Twitter Thread by David Halbfinger



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2nd thread of leftovers from this interview w/ @USAmbIsrael begins here.

On the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif:
Trump peace plan held a contradiction: The status quo — Muslim prayer only, other faiths can visit but not pray — should "continue uninterrupted" and be "preserved"; but "people of every faith should be permitted to pray" there. /26

Last yr, DF clarified that WH hoped this would happen by agreement, but wouldn't impose it. But then UAE & Bahrain peace deals stated that Muslims may pray "at al-Aqsa Mosque, and Jerusalem's other holy sites should remain open for peaceful worshippers of all faiths." /27

Careful readers like @DanielSeidemann noted this cd reduce Muslim exclusive to the mosque, but leave rest of Temple Mount open to Jewish prayer — shattering status quo and fulfilling longstanding Muslim fears. I asked @USAmbIsrael if he disagreed with that reading. /28

"No," he said, "but I think it remains aspirational. But I don't disagree with the language." He went on to acknowledge the "sensitivities."
"Aspirationally, we would like to get to a place of greater openness. But we're not there yet. We're not going to force it." /29

Asked if he favored giving the Saudis a role on the Temple Mount as an incentive to normalize with Israel, he said he had "never thought of that at all," acknowledged that would pose a threat to Jordan and said "I have no interest in picking a fight with anybody." /30

Trading annexation for normalization was a "no-brainer" because it was only suspended. A more permanent abandonment of the idea, he would not have supported, he suggested, making clear his views of land-for-peace: /31

"I don't think it would've been appropriate for Israel to, especially without the consensus of the Israeli population, to just give up territory permanently for any agreement with another country," he said./32

He volunteered no mistakes. Despite having been outlasted now by Abbas, and had no dialogue with the P.A., he did not second-guess decision to close Jerusalem consulate and downgrade U.S. mission to the Palestinians. /33

He said it ended situation of “two missions essentially in the same country reporting back to Washington with conflicting views, with no obligation that they reconcile those things.” Now, that was done inside the Embassy, he said, and “I don’t put my thumb on the scale.../34

You know, I want to hear all the views that I would sort of reflexively disagree with. If I’m missing something, I want to hear it.” /35

He had an interesting take on this 2010 friction (https://t.co/DEfcfUnMjT) between Biden and Netanyahu over a settlement announcement: /36

“The reality here is whenever under the last administration somebody of significance came to visit, the Israeli left would immediately publicize whatever they could find in terms of settlement expansion, to create that friction," he said. /37

I mean, there was an attempt to create that friction. It was strategic friction. Our view is this doesn’t help, we don’t need to have this.” /38

Instead, he said, he agreed with the Israelis that they should build “from the inside out” — to expand settlements “with the least amount of damage to the overall footprint. And that’s how they’ve been operating over the last four years.” /39

He lavished praise on Netanyahu, singling out his ability to “compartmentalize” and maintain “disciplined, objective, strategic thinking in times of stress.” But said he wd have worked as closely with another PM, even a lefty. /40

“I have deep disagreements with the Israel left, but I have deep respect for the Israel left because I think that the Israel left, you know, they put their money where their mouth is: They send their kids to the army, they pay their taxes, they live in this area... /41

...they take the risks. They have a view as to how the Zionist dream should be actualized and they’re entitled to it. Very different than I have a view of the American left, who I think really are not sufficiently educated on the subject and aren’t willing to take the risks.../42

So, I mean, if the American left is wrong, they don’t suffer.” /43

Finally, there's talk of his forming an Israel-based pro-settlement group. He hinted: “I will stay in the space somehow, but I just don’t know how,” he said. “I’ll try to maintain a voice. I mean, it’s a huge drop-off when you no longer have access to the president.”END