

Between the Gulf and the Deep Blue Sea:
The Task of Securing The Peace

by

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Having led the coalition to liberate Kuwait, America's overriding interest now is to secure the peace -- peace not only in the Gulf but in the region as a whole. Responsible American and allied policymakers have long agreed that a durable peace in the Gulf is inseparable from an end to the Arab-Israeli, Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

With U.S. credibility and influence in the region at an all-time high, the atmosphere has never been more receptive, the moment more propitious, nor the need more compelling, for the U.S. to exercise the leadership and courage necessary to bring this conflict, too, to an end. Neither a strengthened UN, nor a new world order, nor peace in the Middle East, is possible without it.

Let there be no mistake: winning the peace will prove far more difficult than winning the war. Major challenges remain. The Bush Administration has its hands full. First and foremost, it must persuade the current Israeli leadership to cease sabotaging its own, the UN's, America's, and everyone else's efforts to bring peace and stability to the region. Second and simultaneously, it seeks to prevent the Shamir government from defeating American efforts to build a more credible defense system in the Gulf.

The Israeli leadership's opposition to these two U.S. objectives is accompanied by a list of demands. If it can manage to tie the U.S. up in responding to them, the result, not for the first time, will be indefinite postponements of both objectives -- postponements that will serve the interests of the Shamir government but no one else.

Take, for example, the less complicated of the two objectives: namely, strengthening the defense dimension of U.S. relations with the six Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. In planning for an effective defense of these countries, the prerequisite of being able to forge a credible structure requires long lead times. Like our own defense structure, it cannot be built up overnight.

Kuwait had for years sought and received modest levels of international assistance in its efforts to strengthen its defense. However, Israel's successful opposition to American willingness to assist Kuwait and other GCC countries in their attempts to bolster their defense systems at critical points in the 1980s sent the worst possible message to Iran and Iraq. Both countries proceeded to attack Kuwait. Both countries provoked the U.S. to mobilize and deploy tens of thousands of its citizens in defense of Kuwait and the other GCC countries.

The present Israeli government's opposition to America's attempts to bring stability to the region, and to forge a mechanism that would enable the

U.S. to plan for the future more efficiently and cost-effectively, is but an echo of its previous obstructions, of its continuing insistence on placing its own interests ahead of, and in this case at odds with, America's.

What Iraq did to Kuwait last August was unconscionable. What Iran, with Israeli strategic and covert military support, earlier sought to do to all seven Gulf Arab states was also unconscionable. To prevent a recurrence, the basic challenge is to devise a means for deterring threats to the GCC countries which does not require a permanent foreign military base or the long-term ground presence of American or other Western troops.

If these countries are to become more self-reliant in terms of their defense -- a major strategic goal that they, the U.S., and most of the rest of the world have in common -- then Kuwait and the other GCC countries will need an extended breathing space, a new lease on life. Achievement of this mutually beneficial goal will require a helping hand from the United States.

There is nothing new in this regard. Indeed, for 400 years, the defense of the area embraced by these countries has always involved the assistance of outside powers. Deterrence has been, and continues to be, the key strategy of these countries and their allies. Deterrence that works can be a sound defense, as demonstrated in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere.

Certainly, none of the GCC countries can expect to match either the deterrence or the military might -- or the demographic or natural resources -- of their larger neighbors, Iran and Iraq. A credible GCC self-defense capability, however, can deter aggression from these two and other countries if it is combined with the certain knowledge that in an emergency external support will be forthcoming.

In the current context of regional realities, such an arrangement is both possible and greatly preferable to the long-term stationing of foreign ground forces in these countries. Kuwait was invaded precisely because the invader was not deterred; it had neither a credible self-defense capability nor an unambiguous commitment from the international community to come to its defense. The goal of U.S.-Arab cooperation in the Gulf in the aftermath of Kuwait's liberation is to prevent the recurrence of such a failure.

The Shamir government is aware that prevention of a recurrence of the breakdown in regional security that occurred in August 1990 requires a strengthened and expanded U.S.-GCC relationship in the areas of deterrence and defense. It recognizes that, in order to achieve this objective significant quantities of high-tech U.S. defense equipment and systems must be provided to the GCC countries in order to build a credible deterrence; equipment and defense systems not in place have never deterred anyone.

Second, it is in U.S. interests to sell to these countries much of the U.S. equipment transferred in connection with Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The purpose: to avoid repeating the costly buildup of 1990-1991 should it be necessary once again to mobilize and deploy troops to the region.

Third, the U.S. needs to pre-position other equipment in these countries and in nearby areas. The purpose is not only to deter any would-be aggressor. It is also, in the event deterrence fails, to be able to respond to aggression with greater decisiveness and dispatch than was possible immediately following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Israel's current leadership concedes the third U.S. objective. It is opposed, however, to the first and second. If successful in either instance, its opposition will deal a significant blow to major U.S., UN, U.S.-Arab, and other allied goals in dealing with the Kuwait crisis: namely, to restore stability and order to the region and to forge an arrangement that would prevent future aggression.

Despite the U.S. government's certification that Israel's own deterrence capabilities and its military remain strong enough to take on and destroy all the Arab armies combined, the present Israeli leadership is demanding that, for such U.S., Arab, and allied peace objectives to be allowed to succeed, it must be compensated -- economically, politically, militarily. Otherwise, it will not only refuse to cooperate; it will actively campaign -- indeed it is already campaigning -- to defeat these objectives.

In other words, the Shamir government will continue to oppose the present efforts of its Arab neighbors, Palestinian leaders, the U.S., the UN, the European Community, the Soviet Union, China, and virtually every other important country to settle the Arab-Israeli, Israeli-Palestinian conflict peacefully. Simultaneously, it will also continue to oppose U.S. efforts on behalf of American, allied, and global interests to build a credible deterrence and defense structure for the GCC countries.

Here one needs to pause and acknowledge that what is happening is not new. It is the latest version of an enduring Israeli tactical game that is played out in the context and at the expense of the U.S.-Arab relationship. The game, now 43 years on, is to persuade as many of Israel's American friends in the U.S. Congress, media, and other areas of influence as possible to join it in doing whatever is necessary to make Arabs continuously disappointed with Americans, Americans continuously disappointed with Arabs, and, whenever possible, Arabs disappointed with Arabs.

The tactic has many faces and many forms and is implemented in a wide variety of forums. What it does, when effective, is serve a higher Israeli strategic goal. That goal, as alive and pertinent to the present situation as it was the day Israel was born, is to preclude influential Americans and Arabs, and, no less importantly, Arabs themselves, from ever becoming or remaining close for any extended period of time.

Under the circumstances, can the present Israeli leadership, with Israel so recently defended by the U.S., and with its economy and standard of living continuously supported by the American taxpayer, be persuaded now to act in support of U.S., allied, and global interests? The fairness implicit in such requested reciprocity aside, there is presently little reason for optimism, as, in exchange for considering, but not promising, cooperation, the Shamir government demands:

* U.S. loan guarantees for \$10 billion to assist in absorbing Soviet emigres over the next few years -- emigres who, in violation of international law and Israeli Prime Minister Shamir's promise to President Bush and Secretary of State Baker, are being settled in increasing numbers on Palestinian lands;

* Ongoing U.S. *de facto* acquiescence in Israel's seizure and control over all of Jerusalem, its continued colonization of Palestinian territory, its annexation of Syria's Golan Heights, and its ongoing violation of Lebanon's sovereignty;

* Greater access to U.S. government classified intelligence data, including "real time" information from U.S. aerial surveillance;

* A more privileged position than its already favored status in selling munitions and other defense materials to the U.S. armed forces;

* Gift replacements of U.S. F-15s for its aging Kfir fighter aircraft;

* Preferential receipt of additional military equipment "gifts" from the draw-down of American forces in Europe;

* In 1992, *additional* economic assistance from the U.S. over and above the more than \$4,000,000,000 it will receive in 1991, despite knowledge of high U.S. unemployment rates, the U.S. budget deficit, cutbacks in U.S. aid to other countries, and pressing U.S. needs to support more generously a range of seriously under-funded domestic programs for Americans;

* Support for Shamir's position against UN involvement in the efforts to settle the Arab-Israeli, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite the UN's critical role in Israel's creation, Israel's membership in the UN, and virtually every other UN member's insistence that the organization has a legitimate right and a need to be involved;

* U.S. resistance to all appeals for it to reestablish a dialogue with the PLO and to the principle that the Palestinian Arabs alone, and not the Shamir government or anyone else, be allowed to determine who shall represent the Palestinians in any Israeli-Palestinian peace talks;

* And continued U.S. non-inspection, non-verification, and even non-discussion of Israel's nuclear weapons capabilities and its continued refusal to join the U.S. and most of the rest of the world in adhering to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

In the aftermath of Kuwait's liberation and U.S. efforts to bring peace to the region, Israeli officialdom's objections, obfuscations, and ruses are not without consequence. Collectively, they unmask the emptiness of: (1) its oft-repeated wish for peaceful and mutually beneficial relationships with its Arab neighbors, and (2) its claim to be a trusted friend and ally of the United States.

The implications of the Shamir government's demands, anti-peace stance, and U.S. disinformation campaign notwithstanding, the challenge for the U.S. is to make the most of an otherwise propitious moment. The task at hand is to manifest vision, to exert leadership, to demonstrate courage -- physical, political, moral. Millions of Arabs and Israelis are in agreement as to what is required. They and many millions of others throughout the world who are also Christians, Jews, and Muslims, cry out to President Bush and to Secretary of State Baker. They speak as one: don't give up; don't give in; stay the course; secure the peace.

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