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Crown Prince Abdallah's Peace Initiative

By John Duke Anthony

Executive Summary

It is nearly nine months since Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdallah presented his path-breaking proposal for peace with Israel. The initiative was delivered in Beirut to a summit of leaders representing all 22 members of the League of Arab States, who endorsed it unanimously.

America's highest ranking officials immediately praised the proposal, as did the heads of more than 60 countries. To this day, U.S. government leaders and their counterparts in many other nations continue to do so. Yet despite this collective Arab presentation of an olive branch containing all that Israel's national leaders have asked for over a period of 55 years, neither Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon nor any other Israeli leader has accepted the offer. This fact alone has endangered the near-term prospects for peace, stability, and security in a region of vital importance to all of humanity.

The essay that follows, by Dr. John Duke Anthony, revisits the context and content of this one of a kind pan-Arab initiative. In so doing, he draws on his study of the Kingdom's long involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian Question since its inception. He demonstrates why there is every reason to seek the furtherance of Crown Prince Abdallah's initiative as the boldest and most far-reaching Arab peace proposal ever submitted to the Israeli people.

Dr. Anthony makes the case that only through a willingness by Israel to respond positively to this unprecedented Arab peace offer will there be a chance to bring to an end not only the suffering of Arabs and Israelis born of this long-festering conflict. He illustrates as well how the conflict's resolution would remove the single oldest, largest, and most pervasive impediment to restoring goodwill towards the United States among Arabs and Muslims worldwide.

Ever since it was first presented to the Arab League Summit in Beirut this past March, there has been a discordant chorus of American and Israeli voices against the Middle East peace proposal of Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdallah.

One voice claims that Saudi Arabia has never before interjected itself into the Arab-Israeli peace process and, thus, ought not to be allowed to do so now.

A second postulates that the intentions and timing of the Kingdom's proposal are deceptive.

A third faction maligns the Crown Prince's intentions by claiming the Kingdom does not genuinely desire dynamic engagement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Rather, he seeks to deflect the media spotlight from the fact that 15 of the 19 hijackers who committed the September 11 attacks were Saudi Arabians.

A related purpose, reason a fourth wing of critics, is to make the Kingdom look good by shifting attention from the fact that a significant number of the suspects incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay are Saudi Arabians.

A fifth sector alleges that the Kingdom's only reason for identifying with the Palestinians' plight is to successfully divert the anger and frustration of the Saudi Arabian people from their own government.

All of these assertions are bogus.

The Truth

History provides overwhelming, documented evidence that from the outset, outside Israel's immediate Arab neighbors, Saudi Arabia has been the longest, most closely associated Arab country intricately involved in trying to end the Arab-Israeli dispute.

The Kingdom has many reasons for its lengthy identification with this conflict, but none of them have anything to do with the fraudulent ones alleged above.

The Reasons

One reason is sheer twentieth century chronology. Saudi Arabia's involvement with this problem is factually evidenced prior to the establishment of Israel as a Jewish State.

Saudi Arabia was the only developing country to enter into the community of nations in the last century as a new country not through independence from a Western power.

Therefore, Saudi Arabia saw the unfolding saga of modern day Palestine through its own unfiltered lenses.

The veracity of this statement needs to be underscored, for analysts almost always overlook this unique perspective.

The evidence that the Kingdom's top leaders have been intimately close with the debate over Palestine's sovereignty, political independence, and territory is abundant.

FDR, "Ibn Saud," and King Faisal

One of the most prominent Saudi Arabians who grew up with the unfolding tragedy of Palestine was the late King Faisal (r.1965-1975).

An essential insight into understanding the Kingdom's peace initiative is to appreciate Faisal's unique role in educating his and the Crown Prince's father, King Abdalaziz bin Abdalrahman Al Sa'ud, "Ibn Saud," on the question of Palestine.

Faisal was barely in his teens when sent by his father as the Kingdom's Special Envoy to London prior to the League of Nations' post-World War One decision to award a Mandate for Palestine to Great Britain.

This initial foray into the international world of politics and diplomacy proved auspicious.

Faisal thereafter spent more than three decades, as Minister of Foreign Affairs before becoming the Kingdom's head of state.

Carrying on as Foreign Minister for the past quarter century has been Faisal's son, HRH Prince Sa'ud Al-Faisal.

The fact that two generations of father and son have searched for a just and durable resolution to this conflict puts to rest the disinformation of any who imply that the Kingdom is newly intervening in the conflict.

Faisal, first, as Foreign Minister, and then as King, was as intricately involved in the pan-Arab and pan-Islamic considerations related to Palestine as any Arab leader.

Faisal was more than a clear thinker and an astute analyst. From the 1920's, earlier than most, he was prescient in foreseeing the tragedy that lay in store for the Palestinian people. He knew as well as anyone what the negative fallout would be for his own and other Arab and Islamic countries' national interests in the event the Mandate were to be terminated at the expense of legitimate Palestinian rights and aspirations.

This, in his view, was inevitable in light of what he knew would, soon enough, be Saudi Arabia and America's burgeoning roles in world affairs.

In this way, Faisal was not unlike the great American statesman, George Catlett Marshall, winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace, Secretary of Defense, architect of the Allied War effort in World War Two, and author of the plan bearing his name that restored Europe's economy.

As Secretary of State, Marshall told Truman that if he insisted upon the partition of Palestine in 1947, he would personally vote against him in the 1948 Presidential election.

Marshall echoed the views of many when he emphasized to Truman that American support for an unjust partition of Palestine would be calamitous.

As America's top foreign policy strategist at the time, Marshall was certain that such a decision

would cause endless regional tensions and consequent threats to American national security interests, and not just in the immediate region, but elsewhere, given the vastness of the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Broken Promises

In this, Marshall was prophetic. So were three other high-ranking U.S. foreign policy makers who agreed with him: Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, Undersecretary of State Robert Lovett, and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Warren Austin.

But whereas the advice of Marshall, Forrestal, Lovett, and Austin failed to move President Truman, Faisal's counsel to his head of state had more effect.

In the meeting between President Roosevelt and King Abdalaziz on February 14, 1945 aboard the *USS Quincy*, the Saudi Arabian monarch spoke extensively about Palestine.

Subsequently, Roosevelt said, "I learned more about Palestine from that man in five minutes than I had learned in a lifetime of study about the subject up until then."

Consequently Roosevelt promised King Abdalaziz that he would do nothing that might unduly affect a just solution to the Palestine problem without first consulting him.

Truman, who succeeded Roosevelt as President, had different views on this issue.

Openly admitting that he was putting partisan political purposes above what was essential to the national welfare and vital American national security interests, Truman broke that pledge.

Lessons Not Learned

The United States, Israel, Palestinians and other Arab peoples have been paying for that decision ever since.

Some lessons are indeed poorly learned, for history reveals that President Richard M. Nixon made a similar pledge to King Faisal himself and like Truman, broke his promise to the Saudi king.

In the midst of the October 1973 War, Israeli forces were still deeply entrenched in the Sinai Peninsula which Israel had invaded and illegally occupied since June 1967.

Nixon, without consulting King Faisal, asked in a joint session of Congress for 2.2 billion dollars in emergency aid for Israel.

Upon learning that Nixon had broken his word to him, King Faisal, no longer bound by their mutual pledge, decided to join the Arab oil embargo.

Contrary to myth, the oil embargo had been declared earlier by nearly every Arab oil exporter

but Saudi Arabia, which remained true to Faisal's word solemnly given Nixon.

In one fell swoop, a United States President unwittingly made a decision that he and his successors have rued ever since.

550,000 barrels of Saudi Arabian oil were instantly removed from the market, as a result of Nixon's breach, sending the international price of oil skyward and the world changed.

Putting Paid to the Past

To truly comprehend the context, background and perspective of what led to the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince's peace proposal, an examination of both the foregoing as well as subsequent litany of key Saudi Arabian-centric milestones preceding the proposal is essential.

Several milestones predate Israel's establishment but strongly influenced a significant portion of the Kingdom's policies and official attitudes towards it both before and after 1948.

King Faisal was deeply concerned by Communism and Zionism, which he regarded as having nearly equally dangerous effects on the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Faisal's concerns were not academic but hammered out on the anvil of empirical experience.

Faisal visited the Soviet Union in the 1930s for nearly a month, but he returned to his country profoundly influenced forever by what he had seen.

In the Stalinist campaign to inculcate a nation with the values of Marxism-Leninism, Faisal saw the antithesis of everything that Islam and Saudi Arabia represented and hoped to become.

Consequently, the Kingdom refused to have diplomatic or other relations with Moscow from the 1930s throughout the Cold War.

Faisal believed that the campaign to implement political Zionism in Palestine, much like Moscow's quest to gain footholds in the region, bore ill tidings for the future. This belief left an indelible imprint on his musings about the essential ingredients to produce and prolong a framework of order and evolutionary development in the Middle East.

In the run-up to the partition of Palestine, Faisal anticipated that Marxism, on one hand, and Zionism, on the other, would provoke almost equally radical tendencies and thereby constitute two of the greatest challenges to regional peace and stability.

Present at the Creation

Faisal, King Fahd (r. 1982-) and King Khalid (r. 1975-1982), then princes, were all present at the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco.

These three leaders and other members of the Saudi Arabian government followed closely, and

were positively impressed by, the United Nations in its first few years.

The United Nations bestowed three consecutive major victories to weaker countries, Iran, Syria and what would become Indonesia, over a trio of imperial powers, the Soviet Union, France and the Netherlands, respectively, bent on perpetuating their domination of their subject peoples.

The United States and other Great Powers, working in concert in the nascent United Nations, made a difference that has not been matched since.

In this context Saudi Arabians and many other Arabs believed that the United Nations would deal with the Palestine situation justly when Faisal and other Arab and Islamic leaders attended the fateful U.N. session in November 1947. This is the background to what Arabs ever since have termed the *naqba*, or catastrophe that ensued.

At the 1947 UN meeting, Faisal witnessed the UN General Assembly, acting in response to heavy-handed pressure from the United States, vote to partition Palestine. In so doing, those who joined with the United States and voted in favor elected, in effect, to give the 30-40% percent of the population of Palestine that was then Jewish 55% of the land while the 60-70% percent of the population - i.e., Palestinian Arab Christians and Muslims -- was entitled to only 45% of the amount of land. Far worse was that the 93% of the Palestinian Arab Muslims and Christians who owned the land would have their land holdings reduced to only 45% of the total.

After failing to prevent the American-sponsored resolution's passage, the leaders of several Arab countries decided to mobilize and deploy their armed forces to prevent the resolution's implementation.

These Arab armies were comprised of exceptionally modest numbers of ill-equipped and poorly trained troops.

While Saudi Arabia also decided to deploy its troops, the Kingdom's armed forces were exceptionally small in number and were located the furthest distance from the scene of conflict.

Saudi Arabia's military facilities and communications as well as transportation infrastructure were comparatively less modern and developed than those of the countries whose soldiers actually fought. As a consequence, the Kingdom's troops never made it into battle.

The Stubbornness of Facts

History proves the Kingdom has been involved in the Palestinian tragedy since the beginning and, by that standard alone, longer than most.

What also needs emphasizing is that, since the conflict's inception, the Kingdom's greatest concerns regarding its potential consequences have repeatedly materialized.

The consequences in question are related not only to the several Arab-Israeli wars that have been fought but also to a core Islamic value - *fitna* - or social chaos, which often occurs in tandem

with war and can just as easily transpire in reaction to a gross injustice for which no available remedy is perceived.

Every Muslim leader and head of state is enjoined to do whatever is necessary and possible to prevent *fitna* from occurring because no possible societal good can ensue.

As Custodian of Islam's two holiest places, and as a country eager to see that legitimate Muslim rights are upheld with regard to the Haram ash-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Israeli-controlled Jerusalem, the reasons behind Saudi Arabia's support for a just and enduring conclusion to the Arab-Israeli dispute have been self-evident for quite some time.

Long before the partition of Palestine, the goal of achieving a peaceful and successful settlement of this conflict has been uppermost among Saudi Arabia's enduring strategic objectives.

For the Kingdom the price of the long outstanding conflict has been enormous and risks escalating to be prohibitively high until far into the foreseeable future.

The extremism that the dispute's persistent irresolution has fanned throughout the region -- exactly as Marshall and other American strategists and national security advisers had predicted - is indisputable.

Moreover, as Marshall, Faisal, and other farseeing statesmen feared, the conflict, and in particular America's role in sustaining it through its massive support for Israel, allowed Soviet entry into the region on a massive and pervasive scale.

Moscow's Trojan Horse

Moscow saw in American policies towards this conflict a Trojan Horse within which its interests could be and were given a relatively free and for a long time successful ride into the region.

Following Moscow's ideological defeat, the same propellants of Arab, Islamic, Israeli, and Jewish radicalism rooted in the perpetuation of this conflict remain, reciting the same rhetoric.

"One can understand the United States and the American people's feeling the need to strike back at those who have hurt America. This is only natural.

But whatever a country's policies, the substance should avoid antagonizing its friends" is what a wizened Saudi Arabian mentioned in the aftermath of September 11.

American archives are replete with the oral history depositions of dozens of retired U.S. diplomats that relate to this issue.

Diplomats have testified that, after 1948, it was the conscientious and deliberate policy of successive American administrations not to encourage a close strategic and political relationship between Washington and any of Israel's neighbors.

That such a policy and strategic mindset was a mirror image of Israeli strategic objectives, but forged in a context that harmed American national interests, was not a coincidence.

America's rejection of Egypt's and Syria's outstretched hands of friendship and the potential benefits of a special partnership with these two countries did not come cost free.

Out of national pique, pride, and humiliation more than strategic desire, the leaders of Cairo and Damascus opted to forge close ties with the Soviet Union instead.

What If?

In this context, one needs to ask several "what if" questions.

A few will suffice to illustrate how the region's history and America's involvement with it would have unfolded differently and "better" without this conflict.

What if the Soviet Union had not gained as many footholds in the Arab and Islamic worlds?

What if the Soviet Union had not gained as much influence in this vitally important region as it was able to achieve and maintain until the end of the Cold War?

What if Russia were not able to utilize the current waves of anti-Americanism in Baghdad and Tehran, to fish with a nuclear pole in Iranian and Iraqi waters?

What if the Suez Canal had not been shut down twice for extended periods as a result of Israel's invasions of Egypt in 1956 and 1967?

What if no oil embargo had been declared against the United States, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Portugal in 1967, and against the United States again, in 1973?

What if Lebanon had not been invaded and occupied by Israel from the late 1970s for almost two decades?

What if no American diplomats, foreign affairs practitioners, and Marines had died as a result of anti-American suicide bombers?

What if there had been no Israeli invasion and occupation of Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, the Occupied Territories and no denials of a viable and independent Palestinian state?

What if Saudi Arabia had not been dragged through the mud of American jingoism in its several legitimate quests to purchase U.S.-manufactured defense equipment at the time of the Iranian revolution in 1979 and again in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war?

What if there had been no Israeli humiliation to the Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian people, and their supporters among Arabs further afield, enabling political extremism - often the harbinger of *fitna*, and its close cousin: anti-Americanism -- to take root and grow throughout

the region as a whole?

What if there had been no September 11, 2001?

It is an understatement that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdallah, like the leaders of every other Arab country, would have given generously to have prevented any of these tragedies from occurring, for their occurrences benefited no good cause.

The Path Previously Trod

The Kingdom's peace initiative can be best understood in this context.

The ongoing denial of prosperity to Arabs and Israelis alike is mainly caused by the perpetuation of this conflict.

The Kingdom has repeatedly stressed that there is no greater challenge to regional peace and stability.

Saudi Arabia historically introduced the region's first, momentous peace proposal at a summit in Fes, Morocco, in the early 1980s. The proposal guaranteed each and every state in the region the right to live in security.

This initiative completely reversed and renounced the Palestinians' strategy of armed struggle to gain independence and end the Israeli occupation.

The kinds of terrorism that Israel's own founders had practiced at length were foresworn. It was replaced with a commitment to achieving such goals by peaceful, political, and diplomatic means.

But Israel, then as now, downplayed, derided, and ultimately dismissed Saudi Arabia's unprecedented peace proposal as little more than a public relations ploy.

Rejection and Defiance

Israel's historical response to that peace offer, to American calls for a moratorium on building settlements, and to withdraw from re-occupied Palestinian territories has been rejection and defiance.

Israeli settlement building -- illegal acts of colonization that cause regional extremism and anger against the United States -- not only continued but accelerated.

Yet, despite these and other provocations, Saudi Arabia's leadership has never lost sight of the strategic objective of achieving a peaceful and comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

The Kingdom was one of the first to endorse America's Arab-Israeli peace proposal in 1991, out of which the Madrid summit convened.

Saudi Arabia actively participated in the Madrid summit through the Kingdom's Ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar, and also extensively engaged in the parallel multi-track diplomacy.

More than 30 nations committed to simultaneously address such issues as Arab-Israeli trade and investment, refugees, arms control, labor, and water.

Each of the multi-track meetings held by Israelis in Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar were endorsed by Saudi Arabia. Commercial and business leaders from the Kingdom participated alongside their Israeli counterparts with prominent private sector representatives from dozens of other countries at the 1990s' Middle East and North Africa Economic Summits in Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, and Qatar.

As further evidence of its commitment to go the extra mile in search of a peaceful settlement, Saudi Arabia's leaders did the unprecedented by enabling numerous high level delegations of American Jewish organizations' leaders to visit the Kingdom in the 1990s to see the country and explore prospects for peace between Arabs and Israelis.

Even the Kingdom's energy policies reflect its tireless quest for peace as it remains second to none in OPEC in calling for moderate oil prices and uninterrupted levels of production commensurate with meeting world economic needs and demands.

Added Assurances

This peace commitment in prudent oil and gas policies can also be seen in the Kingdom's standing offer to assume all the front-end design, engineering, and construction costs, and to staff and host in Riyadh at its own expense, an informal secretariat that would work year-round to address the legitimate needs of energy producers and consumers.

Thus, the Kingdom, contrary to popular mythology, has led the way to provide even further international assurance that the politicization of oil as a means of influencing the Arab-Israeli conflict is a strategic, economic, and political non-starter.

Indeed minutes after Iraq threatened to embargo oil sales to the United States this spring, the Kingdom declared that it would instantly replace any Iraqi oil removed from the market.

The Bottom Line

Based on the preceding discussion, the Kingdom clearly has from the outset actively concentrated on resolving the longstanding Arab-Israeli conflict peacefully and in ways that do justice to the legitimate interests of all the parties.

Much of this conflict, from its beginning, is about honesty and denial.

Forging a peaceful settlement turns on the accentuation of the former and on the diminution of

the latter.

Any evaluation of Crown Prince Abdallah's unprecedented peace proposal would do well to keep this in mind.

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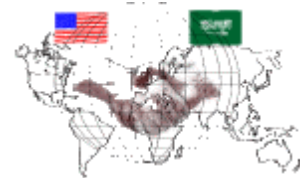
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