

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY MELVIN GOODMAN

19.05.2024

Friedman, Biden and US Weapons Sales to Israel



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

In a long oped on Sunday titled “Biden’s Error in Pausing Military Aid,” Thomas Friedman buys into Israeli propoganda that describes Iran as an “existential threat,” and harshly denigrates President Joe Biden for announcing a pause in U.S. weapons sales to Israel. Friedman is critical of Biden for announcing the pause in the transfer of 3,500 bombs to Israel in an “off-the-cuff-exchange with CNN’s Erin Burnett during a campaign stop in Wisconsin.

In actuality, Biden had been threatening Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with a serious departure in U.S. foreign policy in several sensitive and acrimonious phone calls that began

in December 2023. Friedman chose not to say—or didn't know—that Biden had notified the Israelis privately about the decision to stop the shipment of bombs. Biden did not want to make a public announcement because he didn't want a public blowup. It was the Israelis who leaked the news in order to embarrass Biden and notify their U.S. supporters; this forced Biden to go public on CNN in order to stress that the United States would not be a part of any major military operation in Rafah. Friedman was either being disingenuous or didn't understand the background of Biden's comments.

Friedman typically supports Israel's insistence that it faces an existential threat from Iran. His echoing of Israeli propaganda stresses that "Israel's true existential threat is from Iran and its network of allies—Hezbollah, the Houthis, Hamas and Shiite militias in Iraq." Israel's easy military victories over its Arab neighbors in various wars since 1948 as well as the recent Israeli defeat of nearly all of Iran's drones and missiles fired at Israel last month secured its superpower status in the Middle East. Israel's success along with support from Britain, France, and several Arab countries brings into question the assertions there is an external existential threat to Israel.

Friedman should have noted that Biden's symbolic move against Israel represents the first time that a Democratic president has been willing to challenge Israeli aggression. A series of Republican presidents have done so, starting with President Dwight D. Eisenhower during the 1956 Suez War, when Israel unwisely linked itself to the European colonial powers trying to hold onto the Suez Canal. President Ronald Reagan help up arms shipments because of the devastating Israeli bombing of Beirut in 1982. And President George H.W. Bush held up economic assistance because of Israel's expansion of its illegal settlements on the West Bank. President Barack Obama had every reason to punish the Israelis in 2015 because of Netanyahu's unconscionable interference in U.S. domestic politics in an effort to block the Iran nuclear accord. Instead, Obama "rewarded" Israel with the largest military aid package in the history of U.S.-Israeli relations.

Walt Kelly's Pogo said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." In Israel's case, the existential threat is internal: the threat of the Israeli ultra-orthodox Haredim, who are a political and social threat to Israeli stability, and the threat from Netanyahu's right-wing government that favors an Israeli state "from the river to the sea." In 1977, the Likud Party's charter inserted the support for Israel "from the river to the sea," which didn't originate with the Palestinians. Netanyahu's war crimes in Gaza threaten to make Israel a pariah state, moreover, which would add the Prime Minister himself to the list of internal or domestic existential threats.

Friedman also asserts that Hamas “invited this war,” which ignores the fact that Israel had turned Gaza into an outdoor jail in the wake of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s decision to withdraw Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip. One of Israel’s most popular mythologies, which is corroborated by the mainstream media, is that the withdrawal of Jewish settlers from Gaza was a peace gesture to allow Gazans to fend for themselves as citizens. In actual fact, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (and the West Bank) are neither refugees nor citizens. As Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has written, the Palestinians are “citizen-less inhabitants. They are inmates...of a huge prison in which they have no civil and human rights and no impact on their future.”

In fact, the Israelis have been conducting an incremental genocide against the Palestinians since the withdrawal of the settlers in 2005. Today’s Gaza is not inhabitable. Gaza’s cities are little more than pulverized, dusty-gray rubble that resembles the scenes in wartime Germany in the wake of Allied bombing. The United States of course is complicit with its supply of fighter jets and 2,000-pound bombs that Israelis are using in urban areas. Biden’s modest decision regarding a pause in military shipments of only these bombs is actually too little, too late.

Friedman has used several columns in the past few months to argue the case that the path to peace in the Middle East runs through Saudi Arabia. As a result, Friedman and many others strongly support a U.S. security alliance with Saudi Arabia to reshape the Middle East and end the war in Gaza. It’s not clear to me what kind of game Mohammed bin Salman is playing with the United States, but the Biden administration should be cautious regarding any defense arrangement with Saudi Arabia.

The United States and Saudi Arabia are secretly discussing a wide range of cooperative activities, including a leading role for U.S. companies in building the first phase of Saudi nuclear reactors and a Saudi investment in a U.S.-based uranium enrichment operation, which could reduce U.S. reliance on importing enriched uranium from Russia. Any cooperation in the nuclear sphere that would further Saudi knowledge of the nuclear fuel cycle seems to be a particularly poor idea, and could lead to further proliferation in the region to include Turkey and Iran.

Finally, Friedman even supports the idea of the Israeli Defense Forces going into Rafah, arguing that “if it takes Israel going into Rafah” to defeat Hamas, “then so be it.” His proviso is that “Israel partners with non-Hamas Palestinians to build a better Gaza and create the possibility of a new dawn for Palestinians and Israelis.” What would be the “new dawn” for the million and a half Palestinians trapped in Rafah?

The United States needs to reduce its exposure in the volatile Greater Middle East, and should not be looking for ways to expand its military presence. The region has been Washington's briar patch for the past sixty years, and U.S. interests have suffered as a result of close military ties to Israel and a heavy military presence in the region. The United States has far more urgent challenges elsewhere.

Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of [Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA](#) and [National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#), and [A Whistleblower at the CIA](#). His most recent books are "American Carnage: The Wars of Donald Trump" (Opus Publishing, 2019) and "Containing the National Security State" (Opus Publishing, 2021). Goodman is the national security columnist for [counterpunch.org](#).

MAY 17, 2024