Trump’s swashbuckling regional diplomacy offers opportunities

written by David M. Weinberg | 16.05.2025

More than any other country, Israel was hit this week by Trumpian whiplash; by the checkbook diplomacy conducted in blitzkrieg fashion by US President Donald Trump in the Middle East.

There was something unseemly about the extravagance and opulence that marked Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. There was something childish in President Trump’s enthusiasm for the glitzy gifts and sycophantic love that Arab rulers heaped on.

There was something unnerving in his chummy acceptance of mega-cash and a jumbo jet from the Hamas-supporting, Al-Jazeera-bankrolling Emir of Qatar. There was something unruly in the way he enthusiastically embraced Syria’s new president, Ahmed al-Sharaa (AlJolani), a former al-Qaida commander, complete with quite cavalier sanctions relief for Damascus.

And there was something smarmy about Trump’s assertion that America would use all these ties for Israel’s benefit.

Politicos and journalists fretted all week that Trump’s turbo-charged trillion-dollar dealmaking with oil-rich Gulf nations put Israel at diplomatic disadvantage. They asserted that Israel was being left out or left behind in Trump’s wheeling and dealing.

The uneasy feeling is compounded by other moves Trump has taken in recent weeks which might suggest distance between Washington and Jerusalem. This includes the lightening announcement of direct nuclear talks between Washington and Tehran, and the concomitant flood of statements suggesting that the US would settle for drawdown, not full dismantlement, of Iran’s nuclear and missile military juggernaut.

There was the abrupt Trump decision to call-off the American military campaign against the Houthis in exchange for a Yemeni pledge not to anymore attack US ships; a pledge to ceasefire that clearly does not include Israel.

And then there was Steve Witkoff and Adam Boehler's negotiation with Hamas to release American-Israeli hostage Edan Alexander. The release is a blessed thing, but the impression that this was done over Israel's head and at the expense of hostages who are "only" or "just" Israeli – is problematic.

And all-of-a-sudden everybody in the world is talking about rehabilitating Syria and investing in Gaza without a dime of consideration for devastated southern or northern Israel.

In short, it is hard to escape the sinking feeling that Israel just has not been invited to Trump's party.

BUT THIS is a wrong and ruinous misreading of the strategic picture. Israel still has an indispensable and prominent place in the wild and wooly Mideast of Donald Trump. Trump already has and surely will yet support moves that are critical to Israel's security and prosperity.

A more positive reconsideration of the strategic picture starts with recognition that Trump's visit was mainly about business deals to boost American fortunes, stemming from his urgent need to demonstrate economic achievements. This explains his enthusiasm for the insanely rich Gulfies. It does not mean dismissal of Israel.

It is true Israel does not have shiny toys or trillion-dollar business ventures with which to boost Trump, but it has other demonstrable and no-less-valuable advantages to America.

Trump surely understands that without Israel's decapitation of Hezbollah, the Assad regime in Syria (backed by Iran and Russia) would not have fallen. Trump surely understands that without Israel's destruction of Iran's air defense system the ayatollahs would not have been willing to even talk to him. Tenacious Israeli victories paved the way for Trump to cash-in.

Trump surely also understands that Israel's (still incomplete) evisceration of Hamas and other terrorist groups of Moslem Brotherhood ilk in Judea and Samaria too – evidence the horrible terrorist murder this week of Tzeela Gez – is critical to Saudi and Emirati security and to broad regional stability.

Without this there will be no better future for Palestinians, and the Saudis will

have less reason to respect and partner with Israel. Thus, Trump unapologetically has massively resupplied Israel with weapons and backed dramatic plans to depopulate Gaza of the bad guys.

So, while Israel may have seemed absent from Trump's swing through the region, it was not. In fact, President Trump promoted the Abraham Accords, demanded condemnation of the Hamas invasion of Israel at every step of the way (right in the face of Qatari and Syrian leaders), and talked toughly about Iran.

Equally important, Trump did not plaint about "Palestine" and the two-state delusion; did not moan about Israeli military operations in Rafah, Jenin, the Bekaa Valley (Lebanon), and Derra Province (Syria) – unlike the blessedly passe Biden-Harris team; and did not wail about gas for Gazans and outrageously threaten Israel with economic sanctions – unlike French President Emmanuel Macron.

Throughout, Trump emphasized peace through strength. The message was clear. Trump's America is seeking sovereign partners who carry their own weight and increase America's safety, strength, and prosperity across the globe.

This presents excellent opportunities for Israel. This country holds great regional strategic advantage and military strength. If it seizes the moment to act decisively in its own interests – which clearly are America's interests too, in the main – it will garner Trump's support. This is particularly true regarding Gaza and Iran.

However, if Israel hesitates or wilts, Trump will lose interest or patience or both. And then he may go off in his own capricious directions, over Israel's head and without due consideration of Israel's perspective.

Again, Trump has not abandoned Israel; he is daring Israel to act daringly. He wants Israel to be the regional hegemon that it must be.

In other words, object not to Trump's swashbuckling regional diplomacy. Complain, if you will, about Israeli procrastination and irresolution. The ball is in Israel's court, and Trump is waiting for Jerusalem to serve with full force.

SO WHY isn't this assessment widely heard? Because the political opposition to Prime Minister Netanyahu and the mainstream media which slavishly serves it drive a false, nasty narrative of Israeli malfeasance; that Jerusalem has wrecked relations with Washington, and that Netanyahu has fallen out of Trump's good

graces.

Pundits and politicians gleefully pattered-on all week about Israel being downgraded. They could barely disguise their *schadenfreude* at Netanyahu's supposed sidelining. They purposefully misconstrued Trump's diplomacy to pile on Bibi yet again.

Don't believe it. Instead, demand that the Government of Israel act expeditiously to take advantage of the strategic windows of opportunity that President Trump holds open for Israel and the region.

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