

“Between Iraq and a Hard Place”

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The Middle East is a difficult and dangerous place, and a difficult and maybe dangerous subject to talk about. Certainly it is extremely difficult to talk about in 20 minutes. And is dangerous because almost everything one may say about is controversial, and may produce outrage from your audience. It is a minefield

The last time spoke to Rotary about the Middle East it was 1991, just after the Gulf War. Peace talks between Israel and a Palestinian delegation had just begin in Madrid.

I was moderately optimistic, but I should have been a pessimist. Today the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis looks even further from a solution than it did 13 years ago.

Such pessimism—or realism—reminds me of a joke.

OPENING JOKE

God looks down on the world, and evaluates the human experiment. He looks at all the trouble humanity has gotten in to, and concludes that the experiment has failed. God decides to call off it off and end the world. Then, in his mercy, he reflects that it would be unfair to destroy the world without warning. He decides to break the news to 3 world leaders that in 3 days it will all be over. God transports President Bush of the US, President Hu of China, and Prime Minister Sharon of Israel up to heaven, where he reveals the news. When they are returned to earth, they go on TV in their countries to tell their citizens what is about to happen.

- In the US, Bush goes on national TV and announces, “My fellow Americans, I have good, and bad news. The good news is there is a God, I have met him, and he’s a Republican. But there is Bad news, too: God is disappointed in us, and has decided to end the world in 3 days. Goodbye, Good Luck, and God bless America”.

- In China, Pres. Hu goes on national TV. “Comrades,” he begins, “I have bad news, and worse news. The bad news is there is a God, and I have met him. The worse news is history ends in 3 days, and we will never get to Communist utopia. So sorry.”

- And in Israel, General Sharon goes on TV. “My fellow Israelis, I have good news, and even better news. Yes, there is a God, and I have met him. And the even better news is--- that there will never be a Palestinian State.”

Looking at the Middle East today, even this morning, there seems to be no good news, only bad news. What are we doing there?

X deleted (The Middle East is actually a term coined by an American, Alfred Thayer Mahan, back in 1902. Mahan was a naval historian and strategic adviser to President Theodore Roosevelt, who built the first American overseas empire. Back then the Middle East was under the control of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. The last great Islamic state, it was in sharp decline, and the diplomatic issue of the day was called “The Eastern Question”, posed as: “What will fill the vacuum left by the decline of the

Ottoman Empire?”. After World War I the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the British and French occupied the area and invented the map of the Middle East we essentially see today. Iraq and Jordan and Palestine were created by the British; Lebanon and Syria by the French. These “successor states” to the Ottoman Empire became independent after World War II, and since the 1950’s several of them have tried to fill the vacuum: Egypt in the 1950’s and 1960’s; Israel and Iran in the 1970’s; Iraq in the 1980’s, up to 1991. The turmoil of the last 50 years has finally culminated in the US trying itself to answer the Eastern Question. Now into the vacuum we have stepped to wage war against terror, to conquer and occupy Iraq, and to draw a roadmap to peace between Israel and the Palestinians.)X

OIL, ISRAEL, CONTAINMENT

Just what are America’s NATIONAL INTERESTS in the Middle East? Historically, there are 3: OIL – ISRAEL – CONTAINMENT.

1. First, OIL. This interest really began in the 1920s, as the conversion of battleships from coal to oil, and the rise of the automobile industry made ACCESS to oil reserves a national interest. In 1928, the US govt declared participation in the Middle East oil industry a national interest, and pressured reluctant British companies to granting US companies a stake in Iraq and Kuwait. In 1930s US oil companies began developing Saudi Arabia’s oil fields. Today Saudi Arabia holds the world’s largest oil reserves (25%), and the area around the Gulf—in Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran may hold as much as 2/3’s of the worlds oil reserves. Since the 1970s, we need it for about 25% of our consumption; Europe and Japan are almost completely dependent on it. Oil is essential to the survival and economic security of the US and is the keystone of the global economy. Access to OIL is America’s #1 national interest.
2. Preserving ISRAEL is our #2 national interest. This is more a result of domestic politics than geopolitical calculation. Israel’s supporters in the United States are masters of interest group politics and have ensured America’s commitment to Israel’s survival. This relationship goes back to 1948, when President Truman recognized Israel with 15-minutes of its declaration. This has embroiled the US in two disputes—the Question of Palestine, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The Question of Palestine is the core issue: an inter-communal struggle between two peoples for the same land (it may be unsolvable). The Arab-Israeli dispute is an inter-state conflict between the state of Israel and the neighboring Arab states (it is solvable). Whether the US has been even-handed or practices a double-standard favoring Israel is an on-going debate. Whether Israel is a strategic asset or a strategic liability is also a hot topic. (The United States is certainly a strategic asset for Israel). In any case, Israel is the only Middle Eastern state with nuclear weapons, (since the 1960’s, now estimated at 200 warheads) so better to stay on good terms than risk Israel acting like Samson.
3. Throughout the Cold War, the US feared that the Soviet Union would try to answer the Eastern Question. Keeping the Soviet Union out of the Middle East

was our #3 national interest. CONTAINMENT WAS AMERICA'S POLICY. In 1947, at the beginning of the Cold War, President Truman proclaimed the Truman Doctrine: the US would support governments against Soviet pressure or subversion. He sent an American battleship to anchor off Istanbul to support Turkey against Russia's historic drive to get control of the Turkish Straits (Bosphorous and Dardenelles). This was the origin of the US 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean. For the rest of the Cold War "containment" was the major US interest: keep the Soviets out of the Middle East, so they could not blackmail the West by controlling access to the oil.

A corollary to Soviet Containment was keeping local states from causing trouble that the Soviets could use to get in the door, or from taking control of the oil themselves. This meant checking Pan-Arab leaders like Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s. Sometimes it meant containing Israel's expansionism—at least it did under Eisenhower and Kennedy until 1967. It has also meant containing theocratic Iran since the Khomeini Revolution in 1979. Containment continued up through the Clinton years, when American policy was "dual containment": keeping Saddam Hussein of Iraq and the theocrats in Iran out of Arabia and the Gulf oil fields.

NEW U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

The end of the Cold War meant an end to need to contain the Soviet Union. The US emerged the world's one and only superpower. For the last decade there has been a search for a new grand strategy. The Bush Administration arrived with a plan, devised by the Neo-Conservatives. (See website of The Project for a New American Century; read the "Weekly Standard" magazine). They thought that America should use its dominance while it can to change the world in our interests—and image—before a rival power, likely China, rises to challenge us. This means spreading democracy and "open doors" – free trade and capitalism i.e. "globalization". They also thought the US should take on rogue states and prevent them from developing nuclear weapons. They argued "dual containment" was too passive, and proposed to take down Saddam Hussein first. War with Iraq was inevitable from the day George W. Bush won the 2000 election.

On September 11, 2001 we woke up to another menace from the Middle East: Islamic militants and terrorism. President Bush declared war on terror, struck back at Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization and destroyed its sanctuary provided by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Then in September 2002 the President enunciated the new national security doctrine: no more containment. He declared the 4 principles of American foreign strategy henceforth:

1. primacy
2. pre-emption
3. unilateralism
4. democratization

America was #1, and would use its immense power to crush rogue states and the terrorists. We would not wait for another attack to react, but would strike first at perceived threats. We would act multilaterally with allies if possible, but alone if

necessary. We would actively seek “regime change” in rogue states, and aim to promote democratization to replace or reform regimes whose dysfunction bred terrorists. This new doctrine would be applied first to the Middle East.

1967 AND 1979: MILESTONES TO THE PRESENT

The Middle East has been in turmoil for years. Looking back, I think two years stand out as turning points: 1967 and 1979.

-In 1967, Israel won the June War, and in 6 days occupied the remaining 22% of Palestine as well as part of Syria & Egypt. 1967 triggered religious stirrings. Among Israelis, religious fervor began to rise in what had been largely a secular society. The 1967 victory was seen as a sign of divine favor and a permanent deed to the land. Settlements began to “redeem” occupied territory “for the land and the lord”. Christian fundamentalists grew excited—evangelists like Jim Baker, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, talked about prophecy being fulfilled.

Arab Muslims, disillusioned with all the imported Isms that didn’t work (liberalism, socialism, nationalism, etc.), began to return to the greatest ideology of all, “the straight path”, Islam. One of first signs: Egyptian university students started to demand segregation of classes by gender; women donned the hejab, began covering up. An Islamic Reform movement began to gather steam. A new Islamic political ideology began to resonate among millions of young men & women across the Islamic world. This ideology was a sophisticated and genuine intellectual effort to find an Islamic answer to the challenges posed by the West’s cultural, economic and political superiority. Its program was political but articulated in religious terms.

All three political-religious movements began to vibrate together. The fervor has only grown until today the power of religion in politics in Islam, Israel and US Christianity is obvious to us all. Israel has gotten the backing of 40 million evangelicals, including one in the White House.

Since 1967 religion has increasingly suffused the politics of the Middle East—and political views of the Middle East. This makes things all the more difficult and dangerous because how can there be compromise when God commands you to do things.

The second key year was 1979. That year 4 things happened that shape our present.

1. Egypt and-Israel signed a Peace Treaty. At the White House President Anwar Sadat and Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed an accord brokered by President Jimmy Carter. Egypt recognized Israel and in return for full peace Israel returned ALL the land it had conquered in 1967. This removed the strongest Arab state from the battlefield, and started the end of the Arab-Israel conflict—the state vs state clash. Sadat also tried to get something for the Palestinians. At Camp David both Sadat and Carter heard Begin commit to freezing the building of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and creating self-rule or “autonomy” for the Palestinians in the occupied territories. But Begin reneged on this promise, so the second half of the Camp David accord was never implemented. Israel had no intention of ever leaving the land of Palestine and has kept building settlements in the West Bank and Gaza ever since.

- 2) Also in 1979, an Islamic Revolution in Iran toppled the Shah (Mohammed Reza Pahlavi), an American ally. American hostages were held for 444 days to prevent the Great Satan from intervening. This created the first Islamic Republic, a theocracy ruled by the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shiite clergy, and inspired Arab Islamic militants to dream of doing the same. But to their frustration, they have still not succeeded anywhere. There is NO Islamic Republic anywhere in the Arab World.
- 3) Islamic militants did try for a revolution in Saudi Arabia: Islamic revolutionaries seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca, hoping to trigger an overthrow of the Saudi Monarchy. Saudi troops stormed the mosque—the Vatican of Islam—and killed 700 militants. This terrified the Saudis---a family of 5,000 princes---whose legitimacy rests on an alliance with an Islamic reform movement, the Wahhabi's, who want to take Islamic back to its pure beginnings. They began funding Wahhabi missionaries, mosques, schools (madrassahs), charities all over the Muslim world to prove that the Sunni Islam of Arabia was even truer to original Islam as anything the Iranian Shiites might do.
- 4) Finally, at the end of 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, provoking a resistance movement that drew Islamic fighters from all over the Muslim world. In one of the cruelest ironies of the Cold War, American support of the Afghan resistance (remember Rambo?) helped inspire Osama bin Laden and the Taliban. The mujahadeen, with help of American Stinger missiles, turned Afghanistan into a Soviet Vietnam. When Gorbachev withdrew the Red Army in 1989, bin Laden thought Islamic Holy Warriors had defeated a superpower—the Soviet Union, which collapsed just two years later. In Afghanistan, the Taliban replaced the secular regime abandoned by the Russians, and created the second Islamic Republic, the Taliban's theocracy in Kabul. With the war over the thousands of Muslim fighters, many of them Arabs, looked for a new battlefield to fight for Islam.

WAR WITH A POLITICAL RELIGION

The Afghan war produced the Frankenstein monster that struck us on September 11, 2001.

Remember the Islamic Reform movement stirred up by the Arab defeat in the June 1967 war? By the 1990's the Islamic Reform movement in the Arab world was frustrated. There were Islamic governments in Iran and Afghanistan. But NO Islamic reform government had come to power in an Arab country. The Monarchies and the authoritarian Republics were still in place. They kept the lid on and the oil flowing.

Islamic Reform organizations—which could be traced back to the Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt in 1928—turned radical. They evolved a radical, millenarian worldview that saw an apocalyptic battle coming between good and evil, believers and unbelievers.

Its basic tenets:

1. There must a relentless, merciless, global war against the West, and its leading power, the United States, which props up the “corrupt” and repressive Arab regimes.
2. Establishment of an Islamic system of government is not simply an alternative, but an imperative.
3. Since the legitimacy of Islamic governments is based on the Sharia (the Quran + Hadith—sayings of the Prophet), those governments that do not follow it are illegitimate. Those who fail to follow Islamic Law—governments and individuals—are guilty of “unbelief.” “Unbelievers” are no longer Muslims, but atheists whose unbelief demands holy war. (This meant monarchies like the Saudis and authoritarian republics like Egypt).
4. Christians and Jews are defined as “unbelievers” rather than fellow “People of the Book” because of their connections with imperialism and colonial Zionism. They are partners in the Crusader-Zionist conspiracy against Islam and the Muslim world. (This is a departure from traditional Islamic tolerance of and protection for Jews and Christians as fellow monotheists and heirs of Abraham.)
5. Jihad—militant struggle against “unbelievers” --is a religious duty. All true believers are obligated to combat the governments of America, Israel and the puppet Arab (Muslim) regimes (such as the Saudi monarchy and Mubarak’s Egypt.) One is either with them or against them—a true believer or an infidel. The army of God is locked into a holy war with the followers of Satan. Jihad is the most important pillar of Islam. (Another departure from the traditional view that the profession of faith in the one God is the most important of the 5 pillars of Islam.)

One reason for the evolution of this twisted, violent form of politicized religion was the tendency of governments in the Middle East to crush moderate movements. Scared of radical Islam taking power, the regimes blocked democratic reform. Because there is no reform, radical Islam grew in support. As national Islamic movements, moderate or violent, were crushed, anger was channeled into the symbolic realm and into international, cosmic, apocalyptic language.

This where Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda came from.

A Saudi millionaire militant—Osama bin Laden---had helped support the mujahadeen in Afghanistan against the Soviets. After the defeat of the Soviets, he hoped to reform his homeland, Saudi Arabia. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1991, he offered to raise an army of Afghan veterans to defend Arabia against Saddam Hussein. The Saudi monarchy rejected his offer, and instead turned to the Americans. Osama was furious.

Bin Laden had been taught in university by Muslim Brothers. He gathered a brains trust of Egyptians, former Muslim Brothers—and they got together in far off-, backward, Afghanistan and created a base for jihad—a holy war.

* Osama first resolved to target Saudi Arabia---and the hypocrite governments of the Arab world like that of Mubarak in Egypt.

*With the help of the Taliban he set up bases to train an army of 70,000 that would fight to revolutionize the Islamic world

*And he created al-Qaeda, a kind of Holy War Foundation. Like a grant agency, militants came to him with proposals for attacks. If he and his advisors thought the project had merit, and was feasible, they offered funding, training, and volunteers---sort of like a Foundation or agency funding a grant proposal.

On August 23, 1996 bin Laden issued an 8,000 word “Declaration of War against the Americans occupying the land of the two holy places”. It is couched in religious language but articulates modern political grievances. Much of it is a diatribe against the House of Saud. Listen..

He complained that Saudi Arabia, despite billions in oil revenue, was afflicted by “injustice”. “Injustice” affected indebted civilians, poorly paid officials, and hundreds of thousands of unemployed graduates. The social services were miserable, especially sanitation and water services, and the government hadn’t even paid its bills to merchants and contractors (remember bin Laden Co. is a huge construction firm).

Because the House of Saud follow a ‘pagan’ legal code and not Sharia Holy Law, they can no longer be considered Muslims, he declared. The Saudis are hypocrites and unbelievers (munafiq & kufr) who must be overthrown.

He unconsciously mixed modern grievances—bad sanitation, government not paying invoices—with accusations of tyranny, all couched in religious language.

In the short term, Osama focused on the Saudi government, but he announced a broader aim: end the oppression of the Islamic world by “hypocrite governments” and the “Crusader-Zionist alliance” supporting and manipulating them. He said the West and the Jews want to maintain the Islamic world in a state of weakness, division, and poverty. In his world, the Crusades have never ended. The hostility of the Crusader-Zionist alliance is manifest in both their support for munafiq (hypocrite) governments (the Saudis, Egypt) and their own repression of Muslims. Muslim blood is being spilled in Palestine and Iraq, he cried. The reason for the TRIBULATIONS suffered by the Muslims is that they have allowed the Holy Places to be occupied—Arabia, with its holy cities of Mecca and Medina—and the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The only solution to this humiliating situation is jihad. He called upon Saudi youth to be the “vanguard,” to martyr themselves.

What was new in bin Laden’s declaration of 1996 was the shift in target. Previously Islamic groups had largely targeted their own governments—what they called the hypocrites and the apostates, Muslims who weren’t really Muslims (according to radical Islamists). Now he targeted the Crusader-Zionist alliance, specifically the United States. Targeting the US as the common foe was a way to overcome the parochialism, and factionalism that had hobbled militant Islamic reform movements for 30 years. Tapping the resentment in the Islamic world of Western supremacy would enable him to overcome “fitna” (division) and unite the radicals under his banner in one great global jihad against the main enemy. Thus bin Laden expanded, in fact, internationalized militant millenarian Islam. He declared 4 aims:

1. get American forces out of the Holy Land, Saudi Arabia

2. get American forces out of the Middle East entirely
3. overthrow Arab governments in league with the US
4. destroy Israel.

In (Feb.) 1998, bin Laden announced formation of a World Islamic Front and promised Jihad against the Cruaders and Zionists. He issued a “fatwa” (legal opinion) saying that:

“...to kill Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa mosque (in Jerusalem) and the Holy Mosque (Mecca), and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.”

In May 1998, he gave an interview to ABC television network, and stated:

“Any American who pays taxes to his government is our target because he is helping the American war machine against the Muslim nation.”

He promised ABC news that there would a major action soon. On August 6, 1998 the American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, were blown up. And, as we all saw on September 11, 2001, 19 young men, with prayers on their lips, flew airliners into the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

President Bush declared war on terror. But terror is just a tactic. The enemy is a twisted, mutant form of Islamic Reformism. It is a political religion. It has a messianic leader, it posits an apocalyptic battle between good and evil, and promises heaven on earth after the final battle. It is a like a millenarian movement, echoing some during the Protestant Reformation, and secularized versions such as Lenin’s Bolshevism and Hitler’s Nazism. (See Norman Cohn, **The Pursuit of the Millenium: Revolutionary Messianism...** about Jan of Leyden’s Anabaptist revolution in 16th century Germany).

9-11 was a spectacular act to arouse an “awakening.”

BinLaden’s aim is to radicalize and mobilize. His language and concept of an apocalyptic struggle has been spread among tens of millions of people. He’s tapped the anger and resentment of young men and women throughout the Islamic world. America’s invasion of Iraq, followed by George W. Bush’s “bring ‘em on” invitation for Islamic militants to come fight us there, is helping to create a new generation of jihadists. The craving for jihad that drew 70,000 young men to seek training in Afghanistan is thriving.

The US claims to have killed or captured 3,000 of Osama’s leaders and fighters, but the other the 67,000 are still out there. Killing or capturing bin-Laden, even disrupting Al-Qaeda’s networks won’t end it. Contemporary Islamic militancy doesn’t need a commander, or a mastermind. New recruits are joining the ones who got away. It is from the “freelancers” that will probably come a new wave of terror attacks. They may have no connection with known groups, and no previous involvement with terrorism. They may

not have access to sophisticated weapons, but once they have accepted bin Laden's apocalyptic world view, they will find a way.

"Freelance" attacks, such the one by an independent group that formed in Bali in 2002, are likely the future of radical Islamic terrorism.

To counter the mutant version of Islam and the world preached by the radical Islamic militants, we need to reach out to moderate Muslim leaders, ask their help to stem the spread of apocalyptic strands of Islam. Together we must make a conscious effort to counter the growing sympathy for the Islamic millenarian's worldview that there is an American-led war on Islam. We dare not stir a clash of civilizations. The best weapon available is the decency, honor, and integrity of the vast majority of the world's Muslims--without it we will lose. We are not just in a battle with thousands of "terrorists." We are in a battle for THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF ONE BILLION PEOPLE. And it is a battle we, and our allies in the Muslim world cannot afford to lose. This is why what we do now in Iraq and for the Palestinians is so important.

IRAQ: APPLYING THE BUSH DOCTRINE

There is a logic that links our two national interests—access to oil and preserving Israel—to our new national security doctrine that is being tested in Iraq. Dismantling Saddam Hussein's WMD program was the justification, or pretext, for war in March 2003. Since then many more reasons have emerged. Here are 7 propositions, in logical order, that explain why I think help explain all that is now at stake in Iraq:

1. The most important country in the Middle East is Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is where the oil is, but is a fragile entity. Remember that in 1979 Islamic militants seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca and called for an uprising to bring down the monarchy. I won't be surprised if there isn't a repeat attempt in the near future. Nothing could be as disruptive to the whole world as the fall of the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia is still #1 target for Osama bin Laden and the Islamic millenarians. If the Saudi monarchy is overthrown and oil production interrupted, prices will spike to \$100/barrel, pitching the world economy into a potential Depression.
2. Protecting access to Saudi oil is the #1 national interest of the US in the Middle East. America declared so in the Carter Doctrine of 1980, set up bases in Oman and Somalia, and built up a Rapid Deployment Force that could use Saudi bases, following the Revolution in Iran and Russian takeover of Afghanistan. After Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Saudis reluctantly agreed to the actual basing of thousands of American troops and hundreds of aircraft in Saudi Arabia itself. They stayed on after Iraqi forces were driven out of Kuwait in the first Gulf War in 1991. The presence of foreign troops in Arabia, the Muslim Holy Land, has been a major grievance of Islamic militants. It is one of the reasons Osama bin Laden declared war on the US.

3. The Bush administration came to power convinced that the “dual containment” policy of keeping Saddam in a box and isolating theocratic Iran was too passive. It took office resolved on war with Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein. This would have many benefits: a) it would remove the major external military threat to Saudi Arabia, and thereby enable American troops to leave the Holy Land. b) Securing Iraq would provide access to the world’s #2 source of oil, an alternative source in case Saudi Arabia is taken over by Islamic militants. Since April 2003, after the invasion of Iraq, virtually all American troops have departed from Arabia.
5. Toppling Saddam offers a chance to make Mesopotamia safe for democracy. If successful, the American effort will create an alternative to the kinds of governments that characterize the Arab political world: a) monarchies like Saudi Arabia or Jordan and family-run sheikhdoms like Kuwait, or b) “khaki republics”, authoritarian regimes like Mubarak’s Egypt and Asad’s Syria. It would also be alternative theocracy in Iran. A democratic Iraq could spur reform all over the Middle East that would give voices to people long suppressed by authoritarian governments. This is the “Greater Middle East Initiative” Bush has talked about. It could even produce a domino effect and spur the downfall of the theocratic regime next-door in Iran and/or the other Baathist regime in Syria. And it might enable Mubarak’s Egypt to “lighten up.”

Creating a democracy in Iraq means empowering the majority, who in Iraq are Shiite Muslims. The Shia—sort of Islam’s Protestants--have long been oppressed in the Arab world by the Sunni (Orthodox) majority. Only in Iran is Shiism the state religion (Iran is not Arab). The Shi’a are viewed as heretics and persecuted in Saudi Arabia, even though 15% of population. They’ve been a long suffering poor minority in South Lebanon. A new democratic Iraq that gives the Shia power will be something really new.

What exactly a New Iraqi Government will look like we don’t know. Presumably it will be some form of Federal system to hold Iraq’s three main areas—Kurds in the north, Sunnis in the middle, and Shia’s in the south—together. How secular it will be is questionable. In the one public opinion poll, 51% of Iraqis said the new government will have to be Islamic.

The relationship between mosque and state is the key. If some kind of balance can be found, the first Arab Islamic Republic—an Islamic Reform government-- may emerge. A new Islamic Republic of Iraq---combing Islamic values with guidance but not rule by the clergy---could go a long way to alleviating the frustrations of an Islamic reformers who have gotten nowhere against the authoritarian monarchies and khaki republics of the Arab world. But if the New Iraq’s court system is taken over by militant religious judges, as happened in Iran, we will be bitterly disappointed.

Remaking the politics of the Middle East is a radical program. Pres. Bush has said that the US has for 60 years supported undemocratic regimes that suppress their

own people. Now we're going to create a New Iraq that will be model for a New Middle East. Sounds like good-bye to Khaki Republics and the Family Monarchies. Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Sheikdoms and others are now all on notice. The US is now committed to a transformation of the whole region; Bush wants to make the Middle East safe for democracy. Amazing! He's gone beyond Teddy Roosevelt to sound like a reincarnated Woodrow Wilson. Just as Wilson came up with his slogans of "Making the World Safe for Democracy" to counter Lenin's Communism in 1917, so Bush is trying to answer bin Laden's Islamic radicalism—the millenarian militancy that sees the world in a cosmic struggle between good and evil. Iraq is the place we start.

6. Iraq can be the site new bases for American power in the region. When—if-- Iraq is pacified, and an effective government constituted, an Iraqi-American Defense Treaty will be worked out giving the US basing rights for troops and planes in Iraq. This is exactly the pattern of the British, who after creating Iraq in the 1920s, and putting down a major rebellion, gave it a nominal independence and then signed an alliance that lasted until the Revolution of 1958. Britain's "Empire by Treaty" with Iraq, and Jordan, and the Gulf States is the model the US will follow in the decades to come. If America's "moment in the Middle East" lasts as long as Britain's, we'll be there for 40 years—until 2043.

Bases in Iraq will enable the US to intervene back in Saudi Arabia if the monarchy is really threatened, or toppled. We could intervene against an Islamic revolution if we dare. But access to Iraq's oil means we aren't so dependent on Saudi oil. Even if radicals cut off the flow of oil for awhile, eventually they would have to sell it to survive.

Iraq, with 22 million people, exists in one of the most strategically important and resource-rich territories in the Middle East. It has oil reserves, #2 in the world. It is a key transportation route from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. And it has an educated population, with many engineers and doctors, for example. Iraq has the resources, power, and wealth to be the center of the Middle East. Indeed, it once was the center, when Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, the second great Arab empire (749 AD to 1258 AD), the one we know from the Tales of the Thousand and One nights. With its geographic position, balance of population and resources, it is the best possible choice for a place to try to create to a model for a new Middle East.

7. Toppling Saddam Hussein's regime also was done in pursuit of America's #2 interest: protecting Israel. Iraq's nuclear program was not aimed at the US—it was an Arab deterrent to the only nuclear power in the Middle East. (Israel has had a nuclear weapons program since the early 1960s, and is now thought to have 200 warheads). To preserve its monopoly, Israel destroyed Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981. That's when Iraq's weapons program went underground, and Iraqi's became masters of concealment. The prime justification the Bush administration

used to justify invading Iraq was the threat of Saddam's WMD—nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. So far, none have been found. Now it looks like Iraq's WMD's really were dismantled after the First Gulf War. But no matter: Iraq also supported the cause of the Palestinians, and used the Palestinian cause in its pan-Arab propaganda. Saddam was paying \$25,000 to the families of suicide bombers who blew themselves up during the second "intifada" that started in 2000. With Saddam gone there is not one Arab state that can threaten Israel.

By destroying Hussein regime in Iraq, the US has effectively ended the Arab-Israel Conflict—that is, the state vs. state level conflict. The other key Arab states either have peace treaties with Israel, or have offered to negotiate:

- a) Egypt signed the Camp David Accords in 1979.
- b) Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in (Oct 26) 1994. Both have normal diplomatic relations, as do Morocco, Tunisia, and Gulf states such as Qatar that recognize Israel.
- c) A draft Syrian treaty exists, developed in talks in March 2000 between PM Ehu Barak and Pres. Hafez al-Assad under Clinton's aegis. They failed because Syria insisted on a return to the line of June 4, 1967—just as Sadat got at Camp David. Barak refused, because this would return Syria to the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. The Israelis wanted the border 10 meters inland. Assad said he swam there a child, said Syria could wait a hundred years if necessary, and walked away. They were just 10 meters---barely over 30 feet—apart.
- d) A draft Lebanon-Israel agreement was worked out in May 1983. When these two states sign, Israel will have defined borders with all four states which it touches. (Israel persists in holding a few farms, just like Taba and the 10 meters of shoreline, to avoid going back to June 4 line).
- e) In April 2002 the Saudis offered peace and normal relations with all 22 Arab states if Israel will return to the June 4, 1967 lines i.e.give up Gaza and West Bank.
- f) With Iraq disarmed there is now no Arab state able to threaten Israel. Iraq has no border with Israel. We may expect that the New Iraq which the US or UN helps create will be led to a treaty and normal diplomatic relations with Israel. This is what Ahmad Chalabi, the darling the VP Cheney and the Neo-Conservatives, promised if he could head the New Iraq.

Maybe a New Iraq will move to negotiate a peace-treaty with Israel. If Iraq recognizes Israel—with which it has been technically at war since 1948-- the Arab-Israeli conflict is over. Egypt and Jordan already have peace treaties with Israel. Syria will follow Iraq. The state vs state conflict will be at an end.

The Arab-Israeli conflict—the state vs state conflict—could be just about over. Israel has survived, if it was ever really threatened, and with peace and acceptance by its neighboring states can become a normal player in the Middle East state system.

These are the things America's War in Iraq has been about. Now for the "Hard Place":

...AND A HARD PLACE

7. The near end of the Arab-Israeli Conflict means facing up to the other core issue: The Question of Palestine. This intercommunal struggle within Palestine between the Zionist, Jewish state of Israel and the Palestinian Arab Muslim and Christian community is not over. Whether it will result in the creation of a new state, a Palestine state, that will join the other Arab states with defined borders and normal diplomatic relations with Israel remains to be seen. At best it will be a tiny state, less than a quarter of the size of Israel—which always make so much of how small it is.

Finally, success in Iraq may provide a chance to solve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

Israel has become ever more wedded to keeping the land conquered in 1967, all of it, or almost of all of it. Israel already had 78% after 1948. In 1988 the Palestinians recognized Israel, conceded 3/4s of their homeland as lost, and have aspired since to create a Palestinian state on the remaining 22%. For the last 16 years, this fragment—22%-- is what the fight is about. Many on the Israeli Right, particularly religiously motivated settlers, want to keep it all---and some advocate expelling (“transfer” is the Israeli euphemism for ethnic cleansing) the Arabs across the river into Jordan.

The Israeli Left has land hunger too. When Prime Minister Ehud Barak met President Yasir Arafat at Camp David in summer 2000, he presented a “take it or leave it” offer that was billed as the most generous deal the Palestinians would ever get: Israel would annex another 10%, lease 14%, i.e. take almost quarter of the West Bank and leave the Palestinians with three separate little fragments. No viable Palestinian State would be possible. Arafat was stunned, rejected it, and got the onus. Barak claimed he had exposed Arafat as not wanting a settlement.

In September General Sharon accompanied by 1,000 armed escorts visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, also site of the third holiest mosque in Islam, touched off a demonstration in which 20 Palestinians were killed, and the a second intifada erupted that continues to the present. Now PM Sharon is building an “Iron Wall” that will annex 90% of the West Bank and leave the Palestinians with just 10% of their former homeland, with the Gaza Strip and separated fragments on the West Bank.

Israel still cannot face up to the fact it will have to trade land for peace. The Israelis won’t negotiate from a position of strength, and the Palestinians can’t negotiate from a position of weakness. A solution for the Palestinians, a viable mini-state on 20% to 22% of their homeland, looks hopeless. The impasse, and America’s apparent double-standard favoring Israel, will continue to alienate the Muslim world, and the Arab world, and inflame the Islamic militants.

But there is one big change coming.

Around 2010 the “demographic bomb” will arrive. In 2010 or shortly thereafter Palestinian Arabs will outnumber the Jews living in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Again, as before 1948, the Arab majority will have returned—the Arab majority (90%+)

that was there when the first Zionist settlers arrived in the late 19th century, the Arab majority (66%) that was there when Palestine was partitioned by the UN in 1947, the Arab majority that was only dispersed by the expulsion of 750,000 people by Israel in the First Arab-Israeli war of 1948.

If the Palestinians take up the cry: let's practice democracy, one person, one vote, they can demand a bi-national, secular, democratic state. Let's have democracy—as President Bush wants---in all of Palestine/Israel.

Yasir Arafat has been marginalized by Israel and the United States. He won't be around much longer. What the Palestinians await is the appearance of their own Nelson Mandela.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who spoke to the West Michigan World Affairs council in Grand Rapids a year ago, said he wants to keep Israel as a “Jewish, Zionist, democratic state.” The essence of Zionism is building a state with a Jewish majority. Israel has done so by immigration, colonization (building settlements), and, frankly, “cleansing the land” (in Menachem Begin's words) of its Arab majority. But after 2010, demographics will demonstrate that Israel can't have all three, it cannot be a “Jewish, Zionist, democratic” state on 100%--or even 90%-- of the land also called Palestine. .

Israel will soon have to chose: 1) give up some land, with its Arab inhabitants; or 2) “transfer” i.e. ethnically cleanse the Palestinians again, or 3) Israel keep the land AND the people but rule as a minority apartheid regime, a Jewish South Africa.

Where will the United States stand? Will we let Israel turn itself into an apartheid state. Or will we save Israel from itself---especially from it's religious militants (fanatics)* by finally forcing the parties to the deal that everybody knows has to come: land for peace. My hope is to see an American President, George W. Bush, or a successor, go to Middle East and proclaim: “Mr. Sharon, tear down this wall!”

Nothing could do more to convince a billion Muslims, and the Arabs, that we really mean what we say when we want to spread democracy and peace in the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with one more joke.

The Pope, according to a probably apocryphal story, once said that there are two possible solutions to the dispute between the Arabs and Israel: the realistic and the miraculous. The realistic solution involves divine intervention. The miraculous solution is a voluntary agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians.**

All this is a mighty tall order. We are, indeed, between Iraq and a Hard Place.

* See Jeffrey Goldberg, “Among the Settlers: Some Jews believe God sent them to the occupied territories. Will they destroy Israel?”, The New Yorker, May 31, 2004.

**After the failure of the Camp David meeting in 2000, the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams continued meeting and did reach a “virtual peace treaty”, signed in Geneva, Switzerland in 2003. It is called the “Geneva Accord” and the 50-page text is on the web. It has no official status, and PM Sharon has denounced it as “treason.” Nonetheless, it is proof that a miracle is still possible. See: <http://www.mideastweb.org/geneva1.htm> - Geneva Accord (Virtual Israeli-Palestine Peace Treaty, October 2003, 32 pages

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SUGGESTED READINGS

“There is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know.” – Harry Truman.

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James Bamford, *A Pretext for War* (2004). Neo-Conservative plan for war on Iraq developed in 1996, "Clean Break", proposed to Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu. Authors were Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser, who became Bush officials. Goal: topple Saddam Hussein, replace him by Ahmed Chalabi. Israel demurred, but plan adopted by Bush administration immediately after 9-11.