS in Syria and Iraq. A year earlier, President Barak Obama had ignored his own red lines in Syria. His doctrine of “strategic patience” aided in the survival of Syrian dictator Bashar Assad’s oppressive regime and effectively assisted Vladimir Putin’s interventions in Ukraine at a time when Islamist terrorism was on the march in Afghanistan, Libya, South Yemen, and Syria.

Zeman, who has expressed the view that “Obama’s policy destroyed practically all the Middle East’s structures and countries,” also rejected Obama’s mistreatment of Israel and its declining Western European support at the UN. As Francine Klagsbrun pointed out in *Lioness, Golda Meir and the Nation of Israel*, Meir’s reference to the “Munich attitude” referred to the 1938 Munich sellout of Czechoslovakia to Hitler by British Premier Neville Chamberlain and French leader Eduard Daladier – but it also

referenced the EU sellout of Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War and European leaders' animus towards Israel in the decades that followed.

In 2017, Zeman was the only EU leader to applaud the Trump administration's decision to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, going so far as to call the other EU leaders "cowards." Yet the Czech president has neither been invited to the White House nor visited by Trump in Prague. This suggests that Trump's NSC is not aware of who Zeman is or what he can offer.

In the Czech Republic, the presidency is a largely ceremonial office. Yet as Commander-in-Chief of the Czech armed forces, Zeman has taken on an unusually active role in foreign policy-making with regard to Central Europe and the Middle East. A riveting, tell-it-like-it-is speaker, he earned from one interviewer the comment, "The president no longer pushes the limits; he exceeds them."

Unlike the iconic, late President Vaclav Havel, whose eloquence, good manners, and international fame as a playwright appealed to urbanites, the self-made economist Zeman is the darling of the Czech countryside for his politically incorrect plain speaking. Like former liberal Democrat and centrist Trump, former Social Democrat Zeman has been unjustly pelted with *ad hominem* attacks as a purported far rightist. This is largely because of his uncompromising attitude regarding Islamic terrorism and insistence on the strict vetting of Middle Eastern immigrants to his country. He believes those immigrants cannot be "assimilated."

An admirer of Winston Churchill, Zeman views Islamic terrorists as the modern incarnation of the Nazis who once tyrannized continental Europe. To him, Europe is under the same kind of threat that Churchill warned against in the late 1930s after Hitler rose to power. At that time, Churchill was laughed at and scorned in Parliament – the same Parliament near which murders were committed by Islamist terrorists in 2017.

Like Trump, Zeman wonders when "old Europe," led by misguided Chancellor Angela Merkel, will wake up. Germany, France, Britain, Spain, and Belgium are now terrorized by Muslim immigrants and by Muslims born in Europe who have since turned into Islamist terrorists.

Zeman has been accused by US State Department foes and Havel supporters of being a pro-Russia stooge. This is as false an accusation as it is with regard to Trump. While Trump has reached out to Moscow to pursue a limited partnership in the fight against jihadists in Syria and in dealing with rogue regimes in North Korea and Iran, Zeman, a trained economist, favors good relations with Russia because of geo-economic realities.

Zeman recognizes his country's dependence on the Kremlin's energy resources and trade. Just a few weeks ago, he led a delegation of 150 Czech businessmen to Russia

(versus a delegation of a few dozen to France earlier this year, a comparison that reflects economic realities).

Though some of Zeman's comments on the resolution of the Ukraine conflict have been simplistic, he fully recognizes that NATO members must discourage Russian aggression. That is why he has made it a national priority to 1) reverse a decrease in defense spending for NATO that resulted from the 2005 economic crisis; and 2) restore the 2% GDP contribution for NATO required by Trump.

Another priority for Zeman is his unswerving support of Israel. During his 2014 trip to that country, the Czech president was praised by Israeli leaders for his opposition to the aggressive intentions of the Iranian regime and his blacklisting of the military wing of the terrorist organization Hezbollah.

There is a longstanding bond between Israel, the Czech Republic, and America. Modern Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918 by Tomas Masaryk, a young professor-turned member of the Austrian parliament. A strategic ally of President Woodrow Wilson during WWI, Masaryk's Czechoslovak Legion bravely fought Lenin's Bolsheviks. Then, through his own formidable lobbying in Washington and aided by Jewish writers who remembered his struggle against anti-Semitism, he was able to create an independent and democratic Czechoslovakia from the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. (The country was divided in 1992 into separate Czech and Slovak nations.)

Masaryk supported the World Zionist Organization's congresses in Prague and Karlovy Vary [Carlsbad], and in 1927, he became the first European leader to visit Mandatory Palestine. Subsequently, streets in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, and even a kibbutz were named after him.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, Czechoslovakia became a democratic oasis for anti-fascist refugees and Jews from Germany. However, in Munich in 1938, Britain and France ceded a part of democratic Czechoslovakia to Hitler without Czech consent. The betrayal of Czechoslovakia – Mrs. Meir's "Munich attitude" – resulted in a bitter historical lesson on appeasement, and not only for the Czechs.

Three decades after Masaryk's lobbying in America, Meir lobbied for the creation of another free new nation: Israel. President Harry Truman recognized the new state of Israel in May 1948, as did Josef Stalin. However, the US State Department and British Foreign Office not only declined to follow suit but placed an embargo on the shipment of weapons to Israel, endangering its survival.

Czechoslovakia, with Stalin's blessing but without Kremlin involvement, launched a rescue mission in cooperation with the Haganah. Breaking with the arms embargo, Czechoslovakia became the only country to sell Israel dozens of fighter planes in

addition to other military equipment. Czech pilots provided training to Jewish young men from Mandatory Palestine, the US, and elsewhere.

Sadly, the evil of Stalinist, anti-Semitic communism reemerged in Prague. The KGB helped to organize murders and show trials of Czech leaders supportive of Israel, their agonies foreshadowed in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*.

By the mid-1960s, however, Czech politics began to mirror the democratic reform forces at play. What was missing was what Lenin referred to as an *iskra* [spark]. In June 1967, the Six-Day War provided that spark for Czech students and intellectuals.

The Israeli victory had a direct bearing on the radicalization of many Czechs towards the democratic reforms of the Prague Spring. Hundreds of Czechoslovak students, including Zeman, applauded the advance of Israeli tanks to the Suez Canal. To these students, the defeat of the Arabs with their Soviet weapons and advisors meant a defeat of the Soviet empire.

In May and June 1968, during a sharing of ideas with students and faculty at universities in Leningrad and Moscow, Zeman – who is fluent in Russian – led his classmates' efforts to convince the Russian interlocutors to support Prague's democratic reforms, an effort that infuriated KGB "observers."

In August 1968 came the Soviet invasion. As a young member of the Communist Party's reform wing, Zeman tried to organize an anti-Soviet "resistance. In 1970 he was expelled from the Party, by then overseen once again by Soviet advisers, as a "traitor." Hardly the history of a Russian stooge.

During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, European NATO countries displayed a "Munich attitude" towards Israel. USAF planes bringing military supplies to Israel were not permitted to refuel on the continent, with only Portugal allowing them to land on the Azores.

In the summer of 1989, Zeman published a devastating exposé of the Czech communist economy, and in November, playwright-dissident-president Vaclav Havel led a "Velvet Revolution" that navigated his country's return to genuine democracy. He also restored friendly relations with Israel.

In January 2013, Zeman became the first elected president of the Czech Republic; his two predecessors, Havel and Vaclav Klaus, were elected by parliament. Zeman then defined Czech national interests by reinforcing the country's close relationship with America, though he did not blindly follow Washington as Havel sometimes had (in the case of the 2003 Iraq invasion, for example).

In 2015, Zeman decided to attend the May 9 parade in Moscow celebrating Russia's WWII victory over Nazi Germany. Calling Zeman's decision "short-sighted" in a TV

debate, US ambassador to Prague Andrew Schapiro, a major donor to Obama, advised Zeman that it would be “awkward” if he were the only EU statesman not to follow the Brussels decision to boycott the celebration in support of EU sanctions on Russia.

Zeman did not appreciate Schapiro’s remarks. As he explained, he couldn’t “imagine the Czech ambassador in Washington giving advice to an American president about where to travel.” Unlike Havel, who likely would have followed the EU lead and the advice of the US ambassador, Zeman behaved like the president of a sovereign state.

He did not mind joining Putin in celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany, the evil that Czechs, Americans, Jews, and Russians had fought together. Yet he denounced as an insult the publication of an offensive article at Russia’s *Zvezda* state channel, holding that the Czechs should be grateful for the 1968 Soviet invasion. Again – this is no Kremlin stooge.

If Trump is given a truthful narrative about Zeman, he will see that the Czech president has become the spokesman for a “new Europe”: Hungary, Poland, and the new government in Austria, which rejects mass Muslim immigration. Zeman could lead the effort for these nations to become close friends of Israel, as he himself has done.

Trump has been neglecting a courageous ally, Israel’s best friend in Europe, and a man who – like himself – continues to fight the “Munich attitude” of appeasing rather than fighting Islamic terrorism. He would be well advised to remedy this lapse.

Dr. Jiri Valenta is a Non-Resident Senior Research Associate at the BESA Center. He and his wife, Leni, are the principals of The Institute of Post-Communist Studies and Terrorism (jolv.net). A member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Jiri served for a decade as a professor and coordinator of Soviet and East European Studies at the US Naval Post-Graduate School and was a consultant to senior members of the Reagan administration.

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