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CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH'S PEACE INITIATIVE

=====GulfWire~~Perspectives=====

PASSING BRAVE: CROWN PRINCE ABDALLAH'S PEACE INITIATIVE

by

John Duke Anthony

With the world still awaiting word from President Bush on what he will say next in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace, public commentary continues apace on Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdallah's March 28 peace proposal for solving the Arab-Israeli conflict. GulfWire is pleased to offer herein a perspective on the topic by GW publisher, Dr. John Duke Anthony. Dr. Anthony focuses on the Crown Prince's initiative in light of its treatment and assessment to date by many Americans, Arabs, and Israelis, including, among the latter, the Israeli leadership.

Depending on the degree of familiarity that analysts and critics have with the subject, and, also, on what they know about modern Saudi Arabian history, much of the public commentary thus far has been somewhat mixed and inconclusive. Generalists and specialists alike appear to have veered from being outright dismissive of the proposal as a perceived attention-getting gimmick, to being perplexed as to whether it is serious and, if so, why.

On the other hand, as many others have professed to being confounded as to whether the initiative, even if acknowledged as unprecedented, is likely to make any difference. A frame of reference is the Israeli Likud Party's decision last month to reject outright any idea of an independent State of Palestine. Some commentators confess to being dumbfounded as to why Prince Abdallah introduced the proposal when he did. Still others are uncertain as to whether, for any reason, it ought to be dignified with the serious discussion and debate that its author clearly intended, and clearly still intends, for it to receive.

In the essay that follows, Dr. Anthony takes a different tack. He provides essential context and background as to why the proposal surfaced at this time. He also contributes a range of insight and analysis regarding the Crown Prince's initiative that, for the most part, have not appeared in other published commentary to date. In response to such questions as, "Where's Saudi Arabia coming from with regard to this proposal?" and "What's driving the Kingdom to take such a position, especially when there are signs aplenty that this issue is as intractable as ever?" he offers clear answers and much of interest and value.

Dr. Anthony provides hard-to-come-by historical facts, strategic viewpoints shared by the Kingdom's policymakers to which he is privy, and matters

pertaining to the country's Arab and Islamic identity. All this and more is integrated into Dr. Anthony's assessment of Prince Abdallah's initiative. On balance, he argues that, for a period far longer than many are aware, in terms of what he has offered as a way out of the Arab-Israeli impasse, the Saudi Crown prince is serious in his hopes of being taken seriously, first and foremost, by Israel and its American supporters.

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[Washington - June 24, 2002] The world eagerly awaits President Bush's Mideast peace speech. Who is not eager to know what the President will say about how he intends to bring the new State of Palestine into being and, thereby, travel such a meaningful distance further along the road to peace between Arabs and Israelis?

Until the President delivers his speech, the main peace offer to Israel on the table is one advanced by Saudi Arabia that enjoys extraordinary pan-Arab backing. Following is an analysis of much of the hullabaloo that has transpired regarding the proposal.

On March 28, a summit of the 22-member League of Arab States in Beirut unanimously endorsed an Arab-Israeli peace initiative submitted by Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdallah. The proposal requires that Israel withdraw from all Arab territories it has occupied since June 4, 1967, that it recognize an independent State of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem, and that it agree to a just resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem through repatriation, compensation, or a combination of the two.

In exchange, the proposal includes everything Israel has asked for. Included are peace and normalization of diplomatic and commercial ties with the Jewish state, pan-Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist and to security, and a guarantee of regional defense in which there would be no attacks against Israel, or by Israel against an Arab country, of any kind.

The Saudi Arabian initiative, according to innumerable published accounts by analysts far and wide, is the most momentous and far-reaching one ever offered Israel, the more so for its having been presented by what many believe is the world's most important Arab and Islamic country.

THESIS

Notwithstanding widespread international acceptance of the proposal, a discordant chorus of American and Israeli voices has arisen against it since it was introduced, claiming specifically, that:

- o Saudi Arabia has seldom before interjected itself into the Arab-Israeli peace process and should not do so now;

- o The Kingdom's intentions and timing are deceptive;
- o Riyadh's real motivation is to deflect public attention from the fact that its citizens comprised 15 of the 19 hijackers in the September 11 attacks;
- o The proposal is a public relations ploy for the Kingdom to repair its image by shifting public attention from the fact that its citizens are numerically the most prominent among those imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay;
- o The Kingdom's leadership manipulatively identifies with the Palestinians' plight so as to divert its citizens' anger and frustration from itself; and
- o The Saudi Arabian ruling family's situation is fragile, its leadership fears being overthrown, and this is why the Crown Prince is trying to please the United States at this time.

COUNTER-THESIS

However plausible these statements may appear on the surface, whether viewed individually or collectively, it is this writer's view that nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, all of these assertions, and many others similarly unsubstantiated, are bogus. There are many reasons, but none has anything to do with the six spurious rationales noted.

One reason derives from the conflict's consistently adverse impact on the region's well being. To wit: the conflict has generated half a dozen wars. It is the oldest, largest, and most pervasive factor explaining why regional peace is likely to remain elusive for sometime yet to come.

A second reason flows from the Saudi Arabian leadership's deep understanding of the conflict and its implications from the outset for the region's legitimate quest for stability and prosperity. This stems from the intricate and passionate identification of the Kingdom's citizens with the conflict's international and domestic repercussions.

The latter include two closures of the Suez Canal, the spread of regional radicalism as well as anti-Americanism and terrorism, three oil embargoes, the perpetuation of an atmosphere disfavorable to inward flows of foreign investment, and the fact that many of the wounded and disabled Palestinians who have sought to end the Israeli occupation are in the Kingdom's hospitals.

A powerful third reason is imbedded in the observation that many Americans are fond of stating that Israel is the United States' only friend in the region, forgetting or overlooking the fact that, before the establishment of the State of Israel, American had no enemies in the region.

A formidable fourth reason is rooted in a unique facet of the Kingdom's history, about which most critics apparently know very little. Especially important in this regard is that, among the world's 140 developing countries, Saudi Arabia is the only one both to have become an entirely new state and entered into the community of nations in the last century not by having achieved its independence from a Western power.

The Kingdom's special perspective of having viewed the unfolding saga of Palestine from the beginning through unfiltered lenses has not been lost on specialists. Yet despite the abundance of evidence demonstrating the

Kingdom's extraordinarily close monitoring of the ongoing debate about Palestine's sovereignty, political independence, and territory since the debate's inception, generalists almost always overlook this dynamic.

The latter include three American groups that regularly bash Saudi Arabia: namely, the mainstream print media, major television and radio talk show hosts and participants, and most Members of Congress.

A PRESCIENT SAUDI ARABIAN: PRINCE FAISAL ...

A fifth reason why so few Americans know much about Saudi Arabia's deep and broad identification with the Arab-Israeli conflict from the very beginning is rooted in their not being aware of the lasting and profound educational impact of the late Saudi Arabian King Faisal (r.1965-1975) regarding this issue in the minds of many of the Kingdom's citizens.

Very few generalists appreciate the extent to which Faisal never tired of emphasizing to Saudi Arabians, Americans, and many others the need to achieve a just, durable, and comprehensive settlement of the Palestine problem. Even fewer are aware that Crown Prince Abdallah's peace proposal is anchored in, and an extension of, the same strategic objective.

Regarding what he and many others have long regarded as the core problem of the Middle East, Faisal, together with Prince Abdallah and numerous other Saudi Arabian leaders, knew longer and better than most about that which he spoke. Little wonder why: he grew up with the unfolding tragedy of Palestine.

Barely in his teens, Faisal was sent by his and Prince Abdallah's father -- King Abdalaziz bin Abdalrahman Al Sa'ud, "Ibn Saud" -- 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.

Subsequently Faisal spent more than three decades as Minister of Foreign Affairs before becoming king of Saudi Arabia. Carrying on as Foreign Minister for the past quarter century has been Faisal's son, HRH Prince Sa'ud Al-Faisal, who is as close to Prince Abdallah as any within the Kingdom's Cabinet and ruling family. Like the current Crown Prince and many others among the Kingdom's leaders, Prince Sa'ud equally acknowledges an intellectual debt to his father regarding this issue.

In short, two generations of Saudi Arabian king father and son, not to mention four kings in succession and one presently in waiting, have searched for over three quarters of a century for a just, durable, and comprehensive resolution to this conflict. This fact alone negates all assertions that the Kingdom is newly and deceptively embarking upon a path it has not traveled previously.

Regarding pan-Arab and pan-Islamic considerations related to Palestine, Faisal was more than a clear thinker and an astute analyst. He was prescient. From the 1920's onwards, Faisal foresaw the looming tragedy that lay in store for the Palestinian people. Along with many others, he envisioned the inevitable negative effects upon his own and other countries' national, regional, and international interests in the event the Mandate

were to be terminated at the expense of legitimate Palestinian rights and aspirations.

...AND A PRESCIENT AMERICAN: GEORGE MARSHALL

In this way, Faisal was not unlike another statesman, an American, 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 and material well being.

As Secretary of State in 1947, Marshall emphasized to Truman that American support for an unjust partition of Palestine would be calamitous. From his vantage point as America's top foreign policy strategist, Marshall was certain that, if Truman put narrow domestic self-interests above the dictates of realpolitik, above the determinants of a foreign policy that among other things took into consideration ground zero realities, no good and much that was bad would follow. He firmly believed that a decision to divide Palestine unfairly would be the cause of endless regional tensions.

Marshall also knew that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the United States to be able to contain such tensions. And he was fully aware that failure to do so would pose mounting threats to American national security interests not only in the immediate region, but elsewhere, given the vastness of the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Marshall and 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 - spoke the truth as they saw it, and as high-ranking public servants, they felt compelled to convey it, at the time. Hindsight reveals they were prophetic.

But whereas Marshall and his colleagues failed in their efforts to move Truman to do right by America's interests, Faisal, in contrast, was more effective in counseling his head of state.

In a meeting with President Roosevelt on February 14, 1945 aboard the USS Quincy, King Abdalaziz, who had been advised ahead of time at length by Faisal, spoke extensively about Palestine.

It bespeaks volumes that Roosevelt claimed afterwards that he learned more about Palestine in five minutes of talking with the Saudi Arabian monarch than he had during his entire life up until then.

As a result, the American President promised the Saudi King that he would do nothing that might unduly affect a just solution to the Palestine problem without consulting him first.

BROKEN PROMISES

But such was not to be. Truman, who succeeded President Roosevelt, had different views and broke Roosevelt's pledge.

In Washington, Truman met with all of America's ambassadors to the Arab world, whom he had recalled to the nation's capital. Without so much as saying so, he openly admitted that he would be putting partisan political purposes above national welfare and vital national security interests.

Secretary of State Marshall, an eyewitness to this exchange, informed Truman that, if he did so, he himself would vote against Truman in the 1948 election.

Reflecting the fact that he was behind in the electoral polls at the time, Truman, in a statement much quoted in later years, said, "Gentlemen, as you are aware, I am running for the highest office in the land.

"As such, I am responsive to the wishes of thousands of Americans who are anxious for the success of political Zionism. I have no Arabs among my constituents. I am sorry."

Strategists and historians ever since have frequently sparred about the moral and realpolitik merits and demerits of that decision. However, few specialists differ in the view that Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, and others have paid dearly and, while they await what President Bush has further to say on the Arab-Israeli conflict that ensued, are still paying, for that decision.

It remains an open question as to what American lessons, if any, have been learned from the past. Of interest in this regard is that President Nixon, more than a quarter of a century later, would make a similar pledge to King Faisal, and, like Truman before him, he would break it.

In the midst of the October 1973 War, Nixon, without consulting King Faisal, as he had promised he would do in the event he intended to do anything that would tilt the balance between Israel and any of its Arab neighbors, asked Congress for 2.2 billion dollars in emergency aid for Israel.

Nixon did this despite the fact that Israel's armed forces remained deeply and illegally entrenched in Egypt from its June 1967 invasion and occupation. And he did so, as specialists in international law have noted, in spite of the fact that Egypt was not attacking Israel per se, but exercising its lawful right to forcibly resist Israel's occupation of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

Upon learning this, Faisal considered his pledge broken by Nixon, and he joined the Arab oil embargo. Contrary to myth, the oil embargo had been declared earlier by nearly every Arab oil exporter but Saudi Arabia, which had remained true to Faisal's word to the American President.

Daily supplies in the form of 550,000 barrels of Saudi Arabian oil were instantly removed from the international market as a result of Nixon's breach, and the world changed forever.

PUTTING PAID TO THE PAST

At issue in the present circumstance is not the possibility of another Arab oil embargo. That issue is dealt with below. Rather, the issue is a quite

different matter, albeit, like several of the others, one of no small moment.

At issue is the degree to which Arabs and Israelis have been led to believe President Bush's oft-stated vision of a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, whereby a State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, will be brought into being and enabled to exist side by side with an Israel, with each having secure and recognized boundaries, is the equivalent of a similar promise.

If so, many wonder whether this promise, too, will be broken or, if not, whether its implementation will be indefinitely delayed, which, at the end of the day, might have the same effect.

With this as background, and despite critics' claims to the contrary, it can more easily be seen that the urgency and immediate relevance of Crown Prince Abdallah's peace proposal has hardly emerged from out of the blue, nor can it be fairly interpreted as either diversionary or insincere in intent.

Rather, the timing and intent of the proposal have their origins elsewhere. They stem as much as anything else from a wish by Prince Abdallah, other Saudi Arabian decision makers, and the leadership of practically the entire world to put this seemingly endless morass as decisively and effectively in the rear view mirror.

This, plus the hope of thereby avoiding a repeat of the kinds of costly mistakes noted that have repeatedly resulted from the world's inability, or rather its leaders' unwillingness and timidity, in face of the challenge of doing whatever is necessary to settle the conflict.

It is in this light that Saudi Arabia's de facto top leader and his supporters, which include many Americans, Arabs, and Israelis, reason that only thus can one effectively address the legitimate Arab and Israeli hopes and aspirations of the present pursuant to laying this conflict to rest.

ADDED ASSURANCES

Even in the decades-long absence of peace, it cannot be said that the Kingdom has failed to continue to seek new means of bringing the conflict to an end.

In the 1980s, the Kingdom offered the Fahd Peace Proposal, which also was unanimously endorsed by all the League of Arab States and became the Arab Peace Plan. The plan acknowledged the right of all states in the region to live in peace and security.

In endorsing the proposal, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) foreswore armed struggle as a legitimate means of ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab lands seized in the June 1967 War. What the PLO and other Arab resistance groups did not count on, however, was continued Israeli expropriation of Palestinian and Syrian land and Israel's prolonged occupation of Lebanon.

In the 1990s, the Kingdom broke Saudi Arabian tradition, and, in the eyes of many of its citizens, bent principle in order to demonstrate a willingness to do the unexpected and, in this case, walk an extra mile along the path towards peace. To this end, Riyadh hosted numerous high level delegations of American Jewish organizations' leaders who visited, toured the Kingdom, and met with key Saudi Arabian officials.

In this way, it was hoped that the offer of an Arabian olive branch would help to assuage some of the anxieties about Saudi Arabia and its leaders, as well as the Saudi Arabian citizenry, that have long been prevalent among anti-peace leaders inside Israel and their compatriots in the United States.

The idea was for the pro-Israel visitors to see for themselves the eagerness and sincerity of Saudi Arabian government officials, the Kingdom's private sector leaders, and many others to explore the prospects for peace between Arabs and Israelis. A related goal was that these American Jewish leaders would share what they saw, heard, and experienced in Saudi Arabia with their friends and associates in Israel.

SYNCHRONIZING STRATEGY

In the first decade of the 21st century, Riyadh has been similarly active and creative on still other strategic policy fronts. For example, it has been at pains to demonstrate on an ongoing basis how its energy policies underscore its support for Arab-Israeli and broader regional peace.

To this end, Prince Abdallah and the Kingdom's highest-ranking energy officials have gone out of their way to acknowledge repeatedly to President Bush and the American people that the engine of the United States economy, and the economies of America's allies, rely on the energy resources of Saudi Arabia and other Arab and Islamic nations more than on any other collectivity of peoples and countries.

A corollary to this reliance is the pivotal strategic role of the United States and Saudi Arabia as major pillars of the world's material well being, and of international stability, both now and in the decades to come.

It is with this in mind that, for more than a quarter of a century, the Kingdom has consistently called within OPEC for moderate oil prices and uninterrupted levels of production commensurate with meeting world economic needs and demands.

Similar considerations prompted Prince Abdallah, at an international energy conference in Riyadh two years ago, to offer to establish a permanent international secretariat that would be headquartered in Riyadh. He also offered to pay for all the front-end design, procurement, and construction costs of such an organization.

The Saudi Arabian Crown Prince made the offer as a means of addressing the legitimate desires of consumers and producers to have an additional means of ongoing discussion on matters pertaining to their respective energy and energy-related economic interests.

These and other Kingdom-driven economic, energy, and international political initiatives are ones from which the United States, the industrial nations, and the entire world, including Israel, have been, today are, and in the future will continue to be net beneficiaries.

Moreover, contrary to popular mythology, the Kingdom, for the past two and a half decades and counting, has repeatedly assured the world that the option or likelihood of its politicizing oil to influence the Arab-Israeli conflict is a strategic, economic, and political non-starter.

This past spring, the substantive veracity of these assurances materialized in a matter of minutes after Iraq threatened to embargo oil sales to the United States. The Kingdom declared that it would instantly replace any Iraqi oil removed from the market, and it did.

THE BOTTOM LINE

From the foregoing, it should be clear that, from the outset, other than Israel's immediate neighbors, Saudi Arabia has been the one Arab country more intricately involved than any other in trying to end the Arab-Israeli dispute.

It is in this context that the Kingdom can be seen as having been, and in remaining to this day, among America's closest and steadfast friends and the source of undeniable benefit to innumerable U.S. strategic, economic, political, commercial, and defense interests.

In pursuit of vital U.S. national needs and concerns, and those of its allies, Saudi Arabians and many others the world over have an abiding hope. That hope is that the Bush Administration will not lose sight of, or view lightly, this abundant evidence of the Kingdom's responsible international policies and positions, that it will spare no effort in leveling with the American people on how the Kingdom has contributed positively on these and related issues, and that it will lead by leading.

In the eyes of more than one Saudi Arabian leader, one key additional way to exercise responsible leadership in this regard would be for American and Israeli critics, especially at the level of their respective executive and legislative branch leaderships, to cease casting aspersions on the intentions and substance of the most seminal Arab peace proposal ever submitted to Israel.

Especially when, as in this case, the initiative, which offers peace and normalization in exchange for peace and normalization, has the full, unqualified support of all 21 Arab countries, the Palestine Authority, a great many Israelis, and, except for key elements within the Israeli leadership to date, practically the entire world.

Especially when, at the end of the day, as though through a glass seen darkly, reality brooks no illusions, and there is no good reason for America's leaders' to refrain from pointing their fingers at the truth.

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