Twitter Thread by David Halbfinger



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Thx to @USAmbIsrael David Friedman for his time: Intvu ran > 2 hours. Lots of important/interesting stuff didn't make it into piece. But for students of the conflict, it's worth setting down some of that here. This will take 2 threads. Here goes 1st.

Straining credulity, he insisted there'd been no pressure campaign vs. the Palestinians. "I would call it minimal accountability, not maximum pressure," he said — "holding them accountable to sort of basic norms of conduct." /2

E.g., after PA Pres. Mahmoud Abbas defied Congress and urged the Int'l Criminal Court to prosecute Israelis, allowing the PLO mission to remain in Washington would have required the administration to defy Congress, too. "None of us wanted to shut down the mission," DF said./3

Similarly, he argued that attacking UNRWA was not tantamount to harming the Palestinians, it was about defunding a "corrupt, decidedly unhelpful" agency that "perpetuates rather than relieves" suffering./4

"Almost every single thing that was adverse to the Palestinians by way of aid was completely avoidable" had they conformed to U.S. laws, he said: "These were all unforced errors on their part." /5

A product of the 5 Towns, he saw Palestinians through a lens refracted by having lived through periods of great tension in NYC.
Arguing that people mistakenly saw Israel as the "stronger party" with the "greater demands," vs. the "poor and underrepresented" Palestinians.../6

...he called that "nonsense."
"I mean, Israel's militarily stronger. If they weren't, they wouldn't exist. But from a perspective of the world, I mean, [the Palestinians] had this scheme going for a generation, of kind of holding the Arab street hostage throughout the world.../7

and people had to, you know, kind of show and pay homage in order to — it reminded me a lot of what @TheRevAl Sharpton used to do, where he wd go threaten boycotts of various industrial companies unless they would hire him to teach the companies diversity programs.../8

He'd get paid a lot of money, and then he wouldn't do a boycott. It's a great scam. And that's the way the Middle East used to work. And that just had to be broken." /9

Another LI-NYC reference: Despite what many have called the unworkability of the Trump map, DF said: "We spent months working on ways to achieve contiguity. You can drive from Hebron to Nablus and never see an Israeli." He recalled that when he worked in Manhattan... /10

"I used to take the Midtown Tunnel to work every day. If you tell me that there's a river, that I go under a river, I don't know that. I never saw the river once. I drove under that thing for 30 years, never saw a river. So I take it on faith that there's an East River.../11

I'm just saying that we created enough contiguity so that Palestinians could go throughout the West Bank without ever coming face-to-face with the Israelis." /12

He said Israeli officials did not help write the Trump peace plan, though they were consulted about it often. "The editorial control was always ours," he said. "This was entirely authored by us and almost entirely conceptualized by us." /13

Having clashed with Tillerson, he clicked with Pompeo, and worked for a year on the overhaul of settlements policy later dubbed the "Pompeo doctrine." Peace talks would only gain traction with the Israeli right, he said... /14

...if Israel could come to the table "without the accusation that somehow it's a thief and being asked to return things that it stole. Israel will not and should not come to the table on the basis of being an illegal occupier of stolen land." /15

He said it was pointless for U.S. to ask Israel for a settlement freeze, "because for them, I think a freeze of construction is the acknowledgment that the land doesn't belong to them."
Still, he denied there was a U.S. interest in expansion of settlements... /16

...with one exception: "It's important to send a message to the Palestinian terror apparatus that their efforts will fail" by "expanding a settlement in a place where they commit an act of terror," he said. "That's a very specific message that I endorse." /17

He said history had shown that, contrary to the arguments of critics of the occupation, "the status quo is not unsustainable, but I think the status quo is suboptimal and should be."

(NB: "Suboptimal" is a signature word.) /18

Yet, DF said that endless subjugation of the Palestinians posed no threat to Israeli democracy. "I don't think it has anything to do with Israel's democracy because Israel's democracy is the function of the citizens, and these are not citizens of Israel." /19

Some Israeli critics have faulted him for outflanking Netanyahu from the right, e.g., by endorsing maximalist Israeli positions on refugees and Jerusalem without the caveats that Israeli officials usually add to preserve maneuvering room... /20

This, they warn, may have created unrealistic expectations among the Israeli public about what can be achieved. Friedman did not dispute this: “That may have been an unintended consequence” of articulating what he thought were “achievable compromises,” he said. /21

He acknowledged denouncing Palestinian violence often, and Israeli violence rarely, but said this was because Palestinian acts of terrorism were “rewarded” by Palestinian leaders. Jewish terrorism, he asserted, was condemned by the Israeli government./22

(Condemnation of attacks on Palestinians is actually quite rare.) But DF expressed confidence in the Israeli justice system to prosecute Jewish attackers: “I’m not looking to put my finger on the scale,” he said. /23

Recalled his parents crying in ’67 when Western Wall was captured, and “immediately making arrangements that I could have my bar mitzvah” there. Under Jordan from '48-67, he said, “it was essentially a parking lot for donkeys and camels.” /24 (more tk in 2nd thread)