

Obama must hold fast to moral compass on trip to Israel

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As President Obama touches down in Israel on Wednesday, he will not be stumbling into a morally neutral landscape somewhere between the Hatfields and the McCoys. Instead, the ticket to wading successfully into the Arab-Israeli conflict is to hold fast to a moral compass of inalienable rights, starting with equality, and freedom from racial and religious intolerance.

The appeals that the president can expect to hear from Palestinian quarters will be deliberately couched in the emotive language of discrimination – Jewish settlements on Arab land and “apartheid walls” surrounding them.

Settlements are widely perceived to be the key wedge issue between the United States and Israel.

After all, early in his tenure, Obama became the first U.S. president to tell Israelis that a total settlement freeze was a condition “for us to move forward.” The date was May 18, 2009 and he was standing beside Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu at a press briefing.

Israel responded with a unilateral moratorium on new settlement construction, but it expired in September 2010 after the good faith gesture went unanswered. Subsequently, the Palestinian Authority took its cue from the president’s words and has refused to resume negotiations ever since.

Fast forward. The Palestinian political machine has commandeered every international forum at its disposal to make settlements the central sticking point. The most recent example is a new UN report from a “fact-finding mission” that was commissioned by the UN Human Rights Council on the rights violations said to result from Israeli settlements.

But here’s the rub. At the heart of the furious opposition to settlements, is the endorsement of one more Arab country without Jews. The creation of what is best described as ‘apartheid Palestine’ is the real end game.

The Middle East Road Map, endorsed by the Security Council in 2003, labeled settlements a “final status” issue to be “negotiated between the parties” because ownership of the land and the longevity of settlements had not, and has not, been determined. If negotiators decide that a particular territory will become part of a future Palestinian state, why should an exodus of current Jewish inhabitants be automatic?

One-and-a-half million Arab men and women – twenty per cent of the population – are free citizens of democratic Israel. They have the right to vote, to stand for election, to sit on an independent Supreme Court and to represent their country abroad, freedoms that are non-existent for their brothers and sisters in Arab countries.

And yet eliminating the presence of Jews now residing in what is claimed to be “Palestine” is the gold standard for building an Arab state.

Moreover, Jewish settlements have been uprooted by Israeli governments in the past under very difficult circumstances. Israeli governments have put the issue of settlements on the negotiating table and stand ready to negotiate immediately, without preconditions. So the irrational refrain that settlements are an obstacle to peace resonates for the wrong reasons, as the UN so ably demonstrates: anti-semitism and the objection to any Jewish state are at the root of it all.

The Human Rights Council’s settlement report, currently being applauded in Geneva, has one annex. It begins: “Timeline – Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestine Territory 1948.” Not 1967. The report’s pseudo-legal analysis objects to “Settlement Master Plans.” The lingo – invented by the reports’ authors – is an unmistakable allusion to the deportation “master plan” of Nazi SS chief Heinrich Himmler.

The “selected sources” upon which the UN “fact-finders” relied (and which are posted on the UN’s website), include tales that Israel is deliberately dumping “waste” in the territories to increase cancer and miscarriages among Palestinians and declarations that Israelis harbor “racist beliefs of Jewish supremacy.”

The link between the anti-settlement battle cry and the racist challenge to the Jewish state’s legitimacy is also apparent from the General Assembly’s most recent fall session.

Last November, 120 countries represented by the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Non-Aligned Movement and its spokesperson Iran, hollered about: “the racism of Israel and its settlers;” “Israel’s racist, inhumane policies... feverish

settler campaigns and systemic killing of civilians;” “the terror, violence and provocations by extremist Israeli settlers;” “The era of Zionism is over.” In short, the demonization and delegitimization of settlements is inextricably connected to the demonization and delegitimization of Israel itself.

Big words, but not abstract.

On March 11, 2011, Palestinian terrorists decapitated 3 month old “extremist settler” Hadas Fogel, and butchered her “settler” brothers Yoav, 11, Elad 4, and her “settler” parents Ehud and Ruth.

In January 2012, Palestinian Authority official television broadcast and re-broadcast a program in which family members of the by-then convicted murderers – egged on by the PA TV host –praised the “operation.”

Facilitating the creation of apartheid Palestine is not a confidence-building measure. It will not produce a peace partner or spawn a law-abiding future neighbor. Enabling apartheid Palestine should be an anathema to every post-segregationist fiber in the American body politic, starting with President Obama.