

A Chance Encounter With Rex Tillerson

BY EZRA FRIEDLANDER

Due to President Obama's ill-conceived abstention on United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 to condemn Israeli settlements in the disputed post-1967 territories, there has been a feverish focus around the paralyzed "peace process" between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The unwanted attention and subsequent conversation has been concentrated on what Israel has done wrong, what she should be doing, and how the peace negotiations should be handled.

While respected experts and pundits alike have offered their insight on the never-ending conflict, I want to shed light on what I feel is a critically important component of the conversation that has been glaringly missing: history.

The international community—and in particular members of the Security Council—in their pursuit to identify the root cause of the conflict have failed to learn the lessons of history. They have what one might call convenient amnesia. What the "experts" seem to have forgotten is that the historic and enduring peace between Israel and Egypt, negotiated by the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the late Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin, came about as a result of Sadat's bold declaration to his own people and to the Arab world that he was ready to recognize

Israel and seek peace with her.

Sadat made what was once deemed an unthinkable proposition and issued a presidential declaration of peace with the Jewish state, in the shadow of the Yom Kippur War. His message preceded the actual commencement of direct negotiations and was the exact opposite of an internationally imposed solution.

No one is talking about Sadat today. In the midst of the frustrating gridlocked peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, why isn't anyone looking back at the most successful and lasting peace process the Middle East has ever known?

Why do I bring this subject up now?

Well, one of the greatest advantages of working as a public-policy consultant on Capitol Hill is that you get the chance to meet some interesting and influential people. On my most recent trip to the Hill, I had the good fortune of engaging in a conversation with President-elect Donald Trump's Secretary of State-designee, Rex Tillerson. During the brief time I was able to speak with him, I seized the rare moment to stress to him that this lack of focus and understanding of history and its application and relevance to the conflict today is a missed opportunity. I humbly suggested to him that he might want to consider the following.



Secretary-designee Rex Tillerson with Ezra Friedlander

President Anwar Sadat was a champion of peace and a pioneer of diplomacy—one of the greatest visionaries the world has seen. He became the first Arab leader to officially recognize Israel as a nation-state, facing public backlash from radical groups.

Sadat was indispensable to establishing lasting peace between Israel and Egypt by courageously expelling those hostile to Israel and successfully negotiating a peace treaty at the Camp David Accords along with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

Most remarkable about Sadat's diplomacy was his decision to travel to Israel before commencing negotiations. He addressed the Knesset on November 19, 1977, and spoke about his views on how to achieve comprehensive peace in

the Arab-Israeli conflict, courageously announcing: "I have come to you so that together we might build a durable peace based on justice, to avoid the shedding of one single drop of blood from an Arab or an Israeli. It is for this reason that I have proclaimed my readiness to go to the farthest corner of the world."

Throughout the peace process, Sadat was well aware of the controversy to which his actions would lead, but held on to his ideals and pushed for peace anyway, ultimately paying with his life.

I believe that the lasting success of the Camp David Accords is due to the bold and courageous first move Sadat took by visiting Israel before the negotiations started.

It was an important symbolic action that generated the goodwill which successfully contributed to the treaty's success. This quality is what is lacking in today's peace process. We do not have the Anwar Sadat of our time—someone willing to boldly pursue peace, despite the risks or controversy.

The conversation should be about working towards building comprehensive peace, rather than practicing absenteeism and abstention. Only when this happens can there be lasting change.

Mr. Tillerson graciously listened, as I imagined a potential secretary of state would. I wished him well and we parted ways. ❖

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