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What to do with lemons like Thomas Friedman

By EMMANUEL NAVON
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The world is not flat, but Thomas Friedman's latest proposal for peace very much is. Opting to either twist the facts or ignore them entirely, Friedman's proposal is riddled with holes and fallacies.

Thomas Friedman has a knack for garnering attention using provocative statements and inaccurate facts. His latest recipe for solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, penned for *The New York Times* and entitled "[What to do with Lemons](#)," is a case in point.

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Friedman's 2005 claim that "the world is flat" of course had no meaning beyond being a catchy title for his book on globalization. The book begins with the story of Christopher Columbus, who set out to find India only to reach the Americas. Friedman erroneously claims that this was what proved Columbus's thesis that the world is round. Actually, proof that the world is round came later, in 1522, when the sole surviving ship from Ferdinand Magellan's fleet returned to Spain.

However, in light of Friedman's notions regarding the Middle East, his belief that the world is flat no longer seems like a publicity gag. No amount of evidence will make him budge from the dogma that the establishment of a Palestinian state along the 1949 armistice lines will bring the conflict with Israel to an end. Which is why he twists facts in order to suit his theories.

For a start, UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (from November 29, 1947) did not partition the British Mandate between a Jewish state and an Arab state. It only endorsed the recommendation of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). General Assembly resolutions are not binding upon UN members. And apart from anything else, Resolution 181 became moot after the Arab states rejected it and attacked Israel.

Turning Resolution 181 into a Security Council Resolution, as Friedman suggests, will accomplish nothing. Such a resolution would not be adopted under Chapter 7 of the international convention dealing with acts of aggression. It would be adopted under Chapter 6, which deals with finding a peaceful solution to international disputes via negotiations. So the Security Council would officially ask Israel and the Palestinians to negotiate. What an achievement! They've been doing just that - to no avail - for the past two decades.

Besides, there is already a Security Council resolution on the Arab-Israel conflict: Resolution 242. This Resolution does not require Israel to withdraw to the temporary 1949 armistice line. Rather, the future border

between Israel and its eastern neighbor is to be negotiated. When Friedman claims that “the dividing line should be based on the 1967 borders,” he not only invents a border that never existed, he also turns Resolution 242 on its head.

Clearly aware of the fact that reverting to the 1949 armistice line is technically impossible, Friedman calls for “land swaps” that would enable “5 percent of the West Bank where 80 percent of the settlers live” to be “traded for parts of pre-1967 Israel.”

Why should there be “land swaps” when Israel is entitled, according to Resolution 242, to retain parts of the West Bank in the framework of a peace agreement? In his address to AIPAC on May 22, President Barack Obama claimed that the 1967 lines with land swaps “has long been the basis for discussions among the parties, including previous US administrations.” This is untrue. The only time that land swaps were mentioned was during the Clinton Administration in the Camp David negotiations of July 2000.

Friedman concludes his op-ed by quoting Gidi Grinstein’s gloomy prediction that “September can be a confrontational zero-sum moment with potentially disastrous consequences.” In actual fact, PA President Mahmoud Abbas is doing little more than bluffing. “Palestine” was already recognized by the UN as a state in 1988.

In addition, one of the conditions for state recognition in international law is to have a government. This is why Abbas tried to work out a deal with Hamas in order to put an end to the Gaza/West Bank dichotomy. With this deal falling apart there are still two Palestinian governments.

The world is not flat and Thomas Friedman is flat-out wrong about the Middle East. “You know what they say to do with lemons?” he asks. “Make lemonade.” Well, do you know what I say to do with *prima donnas* whose judgment is blurred by an inflated ego? Ignore them.

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