

David M. Weinberg



Trump's Mideast Innovations Should Stick

Many of the outgoing Trump administration's novel Mideast policies should be adopted by the next administration, even if Democratic leaders shrink from crediting Trump for any breakthroughs.

There are three axes of Mideast policy that must not be abandoned.

The first is the unleashing of a rewarding regional dynamic whereby Arab states are moving to open partnership with Israel on a wide range of issues. Already this has led to three peace agreements (between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan). Additional Arab countries should be encouraged to follow suit.

Sustaining this momentum requires active American diplomacy in support of Arab-Israel rapprochement, with signals coming from the highest levels in Washington and concrete offers of US aid on the table (yes, including weapons).

It also requires continuing stiff American resolve in opposing Iran's hegemonic designs in the region and resisting the temptation to over-prioritize the Palestinian issue – as detailed below.

The second axis of intelligent Mideast policy over the past four years has been treating Palestinians as responsible adults.

This means expecting the Palestinian governments in Judea, Samaria and Gaza to end their payments to terrorists, disarm terrorist militias, ending attempts to brand Israel a war criminal in international courts, end the teaching of genocidal anti-Semitism in their schools and media, and respect human rights, religious freedoms, and a free press. These are all-American principles; they must not be soft-pedaled.

This might nudge Palestinians, *inshallah*, towards the replacement of their rejectionist leaders with men and women who seek peace and prosperity for their people in partnership with Israel. Younger Palestinians must know that the Palestinian national movement will be marginalized in the Arab world and in Western capitals unless they come to the table with new leadership willing to compromise.

For American diplomats to start once again scurrying about the region without pressing such inevitable truths on the Palestinians would be worse than mischievous; it would be disastrous. To be overly solicitous of the Palestinians, a long-time mistake of professional peace processors, would be unhelpful in the extreme.

Continuing to dial-down Palestinian expectations would be much more constructive. No administration should revert to stale and unworkable formulas based on maximalist Palestinian demands and minimalist regard for Israeli security needs and national-historic claims. I am referring, of course, to discredited formulas involving the uprooting of settlements, Israeli withdrawals from most of Judea and Samaria, and a division of Jerusalem.

The third and perhaps most important plank of US policy is the attempt to truly halt Iran's advance towards nuclear weapons and its aggressive troublemaking across the region. There should be no more American charity for Iranian lies, including Iran's vague commitments under the JCPOA agreement negotiated by President Obama and the P5+1; an agreement that took at face value Iranian denials of there being any nuclear weapons program to worry about.

Because Trump defiantly dumped Obama's signature foreign policy "achievement," incoming President Biden (who was Obama's vice-president) surely will seek to entice Iran into a renewed accord, and he will do so by lifting some sanctions against Tehran. This is probably the wrong way to go, instead of increasing sanctions against Iran. Nevertheless, a new US administration surely will understand that Iran must be forced to relent on several key issues.

These are 1. A complete end to Iran's nuclear military program, including all uranium enrichment and plutonium production, with no sunset. 2. A truly intrusive international inspections regime. 3. An end to Iran's ballistic missile development program. 4. A retreat from the forward bases in Syria that Iran is building to challenge Israel. 5. Full cessation of Iranian financing of Hamas and Hezbollah military capabilities.

Short of this, a new deal with Iran will be perilous and unsustainable.

One also would hope that any administration will continue to back the "war between the wars" – Israel's covert strikes on Iranian sites in Syria and on nuclear installations in Iran.

The principles described here are in America's best interests as well as Israel's, and therefore they ought to survive a presidential transition.

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Though war needs physical courage, peace needs moral courage, the courage to break with the past and turn enemies into friends.

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