

Opinion: Netanyahu Shouldn't Believe U.S. Diplomacy

Last week, the Obama administration announced it would support the new unity government forged between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. The only thing surprising about America's reversal of its original commitment not to recognize or provide financial aid to such a government was that anybody was surprised by it, least of all Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

If there is one thing the Israeli leader should have learned by now is not to take Secretary of State John Kerry at his word, particularly when it involves Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

This is not because Kerry cares about Abbas specifically. No, it is likely that Kerry has as little patience for the PA president as he does for Netanyahu. But the world's top diplomat, whose dreams of a Nobel Peace Prize keep being mugged by reality, has no desire to live out his term with egg on his face.

If Netanyahu was under any illusions to the contrary, he was engaged in some serious wishful thinking—the very kind that causes the world to believe every promise made by Abbas, no matter how often or egregiously he breaks each one.

The European Union and other countries satisfied with the merger of what Economy and Trade Minister Naftali Bennett called “terrorists in suits” are a different story where Netanyahu is concerned, though Canada's ambiguity must have come as somewhat of a shock. While the Harper government said that it would only back a Palestinian unity government that “renounces terrorism and recognizes Israel's right to exist,” any entity that includes Hamas cannot meet such requirements.

(Nor has the PA, when ruled solely by Abbas' Fatah party, ever actually done so, which is why unity with Hamas was possible in the first place. Indeed, the enmity between the two stems from a struggle over power, money and strategy, not ideology.)

What Netanyahu had not anticipated, however, was that the PA was going to come up with the perfect rhetorical ploy as a defense against Western concerns about legitimizing Hamas: that new unity government is "technocratic" in nature. In spite of how meaningless this assertion is, it has been lapped up eagerly by those at which it was aimed.

The EU, taking its cue from Washington, was thrilled to be able to continue criticizing Israel and funding Palestinian corruption and terrorism, without acknowledging that this is what they are doing. Though the U.S. paid lip service to the need for "monitoring" the unity government, the EU welcomed the process of "Palestinian national consensus," going so far as to state that it "creates new opportunities for the peace process, for democratic renewal and for the Palestinian people in both Gaza and the West Bank."

Netanyahu's reaction, other than expressing his "disappointment" at being lied to by Kerry, was to announce the approval of plans for the construction of 1,800 housing units in existing neighborhoods in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria (the West Bank).

Naturally, it was this, not Hamas, which elicited outrage from all corners of the globe.

Abbas immediately warned of "an unprecedented [Palestinian] response."

On Thursday, the 47th anniversary of the outbreak of the Six-Day War, the U.S. and the EU called on Israel to reverse its decision on settlement activity, as did U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

In Israel, members of Netanyahu's coalition, such as Justice Minister and peace negotiator Tzipi Livni and Finance Minister Yair Lapid, are blaming Netanyahu for arousing the ire of the international community. And Opposition Leader and Labor Party head Isaac Herzog is even faulting him for Abbas' truce with Hamas. The twisted logic of this position is that, due to Netanyahu's "failure" to establish a Palestinian state, Abbas directed his aspirations for peace at Gaza.

Livni, in particular, ought to bow her head in shame. On Monday, as Rami Hamdallah was being sworn in as prime minister of the new Palestinian government, Mrs. Peace Process was presiding over a gay wedding. "I have come here on the authority of my moral position, and to say that the time has come that the state accept any couple who has chosen to tie their fate together as a couple," she told the two grooms and their guests.

One wonders how she can criticize her own government's lack of social and political progress, yet consider a bunch of Islamist homophobes as partners for peace.

Everyone else would do well to take note of the fact that on Tuesday, as the "international community" was welcoming the Fatah-Hamas union, outgoing Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniyeh's mother-in-law was being ushered into the Augusta Victoria hospital in Israel for cancer treatments. (Last November, his granddaughter—who subsequently died—was treated in Israel for a digestive tract infection.)

Haniyeh's term in office was marked by hundreds of missiles fired into Israel, in keeping with his organization's goal to annihilate "Zionists and Jews." Christians, too, have been targets of his jihadist ideology. This did not prevent him from rushing his family to a church-run hospital in the Jewish state for medical care. More significantly, it did not cause the Israeli authorities to deny him such a privilege.

It is this that should astound the U.S., the EU and the U.N. about Israel. Alas, a few apartment buildings worry them more than terrorists backed by Iran.

Netanyahu should stop relying on assurances from iffy allies and stick to his guns, literally. It is weapons, not two-faced friends, which Israel is going to need now more than ever.

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