

Obama and Israel

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Former President Obama is regarded as something of a saint. His voice is the gospel of the Democratic and academic constituency of the USA. He was a pragmatic president and one constrained both by pressure from the left as well as the right. He tried to balance different narratives. But in the end, his policies, particularly on foreign Affairs were either disastrous or appeasing. Nevertheless, he remains influential.

Therefore, the distortions and woeful ignorance (if not ideological dogma) about Israel in his latest book, are all the more disturbing and augur badly for peace in the Middle East. How ironic that he called it "A Promised Land." Clearly, he does not know there was another Promised Land before his. Or maybe, as he was educated in such matters by Rev. Jeremiah Wright, he believes the Old Testament has been revoked.

His antipathy towards Israel and Netanyahu fairly screams from the pages in which he deals with the Middle East. That's his right of course. But it is his distortion of history that really offends. He writes that "the British were occupying Palestine when they issued the Balfour Declaration." It is true that they were well on the way to defeating the Ottoman Empire at that moment, but the Ottomans were not yet defeated and did not concede until 1918. Whereas the Balfour Declaration was in 1917. Besides, it was the Ottoman Empire that had no interest in nationalist politics that had occupied the area well before the British. Ironically, it was the Ottoman Empire that had welcomed many of the Jews fleeing the Christian expulsion from Spain and encouraged them to settle in their ancient homeland which many thousands did.

It was the League of Nations in 1922 that established the "Mandate for Palestine" in carving up the body of "the sick man of Europe" (an epithet most appropriate now for Erdogan of Turkey). And it was the League of Nations that said that "recognition has hereby been given to the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and to the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country." And it was the international San Remo conference of 1920 that decided on the allocation of The Middle East. What a shame Obama did not read T.E. Lawrence's "Seven Pillars of Wisdom."

In omitting to mention this internationally agreed mandate for Jews in their

historical homeland he is legitimizing the lie that the movement for a Jewish homeland in Judea and Samaria had no legal international legitimacy but was simply a colonial invasion. An evil plot by the Imperialist powers to humiliate Islam.

The Jews maintained a continual presence throughout the 2,000 years that most were exiled from the land. If more did not come, it was because the economic conditions simply made it impractical. In Medieval Spain, Yehuda Halevy wrote, " My heart is in the East, but I am at the end of the West." And great Jewish leaders, such as Nachmanides and Maimonides, tried to settle there. Isaac Luria and the Kabbalists made Safed the spiritual capital of Judaism in the sixteenth century. Many of the important Hassidic leaders of Eastern Europe moved already in the eighteenth century. More than 100,000 immigrants arrived in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1920s, Jews fleeing anti-Semitism in Europe found a safe haven in Palestine not as Zionists but as Jews. The immigration of Jews created employment prospects that drew almost as many Arab immigrants into the area as well.

In talking about Israel's foundation, Obama's use of "Zionist leaders" instead of "Jewish leaders" plays right into the current international climate, in which it is politically correct to be "anti-Zionist," while unacceptable to be anti-Jewish. Have you heard of anyone who is pro Muslim but against the existence of a Muslim State?

His claim that the new immigrants "organized highly trained armed forces to defend their settlements" is also misleading. It was the rise of militant Arab nationalism that encourage constant attacks on Jewish areas. Jews had no choice but to take up arms to defend themselves. There were Arab riots and massacres throughout the twenties and thirties.

Obama tells the story of the establishment of the State of Israel in two sentences, which are nothing short of outright revisionist history: "As Britain withdrew, the two sides quickly fell into war. And with Jewish militias claiming victory in 1948, the state of Israel was officially born." The two sides didn't "fall into war." The two sides had been fighting for decades. And the Mufti of Jerusalem had appealed to Hitler to come and destroy the Jews.

When the British withdrew in May 1948, the Jews made the very difficult decision to declare their independence based on the U.N. Partition Plan approved by the United Nations. The plan was heavily weighted against Israel. But at least it gave the right for a Jewish state alongside an Arab state.

The Arab states refused to accept. They were the ones who declared war, sent their armies in, and bombed Tel-Aviv in May 1948. Why does he say that there were "Jewish militias claiming victory"?

The most disingenuous sentence of Obama's history of Israel is in his description of what happened during the 30 years following Israel's establishment: "For the next three decades, Israel would engage in a succession of conflicts with its Arab neighbors..." The Arab armies and their terrorists maintained a state of war and attacked Israel again and again. Israel fought to defend itself. The pre-emptive strike in 1967 only came after Egyptian provocation, threats, closing the Straits of Tiran and expelling UN Peacekeepers from Sinai. Perhaps he forgot or chose to ignore the Second Amendment of the American Constitution. I was there. I remember. Israel simply did a better tactical job against overwhelming odds and numbers. Even if on occasion they made mistakes.

Obama's bias was evident almost immediately after he came to power. In addressing the Arab world from Cairo he did indeed admit that Israel had a right to exist. But he justified it exclusively in terms of reaction to the Holocaust. This is precisely how the Palestinian narrative distorts history, by claiming that the only reason Israel gained a State was that the imperialist powers felt guilty for the Holocaust. He said nothing at all about the long history of Jewish settlement and governance. He was accepting the Palestinian narrative that Jerusalem was never a Jewish city. Indeed, a claim he ordered his United Nations delegation to sign off on days before he left his position. He clearly did not know that we Jews have prayed "Next Year in Jerusalem" for two thousand years and there is no Muslim equivalent. In other words, in this book, he was parroting the anti-Israel narrative of the left that Israel is an artificial Imperialist stooge imposed on the Arab world to protect American interests.

I fear President Biden's team of Obama hacks will be back in place and toeing the line of their god. Tarnishing Israel's image by painting her as a colonialist aggressor (which most of the Arab world and the Left pretend) will not help peace. In reality, the left does not want peace, it wants extermination. "From the River to the Sea" is their slogan.

Let us remember there has never been an agreed peace treaty that has fixed borders. There could have been a Palestinian State in 1967 but the Khartoum meeting of the Arab League categorically rejected peace with its three "nos." No Peace, and No recognition, and No Negotiations cruelly stymied any chance of a deal.

I always supported the idea of Land For Peace, of two States. But the more violence became the norm on both sides attitudes have hardened. Seventy years of others interfering got nowhere. At last economic self-interest and the threat of Iran are now achieving more than any political intervention or ideological campaign of hatred.

Obama's baleful influence and biases will certainly not help the cause of peace. Do you think Obama is going to revise his information? Don't bet on it. Prejudice is rarely defeated by facts.