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“An Open Letter to Dennis Ross and Aaron Miller: Managing the Final-Status Negotiations”

by Kenneth W. Stein

Dear Dennis and Aaron:

Welcome back to the Holy Land. I wish I had your frequent-flyer mileage from the hundreds of trips you have clocked over the past decade or more. Dennis, I still remember your attendance at our Arm's Control Consultation at Emory's Carter Center in the 1980s. And, many negotiations have passed since Jim Baker and you cobbled the Madrid Conference together in 1991. If nothing else, you deserve enormous credit for resilience, steadfastness, and commitment to keep pouring the American glue on the respective sides.

As for you, Aaron, our dissertation advisor at Michigan would barely recognize our engagement in Middle Eastern matters; I know he would be proud of you. If I may be understated, among the three of us, I think I have the cushier job; I only have to worry about academic politics and teaching about the conflict. You have to manage it, which means, among other things, keeping the talks going. This is unlike a football or basketball game where time runs out; it is an extra-inning affair with knockdown pitches, on-field brawls, and each manager emptying his bench and bullpen.

Hopefully, the next American administration will sustain our historic bipartisan foreign policy of giving our best to reach a series of durable and comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlements. Given your admirable track record under Republican and Democratic presidents, maybe you two can stay at this for life and then retire to some diplomatic Cooperstown.

I noted recently in the Arabic and Hebrew press, as well as interviews given by relevant political leaders, that there are hopes that you, as umpires, will apply pressure to one side or the other. Be prepared for blasting volumes that will proclaim that you are biased in favor of one or the other. But take heart, it was that way eighty years ago.

Convincing the umpire of the righteousness of one's nationalist cause against the other community was the modus operandi for both Arabs and Zionists in Palestine. The degree of beseeching caused

Britain's Jerusalem District Commissioner, Ronald Storrs, to remark in the early 1920s that "two hours of Arab grievances drive me into the synagogue, while after an intensive course of Zionist propaganda I am prepared to embrace Islam."

And Britain's High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir John Chancellor, in defining the intermediary role which Britain was playing between Arab and Jew, told his son in early 1930, "There is a tendency here to regard the government as sort of umpire and scorer, trying to hold the balance between the two races, noting when one scores off the other, and regarding it as only fair that the next point in the game should be scored by the race that lost the preceding one."

Hang tough. Neither side can resolve this complex dilemma without the United States as referee and guarantor. Remember what Mubarak's political advisor, Usamah al-Baz, said last year. While the main sponsors of this peace process are Egypt, the United States, the European Union, supported by Russia, "only the United States is enmeshed in the day-to-day negotiations and can provide the guarantees necessary for a workable outcome."

Both of you enjoy the precedent of enormous flexibility. You can pick and choose what is needed at any particular moment. Your predecessors from Kissinger to Christopher and all those special negotiators in between have played various roles: advisor, architect, catalyst, cheerleader, choreographer, engineer, facilitator, financier, friend, fundraiser, guarantor, hand-holder, mailman, mediator, messenger, nag, ring-master, wordsmith, and umpire.

Moreover, since the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the beauty of (y)our diplomacy—and the core of criticism of it—have been that we have not had a preference for the shape of the substantive outcome. Likewise, we have used a variety of procedures to reach conclusions: conference diplomacy, mediation, presidential involvement, active participation of the secretary of state, special negotiators working the problem privately and publicly, shuttle diplomacy in the region, and closed conference diplomacy. The U.S. preference has been that we neither have a specific blueprint in mind, nor do we condone unilateral actions.

However, if I may make a suggestion, lots of folks in the Holy Land have done amazing things with water. They've reportedly walked on it, parted it, thrown bread on it, turned it to blood and more. Finding a couple of billion dollars to build a water desalination plant might be a good idea. It is not one of those earlier miracles, but it might work with

incredible benefit for all.

Stay the course: search for the fair, balanced, equitable, inferable, and collaborative conclusions. You are admired for being Cal Ripkin-like diplomatic iron-men.

Good Luck,

Ken

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