

New perspective for a new administration

In search of a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East

The excuses for noninvolvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are many, and on the surface often appear reasonable. Appearances can be deceiving, however -- perhaps less so in the West than in the East, where government information is easily hidden from public view.

For example, some view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a dispute between two small querulous neighbors who neither want, nor know how, to get along. These people argue that it is neither wise nor possible to find a solution until both sides are willing. Still others argue that taking sides makes one vulnerable to the opposite side, and that it is better to stay away from both. Then too, there are those, who simply do not want to be bothered by a problem they do not consider theirs, and argue that neither Israelis nor Palestinians are a threat to anyone but themselves. Finally, there are those who are tired of the incessant violence and have simply closed their eyes and ears in disgust.

Surely the violence must someday reach an end, but when that will be, and how it will be achieved is difficult to say. Whatever form it takes the United States will be considered a part of the final outcome. Unrelenting support of Israel to the chagrin of the United Nations, crucial dependence on Arab oil, and a badly soiled world reputation as a result of the invasion and occupation of Iraq, are all very good reasons why the US is inextricably involved. Indeed, in the eyes of many in the Islamic community US Americans

and Jews are already considered one and the same.¹

In effect, US Americans may continue to do nothing and surrender their world reputation to the vicissitudes of Israeli domestic politics and overseas diplomacy; or, they may actively participate in a final settlement by urging their own government to apply pressure on the Israelis. Although a reduction in terrorist activity should be expected, a complete cessation of such activity would likely be unreasonable until substantial progress has been made toward the development of a separate Palestinian state or a unified non-Jewish state that brings both sides together under a single national roof.

The United States depend on the Arab world for over 20% of its oil imports, and obtains close to 70% of its imported liquid natural gas (LNG) from the world's Islamic community.² In addition, nearly half of Israel's overseas debt is guaranteed by the US government. In short, the US is already an active, if not direct, party to the conflict and controls a substantial lever for achieving certain political ends.³

¹ In a recent editorial entitled "Jews, Israel and America" Thomas Friedman points out that the Iraqi nickname for US troops in Iraq is *the Jews*. The New York Times (24 October 2004). [online document] <<http://www.nytimes.com>>.

² See EARTH's Viewpoint. 2002 US/Extra-European Energy Imports. [online document] <<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/mideast/energy/index.html>> (31 October 2004).

³ EARTH's Viewpoint. Israeli collaborators. Financing Israel's trade and national deficits. Israeli external debt by type of financial instrument - 2002. [online document - pie chart] <<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/mideast/israel/finance/graph3a.html#graph>> (30 September 2004).

When the United States government invaded Afghanistan to overthrow an abusive government that was harboring and fostering terrorist activities against the United States, it acted in its own self-defense. The world largely applauded. When the United States invaded Iraq for the purpose of regime change, the cheering quickly changed to shouts of foul play. Indeed, the current Bush administration had achieved at home what was impossible to achieve abroad -- namely, rally its own people around the overthrow of a particularly vicious dictator, who was presumed to be in the possession of weapons of mass destruction. By playing on USAmerica's historical dislike for dictatorial government, its passion for constitutional liberty and rule of law, and the public's euphoria over the, then recent, overthrow of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, President Bush led the USAmerican public into a needless war from which it cannot easily extricate itself. Indeed, many USAmericans are more likely to associate the Islamic faith with the likes of USAmerica's former *Black Panthers*, famous US boxers, and of course Osama bin Laden and Abu Musad al-Zarqawi, than with one of our world's three great religions.

Though hardly the aim in Afghanistan; it is difficult to view what has happened in Iraq as anything very different from classical imperial aggression. Add to this the terrorist mess in which the Bush administration's poor handling of the Iraqi occupation has obviously resulted, and the US-Iraqi and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts become extraordinarily similar: both governments are seeking Middle East land in the name of a global war against terror. While the Israelis are in search of water and land rights for the purpose of colonial entrenchment, the US is desirous of strategically located military bases and a secure hold on Middle East oil and gas.

In effect, an historical boomerang has turned full circle. What started out as a conflict between Arabs and Jews in the

postwar period and was brought to a stalemate by Yasir Arafat in Palestine many years later has turned into a global conflict between the Islamic world and the United States in the hands of Osama bin Laden. Surely this was not an accident.

The Israeli nation is the political bastard of British colonialism, US postwar energy policy, German fascism, and a two-millennia-year-old struggle between the Judeo-Christian traditions of the Western world and Islamic society. As such, there were many stakeholders involved in the creation of the State of Israel and its further development, who were not Jews. Even Hebrew, the national language of Israel, did not exist as a commonly spoken language until after World War II, when it was transformed into a modern language spoken by a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous hodgepodge of Palestinians, European Jews, North American Jews, Middle Eastern Jews, and numerous others. Until then it was considered a dead language studied alongside Greek and Latin by scholars and religious clerics. In short, in order to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Middle East crisis, in general, all of the principal stakeholders must be brought together, agreement found, and then enforced.

Until the United States government decided to shut Yasir Arafat out of the peace process and side with Ariel Sharon to the dismay of its European allies, the United States was in a fairly good position to serve as a strong moderating stakeholder. This is no longer the case, especially since the US invasion of Iraq. In order to win back the trust of the Palestinian people and the world's Muslim community the United States must withdraw from Iraq as soon as possible without leaving havoc in its wake. Furthermore, it must force Israel to stand down in Palestine. In so doing, the United States can also win back the friendship of its principal Western European allies. This would make it easier to continue the fight against terror, but not as a mismanaged global war, rather as an undercover police and public secu-

rity effort against a truly heinous network of political and religious renegades.

It pays to have friends on the ground in distant lands to watch and observe in ways that no diplomatic mission can possibly achieve.

US energy interests were at stake, when the United States first took sides with Israel after World War II, and they remain at stake today.

Still one must weigh the costs against the benefits of maintaining such a friendship in the extreme.

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Word count: 1158
Revised 04/11/07