

***THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN IMPASSE:
HAS U.S. POLICY RUN ITS COURSE?***

(Washington, D.C. –November 12, 2001) In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly over the weekend, President Bush, in a departure from anything he had said previously on the subject, announced his vision for an eventual two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this light, he said that he foresaw the existence of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

In remarks on TV talk shows the next day that were aired nationally, Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Affairs Adviser Dr. Condoleeza Rice echoed the President’s statement. They added that there had not been a day since the Administration took office when it was not focused on trying to find a way forward to end the impasse between Israelis and Palestinians.

Powell, Rice, and other top Administration officials have reiterated in recent days their support for the recommendations of the Mitchell Commission. They also commended CIA Director George Tenet’s earlier initiatives aimed at ending the violence between the parties, and the launching of confidence-building measures en route the parties’ return to negotiations with a view to ending the conflict.

Relevant to all of this was the National Press Club’s conference on November 2-3 in Washington, D.C. on “The Israeli-Palestinian Impasse: Has U.S. Policy Run Its Course?” The final speaker at the session on “Where Do We Go From Here?: A U.S. Perspective,” was Dr. John Duke Anthony, President of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and Publisher of *Gulf Wire*.

Dr. Anthony’s address, “Arriving Home: Thinking ‘Out of the Box’ on Palestine,” is hereby printed in this week’s edition of *Gulf Wire’s Perspective*. His analysis extends further than the assessment and recommendations of the Mitchell Commission. It also goes beyond endorsing the near-term efforts by Israelis and Palestinians concomitant to CIA Director Tenet’s intervention and mediation on the security front.

Dr. Anthony’s remarks focus more pointedly on the moral, strategic, and policy imperatives to convey more clearly what is most needed in order to bring the broad outlines of the conflict’s end game into closer view. He also departs from what passes for established thought in much of the mainstream media. To wit: he makes the case for linkage between United States action and inaction with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, on one hand, and the implications for vital U.S. relations, interests, and key foreign policy objectives in the Middle East as a whole, on the other.

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE: A U.S. PERSPECTIVE

Arriving Home: Thinking 'Out of the Box' on Palestine

By

John Duke Anthony

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ARRIVING HOME: THINKING 'OUT OF THE BOX' ON PALESTINE

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Prior to 1947, America had no enemies in the Middle East. Neither did it have any adversaries or critics. In the entire region from Morocco to Muscat, and from Baghdad to Berbera, with Aden, Algeria, and Aleppo in between, its image was the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Sadly, much of the goodwill that had been built up by previous generations of American doctors, nurses, teachers, and business representatives has been drained. There are several reasons. The oldest and main reason by far is the ongoing region-wide reaction to official American policies and positions related to Palestine.

In the event the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains elusive of a just, durable, and comprehensive settlement, the United States will suffer increasingly heavy blows to its national interests. A prolongation of the conflict will continue to pose outsized threats to Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans alike.

The denials of numerous pundits and politicians notwithstanding, Israeli and U.S. actions and inaction on matters pertaining to Israel and Palestine as well as Syria are much more deeply embedded in what has spawned and sustains terrorism than many recognize.

An Auspicious Moment

The most auspicious moment for statesmen to exert bold, visionary, and determined leadership on an issue of importance to all of humankind is not an everyday occurrence. But now is as fortuitous a juncture for the United States to do so as any since the onset of the Israeli occupation 34 years ago. The goal: to bring one of the longest, most protracted, and dangerous of modern wars to an end.

In the eyes of millions, the present circumstances could not be more favorable, nor the setting more propitious. In no previous period have as many Americans been as open-minded, anxious, and willing to learn from the bottom up why America's standing in one of the world's most important regions is unsustainable and dangerous.

Never before have so many Americans been as oriented towards understanding better the roots of the one issue that, more than any other, is behind the mounting Arab and broader

Islamic anger and distrust towards the United States: the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the U.S. role therein.

Consider the following. Israel's critics refer to the past 15 years and, with reference to today's Operation Enduring Freedom, note that Israel is one of the few countries that have not been invited to join the U.S.-led coalition. Indeed, this is the third time in succession in a major regional crisis involving U.S.-Mideast relations and interests when Washington, in effect, has informed Israel: "Thanks for your offer of assistance, but no thanks."

The reason: the strategic liabilities that Israel's overt participation would pose to vital American and Allied needs and concerns in the internationally concerted effort to stem the tide of terrorism. As many supporters of Israel agree, the fact that Israel's current image is the opposite of what its leaders have long tried to project is more than alarming. Left unattended and uncorrected, the implications for important Israeli interests, including its relationship with the United States, could be devastating.

Charles de Gaulle Re-Dux

Statesmen of any country with such a widespread international image problem would regard such a situation as ominous. The more so in this case. Why? Because numerous other countries, including most of the world's 22 Arab and 56 Islamic nations, have responded favorably to Washington's request to suit up as an American ally in the current campaign against terrorism.

Israel's current status as a strategic liability, as Israel's friends point out, is a clarion call for damage limitation and image improvement. Israel needs to make its own bold and visionary decision, much as France's Charles de Gaulle did when, in 1962, in the case of Algeria, he severed his country's colonial control over other people's land and resources.

Failure to do so, Israel's friends agree, will continue to harm near-term Israeli strategic, national security, and related concerns. They also agree that lack of success on this front will not come cost-free: it will endanger the legitimate interest in self-preservation for generations of Israelis yet unborn.

Apologists for the United States and Israel doing nothing to change their policies toward the Palestine Question argue that either a military or imposed solution is unthinkable. True, if the question is limited to whether the current Congress, and segments of the Israeli parliament, would be likely to give favorable consideration to either option.

Regrettably, as several specialists in Congressional and Israeli Knesset affairs have informed this writer, "That's the way it is. It's just not going to happen." In response, one analyst who follows both Israeli and U.S. legislative affairs remarked, "So much for leadership. So much for courage. So much for listening to one's friends, including those in the Israeli peace camp."

Other Possibilities

But what about other possibilities? What if the Israeli leadership, on its own initiative, were to decide to cut its losses by ending the illegal occupation and dismantling the settlements? Who can prove to the contrary that such a decision would do more than anything else to help Israel to overcome its core difficulty?

Supporters of Israel acknowledge that failure to make such a courageous and far-reaching decision at this time is unlikely to be without consequences: it is hard to envision an eventuality in which there will not at some point be an Allied-choreographed action to impose a solution.

“Either that,” said one, “or growing numbers will argue that American taxpayers can no longer afford to proceed as though it is business as usual. How could the United States continue to provide Israel an average of \$115 per second, \$6,777 per minute, and 10 million dollars a day as it has for the past 20 years?”

Political Factors and International Support

Currently, virtually all of the world’s most important leaders would support President Bush were he to take the lead in bringing this conflict to a close. This includes the overwhelming majority of the member-countries of the United Nations General Assembly, all four of the United States’ fellow Permanent Members on the UN Security Council, and the heads of prominent international organizations in every major region and sub-region. They would do so in order that all parties to the conflict benefit from ending the occupation. Few other measures could be expected over time to produce as positive a set of results in support of vital global interests in regional peace and stability.

The timing for such a clear-headed strategic initiative is ripe for two other reasons. One, neither the United States nor Israel is presently weighted down with the dynamics and demands of a major election year. Two, analysts of American elections emphasize that the vast majority of America’s more ardent supporters of Israel’s continued colonization of Palestinian and Syrian land raised funds, campaigned, and voted *against* President Bush.

Optimists posit that there is therefore no credible domestic or international rationale why the President should delay taking appropriate measures to lift the United States and Israel out of their political and national security quagmires. The goal: to free Israel and its American supporters of the overwhelming burden that is tarnishing their reputations in the eyes of the world, eating away at their body politics, and dragging them down morally, financially, politically, nationally, and regionally.

U.S. Needs, Concerns, Interests

Hard-minded strategists agree with this assessment and recommendation but come at the topic somewhat differently. They note that the United States is currently, and will

continue to be until far into the future, in greater need of the friendship, economic, and strategic assistance of key Arab and Islamic countries than it has been in quite some time.

Much of the necessary Arab, Muslim, and Israeli peace camp consensus in support of a bold peace initiative is already in hand. Additional assistance will follow once the United States moves beyond rhetoric to enable Israelis, Palestinians, Syrians, Americans, and others to be rid of this long soul-wrenching nightmare.

How? By ending the occupation and the settlements and thereby the principal threats to Israel's national security and regional standing, and the injustice and indignities visited upon the Palestinians and Syrians since Israel seized their territories in 1967.

The Straight-Talk Express?

It is a given that some will insist now is not a good time, or now is the worst possible time, to end the occupation. Their arguments will echo the leaders of previous colonial powers who contended that, to do so, "would be tantamount to appeasement; it would only reward terrorism." "A bloodbath would ensue." "All hell would break loose."

Assertions such as these make for good copy, but they are hypothetical and speculative. What is indisputable is that few, if any, colonial powers have ever found it easy or convenient to relinquish control over the countries whose lands they had colonized. One must never underestimate the tenacity of those who favor the status quo. The prolongation of power, the perpetuation of privilege, has always been addictive.

Even so, in the century just past, a dozen colonial powers conceded to their subject peoples the right to freedom and independence. In each instance, colonizer and colonized alike emerged, and have remained, by far the freer, better, and stronger.

Many wonder whether there can be any serious doubt that it is only a matter of time before something of the same will be the fate of Israel's illegal colonial outposts in Palestine and Syria. Others agree and doubt whether the nature and extent of violence between Israelis and Palestinians as well as Syrians, and against Americans and U.S. interests, can be expected to cease otherwise.

If not, the question will be: At what cost to Israelis, Arabs, Americans, and others for Israel not ending the occupation? And how many more Arab, American, Israeli – and how many more Christian, Jewish, Muslim -- and other orphans, widows, widowers, and the maimed, whose dreams will have been destroyed forever, must there be?

Facts Are Stubborn Things

It has been ten years since any U.S. President enjoyed such vast domestic approval in response to his statements on the Palestine Question. Millions of Americans, Arabs, and Israelis agree that, in his remarks to the American people since September 11 on this issue, the President has made much sense.

Indeed, the President has stated more positive and factual things about America's Arab and Islamic friends, allies, and strategic partners, and about the beliefs, practices, and institutions of the Muslim faith, than all previous American presidents combined.

And most importantly, President Bush, Great Britain's Prime Minister, and other world leaders have proclaimed support for the establishment of a Palestinian state. In response, few specialists are surprised at the reaction among some segments of the American public.

The media and some members of Congress have mounted a smear campaign in opposition to the President's positions. Without citing him by name, critics contest his upbeat depiction of Arabs and Muslims in general, and of America's vital interests in the 22 Arab state region and the 56 countries that comprise the Islamic world.

Cynics and pessimists hold that the arguments in support of an American move towards more decisive engagement in ending the Arab-Israeli dispute are irresponsible and dangerous. Such assertions are mere surmise and conjecture. Taking such steps at this time would benefit Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, and Syrians greatly; they would neither betray nor damage the legitimate interests of any country or people.

The current effort of hard-line Israeli leaders and their American counterparts to remove such an option from the diplomatic and geo-political table, and to drive wedges between the United States and key Arab and Islamic countries, is hardly new.

Previous pro-Israel campaigns aimed at bashing Arab and Islamic countries succeeded in getting the United States to lash out at Libya and Lebanon, bomb Baghdad, punish Pakistan, threaten Tehran, and slap sanctions on Sudan and Syria. The focus of the current campaign is different. In addition to the Palestinians and Syrians, it is directed mainly at Egypt and Saudi Arabia, America's two most important Arab allies. And, irony of ironies, the tone, tenor, and targets of such hostile and often inaccurate commentary closely resemble remarks attributed to Osama Bin Laden and other members of his Al-Qaeda network.

Linkages

Even so, the strong political linkage between the unresolved Palestinian problem, on one hand, and American relations and interests in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Middle East, on the other, is undeniable. Ignorance of such realities has no redeeming qualities.

Indeed, it is the implications of the linkage for American interests and policies – for example, in the pressing need to find an early and efficacious way out of the Israeli-Palestinian impasse -- that most concerns critics of the United States' special relationships with key Arab and Islamic countries. As one former White House official remarked to this writer, "It is as though opponents of these long-standing and mutually

beneficial ties would insist that Washington officialdom limit itself to but one Mideastern friend, and that such a friend must be neither Arab nor Muslim.”

Every Arab and Muslim knows this. So does every American diplomat, armed forces commander, and corporate representative residing and working in the region. All acknowledge that the ongoing dismay at U.S. policies toward the Palestine problem remains the main impediment to the cause of projecting and protecting America’s vital Middle Eastern interests, and to pursuing key U.S. foreign policies, in the region as a whole.

In reaffirming his Constitutional duty to defend the United States and the lives of its citizens, President Bush has repeatedly said that he “will take whatever steps are necessary to protect American lives and the interests of the United States.” On the face of it, this is reassuring to many, for were he not to do so, Americans at home and abroad would be placed in harm’s way even more than they already are.

Essential: A Viable Independent Palestine

For numerous American strategists, and for many decision-makers in the region as well, the President’s announcement in favor of the establishment of a Palestinian state was timely and essential. Needed now is a more broadly focused American commitment, a timeline, a detailed plan, and an additional allied coalition to help bring the new state into being.

Such a plan needs to be carefully calibrated and choreographed with key regional leaders and their counterparts among the major powers. To this end, members of the Committee for the Nobel Prize for Peace and the International Court of Justice might be asked to serve as observers and supervisors to ensure that the plan is implemented, and to vouchsafe for the integrity of the process.

Why the urgent necessity of effective early movement and leadership on this issue? Because it is the occupation that continues to fuel most of the violence between Arabs and Israelis. Because the increasing hatred, distrust, and suspicion of the United States for its de facto support for the occupation carries its own clear and present danger to Americans and important American interests. Because much of the regional anger against America remains deeply rooted in Washington’s role in shielding Israel from international censure, responsibility, and accountability for its failure to end the occupation.

Ending an Era and an Error

Now is also the time to start putting into place the economic, social, and humanitarian assistance, along with the requisite infra-structural measures, that are essential to ensuring a *viable* Palestinian state is brought into being as soon as possible. Combined with the reality of an end to the occupation, no other act would do more to help restore American goodwill and, en route to a brighter future for all parties to the conflict, push

the memory of the Holocaust's horrors, and the unending trauma of Palestinian and Syrian dispossession, farther back into the recesses of history.

An expeditious and effective end to the occupation is also necessary to sow the seeds for the peace and security that has eluded Israel, and to end the systematic subjugation that has robbed Palestinians and Syrians of their freedom, dignity, and elemental human rights, since the occupation began.

The moral and policy imperatives of establishing such a state, many are convinced, are linked directly to vital American strategic requirements and national security interests. For this reason, the initiative needs to become part and parcel of the broader effort by the United States and its allies against the roots, staying power, and perpetrators as well as targets of terrorism.

The decision to act decisively now would not be synonymous with appeasement. It would be nothing of the kind. The rationale for taking such action at this time is to end an era and an error, to right a wrong, to protect American and allied lives and livelihoods that are linked to the U. S. relationship with Israel and many other countries in the region. By doing so, the United States will ascend to the moral, political, and strategic high ground. It will have done the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, for the right reasons.

Out of Harm's Way

On the defense front, the following is revealing. None of the commanders-in-chief of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the forward deployed force tasked with promoting and protecting American and allied interests in the region since 1979, has failed to inform U.S. policymakers of the most pervasive and persistent threat to American regional relations and interests.

The commanders have regularly shared with Washington, and this analyst, what their more than two-dozen governmental counterparts in CENTCOM'S area of responsibility, and especially in Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf region, have had to say in opposition to U.S. policies. The near-unanimous view of these allied leaders is that U.S. policies toward the Palestine Question, in effect, have prevented the people of Palestine from becoming free in their own land.

A direct result, they add, has been to contribute to much of the regional instability that Bush Administration officials, and their predecessors, have repeatedly professed it is in America's vital interests to end. What is more, these leaders have consistently underscored the CENTCOM host countries' perception that U.S. actions and attitudes regarding this issue are the main reason for the continued Israeli occupation.

If one message is more urgent than others, on which the leaders of all of America's Arab and Muslim allies, and many in the Israeli peace camp, agree, it is this: once Israel's

occupation of Arab lands has ended, Palestinians, Syrians, and Israelis will be far along the road to being free.

Palestinians will at least, and at last, be free to become a country. Syrians will be free of foreign occupation of one of their country's most resource-rich provinces. Israelis will be free in a different way: they will have had lifted from their shoulders one of their heaviest and costliest burdens.

Major steps will have been taken in the campaign against the most unending source of Mideast-based terrorism, and in the quest to enhance the acceptability and respectability of the United States, and of Israelis, Palestinians, and Syrians, in the region as a whole.

Not a Panacea, But Far More than A Palliative

Ending the occupation and the settlements will not eradicate political violence. Neither will it eliminate all the sources of terrorism in the Middle East or elsewhere. However, like nothing else, it will bring to Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, and Syrians alike a far greater measure of personal, institutional, and national security than any that they have attained since the onset of Israel's occupation.

A speedy end to the occupation will remove the single oldest, largest, and most pervasive phenomenon that underlies much of the Arab Christian and Islamic anger against Israelis and Americans. It will do much to help pave the way for eventual Arab-Israeli reconciliation. It will put into place the stepping-stone to ending Israeli insecurity and isolation from its neighbors, and to ending Palestinian and Syrian insecurity and misery. Without such a step, it is difficult to envision Israel, Palestine, and Syria being able to establish and sustain peaceful and reciprocally rewarding relationships with other countries in the region.

U.S. Strategic Objectives

In all of this, the U.S. strategic objective is manifold. In its most elemental aspects, the objective is to place America's relations with the entire region on as positive, secure, and stable a foundation as possible. The requisite vision for achieving such an objective needs to be focused on securing the legitimate interests of the region's member-states in their longing to be away from war and threats to peace.

Such a vision also needs to be focused on ensuring the region's and the outside world's basic economic interests. For both, these encompass unfettered access to the region's prodigious energy resources in adequate supplies and at manageable prices.

The vision, moreover, needs to be focused on assuring broad political interests. In more peaceful and stable circumstances than currently prevail, these would ordinarily flow from the proclamation and administration of the Mideast countries' moderate foreign policies and interstate relations in accordance with the precepts of the United Nations

Charter, UN Security Council resolutions, and the norms and boundaries of international law and legitimacy.

In addition, the vision needs to allow for a robust commercial environment. Such an environment is one that would enable and provide protection for steadily increasing levels of trade, investment, and joint business ventures. And the vision needs to be focused on providing jointly-arrived at effective arrangements for defending the member-states' legitimate rights to self-preservation and against any threats to their national sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity.

Curtain Call

At the end of the day, reality brooks no illusions. This, after all, is the 21st century. The idea that any country receiving official American support should be allowed to continue its occupation and colonization of another has few, if any, credible backers.

The road towards freedom, peace, security, and stability for Arabs and Israelis, two proud and historic peoples, will not be easy. Such things never are. But in getting from here to there, one need not agree with the cynics. The latter would have one believe that the two peoples and their supporters are irreversibly locked into a downward spiral that is headed towards a clash between their respective cultures and civilizations.

The reality is the opposite. In contrast to those who insist upon seeing either of the two sides and their primary supporters in this conflict as "those," as "them," as "other," one need only ponder the following.

Not Otherness, But Us-Ness

Among Christians, Jews, and Muslims, and among Arabs and Israelis and millions of Americans, too, there still flickers an age-old special sense of "us-ness". One would do well to reconsider the implications of this "us-ness" for what must yet be achieved in ending the occupation and dismantling the settlements in the days to come.

Here, in this region of current and seemingly constant conflict and tension, as in no other single place on earth, is the crucible of culture, the cradle of civilization, the anvil of antiquity, the nursery of nations, the source of sunshine on the classical world. Here, too, is the crossroads of three continents and the birthplace of the world's three monotheistic religions.

The combination of these attributes has the effect of making the entire region sometimes seem as though it were one big traffic jam of the devout -- that, and something else: namely, the epicenter of prayer and pilgrimage, of faith and spiritual devotion, for more than half of humanity.

In pointing the way forward, this much seems clear: it is way past time for all the parties to this conflict to leave the battlefield and come home. Germany and France, Russia and

Central Europe, Canada and Great Britain, have no patent on the process, no monopoly on the method, no trademark on the technique, of turning swords into plowshares. In this instance, the United States cannot afford to be seen as asleep at the wheel.

Moral Courage

America's Arab and Islamic partners, and those in the Israeli peace camp, rightly argue that the United States will do Americans, Arabs, and Israelis no favor in the event that it should refuse to assume the mantle of responsibility, accountability, and courage – of political, personal, physical, and above all, *moral* courage -- that it has long urged upon others.

If one is serious about supporting and defending the legitimate rights of Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, Syrians, and many others, there would appear to be no alternative to moving as quickly as possible towards achieving the strategic and related objectives outlined here.

Saying that one will do whatever is necessary to make headway in the struggle against the causes and manifestations of terrorism, in the name of protecting American lives and advancing vital U.S. national interests, is commendable.

However, in pursuit of such laudable goals, it is hard to see how refusal or failure to end the illegal Israeli occupation, together with the equally illegal settlements that the occupation has spurred, and to this day sustains, could be either a winning strategy or a viable policy option.

To paraphrase Edmund Burke, all that is necessary for systematic and institutionalized suppression and injustice to prevail, and, in this case, for relentless anger and acts of terror against Americans, Arabs, and Israelis to continue, is that enough good people do nothing.

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