

Kushner 8-23-2017

Bad timing

The timing for this trip couldn't be worse. It may be that the recent terror and violence at Haram al-Sharif/the Temple Mount -- in which the United States played a minimal role -- has accelerated the administration's timetable and its desire to try to get something going before violence breaks out again. But right now there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that either Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas or Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is in the mood to compromise on the substance of the negotiations or the process itself.

Talk of scandal and indictment is swirling around Netanyahu and is pushing him to circle the wagons and reach out to his right -- never a good omen for peace.

And Abbas is viewed as weak: fighting rear-guard actions against Hamas and his Fatah rivals as well as key Arab states. He is also threatening to internationalize his approach to the peace process rather than enter into talks with Israel.

Indeed, he's reportedly going to present Kushner with an ultimatum that unless progress is made within 45 days, the Palestinian Authority will turn away from the United States as a broker.

No plan

If you don't know where you're going, the old saying goes, any road will get you there.

This will be Kushner's third trip to the region, and the administration has still not decided on a framework or an end state for negotiations.

Indeed, Trump has neither endorsed nor rejected the two-state solution -- the mainstay of his three predecessors' approach to the peace process.

In a recent off-the-record briefing, Kushner admitted the challenges in identifying an end game and wondered what -- new or unique -- he and the administration were bringing to the problem.

One-state solution explained 00:52

No matter who had won the 2016 US election, getting to a two-state solution would have been a real stretch. So is the Trump administration considering another option? And what ideas might Kushner be bringing to the region on this visit?

Is he going to propose a bottom-up approach of interim steps: economic cooperation, turning over more responsibility to Palestinians in parts of the West Bank, and deepening now fraught Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation?

Or will he propose a top-down policy? One that develops a framework on the big issues, such as borders and Jerusalem that the two sides will negotiate with US help?

Whichever direction Kushner and the administration decide to take, they need to make their plans known soon.

The Kushner trip might actually be considered something of a success if the United States managed to identify an approach that Abbas and Netanyahu didn't blow out of the water immediately.

An Arab fantasy

The new ingredient in this administration's attempts to bring peace to the region is the willingness of Arab states to work with Israel -- Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in particular.

And it's no coincidence that the Kushner mission began with a swing through the Gulf, Egypt and Jordan.

Given the Trump administration's penchant for huge events, it wouldn't surprise me if it was aiming to produce some kind of peace conference as a way to jump-start the process. One Arab analyst speculated -- somewhat fantastically -- that the Saudis might host such a happening in Jeddah.

How much the Arab states will give, however, is going to depend on how forthcoming the Israelis will be vis-à-vis the Palestinians and whether the Trump administration will support Palestinian goals, particularly on statehood.

Indeed, it's magical thinking to believe that if the United States wants the Arabs involved in a meaningful way, either Jerusalem or Washington (most likely both) won't have to pay for it.

Credibility on the line

In 20 years of working on the peace process, I wish I had a nickel for every unproductive trip we took to try to start or save negotiations.

Persistence is critical. But so is keeping your powder dry when it's clear that the parties really aren't all that interested in helping out a US envoy. And as part of the President's family, Kushner is no ordinary envoy.

Moreover, he's traveling with deputy national security adviser Dina Powell, the immensely talented, Egyptian-born fluent Arabic speaker who will provide real substance, heft and hopefully some much-needed reality.

Abbas: With Trump's wisdom, peace is possible

Abbas: With Trump's wisdom, peace is possible 00:46

Still, another trip or two without producing a visible sign of progress -- let alone a direction or concept that the Arabs and Israelis can embrace -- will erode what remains of Kushner's credibility on this issue. And the parties will grow accustomed to his visits and weary of his talking points. And while they may humor him because of his closeness to the President, they won't take him seriously.

Had Trump not come out of the gate pushing big breakthroughs and ultimate deals, he might not have put his and US credibility so publicly on the line. No one looking at Abbas and Netanyahu realistically would ever have believed that they -- even with US help -- could produce a final peace agreement on the big issues.

And the President's political travails at home, particularly the self-inflicted wounds in the wake of the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, have raised serious questions about Trump's capacity and focus to deliver on the peace process -- or any other issue.

Right now the emperor has no clothes. And where Kushner and his team will find them is anybody's guess.

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But maybe Kushner may get a few more investors for never-to-be built Trump real estate ventures. That's all DJ cares about

C'mon Man 36 minutes ago

If Donnie thinks the Palestinian's are going to take direction/advice from a Jewish person with regards to Israel, he's even dumber than we now know him to be. A bad move that will likely end in no real ground gained. Kushner is doomed to fail and his father in law set him up for that failure.

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Everyone's got an opinion 26 minutes ago

Rump will sacrifice anyone and anything to try and dig himself out of the hole he's dug for himself - the cavalry is closing in and he's surrounded with no escape route other than to resign.

chris sandoval 2 hours ago

Kushner has a special personal family relationship with Netanyahu. The PM used to visit Kushner's home decades ago and sleep in his bed. Obviously Kush has a one-sided agenda regarding Israel.

FrancesGrimble 3 hours ago

Kushner is yet another no-nothing in the Trump circle. No chance he'll achieve anything.

CNN User 4 hours ago

These Tele Promoters Repuglik guns are so funny about the Obama Man using them,,NOW they Pray Don uses it cause otherwise he looks so stupid.

CNN User 4 hours ago

Kushy just wants a pass to operate and fly around the world on our dime. He is on a four year vacation,just like the rest of his family, at our expense.

I listened to the ridiculous trump last night in Az, and it is sickening that not one person stood up to demand.....'This is not about you, It's about the NAtion and all of us....Crowd size, finger size you wanting to re-write history has done nothing ,so get smart things done or get the heck out!

Plenty of smart capable people who can do the job...Not as good as Obama, but much better than this Sheetshow you've served us.

America's Truth Speaks 4 hours ago

@CNN User That is great he is on vacation. I bet he is making selfies with his middle finger and sending them to you! You like that don't you?

SlackToad 4 hours ago

@CNN User He's the type of businessman who doesn't take vacations because it cuts into his time for accumulating fortunes. He knows it's a waste of effort but Trump must have insisted. There's only so much of this nonsense Jared will tolerate before he tells Trump to stuff it and goes back to the Big Apple.

GForce 4 hours ago

How is Kushner supposed to talk about peace if the White House can't even find peace within their ranks?

Another 4 hours ago

Israel wants to associate itself with all Jews. Nothing can be farther from truth. Israel is like Putin gang. At least the Putin gang is milking Russian natural resources, Israel and its supporters are milking American taxpayers for more than half a century now.

If American leadership insists on underwriting Israeli debt, I insist they underwrite the Pope's debt, the debt of the every country which is a Christian country too.

America's Truth Speaks 4 hours ago

Charlottesville has covered up and plans to remove the traitorous Lee's statue. The next logical step is to cover up and remove the unconscionable vestige of this absolute coward treacherous treasonous traitorous blowhard from America's memory. This is the absolute next logical step. So it is written. So shall it be. So, indeed, shall it be.

@Just @America's Truth Speaks These communities exist in America, dear. There exists America values and principles. American value and principles, no matter, dear, when the community, do not include the celebration of horrific hate and absolute evil. The statues and monuments are coming down. America encourages you to embrace her message. America is speaking and continues to speak. America hopes you are listening to her, dear. America certainly hopes so. Hopes springs eternal. Hopes certainly springs eternal. Hope springs, dear. Hope absolutely springs.

Just 3 hours ago

@America's Truth Speaks @Just The community decides, nothing anyone can do about that