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## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

*Sledgehammer: How Breaking with the Past Brought Peace to the Middle East*, by David Friedman.  
Broadside Books, 272 pages, \$28.99

*In the Path of Abraham: How Donald Trump Made Peace in the Middle East—and How to Stop Joe Biden from Unmaking It*,  
by Jason D. Greenblatt. Wicked Son, 240 pages, \$28

THE HISTORIC ABRAHAM ACCORDS, SO named in order to emphasize Judaism, Christianity, and Islam's shared origin, were signed in 2020 between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Bahrain, and Morocco, and may be the most important—and certainly the most unanticipated—peace agreement of the 21st century.

For decades, U.S. policy toward the Middle East had a depressing sameness to it. With rare exceptions, each new president entered office with the belief that we should recalibrate our policy more in favor of the Palestinians so as to secure an elusive peace deal from a recalcitrant Palestinian leadership. The Palestinians, knowing that each new administration would try to offer them more, with few expectations placed upon them, saw only benefits from continuing to hold out for more and more concessions from Israel. Israeli diplomat and politician Abba Eban's famous declaration that the Arabs "never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity" had things exactly wrong. The United States rarely gave the Palestinians any incentive to take advantage of opportunities.

David Friedman's *Sledgehammer* focuses not only on how he moved from real estate lawyer to U.S. Ambassador to Israel under President Donald Trump, which is interesting in itself, but also his role in many high-level conversations with world leaders. Friedman was deeply committed to changing the way the U.S. government handled the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. His book is "about what happens when the United States stops listening to the diplomatic elite and challenges the parties to look past the grievances of their grandparents in favor of the opportunities available to their grandchildren," which is a good summary of the promise inherent in the Abraham Accords.

According to Friedman, the foundation for the accords began with the 2016 Republican

Party platform. He and fellow attorney Jason Greenblatt carefully managed the language of the plank on Israel. In the platform, they committed the U.S. to the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and did not limit the U.S. to pursuing only a two-state solution in the quest for peace in the Middle East. With this written set of policies approved by the Republican Party, Friedman put in place a new approach for running for office—and for governing once in office.

**S**LEDGEHAMMER ALSO INCLUDES SOME telling details about the world leaders with whom Friedman interacted. Joining Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu on a brief helicopter ride, for example, Friedman observes, "With that twenty minutes that Bibi would have to himself on the chopper, instead of closing his eyes or gazing out the window, his staff always had on hand a massive tome of historical nonfiction that he pored over studiously until landing. He is that cerebral." (Even more charming personal anecdotes may be found in *Let My People Know: The Incredible Story of Middle East Peace—and What Lies Ahead* by Rabbi Aryeh Lightstone, who served as a senior adviser to Friedman and who seems to be pinching himself every time he gets into a high-level meeting.)

Jason Greenblatt, appointed special representative for international negotiations in the Trump Administration, offers his own assessment in *In the Path of Abraham*, which is less a memoir than a legal brief on behalf of a more pro-Israel U.S. policy. He explains the history of Israel's connection to the land, highlights the bad actions of many of its neighbors, and makes the case for a strong U.S. alliance with the Middle East's only democracy, especially given the dangers posed by a theocratic and hostile Iran.

Greenblatt's more polemical book uses every development as an opportunity to launch

a history lesson—on subjects as varied as the 13th-century B.C. Battle of Kadesh, which resulted in one of the first peace treaties in the Middle East, or Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's history of antisemitism. Unfortunately, *In the Path of Abraham* lacks an index, which is a loss for a book so focused on the background of the conflict. Still, if you want to know the history, and why Palestinians have long been unwilling to come to the negotiating table, Greenblatt's is the one for you.

**R**EGARDLESS OF WHICH APPROACH APPEALS, it's clear that the Abraham Accords were a massive geopolitical shift. The incorrect but prevailing consensus was perhaps best summarized in then-Secretary of State John Kerry's infamous 2016 declaration,

There will be no separate peace between Israel and the Arab world.... I can tell you that, reaffirmed within the last week because I've talked to the leaders of the Arab community, there will be no advanced and separate peace with the Arab world without the Palestinian process and Palestinian peace. Everybody needs to understand that. That is a hard reality.

Within four years, the vision brought to the Middle East by Friedman, Greenblatt, and Lightstone proved Kerry wrong, and reshaped the Middle East for the better in the process.

*Tevi Troy is the director of the Presidential Leadership Initiative at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a presidential historian, and a former White House aide. He is the author of four books on the presidency, including, most recently, Fight House: Rivalries in the White House from Truman to Trump (Regnery Publishing).*



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