

Saudi, Emirati Researchers Defend UAE's Normalization Agreement with Israel

by Hugh Fitzgerald



While the Palestinians have been venting their fury over the UAE-Israel “normalization,” several Arab academics have defended the agreement as making the Palestinians the “biggest winners.” The story is [here](#).

Abd al-Aziz bin Razen, a prominent Saudi academic and researcher, defended the normalization agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates on Saturday, saying it “pulled the rug from under the feet of Turkey and Iran” and turned the Palestinians into the “biggest winners.”

In an article published in the Saudi al-Khaleeg online

newspaper, Razen wrote that the agreement was not a “blank check, but rather the goal was to protect the rights of the Palestinian people who have been abandoned by Hamas and thrown into the arms of Iran.

When Razen says that Hamas has “abandoned” the Palestinians, I assume he means that they are not interested in the welfare of those they rule over so cruelly in Gaza, but only in how much, through corruption, they can enrich themselves. Just two Hezbollah leaders, Mousa abu Marzouk and Khaled Meshaal, managed to amass fortunes of \$2.5 billion apiece; there are right now 600 Hamas millionaires living in Gaza. Hamas leaders are not interested in improving the lot of those they claim to care about; they have no desire in reaching a peace agreement with Israel that would also improve the lives of those they now rule over but put an end to their own roles as leaders of a terrorist group.

“The UAE is sovereign and has the right to do what its political and security interests dictate,” Razen argued. “It initiated this agreement after 72 years of the Arab-Israeli conflict to protect Islamic sanctities. One of the conditions of the agreement is to allow Muslims around the world to pray at the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque.”

There was no need to “protect Islamic sanctities.” Israel is scrupulous about protecting Islamic holy sites. The Haram al-Sharif belongs to the Waqf administered by Jordan. Israel’s only role on the Temple Mount (Haram al-Sharif) is to provide security. Razen seems to suggest that Muslims around the world were formerly forbidden from praying at Al-Aqsa. That is not true. Muslims around the world have always been allowed to pray at Al-Aqsa. What is true is that it was logistically difficult to fly into Tel Aviv from Muslim countries that had no relations with Israel; following this agreement, Muslims will now be able to fly into Abu Dhabi, travel from there by

plane to Tel Aviv, and by ground transportation to Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa. So in the interests of the truth, let's rephrase Razen: "It is now *much easier* for Muslims from around the world to get to, and pray at, Al-Aqsa."

The Saudi academic noted that the Israel-UAE deal was not the first of its kind. "It was preceded by several agreements such as the [Israel-Egypt] Camp David agreement, the [1991] Madrid Peace Conference, the [1993] Oslo Accords [between the PLO and Israel] that resulted in the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, as well as the [1994] Wadi Araba Agreement [between Israel and Jordan]," Razen pointed out.

He's trying to defend the agreement by alluding to previous agreements between Arabs and Israel. But the agreement between the UAE and Israel is much more far-reaching than the peace agreements Israel signed with Egypt (a Laodicean peace) and Jordan (a cold peace). This is not only a peace treaty, but it envisions a wide-ranging "normalization" between the UAE and Israel, which means a host of agreements to encourage cooperation in technology, trade, tourism, agriculture, solar energy, medicine, defense, and much else that were not part of Israel's agreements with Egypt or Jordan.

"The UAE, he added, "is trying to put an end to the era of denunciation and condemnation by taking this step to serve the defenseless Palestinian people. It threw the ball into the court of the Palestinians, who must now seize the opportunity and abandon the policy of lip service."

Razen is clearly contemptuous of the ineffectual and corrupt Palestinian leaders, both in Hamas and in the Palestinian Authority, who have accomplished nothing save for the enrichment of themselves, have substituted terror (in the case of Hamas) and tantrum-throwing (in the case of the PA) for policy, and continue to call for a return to the 1949 armistice lines. Yassir Arafat, and then Mahmoud Abbas, turned

down generous offers made first by Ehud Barak and then by Ehud Olmert, for at least 95% of the West Bank. The PA obstinately refuses even to engage in discussions with Israel or the United States about a plan that would not only give the Palestinians a state of their own, but also \$50 billion from donors, the largest aid package for a single country in history. The Palestinians are “defenseless” because their leaders are thieves who have no interest in the well-being of their people, but more in striking attitudes of defiance, and encouraging violence, as with the terrorism-promoting Pay-For-Slay policy.

The U.A.E. has now, in Razen’s view, taken a sensible approach: to recognize Israel, to make public overtures to Israel, to engage Israelis economically in a whole host of undertakings of mutual benefit, and to win, and deserve, Israelis’ trust, and to hope that out of all those connections may come a Palestinian state that Israelis and Palestinians can live with. It is not an embrace of Palestinian maximalist demands. The UAE has not insisted on a return to the 1949 Armistice Lines. Instead, Israel has agreed to “suspend” – not necessarily end forever – annexation plans in the West Bank. According to Razen, it’s now up to the Palestinians – the people, led by new leaders instead of the current corrupt crew – to negotiate, and make peace, with Israel. The UAE has managed to halt, for now, the extension of Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank – a very great concession by Israel, insufficiently appreciated by the world. And not appreciated at all by the Palestinians, who continue to rage about the UAE’s “normalization” of relations with Israel. But the Palestinians, if they think things through, should recognize that they are indeed the “big winners,” because Israel has halted its annexation plans.

In another article published in the Saudi newspaper, Emirati political analyst and researcher Salem al-Ketbi also defended the deal with Israel, saying the UAE was acting in the

interest of the Palestinians and all peoples of the region...

These are two attempts, not entirely convincing but certainly laudable, to persuade the Arabs that the UAE agreement with Israel has made the Palestinians “the biggest winners.” Now Muslims from all over will find it easier to visit Al-Aqsa, via the new Abu Dhabi-Tel Aviv plane route, with the Palestinians benefiting greatly, in both money and prestige, from such religious tourism to Haram al-Sharif. And even more important for them, annexation is on hold, while Israel – which has always been ready to “engage in serious dialogue” – and the UAE both wait for the Palestinians to come to the table and negotiate directly. And if they refuse? Then, having made its good faith effort to help the Palestinians by halting the annexation, the UAE can wash its hands of the whole affair. It will have done what it could. It could not have done more.

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