

The Perils of Engagement

By Jeff Robbins *The Wall Street Journal*

In March 1999, a Democratic president of the United States was leading a military intervention in Kosovo. It was aimed at stopping the mass murder of a Muslim minority by Slobodan Milosevic, a bona-fide war criminal. Our European allies ardently desired the U.S. to shoulder the burden of this effort -- but wished to publicly distance themselves from it, in order to avoid the potential political fallout in their own countries that ineluctably follows an association with the U.S.

The European leaders were not simply imagining political risk where none existed: Tens of thousands of demonstrators packed the streets of European capitals in the spring of 1999, denouncing the U.S. for using military force to stop Milosevic from killing and persecuting Muslim Kosovars. At the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, where I was a U.S. delegate at the time, a middle-aged Greek woman accosted me angrily at a reception and smugly attributed U.S. efforts to stop Milosevic to an American desperation to "protect American markets." I responded that I had not known that American exports to Kosovo were of a magnitude so critical to the American economy as to galvanize the U.S. military industrial complex into launching a major bombing campaign there.

It is increasingly de rigueur around the world and, for that matter, in certain segments of the Democratic Party, to place responsibility for all international crises on the U.S. government. Unsurprisingly, therefore, when it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict, it has attained the level of high fashion to ascribe the persistent absence of peace to a lack of adequate U.S. "engagement" in resolving it.

If the Bush administration were truly "engaged," the argument goes, the chances for Middle East peace would be greatly improved. Next week's meeting in Annapolis, Md., between Israel and at least certain of its Arab interlocutors has the look and feel of more of the same. Yesterday the State Department sent out "formal invitations" to the event, but it remains unclear who will attend besides Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. If history is any guide, the meeting will yield unsatisfactory results, Israel will be blamed for failing to make the requisite concessions, and the Bush administration will be widely and sharply criticized for its "failure to engage."

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This analysis, simple and neat, and for so many so satisfying, would seem at odds with the historical record. The problem is that all too often, those who blame the U.S. for failing to deliver Mideast peace are some of the world's most culpable enablers of Mideast violence -- and those who are themselves actually responsible for erecting the fundamental roadblocks to a resolution of the conflict.

This is so obvious as to almost go without saying -- except that the penchant for placing the blame on the U.S. is so widespread and so addictive that it goes largely unsaid. It was, of course, the Arab bloc, including the Palestinian leadership, that decided to reject the U.N.'s 1947 partition of Palestine into two states, Arab and Jewish, living side by side. Instead it invaded the nascent Jewish state rather than coexist with it, spawning the conflict that has so burdened the world for the last 60 years.

This was not a decision made by the U.S.

We are also not responsible for the Arab world's choice not to create a Palestinian Arab state in East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank from 1948 to 1967, when it easily could have done so -- before there were any Jewish settlements there to serve as the public object of Arab grievance.

It was not the U.S. whose leaders issued the largely unremembered "Three No's" of the Arab conference in Khartoum in the summer of 1967 -- "no" to peace with Israel, to negotiation with Israel and to recognition of Israel -- after the 1967 war backfired so badly on the Arab world. Nor can the U.S. government under President Clinton be criticized for failing to pursue Yasser Arafat with sufficient solicitude between 1993 and late 2000. The Clinton administration was, after all, the most ardent of suitors of the Palestinian leader -- only to be forced to watch Arafat reject an independent Palestinian state in all of Gaza and virtually all of the West Bank. It was the Palestinian leadership, not the U.S., that decided in the fall of 2000 that, rather than accept an independent Palestinian state, its wiser course was to launch a four-year bombing campaign against Israel's civilian population. The result was not merely over 1,100 Israeli civilians killed, but several thousand Palestinians dead, as well as a shattered Palestinian economy and the decision by Israel to begin construction of a security barrier in July 2002.

President Clinton labeled this decision on the Palestinians' part a "tragic mistake." It is certainly

inarguable that this particular decision, like others made by the Palestinian leadership over the past six decades, inflicted serious suffering on the Palestinian people. It has also resulted in suffering throughout the region, and instability beyond -- but it was a course of action chosen and implemented by the Palestinians and publicly supported by Arab states, not by the U.S.

When Israel withdrew from all of Gaza in 2005, the Arab world had the opportunity for a fresh start there -- to create a measure of hope for a population whose suffering long predated any Israeli presence. Instead of taking advantage of the opportunity, the Hamas-dominated Palestinian leadership opted to begin and then intensify an aggressive missile-launching campaign against Israeli civilian centers.

This choice in turn has led to Hamas's international isolation, and conditions in Gaza have grown steadily worse for Palestinians there. For its part, the Arab world has in essence stood by and permitted this to occur, and has once again remained unwilling to place the actual welfare of Palestinians ahead of its desire to stir opposition to Israel.

However significant the role of the U.S. is in nurturing political settlements of international disputes, it simply cannot prevent the Palestinian leadership and its Arab backers from making extraordinarily poor choices or, in President Clinton's parlance, "tragic mistakes." There is a marked tendency on the part of most of the world to cite the Bush administration's lack of "engagement" as the principal stumbling block to peace. It isn't. As for the Arab world, there is an even more pronounced habit of fingering the U.S. as the party which has the means at its disposal to bring about a Middle Eastern settlement, or at least conditions

favorable to a settlement. If the past is any indication, the U.S. does not ultimately possess those means. The Arab world does.

Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, whose treasuries overflow with petrodollars, are in a position to invest heavily in the Gaza Strip, create economic opportunities for its destitute population, and dilute the toxin-filled atmosphere there. They have not done so. The Egyptians are in a position to act decisively to stop the flow of rockets, bombs and other arms from Egypt into Gaza, where they are used to attack Israeli civilians. They have not done so. Europe and Russia, whose lucrative contracts with Iran provide them with such enviable revenues, have been in a position to pressure Tehran into stopping the funding of Hezbollah, which assaults Israel from Lebanon, and Hamas, which assaults Israel from Gaza. They have not done so.

Under the circumstances, one might imagine that those in a position to dramatically improve the situation in the Middle East -- but who have chosen by their inaction to worsen it -- might feel sheepish about placing the onus for the absence of Middle East peace on the U.S. The only thing in shorter supply than sheepishness when it comes to the Middle East, however, is helpfulness. As far as helpfulness is concerned, it is past time for those who complain most about the lack of American "engagement" to begin providing some.

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Unpopular Child By Hillel Halkin **The New York Sun** November 20, 2007

The once much-vaunted Annapolis conference has been reduced, a few days before its convening, to the dimensions of a birthday party for an unpopular child at school.

Everyone now agrees that the parents were foolish to think they could improve their child's social standing by staging an event in its honor with lots of food, fun, games, and a special magic show, but the invitations have already gone out and it's too late to call the party off.

All that can be hoped for now is that enough children will turn up to prevent a fiasco and that the party will be gotten through quickly without fights, broken dishes, or other embarrassments.

The day after Annapolis there will be a post-mortem. It will not tell us anything that a pre-mortem could not have told us just as well, which is that this Annapolis represented the kind of mistaken thinking that has characterized every American or international attempt to resolve the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict since the 1991 Madrid Conference: Namely, the belief that there is something in the world of diplomacy called "process" that has an intrinsically positive momentum of its own capable of overcoming deep disagreements on substance between two sides to a dispute. Just get these two sides to sit down and start talking, the reasoning goes, and little by little they will find points of agreement that will increase trust between them and lead to an overall settlement.

This is of course nonsense. There is nothing intrinsically positive about any diplomatic process. Such processes work when potential points of agreement already exist and can be focused on. When they don't exist, all the processes in the world can't conjure them up. On the contrary, they simply create frustration, disappointment, and rancor.

And in the case of Israel and the Palestinians, such points of agreement do not exist. This is not, as international diplomacy and public opinion go on

wishfully thinking, because the two sides are behaving like stubborn children who need to have some common sense cajoled or spanked into them rather than like rational adults. It is because each side has perfectly rational interests and ambitions that are not compatible with the rational interests and ambitions of the other side. The only way to achieve an agreement between them, paradoxically, would be for one of them to start behaving irrationally.

What are Israel's interests and ambitions? They are to emerge from the conflict as a state that is militarily secure; that has a safe Jewish majority that will be maintainable in the future; and that is not asked to uproot more settlers from their homes than can be politically or economically managed.

Military security means expanding the 1967 borders in key sectors and ensuring that any Palestinian state will be demilitarized. A safe Jewish majority means that no Palestinian refugee families will be readmitted to Israel. A manageable settler policy means that Israel will retain the large "settlement blocs" near and around Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

And what are the Palestinians' interests and ambitions? They are to create a state for themselves that, however tiny and unsatisfactory, will in its initial stage be as large and territorially contiguous as possible; that will have half of Jerusalem as its capital; and that can dream of eventually regaining more or all of historic Palestine by pressing irredentist claims as the Arab population of Israel grows and destabilizes Israel's demographic status quo. A maximally large and territorially contiguous state means near total Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders. A capital in Jerusalem means Israel's yielding much of that city. An irredentist dream means standing firm on the refugee's "right of return" while refusing to accept Israel's definition of itself as a Jewish state – a definition, among other things, that includes Israel's right to have an immigration policy that favor Jews over non-Jews.

These interests and ambitions are not mutually compatible. No amount of diplomatic "process" will make them so. Nor is it the case, as the conventional wisdom has it, that the problem in Palestinian-Israeli relations is that both peoples currently have weak governments that makes it impossible for them to compromise. Yasser Arafat and Ariel Sharon ran stronger governments and did not make peace either. The strength or weakness of a people's government has nothing to do with its strategic interests.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict may not be exactly a zero-sum game, but neither is it a potentially win-win situation. If one side wins by achieving its goals, the other side will have lost. If neither side achieves its goals, both will have lost. At this point, either's capacity to compromise is extremely limited. Like many conflicts in history, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not come to an end by means of a negotiated settlement. A viable Jewish state and a viable Palestinian state west of the Jordan River are not both possible.

The conflict will come to an end because the case for a viable Jewish state is the stronger of the two, the Jewish people having no other country and the Palestinians having Jordan, which will sooner or later re-unite with the 90% of the West Bank that Israel will withdraw from. How and when this will happen is impossible to predict. That it will happen is a near certainty. Annapolis will be quickly forgotten, even quicker than the Madrid Conference was. The dire prophecies of what will happen if it fails ("A catastrophe!" Israel's president Shimon Peres, the chief engineer of the catastrophic Oslo Agreement, has predicted) will not come true.

The Palestinian people is not in the mood for a new intifada and Hamas is not on the verge of taking over the West Bank. The broken dishes, if there are any, will be cleaned up and the real processes in the Middle East, which are not the diplomatic ones, will continue to take place.

The limits of deterrence November 21, 2007

By Louis Rene Beres and Isaac Ben-Israel

Five years ago, the special Project Daniel Group first advised Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on the threat of Iranian nuclear weapons. Our final report urged the prime minister to enhance Israel's deterrence and defense postures, to consider an end to deliberate nuclear ambiguity if Iran becomes nuclear and to refine pertinent pre-emption options. It also concluded that Israel should not expect peaceful coexistence with a nuclear Iran, and that active national defenses should be strengthened.

Israel's core plan for active defense remains the Arrow. To protect against attack from Iran, however, this system of ballistic missile defense (BMD) must be complemented by improved Israeli

The Washington Times

deterrence, and by viable options for certain defensive first strikes against appropriate hard targets. Under no circumstances should it be assumed in Jerusalem that a stable "balance of terror" could be created with Tehran. Here, the essential assumption of enemy rationality might not always be warranted. This would not be your father's Cold War.

Of course, if the Arrow were entirely efficient, even an irrational Iranian adversary armed with nuclear and/or biological weapons could be kept at bay without defensive first strikes, and/or threats of retaliation. But no BMD system can truly be "leak proof." Moreover, terrorist proxies in ships or trucks

— not missiles — could deliver Iranian nuclear attacks upon Israel. In such low-tech but high-consequence assaults, there would be no benefit to any sort of anti-missile defenses.

Israel cannot depend upon its anti-ballistic missiles to fully defend against any future WMD attack from Iran any more than it can rely only on nuclear deterrence. This does not mean that the Arrow fails to play an important protective role as part of a larger security apparatus. It does play such a role. Every state has a plain right under international law to act pre-emptively when facing an openly genocidal assault. Israel is no exception. The 1996 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice even extends such authority to the pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons in certain existential circumstances; but — at least for now — Israel could still undertake "anticipatory self-defense" without such weapons.

If for whatever reason Iran should be permitted to proceed to become nuclear, Israel would have to enhance the credibility of its presumed nuclear deterrent, and to deploy a recognizable second-strike force. This optimally robust strategic force — hardened, multiplied and dispersed — would be

Refusal to accept a Jewish state By Irwin J. Mansdorf The Baltimore Sun

For anyone who wants to know why there is so much suspicion on the part of Israelis as to the real intentions of the Palestinian people, just listen to Saeb Erekat. Mr. Erekat, who is the chief Palestinian negotiator, this week rejected Israel's position that it be recognized as a Jewish state. The newspaper Haaretz reported that in a radio interview, Mr. Erekat said, "No state in the world connects its national identity to a religious identity."

No state, that is, except for the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and a host of other Arab kingdoms, sheikdoms and republics that base their rule on Islam. Egypt, the largest Arab country, has a parliamentary process with a formal penal code written and based upon the principles of Islamic law. The constitution of the new Iraq says that Islam is the official religion, and no law that contradicts the established provisions of Islam may be allowed.

Curiously, Mr. Erekat seems to obscure the fact that even the proposed Palestinian constitution clearly states that Islam is the official state religion and that Shariah - Islamic law - is a major source for legislation. In Europe, there are several examples of countries with official state religions, all Christian. So what, exactly, is the problem with a Jewish state?

For years, we have been hearing that the source of the problems between the Arab world and Israel is Israel's occupation of Arab lands and the lack of a Palestinian homeland. Now that Israel has

fashioned to inflict a decisive retaliatory blow against selected enemy cities. Iran should understand, therefore, that the actual costs of any planned aggression against Israel would always exceed any conceivable gains.

One last point warrants mention. The substantial dangers of a nuclear Iran would also impact the United States. While it would still be at least several years before any Iranian missiles could strike American territory, the United States could still be as vulnerable as Israel to nuclear-armed terrorist surrogates. In this connection, President Bush's intended plan for a "rogue state" anti-ballistic missile shield (a plan that has not gone over very well with Russian President Vladimir Putin) would have the very same inherent limitations as Israel's Arrow.

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withdrawn from Lebanon, Egypt, Gaza and Jordan, it appears that Mr. Erekat is saying that the real problem is not the lack of a Palestinian homeland, but rather the presence of a Jewish one. In denying the Jewish people the right to self-determination and independence, Mr. Erekat not only singles out Jews as undeserving of nationhood, but also blatantly ignores decades-old international agreements that provide for an independent homeland in Palestine for the Jewish people.

When the League of Nations first provided for a "mandate" for what was then known as Palestine, its purpose was to provide for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." When the United Nations later called for the partitioning of part of Palestine, it specifically referred to "the establishment of the independence of the Arab and Jewish States." Now, ignoring what was agreed to and denying fundamental rights to the Jews that he would extend to Palestinian Arabs, Mr. Erekat has shown that the problem is not the "occupation." The problem is the Jews.

Arabs in Israel represent about 20 percent of the population. They have their own schools, councils and national representatives. They attend universities, work where they wish and travel freely throughout the country. The Palestine that Mr. Erekat envisions will be free of Jews and has allowed rhetoric of religious leaders that, in official broadcasts, calls Jews "the sons of monkeys and pigs." But Mr. Erekat, not satisfied that Arab

Palestine will be off-limits to the Jewish people, now denies Jews the right to even call Israel their own.

No doubt Mr. Erekat's apologists will spin his comments into "what he really meant was," rather than condemning his unfortunate comment - a comment that can only further doubts and suspicions rather than building trust and understanding.

As Mr. Erekat was uttering his words, Palestinians, whose obligations under the "road map" call for first ending terror and violence, normalizing Palestinian life, and building Palestinian institutions, were busy killing each other in Gaza at a memorial service for Yasser Arafat. This after years of failure to control the gangs of militias and

terrorists in the West Bank as well, despite having their own security forces in all major Palestinian cities. With internecine Palestinian battles and a failed leadership, Mr. Erekat has thrown a monkey wrench into negotiations whose purpose it is to end Israeli control of Palestinian lives and create secure independence for both Arabs and Jews.

So is it really the "occupation" that is the root of the problem, or is it the fact that the Jewish state exists at all?

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Breaking from the past November 14, 2007

By Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Shelley Berkley The Jerusalem Post

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will host Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Annapolis this winter, attempting to succeed where others have failed: to achieve a lasting peace agreement between the two sides of the conflict. Unfortunately, Secretary Rice appears ready to follow the same path as her predecessors - of broad, unfulfilled promises; painful sacrifices on the part of Israel; and a Palestinian leadership unwilling or incapable of meeting their commitments to combat terror, incitement and corruption - with equally disappointing results.

A failed process will provide no benefits to the Palestinians, while leaving Israel and America less secure. And peace will be nowhere in sight.

At this critical juncture, we must learn from history and devise a new policy that emphasizes accountability and results.

First and foremost, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas has repeatedly pledged to stop terrorism without making good on his word. Abbas has not cracked down on the repeated launching of hundreds of rockets by terrorists into Israeli towns and cities. His own Fatah party's militia, the Aksa Martyrs' Brigades, is on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist groups and has murdered hundreds of Israeli civilians in terror attacks during the last six years. Just this past Thursday, the Brigades publicly threatened to fire hundreds of rockets at Israel. Fatah's constitution, too, supports terrorism and advocates Israel's destruction. Meanwhile, foreign aid to Abbas has entered Hamas's coffers. Abbas himself has: called Hamas an "integral part of the Palestinian people;" met with Hamas officials this week; and promised to engage in further talks if Hamas cedes control of Gaza, without first requiring Hamas to recognize Israel's right to exist and cease practicing terror.

The US has spent, and continues to spend, millions of dollars on programs to assist the PA in providing humanitarian aid, including food, sanitation services and medicine to meet the needs

of the Palestinian people. Millions of US tax dollars were also spent to help Abu Mazen implement educational reforms aimed at eradicating incitement of violence, providing security assistance to Palestinian entities, and promoting accountability and transparency of government institutions.

Despite these efforts, Abu Mazen and his corrupt Fatah party failed miserably at curbing terrorism and implementing government reforms.

Yet, the US has done little to change their behavior, instead, counseling patience and offering further aid. This only encourages a culture of victimhood and unaccountability among the Palestinians, a culture feeding terror and perpetuating and deepening the present conflict. Therefore, given the history of the PA and Fatah, the Administration's recent proposal to hand Abu Mazen hundreds of millions in additional funding is simply wrong.

We cannot continue to substitute hope for reality by continuing to assume the existence of a viable Palestinian partner for peace while placing the onus on Israel to make greater and greater unilateral sacrifices. In doing so, we only undermine a vital ally, endangering our own security.

It is time for a new approach. We must pursue a policy that sets and enforces higher standards for Palestinian behavior, and provides consequences if they fail to perform. The first step is to link our support to results. Instead of disbursing millions to Palestinian leaders in the hope they will change their ways, we must link each disbursement of funds to tangible progress, consistent with the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act, in purging from its security services individuals with ties to terrorism; dismantling all terrorist infrastructure within its jurisdiction and fully cooperating with Israel's security services; halting all anti-American and anti-Israel incitement in Palestinian Authority-controlled media; adopting reforms aimed at ensuring transparent and accountable governance; and

ensuring the financial transparency and accountability of all government ministries and operations.

If the Palestinians do not achieve the intended results, they must not receive US assistance or the legitimacy of political support from US officials.

Simultaneously, the United States must end our support for entities that only serve to perpetuate the Palestinian conflict. We must not blindly hold out false hope that the corrupt Fatah leadership will be able to bring peace without the US holding them accountable. We must support abolishing the UN's biased Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and other

duplicative and incendiary institutions within the United Nations framework.

The United States must settle for nothing less than a genuine partner for peace with Israel that leads, and sets the tone in achieving results. Only then, will there be a glimmer of hope for lasting peace and security in the region.

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida serves as the Ranking Republican on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Congresswoman Shelley Berkley is a Democrat from the State of Nevada.

Palestine, and the crime of being a Jewish state

By Bradley Burston Haaretz November 12, 2007

My heart goes out to the Palestinians. Not only because their entire world has become one of despair, immobility, bloodshed, disillusionment, crumbling infrastructure, crumbling history, crumbling horizons. There's also this: Their leaders are even worse than ours.

Imagine the most pragmatic, the most moderate, the most persuasive, the most reasonable of their representatives, preparing for the first peace summit in recent memory, by attacking the very idea that Israel should be a Jewish state.

Saeb Erekat, chief negotiator for the Palestine Liberation Organization, declared Monday that the Palestinians will not recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Erekat was responding Monday to a series of strong statements by Ehud Olmert the day before, in which Olmert said "We won't hold negotiations on our existence as a Jewish state, this is a launching point for all negotiations," adding that "Whoever does not accept this, cannot hold any negotiations with me."

Erekat's response, speaking to Israel Radio, was clearer than one might have expected from a seasoned diplomat. So was the flat tone of rejection.

"No state in the world connects its national identity to a religious identity," he said. Never mind the fact that the Saudis, sponsors of a peace initiative which the Palestinians hope someday to parlay into an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza, are a theocracy of such sectarian dimension that tourists are forbidden from entering the country with bibles, crucifixes, or items bearing the Star of David.

Never mind the fact that leftists the world over can live with the concept of explicitly Muslim states teaching the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and other explicitly anti-Semitic texts, while arguing that the very idea of a Jewish state implies and, in fact, compels racism against non-Jews.

The bottom line is that if Palestinians want a state - an actual state, and not just a fantasy, not just trappings but actual independence - they are going to

have to reconcile themselves to the idea of an overtly Jewish neighbor.

The other paradigm, which has certainly gained currency in this decade, is to overpower Israel militarily, clearing away the foreign Zionist weeds so that a glorious, supremely non-Jewish Palestine may arise for the benefit of believing Muslims everywhere.

It's not going to happen. The world has had its fill of the Palestinians. The Palestinians have had their chance. The Iranians would love to help them, but at this point, even their brother Muslims will not stand for it.

It's not going to happen. The Palestinians are either going to have a state alongside a Jewish state, or that can choose to have no state at all.

Arafat knew this. That is why, in speaking to his own diaspora, he consistently held out hope for a Palestinian Right of Return, a way to overwhelm Israel demographically.

But that is not about to happen either. Arafat knew that as well.

These days, in the inept leadership sweepstakes, the graft and ineptitude and impotence has a new opposite number, the splintered and floundering upper echelons of Hamas. Once the most disciplined, well-run, canny organization in the Palestinian territories, Hamas has begun to misgovern Gaza the way Israel once did.

As Monday's disastrous memorial rally for Yasser Arafat showed all too well, Hamas has begun to employ a deadly cocktail of apparent tolerance and spasms of brutality.

For Palestinians, Hamas was once a pillar of hope and a role model of probity. Now the best that Hamas can boast is that it cannot bring itself to recognize Israel. Even though, in proposing decades-long truces, it has signaled its willingness to sit down with the people it will not recognize, and negotiate with the people it will not recognize, and live alongside the people it will not recognize.

Here's the rub: There was a time when everything that happened, played into Hamas' hands. If Israel invaded, or refrained from invading, if it talked peace or made war, Hamas profited. Now those days are over. Time is no longer on Hamas' side. Nor on the side of Fatah.

The world has shown its willingness to let Palestinians suffer indefinitely. The world has shown its impatience with the glorious victories of Palestine, whether that means Qassam-butchered six cows about to give birth in a dairy barn on a Negev kibbutz, or raising an army which spends much of its firepower on fellow Palestinians, as in the memorial rally which left as many as eight dead in Gaza.

What matters, in the end, is not whether the Palestinians choose to formally recognize Israel as a

Jewish state. What matters is whether the Palestinians can live alongside a state which happens to be Jewish in character. That is to say, can they come to share the Holy Land with a state in which the dominant religion is not Islam.

Most Jewish Israelis, meanwhile, have come to accept the idea of an independent Palestinian state, in which the dominant religion will certainly be Islam.

If Palestinians cannot bring themselves to accept a Jewish Israel, there is always the default option. It may be unfair. It may seem that Palestinian suffering has been much too long in vain. But here it is: For Palestinians to choose not to accept a Jewish state, is to make the decisive choice for a future of statelessness.

Staticidal zealotry

By Frank J. Gaffney, Jr. The Washington Times November 20, 2007

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice behaves like a zealot. In her ever-rasher pursuit of a Palestinian state, she exhibits the syndrome defined by the philosopher George Santana as one who redoubles her efforts upon losing sight of the objective.

Let's recall: The objective laid out by President Bush, when he decided in June 2002 to support the creation of a homeland for the Palestinian people, was to provide a stable, secure neighbor for Israel, committed to leaving peaceably with the Jewish State.

Mr. Bush explicitly preconditioned such support on: an end to Palestinian terror; a Palestinian leadership untainted by ties to terrorism; and eliminating the infrastructure in Palestinian areas that enables such behavior. After the September 11, 2001, attacks, the United States was in the business of eliminating terrorist-sponsoring regimes, not creating them.

Now, however, it is crystal-clear that the only outcome from Condi Rice's idee fixe — namely that she will convene a Middle East peace conference at the U.S. Naval Academy for the purpose of extracting from Israel the territorial concessions needed rapidly to establish a Palestinian state — has nothing to do with the original Bush vision. Under present and foreseeable circumstances, the best that can be hoped from such a meeting for is failure. For success will result in a new safe haven for terror that is a mortal threat not only for Israel, but for the United States, as well.

Unfortunately, even the failure of Condi's Folly at Annapolis is likely to be a very bad outcome. To the extent her actions are raising unwarranted expectations on the part of Palestinians and their Arab friends, past practice suggests it will translate into a pretext for new violence against Israel.

That will be especially true if, as is also predictable, the Israelis are blamed for the outcome

for not being willing enough — in the face of Palestinian intractability — to make what are euphemistically called "painful" moves for peace. Another way to describe such moves are as reckless concessions certain to jeopardize Israel's security, and quite possibly ours.

After all, it is only reasonable to expect the West Bank to follow the trajectory of the Gaza Strip and, before it, southern Lebanon — both of which Israel abandoned to her foes, only to have those territories become staging grounds for attacks on Israel and secure incubators for terror against us. Among those operating from such areas are Islamofascist terrorist organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, al Qaeda and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, the newest addition to the State Department's list of such entities.

Condi Rice nonetheless demands that Israel now relinquish the West Bank and East Jerusalem to yet another terrorist organization: Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah. To be sure, the secretary of state would have us believe Fatah is no such thing. In fact, the entire Annapolis house of cards is built on the fraudulent foundation that the Palestinian faction established by Mr. Abbas' mentor, Yasser Arafat, is a reliable partner for peace and effective counterweight to Hamas, which now controls the Gaza Strip.

Only a zealot who has altogether lost any sense of reality could make such an assertion. Treating Fatah as the cornerstone of American diplomacy and demands on Israel is nothing less than perilous and irresponsible. Consider the following sampler of recent counter-indicators:

Last August, five Fatah operatives assigned to Mr. Abbas' security detail conspired to assassinate Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert during a visit by the latter to meet the Palestinian "president" in the West Bank city of Jericho. After their arrest on information from Israel's internal intelligence agency,

Shin Bet, several of these individuals were released by the Palestinian Authority.

This is in keeping with past practice. By some estimates, Fatah and its Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade have claimed responsibility for murdering roughly as many Israelis as has Hamas. In those rare cases when the perpetrators are actually arrested by Palestinian police, they are generally set free in short order. How could Israel possibly entrust physical control of the West Bank — from which virtually the entire Jewish State's population can be subjected to rocket or even mortar fire — to people with such a record?

Speaking of the Jewish State, in the run-up to the Annapolis meeting, Mr. Abbas and his subordinates have lately become quite brazen in denouncing Israel's right to exist as such. Their statements not only speak volumes about the degree to which Condi Rice's desperate bid for a "legacy" is now being clearly read as bullies always do: as evidence of contemptible and exploitable weakness. They also make a mockery of the premise that Abbas and Company are preferable to Hamas

The Annapolis Fiasco

By Bret Stephens The Wall Street Journal

Henry Kissinger once observed that "when enough prestige has been invested in a policy it is easier to see it fail than abandon it." At the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., next week, the current secretary of state will illustrate her predecessor's point.

"Annapolis," as it is spoken of in diplomatic circles, was conceived earlier this year by the Bush administration as a landmark conference that would revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and lead to a final settlement by January 2009. It was to be modeled on the Madrid conference of 1991, which brought Israeli leaders face-to-face with their Arab counterparts and, as it seemed at the time, created a new paradigm in the affairs of the Middle East. Back then, the idea was that the Iron Wall between the Jewish state and its neighbors could be brought down just as the Berlin Wall had. Today, the operative theory is that Israel's neighbors, fearful of Iran's growing regional clout, have a newfound interest in putting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to rest.

Nice theory -- if only the locals would get with the concept. The Egyptians are openly skeptical about the conference, which they say lacks "an endgame." The Saudis, supposedly among the beleaguered and newly pliable Sunni powers, can hardly be bothered with Annapolis; even now it's unclear whether their foreign minister will attend. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has told the Saudis he would rather resign than attend a conference that achieves nothing. He fears Palestinians would "turn to Hamas after they see that Annapolis did not give them anything," according to

because, unlike the latter, they are truly willing to live in peace with their Israeli neighbors.

In fact, only the most willfully blind could maintain such a pretense in light of the incessant propagandizing and indoctrination about killing Jews and destroying Israel that passes for official or at least officially sanctioned broadcasts, sermons and speeches emanating from Mr. Abbas' rump Palestinian Authority.

The only Palestinian state that can possibly come from Condoleezza Rice's zealotry will be a dagger pointed at the heart of Israel and a new safe-haven for terror aimed at the United States and other Western nations. Even if a corrupt and politically unrepresentative Olmert government in Israel is prepared to play along, Americans who understand the stakes for the Jewish State as well as our own, must reject her desperate and unacceptable bid to launch a Palestinian one at Annapolis.

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an unnamed Palestinian official quoted in the Jerusalem Post.

Then there are the Israelis, who have even better reasons than the Sunnis to fear Iran. Yossi Beilin, architect of the 1993 Oslo Accords and a political dove, predicts not only that Annapolis will fail, but that its failure will "weaken the Palestinian camp, strengthen Hamas and cause violence." His political opposite, Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu, calls Annapolis "dangerous" and warns that Israel risks giving away everything for nothing in return. Few Israelis take seriously the view that the creation of a Palestinian state offers a solution to their concerns about Iran. On the contrary, they fear that such a state would become yet another finger of the Islamic Revolution, just as Hezbollah is to their north in Lebanon, and Hamastan is to their south in Gaza.

No wonder, then, that as skepticism about Annapolis grows its perceived significance shrinks. What was originally billed as a conference is now being described by the State Department as a "meeting." What was originally envisaged as a three-day event has become a one-day event. There is, as of this writing, no firm list of participants. And there are whispers the date of the meeting may be pushed back, perhaps to December.

As for the agenda, there isn't one. Substantive discussions have been ruled out. There was some hope that Israelis and Palestinians would agree to a joint "declaration of principles," but they could not come up with a common text. Now there's talk of issuing separate declarations, or doing without declarations altogether.

Among the principles sharply in dispute is whether Israel is a Jewish state. "We will not agree to recognize Israel as a Jewish state," says Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, adding that "there is no country in the world where religious and national identities are intertwined." Counters Mr. Olmert: "We won't have an argument with anyone in the world over the fact that Israel is a state of the Jewish people. Whoever does not accept this cannot hold any negotiations with me."

One would have thought the question of Israel's Jewishness was settled 60 years ago by a U.N. partition plan that speaks of a "Jewish state" some 30 times. (One would have thought, too, that Mr. Erekat would be mindful of his government's membership in the 57-nation Organization of the Islamic Conference.) But the question hasn't been settled because Palestinians will not concede the "right" of their "refugees" -- currently numbering in the millions -- to return to their ancestral homes and farms in present-day Israel.

Despite nearly 20 years of trying, there is simply no finessing these differences. If Israel is not a Jewish state, it may as well be called Palestine. If the existential issues of 1948 cannot be resolved, there is little point in addressing the territorial issues of 1967, which are themselves almost impossible to address. Matters are not helped by the unusual political weakness of the key participants. In the last year, Mr. Abbas has lost half his kingdom. He will swiftly lose what remains of it the moment "Palestine" comes

into being and the Israeli army isn't around to suppress Hamas as an effective fighting force.

Mr. Olmert's governing coalition depends on two parties -- the ultraorthodox Shas and ultranationalist Yisrael Beiteinu -- which are opposed to any substantive concessions. The prime minister faces potential criminal indictments in multiple probes connected to his previous tenure as minister of trade and industry. A forthcoming official inquiry on last year's war in Lebanon will reportedly hold him accountable for the deaths of 33 soldiers. Ariel Sharon is still in a coma, but it's his successor who's really on life support.

Why, then, hold a conference at all? The short answer is that Condoleezza Rice demands one, and she has spent countless hours over eight mostly fruitless trips to the region this year trying to arrange it. But this hardly addresses the deeper mystery of why this administration has gotten itself caught in the Venus flytrap of the Arab-Israeli conflict, after vowing not to do so, and why it has done so with a degree of ineptitude that recalls the dimmer moments of the Carter administration. Maybe it's a matter of bureaucratic inertia. Or maybe it's about being seen to try. Or maybe it's the kind of fourth-quarter, fourth down Hail Mary pass that appeals to a secretary of state with a mania for football and a thin record of accomplishment. Then again, maybe it doesn't really matter.

But look on the bright side: Annapolis may yet serve us well as an object lesson in how diplomacy -- the competent kind -- just isn't done.

The Annapolis summit (A view from the other side, ed)

By Ziad Asali The Washington Times November 6, 2007

The skeptics have unassailable arguments: History and a consistent record of failure are on their side. Weak Israeli and Palestinian governments, an American president in the last stretch of his second term, dysfunctional Israeli and Palestinian body politics, and cynical media coverage all dampen any reasonable expectations of success for the Middle East summit in Annapolis.

Yet, Annapolis is the last realistic hope for a two-state solution and the possibility of peace it offers. This is a sobering thought that should focus the attention of leaders involved and that of all global forces interested in peace. The worst players in the Middle East, on every side, are waiting and rubbing their hands in glee in anticipation of its failure.

Fear of failure takes precedence over success. For that reason, Annapolis has to be a process and not an event.

Success should not be measured by any one variable like the document that is being negotiated between the Palestinians and Israelis. The conference should be preceded and followed by

palpable changes on the ground that will convince people of the seriousness of the exercise. It must be crowned by an agreement about a robust follow-up process that binds participants to serious negotiations and defined landmarks for implementation that lead to a viable Palestinian state.

Success can thus be more diffusely defined in making progress on three interrelated tracks: document, deliverables on the ground and mechanisms for follow-up. Such a definition will deny an easy victory for the real enemies of a two-state solution and the historic compromise on both sides.

Lest we yield to despair as we contemplate the compelling arguments for pessimism, let us examine the elements that give us reasons for guarded optimism: The White House and the State Department are communicating the same message of seriousness of American policy.

We hear a cacophony of voices raising doubts about the administration's intentions after years of silence to the point when the question can be legitimately asked: Are the skeptics more wedded to

vilifying the administration than to working for the only available opportunity for peace? Is continued conflict preferable to giving credit to this administration? While Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other officials are talking publicly about the national interest of our country in establishing the state of Palestine alongside Israel, skeptics are talking about salvaging a legacy. What of it? It certainly would be a great legacy and, if achieved, it would be well earned.

Another reason for guarded optimism is that the Palestinian team of Mahmoud Abbas-Salam Fayyad cannot be dismissed as a non-partner. No better Palestinian team can be imagined. The "non-partner" line should not be replaced by the "they cannot deliver" line.

Have they been tested? Have they been helped? Can they be empowered to deliver? The answers are not long in coming.

On Nov. 2, the 90th Anniversary of the Balfour declaration, hundreds of Palestinian policemen have deployed in Nablus to establish law and order. The cooperation of the United States, Gen. Keith Dayton for the Quartet and Israeli Defense Department will help determine whether the Palestinian leadership team will succeed in Nablus. Nothing short of a Palestinian state rests on the success of this effort. Its failure, and the kind of neighborhood the future Middle East will present to the world, will be the responsibility of those who cause it.

The security system must twin with an economic package aimed at rebuilding Palestinian institutions to allow the economy to work its way out of subsidy and dependence. The December Donor meeting, and other public-private partnership initiatives, are as significant as Annapolis in helping to build a viable state. Once again the present Palestinian leadership team has the credibility to be a trusted partner in this effort.

A third reason lies in an Israeli new political scene altered by post-Iraq and post Lebanon war. New strategic considerations have prompted leading officials to proclaim that a Palestinian state is in Israeli's national interest. The present dysfunctional Israeli political situation, which might preclude immediate strategic concessions, has to work itself to serve the national interest. Nothing will replace the need for political courage and statesmanship, but Israel's friends must address its concerns rather than pressure it. The Arab leaders who signed the Arab League Initiative can help matters if they convince the Israeli public of the seriousness of their intentions as they reiterate their commitment to it.

The United States should publicly and clearly articulate its own national interest in the two-state solution and the need for all its allies to understand and accommodate that. An already signed generous

defense package underlines the American commitment to the security of Israel.

What of the big picture? Borders, Jerusalem and refugees? The answers lie in whether the leaders will be able to sustain a partnership that survives negotiations as it identifies and holds mutual red lines. The partners must make and implement the painful concessions they readily talk about. Their domestic entrenched and powerful opponents, and others, will use every trick in the book, as they often have, to frustrate understanding and progress. If there is one job that only the United States can do, it would be to hold the partnership together and make it succeed. The ultimate contours of the solution cannot be far removed from U.N. Resolution 242, the Clinton Parameters, the Geneva Accord, the vision of President Bush and the Arab League Initiative.

Those who are opposed to such an outcome anywhere are on the other side of peace. Those who think ganging up on Israel and making it yield to pressure should abandon their counterproductive counsel. Those who think that humiliating the Palestinians into submission must unequivocally comprehend how consistently they have been proven wrong.

Language has to be found to provide clear enough answers to the big issues to convene and invite partners to the conference and ambiguous enough to keep political leaders in the game. Such language is not magical. It is already in currency and subject to scrutiny. But the real challenge is for leaders to work their way together through the thicket of obstacles in their way beyond the meeting. The follow-up process must be structured to interlock understandings and interests of several parties committed to delivering an outcome that the two main parties can live with but not love: a certain viable Palestine living alongside a secure Israel in peace.

For the rest of us, the first thing to do is "primum non nocere," first do no harm. Cynics and experts can do us a great favor by drawing attention to potential problems and pitfalls as they spare us their sanctimonious pronouncements that this is all in vain and that we have been here before. Low expectations are in order — they can easily be met; however, nihilism and cynicism are not.

Ultimately, a negotiated agreement between Palestinians and Israelis to build a joint future and end the conflict is an act of statesmanship. The administration is rising to the occasion by calling for a conference to lay the tracks for such an agreement. No effort should be spared to extend support. Never has a global public-private partnership been more needed to achieve a more reasonable goal.

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