

The Fallacy of Appeasement

By **RAPHAEL BENAROYA** June 15, 2011

Expecting buds of democracy to bloom, as suggested by the term Arab Spring, is both naive and a dangerous reading of the Muslim street, its culture and its history. So is the President's appeasement of the Palestinians in his recent speech, which many interpreted to have alienated Israel.

Naive, for two reasons:

First, the stark reality of Muslim governance. None of the 57 Muslim countries is a true democracy. They are for the most part autocratic, corrupt and abusive to their own citizens. They hardly live in peace with each other.

We recall the President that saw to the demise of Iran's Shah in response to street cries for democracy. It begot the Ayatollah. Yet another President encouraged democratic elections in Gaza. It begot Hamas. Lebanon has been 'democratic' for some time. It is now dominated by Hezbollah. We aspire to build democracy for Afghanistan and have committed the lives of our brave soldiers to an end that may be unattainable.

Second, even more naive is to see a link between a presumed resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Middle East tranquility. The so called Arab Spring has clearly proven that Middle East problems do not arise from that decades old conflict but instead from tyrannical, corrupt and abusive regimes rejected by their own people. Nor would a resolution of that conflict be a remedy for the festering Jihadist terrorism emanating from several regions around the world. The Arab and Islamic conflicts are for the most part internal feuds and do not have Jewish settlements, Israeli borders or even Jerusalem at their core. These disputes are rooted in the war between religious extremism on one side and secularism on the other. Fifteen hundred years of history would argue that whoever is the "winner" will gain and sustain power with tyranny.

Naivete breeds danger, as well.

To begin with, attempting to appease the Palestinians (and possibly the wider Islamic world) yet again will only keep them away from the negotiation table. The President has publicly undercut Israel's negotiating position twice. First, in the demand for a complete construction freeze in the settlements and in Jerusalem and now with the vaguery of "modified" 1967 lines. These give aways will only entrench the Arab stand on their other demands and all but eliminate their incentive for direct negotiations.

Next, the President is raising expectations on the Palestinian's part with public demands that can never be accepted by Israel. As reality quickly sets in, with no progress in sight, the risk of violence may return with a vengeance.

Further, the President's approach isolates Israel in the international arena even more. Directing imbalanced demands for concessions at her make Israel's weak posture on the international scene even weaker (to be sure, Israel has long lost the "War for the Narrative"). Israel has made serious concessions in land (Gaza, South Lebanon) and has taken security risks in return for mere promises, all broken. The President's appeasement policy has made no serious demands on the Arabs other than renouncing violence.

Lastly, the new betrothal between Hamas and the Fatah cannot and should not be glossed over, as the President did in his speech. Not only does this relationship cast dark clouds on the future of any negotiations or agreement, it is palpably dangerous for Israel. The Iran-Syria-Hezbollah alliance is Israel's axis of evil. Now, its ambassador, Hamas, has joined with Israel's "peace partner". Israel is fully justified to reject outright parties denying its right to exist and committed to its destruction.

So what's next for the "peace process"? There are three imperatives:

The first, get back to direct negotiations. If either party does not want peace, no outside power can dictate it. Providing carrots but not sticks to encourage the parties to negotiate may be useful. Palestinian statehood achieved in the UN unilaterally would produce a short lived euphoria quickly shattered by reality. Such a state would be miniscule, non-contiguous, with volatile rule and unresolved security arrangement. It would have hundreds of thousands Jewish settlers. Absent an agreement with Israel, it would be reliant on its neighbor to the east for overseas transportation. It would have no natural resources. There will be no resolution on matters of refugees and of Jerusalem. It would remain a failed State living on world handouts. US policy favoring the creation of a Palestinian State should be accompanied with the unequivocal demand for direct negotiations.

The second, beyond renouncing violence, the parties should recognize each other's right to exist. The Palestinians should and must abolish their charter's call for Israel's destruction. Hamas must change its spots. Israel cannot and should not be expected to negotiate with a proxy of Syria or Iran, both of which seek its annihilation.

The third, beyond political correctness, the US should delink the state and role of Islam in the world and its relationship with the West from the local Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The latter did not give rise to Al Qaida, the Muslim Brotherhood, Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Taliban, PKK or any other extremist organizations. Nor was that enduring regional conflict even an incidental factor in major conflicts involving Muslim states such as the wars between Pakistan and India or Iran and Iraq. Clearly, the Palestinian- Israeli situation did not play a role in the Arab Spring of Discontent. Atrocities in Chechnya, the Sudan and Somalia are similarly void of any basis in that conflict. The protests in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Tunisia, Libya and even Syria make no mention of Palestine for a simple reason: it has nothing to do with their troubled lands nor do they care about it.

Let's let the Palestinians and Israelis solve their problems between themselves. Interventions and grand statements by the US, the Quartet and the Europeans raise unrealistic expectations, slowing forward movement as the side that feels disadvantaged pushes back. In fact, both Netanyahu and Abbas dug their heels after the President's speech. Netanyahu calling 1967 borders "indefensible" thus a non starter and Abbas not accepting the notion of modification as a starting point, claiming that only the 1967 lines will be the start of any negotiations. Both parties have to be aware that only they can advance the peace process. The US and others should stand ready to facilitate discussions or offer assurances as called upon by the parties but outsiders cannot dictate terms or decide the outcome.

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