



USA, Israel and the Middle East: Time to Repair

When U.S. President-elect Donald Trump takes office next January 20, he will find a very large file called “Middle East” and a smaller, but also very important, folder attached called “Israel-US Relations”. Both will require to pay attention and to carry out new strategies in order to stabilize a region paramount for the security of the world. In addition, there is the need to repair a strong relationship that has sustained damage in the last decade.

The challenges for the new U.S. Administration in the Middle East are important and difficult. Syria, the Islamic State, the nuclear agreement with Iran and the emergence of the Ayatollahs’ regime as a new hegemon, the involvement of Russia, etc. are matters which need action urgently.

Certainly, President Trump should try to counter Iran's growing influence in the Middle East mainly provoked by the bad nuclear deal known as JCPOA, which is also increasing the clashes between Sunnis and Shiites across the region. His Administration should design a plan to revert the JCPOA's detrimental effects—a deal strongly and openly opposed by Trump—which can consist of a faster reimposition of the sanctions by the snapback mechanism set in the JCPOA itself. If that were not possible, he can sign an Executive Order valid until Iran definitely abandons its nuclear program. Additional options to be considered could be tougher sanctions against ballistic missiles tests and proliferation and against non-nuclear but malign activities and improving inspection requirements.

In Syria, the new Administration should support a transitional government without Assad and his Iranian backers represented by Hezbollah—all of that in coordination with Russia, a new major power deeply involved in the area—, and, at the same time, end the caliphate established by the Islamic State in parts of Syria and Iraq.

For these purposes, the Trump Administration has an invaluable partner: Israel.

In this regard, the new president also has to restore the diplomatic relationship with Israel, so deteriorated after eight years under Obama. The status of this relationship is actually curious. While military and technological cooperation between Israel and the US is more intense than ever before, the diplomatic relationship has cracked due to the Obama Administration's eight years of snubbing Israel.

In principle, Trump is pursuing a logical and positive policy towards Israel and the conflict with the Palestinians. The President-elect wants to move the US embassy to Jerusalem (a decision approved in 1991 by the US Congress, though successive presidents have postponed it), and not to impose any peace agreement to the parties. Also, according to the Joint Statement from Jason Dov Greenblatt and David Friedman, co-chairmen of the Israel Advisory

Committee to the presidential campaign, the Trump team reaffirms that settlements are not an obstacle to peace, highlights the importance of the alliance with Israel, condemns the delegitimization against Israel in international forums and by the BDS movement, and raises its concerns about Iran, among other core issues. In addition, Trump has stated that he would love to achieve peace. The peace talks, now stalled, may undergo a restart under the Trump Administration and it seems that neither conditions nor preconditions will be imposed to the parties. That would be a good beginning. Trump would pursue the goal of having both parties at the negotiating table and move them forward, supposedly using a novel approach, to an agreement that guarantees a fair and lasting peace. However, it is worth noting that seven U.S. presidents have failed in their attempts because of the unwilling attitude by Palestinian leaders to achieve peace.

In spite of all these paramount challenges, we hope that, above all, the Trump Administration will rebuild the diplomatic channels with Israel and that the bilateral relation will be strong and unbreakable again. That, for sure, will be essential to fix the broken Middle East — and to guarantee a better future for the West.

Spotlight

Israel and India, A Bright and Flourishing Relationship

The bilateral relationship between Israel and India is at its peak. Israeli President Reuven Rivlin visited India in early November to strengthen the alliance between the two countries and to reaffirm the “multi-dimensional and wide ranging engagement”—in the words of the PM of India, Narendra Modi—in enhancing agricultural productivity and efficiency; boosting research and innovation linkages; employing applications of science and technology for the benefit of both countries; forging strong trade links and investment ties; building defense ties; and promoting cultural and tourism linkages and educational exchanges—the number of Indian students going to study in Israel and viceversa is constantly growing.

The numbers speak of the good health of the relation as well. The bilateral trade between the two countries stands currently at \$5 billion. During the visit, India signed major defense contracts with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) for the purchase of two additional Phalcon/IL-76 Airborne Early Warning and Control Systems (AWACS), and 10 Heron TP unmanned air vehicles (UAVs). These contracts are valued at \$1.4 billion. Actually, Israel is today India's third largest defense supplier and India is Israel's first defense customer.

Besides the numbers and the mutual understanding, both countries also share similar threats. Israel and India are currently targets and victims of extremist groups that want to destroy them. India and Israel are also democratic countries that, despite their hostile surroundings, are thriving and overcoming their challenges.

In this regard, Indian Prime Minister Modi stressed that, “We recognize that terrorism is a global challenge, knows no boundaries and has extensive links with other forms of organized crime. We agreed that the international community must act with resolve and determination against terror networks and States that harbour them. We agreed to intensify our cooperation to combat the forces of extremism and radicalization that threaten all peace-loving nations.” It is not a coincidence that Modi used these words; much less that he chooses Israel to deter the terrorism threat.

The benefits of this growing bilateral relationship, with common goals and threats, are also reflected in the cultural exchange between these two societies. In this regard, in 2015, several opinion polls showed that 70% of India's society had a favorable image of Israel - a number unattainable in many Western societies today.

Besides, the fruitful relationship between Israel and India is further proof of how beneficial it can be to establish a stable alliance with Israel in various fields such as economy, technology, security, intelligence, and counter-terrorism.

FOII'S ACTIVITIES



On November 15, 16, and 17 the Friends of Israel Initiative held its annual board meeting in Toronto. For three days, Board members attended panels and lectures on paramount issues regarding Israel's right to exist and its international position such as the future of Israel in the chaotic Middle East, US-Israel relations after the presidential election, and Israel's expertise in the homefront and the issue of the settlements, among others. Board members also discussed the agenda of the Initiative and especially the upcoming projects.

FOII also welcomed the former Prime Minister of Canada **Stephen Harper** as a new Board member. Harper's record defending Israel's existence is widely known and his experience and prestige will make FOII bigger and better.

Op-eds

"Interests First: Discarding Bad Agreements" Professor Andrew Roberts, Hoover Institution, November 21. Professor Andrew Roberts explains how history shows that ripping up bad agreements has happened often before and usually to America's advantage, in a clear reference to the bad nuclear deal with Iran.

[Read the op-ed.](#)

"Balfour Declaration, November 2016" Colonel Richard Kemp, Gatestone Institute, November 6. On the occasion of the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, Colonel Richard Kemp emphasizes that Britain should be proud to have given such a boost to the Zionist project in 1917.

[Read the op-ed.](#)



"We will move the American embassy to the eternal capital of the Jewish people, Jerusalem."

Donald Trump

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