

Vital Interest

Winning the War on Terror requires a Mideast peace settlement.

By Stephen Van Evera

A VISIT BY CONDOLEEZZA RICE to Jerusalem and the West Bank, a Sharon-Abbas summit, a ceasefire of sorts—suddenly there is diplomatic movement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is long overdue, and these small steps must foreshadow larger ones. The fact is that this conflict is not only a blight on Israel and Palestine. It now threatens the safety of Americans as well by aiding al-Qaeda's recruiting efforts, helping its terrorists find friendly haven in Mideast societies, and making Arabs and non-Arab Muslims less willing to co-operate with efforts to destroy al-Qaeda networks.

The U.S. should treat the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a serious menace to our own national security and move forcefully to end it. Many pieces needed for a settlement are now in place, and though the conflict poses an unprecedented threat, it is also ripe for a solution.

Whatever helps al-Qaeda endangers the U.S., and we should not be lulled by the quiet since the 9/11 attacks. Al-Qaeda remains determined to wreak mass havoc: its gruesome goals were expressed in Osama bin Laden's declaration that "to kill Americans ... civilian and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible." His press spokesman Suleiman Abu Ghaith has claimed a right for al-Qaeda to kill four million Americans, including two million children.

After the U.S. destroyed al-Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan, it morphed into a more decentralized organization, but it remains dangerous. Bin Laden wants to acquire weapons of mass destruction and may also have the opportunity: enough nuclear materials remain poorly secured in Russia to make tens of thousands of Hiroshima-sized atomic bombs. Many former Soviet scientists also remain underpaid or unemployed, primed for hiring by terrorists.

Why does al-Qaeda endure against U.S. efforts? How does it still find recruits and support? An important reason lies in the poison spread through the Mideast by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Opinion polls suggest that the conflict is highly salient in the Arab and Islamic world. Surveys also show that American policy toward Israel and Palestine is deeply despised among Arabs and Muslims and that the U.S. itself is also increasingly unpopular in these quarters. Further, polls show that the first and second phenomena cause the third—that Arabs and Muslims resent the U.S. largely because they care about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and disapprove of U.S. policies toward that conflict.

A March 2001 poll commissioned by the University of Maryland asked respondents in five Arab states—Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Lebanon—to identify

their "single most important issue," including domestic political issues. In Egypt, 79 percent named the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; 60 percent did so in Jordan, Kuwait, the UAE, and Lebanon. An additional 20 percent in these last four countries identified the conflict among their top three issues. Similarly, a spring 2002 Zogby survey of five Arab states—Egypt, Kuwait, the UAE, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia—found that about two-thirds of respondents viewed the Palestinian issue as "very important" or "the most important" issue facing the Arab world.

These poll numbers may be somewhat inflated as respondents may have feared declaring a prime concern about local governance. (Taking issue with the government can be unsafe in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world.) Thus those whose main concern is local mal-governance perhaps stifled that thought and spoke of Israel-Palestine instead. But even discounting heavily for this possibility, these polls indicate broad and intense public concern over the Israel-Palestine question.

The reasons are three: the *intifada* that flared in the Palestinian territories after Sept. 28, 2000; the new Arab satellite TV, including Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and other channels; and the strength of broad Arab and Muslim identities in the region. The *intifada* gives the conflict a dramatic and cruel face, ideal for inflam-

matory TV coverage. Satellite TV, which appeared only in the 1990s, provides a new medium for piping disturbing pictures into the homes of Arabs and Muslims far from Israel-Palestine. Their Arab/Muslim identities are activated by these images, stirring anger even among non-Palestinians.

Arabs widely disapprove of the expansionist policies pursued by Ariel Sharon's Israeli government and fault the U.S. for giving him almost unconditional support. That spring 2002 Zogby survey found minuscule support in five Arab states for U.S. policy toward the Palestinians: only 2 to 6 percent of respondents in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Lebanon voiced approval, and only 10 percent in the UAE. By contrast, 89 to 94 percent of respondents in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Lebanon, and 83 percent in the UAE, voiced disapproval of U.S. policy. In the world of opinion surveys, such huge majorities

Jordan. A Zogby study taken just three months later found even deeper antagonism: 69 percent unfavorable to 20 percent favorable in Lebanon, 73 percent to 14 percent in the UAE, 78 percent to 15 percent in Jordan, 88 percent to 11 percent in Morocco, 94 percent to 4 percent in Saudi Arabia, and 98 percent to 2 percent in Egypt, the beneficiary of \$2 billion in annual American aid. Note that the enmity extends even to traditional U.S. allies like Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan.

And *pace* President Bush, they do not "hate us for our freedoms." They hate our policies. Zogby again, May 2004: 76 percent in Jordan, 78 percent in the UAE, 79 percent in Lebanon, 81 percent in Saudi Arabia, 84 percent in Morocco, and 95 percent in Egypt declared that American policy toward the Arab-Israeli dispute was "quite important" or "extremely important" in shaping their attitudes toward the United States. Similar majorities

that region are militantly anti-American and pro-al-Qaeda. These dangerous fish could swim no more in Mao's metaphorical sea if the public willed otherwise—as it would if it viewed the U.S. with more approval.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the sole cause of Arab/Muslim animosity toward us. The war in Iraq and the impact of virulent anti-American propaganda from al-Qaeda and other Islamist movements also stoke the fire. Winding down the Iraqi occupation would help, as might stronger public diplomacy to counter al-Qaeda's propaganda. But U.S.-Mideast relations will not heal fully while irritation from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict persists. In the meantime, al-Qaeda will benefit accordingly.

Al-Qaeda's leaders will not be weaned from their campaign of terror by an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement. Terror has become their way of life, their reason for being. They cannot be conciliated; they must be destroyed. To achieve this, their support base must be stripped away, and that can only come by engineering a large improvement in Arab/Muslim public attitudes toward the U.S. This will leave the extremists friendless and exposed, to face capture or death. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be ended not to appease their anger but to lay the basis for their demise.

The conflict fuels friction with foreign governments as well as peoples. Often the U.S. needs these governments' help against al-Qaeda and other foes, and U.S. national security suffers accordingly. America's NATO partners are essential to defeating al-Qaeda, but disputes over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have frayed U.S. relations with these allies. Disagreements stemming from Arab-Israeli strife have also disrupted important U.S.-Syrian co-operation against al-Qaeda. For a time after the 9/11 attacks, Syria gave the U.S. valuable assistance including intelli-

A ZOGBY SURVEY FOUND MINUSCULE SUPPORT IN ARAB STATES FOR U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE PALESTINIANS: ONLY 2 TO 6 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS IN EGYPT, SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT, AND LEBANON VOICED APPROVAL.

are equivalent to unanimity. A similar picture emerged in the three non-Arab states that Zogby surveyed. Approval of U.S. policy toward the Palestinians stood at 10 percent in Pakistan, 5 percent in Indonesia, and 3 percent in Iran; disapproval registered 79 percent, 75 percent, and 95 percent respectively.

Hostility toward American policy translates into enmity for the U.S. as a whole. A March 2004 Pew Research Center poll of four Muslim countries found unfavorable views of the U.S. outnumbering positive views by 61 to 21 percent in Pakistan, 63 to 30 percent in Turkey, 68 to 27 percent in Morocco, and a remarkable 93 percent to 5 percent in

ties indicated that what America does is more important than who she is: 76 to 16 in Jordan up to 90 to 1 in Egypt.

Anti-Americanism in the Arab/Islamic world matters because it fosters a friendly environment in which al-Qaeda can flourish, raising new recruits and money. A public friendly to the U.S. would be our eyes and ears, helping to glean the intelligence that is vital to successful counterterrorism. But hostile populations sit on their hands, letting the terrorists hide in their midst while the U.S. searches blindly. Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other al-Qaeda leaders run free in northwest Pakistan today because the people of

gence that helped thwart an al-Qaeda attack on the U.S. Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain and an attack on an American target in Ottawa. (Syria's secular regime has long been targeted by Islamist radicals, including al-Qaeda, so the regime has worked to develop intelligence against these movements, often surpassing U.S. intelligence. It has hundreds of files on al-Qaeda and has penetrated cells throughout the Middle East and Europe.) But co-operation has since ended, foundering on frictions with the U.S. that result largely from Syria's conflict with Israel, which is aggravated in turn by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

So the bad news is that the conflict is damaging American national security. The good news is that many pieces are now in place for a peace settlement. Six in particular bear mention.

1. Years of negotiation have made clear to both sides the terms that each can and cannot accept. If they want peace, they know what its outlines must be. Long months of fumbling in the dark for a mutually acceptable formula will not be necessary. That formula is well known.
2. Most Israelis and Palestinians now agree on the same peace terms. Specifically, polls taken in December 2004 and January 2005 show that 54 percent of Palestinians and 64 percent of Israelis endorse the parameters for settlement proposed by President Clinton in December 2000. If the citizens can agree on the terms, there is little reason their leaders cannot do likewise.
3. Yasser Arafat's demise in November 2004 has brought to power a new Palestinian leadership under Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) that opposes violence and gives all indication of seeking peace on reasonable terms.

4. The Palestinian *intifada* that began in September 2000 has made major Arab states more predisposed to foster peace. Most importantly, the Egyptian government now fears that passions stirred by watching the *intifada* are causing the Egyptian public to mobilize in ways that threaten the Mubarak regime. The fear is that crowds chanting "down with Sharon" at noon could switch to "down with Mubarak" at ten minutes past. Other Arab regimes have also come to favor an Arab-Israeli settlement for similar reasons. This new mood was signaled by the Abdullah peace plan, offered by the Arab League at its March 2002 summit, which envisions a settlement that involves acceptance by the Arabs of Israel's 1967 borders, no demand for large return of the 1948 refugees to Israel, and full integration of Israel into the larger Arab world. If the Palestinians and Israelis want to make peace, they will now find many other Arabs willing to help it happen.

5. Israelis are increasingly worried that Israel will lose its Jewish character unless it makes a land-for-peace trade. This fear extends to important elements of Likud, which see the West Bank as Israeli territory but now accept that demographic realities require Israeli withdrawal.

6. Israel no longer faces a credible threat of conventional attack from its east. Israeli hardliners have long claimed that a land-for-peace trade was unwise because Israel needed to hold the West Bank as a buffer against possible invasion by Iraq and Syria. But over the past 20 years, the threat of eastern invasion has largely disappeared as the economies of Syria and Iraq have stagnated, their Soviet sponsor and arms supplier has collapsed, and the United States has smashed Saddam's regime and put

Iraq under occupation. The extent of the eastern threat was always debatable, but Saddam's demise makes clear that it exists no more, as Syria poses no serious threat by itself. Hence Israel can now be more forthcoming about trading land for peace.

If the U.S. pushes for peace, it pushes on an open door. But peace is not possible on any terms. The range acceptable to both sides is very narrow. The limits are basically those of the four major peace plans widely discussed since 2000: the Clinton bridging proposals of December 2000, the Abdullah Plan of March 2002, the Geneva Accord of December 2003, and the Ayalon-Nusseibeh (or "People's Voice") initiative, also of December 2003. These proposals envision Israel's withdrawal from all the territories it occupied in the 1967 War, except for minor border adjustments involving equivalent gains and losses for both sides, in exchange for a full and final peace. Control of the city of Jerusalem would be shared along ethnic lines. Control of its holy places, including the Temple Mount area, would also be shared. The West Bank and Gaza would form a Palestinian state that accepts sharp limits on its military forces in order to ensure Israel's security. The Palestinians would not insist on a large return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, instead seeing their right of return recognized mainly by generous compensation to the refugees.

Neither side will accept terms outside these parameters. Israel will never agree to a large return of refugees to Israel; Palestinian insistence on a large return would torpedo peace. And the Palestinians will accept no deal that they cannot credibly claim involves full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Jordan's King Hussein both got full Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian and Jordanian territory in

their earlier peace deals with Israel, and today's Palestinian leaders need to claim that they won the same terms to quiet their own radicals, who will otherwise accuse them of surrendering the national cause by accepting second-best treatment—"not even what Sadat got! Not even what Hussein got!" Accordingly, Israel will scuttle peace if it offers less than full withdrawal—as it did at the failed talks at Camp David II in the summer of 2000, where it unwisely insisted on retaining 8 percent of the West Bank and parts of Palestinian East Jerusalem.

What U.S. action does peace require? The two sides cannot make peace on their own; the U.S. must lead them to it. Specifically, it must frame its own final-status peace plan and use carrots and sticks to persuade both sides to agree. Enough with Oslo-style, open-ended peace plans: the two sides will move forward more willingly if they know their destination. And enough with passive mediation: strong U.S. persuasion is necessary. If either side needs incentives to move forward, inducements—both positive and negative—should be starkly framed and firmly applied.

The American final-status plan should involve a full Israeli withdrawal in exchange for full and final peace, in line with the four previous peace plans. The U.S. should use the 2003 Quartet roadmap as its work plan to move the parties toward its final-status agreement and closely oversee progress, framing a schedule for the fulfillment of both sides' obligations and enforcing compliance with that timeline.

The new Palestinian leadership may need U.S. persuasion on two issues: right of return and end of violence. Some Palestinians choke on the notion that those driven from Israel in 1948 will not be allowed to return. But the necessities of peacemaking require that the Palestinians

accept this. The Palestinian leadership also must eventually disarm the various terrorist groups that operate in the territories and establish firm central control of all instruments of force. Mahmoud Abbas may adopt these policies without pressure, but if not the U.S. should apply whatever weight is required.

Israel's government more clearly needs strong American persuasion. Prime Minister Sharon will not freely offer anything close to full withdrawal from the West Bank to gain peace. Instead, he aims to create a Palestinian mini-state on perhaps half of the West Bank, with no presence in Jerusalem and no control of its airspace, and to annex to Israel the other half of the West Bank and all of Palestinian East Jerusalem including the Muslim holy places. No Palestinian leader would ever accept such terms, so Sharon aims to impose them unilaterally.

Sharon's reasons for insisting on retaining large chunks of the West Bank are hard to fathom. He is not known for deep religious concerns, so these are probably not at work. Rather, he is by reputation a national-security hawk. The collapse of the eastern invasion threat over the past two decades should have made him more willing to trade land for peace. But it hasn't. Thus Sharon's motives are a puzzle. For whatever reason, Sharon is now pursuing goals that preclude a peace settlement.

Accordingly, the U.S. must persuade Sharon to drop his pursuit of Israeli expansion. Carrots should include the prospect of large economic aid to cover the cost of adjusting Israeli defenses to new borders and the prospect of a formal alliance with the United States if Arab-Israeli peace is achieved. As a stick, the U.S. should explain that no U.S. government can remain allied to another government that pursues policies that injure U.S. national security. The U.S. should elaborate that Sharon's

policy of retaining large chunks of the West Bank precludes an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement; that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict damages U.S. national security; and that the U.S. therefore insists, as an absolute condition of continuing the U.S.-Israel strategic relationship, that Sharon's policy of expansion be discarded. Instead Sharon must agree to make peace within the terms of the four peace plans mentioned above.

Such a position, pursued with energy, will likely bring the Palestinians and Israelis to a settlement. The publics on both sides already favor moderate policies that align with peace, and they will not support leaders whose policies threaten rupture with the United States. Hence leaders on both sides will find themselves impelled toward peace if the U.S. forcefully applies its carrots and sticks to get them there.

Of course, the current climate in Washington precludes a policy of active U.S. pressure. Instead the Bush team now plans only some rather passive mediation unlinked to a strong U.S. policy. This will not be nearly enough to bring peace. Even the current ceasefire will inevitably break down unless it is reinforced by strong U.S. pressure for peace. The present Mideast calm is refreshing, but without a far more forceful U.S. policy it is only the calm before another storm.

Americans who care about U.S. national security should therefore work to change the Washington climate. Our security requires al-Qaeda's defeat, and that demands a Palestinian-Israeli peace. Our government is derelict if it does not pursue such a settlement—soon and with full force. ■

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