

## **War on Terrorism: A Critique**

**24 September 2002**

A friend recently asked me what I thought about Bush's handling of the "war against terrorism". The question was asked at a social event and my wife gave me a quick glance that said, "don't you dare answer that". She was wise, because my answer would likely have put a strain on the social event.

The short answer is that the basic flaw in our policies is the belief that we alone have truth, virtue, and the moral high ground and that we can go it alone because of our economic and military power. This self-righteous arrogance prevents us from asking the crucial question: why the hatred toward the United States? In short, I believe our policies are leading to the inevitable situation where we, allied with Israel and adopting the Sharon policy, will be pitted against the world. While much of the world may not actively oppose our efforts, they will stand on the sidelines while we flail against enemies—real or imagined. Let me give some background and I will get back to a summary at the end of this essay.

Terrorism is like no other threat we have faced. I'm not sure we know how to respond to it. I am convinced, however, that it cannot be stopped with military force alone. If force is not used wisely, it can create a backlash. One revolutionary said the way to defeat a powerful foe is to treat it like a lion. Put a bee into its ear and it will claw itself to death trying to get at it. Terrorists use this analogy—they so enrage a powerful enemy that the enemy strikes back with force that alienates people and creates more terrorists and supporters. It is difficult to get at terrorists with precision, and countering terrorism often kills innocent people. We are falling into that trap in Afghanistan today. I'm afraid we are not heeding these dangers and it looks as if we plan to expand to other countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, etc.

First let me turn to our campaign in Afghanistan and a little background on that country. There is little doubt that the Taliban government was supporting the terrorist Osama bin Laden and I can understand our emotional need to oust that regime and get Bin Laden whatever the cost. Personally, I would volunteer on a suicide mission to kill him if I could. But I'm not sure what our war in that country has accomplished. Yes, we have ousted a detestable regime that belonged in the dark ages. Ironically, we were largely responsible for its being in power. The Soviet Union backed a secular regime that ruled the country in the 70s. The Soviets didn't want militant Muslims to take over the government because they had 50 million Muslims living in Southern USSR and didn't want them agitated to rebellion by the militants in Afghanistan. But we fed \$3 billion through Pakistan to help the Islamic militants (the Taliban) take over the country. Osama bin Laden was one of them. This radical government then proceeded to foment revolutionary terrorism among the Muslims in southern USSR. Up to the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, we called these terrorists "freedom fighters" and threatened action against Russia if they killed "innocent" people in their counter-terror operations. Of course, after 9-11, we now label those freedom fighters as terrorists and are helping train the Russians in countering them.

So it is a little ironic that we are now fighting the very people we supported when they were fighting the Russians! They are using some of the weapons we gave them. So far, we have failed to get many of the top members of the Al Queda. I suspect it is because they have a lot of sympathy among the people over there—both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. And our military activities are no doubt creating more sympathizers. I hope we do indeed get more of them, especially bin Laden. Even so, we have paid a high price. We have torn the place apart and left a shaky government that I don't think will last. The country is a hodgepodge of tribes now led by

warlords. If we think a democracy is going to flourish there we are very naïve. What will we do? We can pull out and signal to the world that we have cut and run from another intolerable situation. (We were ten years late in doing that in Vietnam). Or, we can stay and be stuck to a tar baby. Frankly, I don't know which is worse.

I realize that the American public demanded some sort of action after 9-11, but I'm not sure what it has accomplished. Now, Bush is beating the drums for going into Iraq, perhaps then Syria and Iran and maybe North Korea later. Where is this going? The rest of the world, with the exception of Israel and Tony Blair, tells us we are going down the wrong road. A few people here are saying the same thing, but they are losing out to the hard right. A recent article depicted a tug of war going on between Colin Powell, Brent Scowcroft, and George Bush, Sr. on one end and the multitude of neo-conservatives on the other end. President Bush is shown in the middle with a puzzled look. Clearly, the hard liners have won the battle. I think this a recipe for disaster for this country. Bush has endorsed the hard liners' policy of telling the rest of the world that we will go our own way regardless of what they think. **Going it alone (with Israel and England) will not work.**

The first fundamental principle I espouse for the war on terrorism is that it must be a project conducted by the world community. This means we will have to make compromises. Moreover, it means we will have to work through the United Nations more than we have tended to in the past. This can be frustrating at times, but it is necessary. Among other things, it means we cannot expect to dictate all the rules of the game. For example, the U.S. cannot define who and who is not a terrorist. The threat that "you are either with us or against us" is useful for rallying domestic support, but dysfunctional for gaining international support. I can understand simplistic slogans for the purpose of arousing the people, but it worries me when the leaders believe their own propaganda, as I believe Bush does.

I mentioned above that force alone would not succeed in controlling terrorism. One must also address the causes of hatred that underlies it. The causes of the current spate of terrorism directed toward the United States are several and will never be totally eliminated. The major cause is not, however, the simplistic notion that they hate us because we are free, virtuous, and wealthy—as President Bush has said. Unless we take a hard look at our policies and make changes that much of the world sees as unjust, we will fail in our effort to control terrorism. Poverty, trade policies, and the tendency to try to make the world over in our own political, cultural, and economic image fall into this category. **The most immediate and central issue that motivates the current crop of terrorists, however, is the Middle East conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.** Let me give a summary of the background to that problem.

### **Palestine and Israel**

After having lived in the area known as Palestine for thousands of years, the Palestinians were pushed out during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Jews from around the world. The Romans had expelled the ancestors of these Jews from Palestine more than two thousand years ago. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a movement was started to establish Palestine as a homeland for Jews. They claimed that particular land by virtue of a covenant with God. According to the Zionists, God promised Abraham that the land belonged to his heirs through his son Isaac. Isaac's son, Jacob, reaffirmed this covenant by his own revelation from God. Ishmael, Abraham's other son—by his servant Hagar—was not included in this covenant. The Palestinians, many of whom are Muslims, are descendants of Ishmael. Of course, they do not accept the biblical view that the land belongs only to Jews—the descendants of Isaac.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, only about 25 thousand Jews were living in Palestine. The Zionist movement succeeded in gaining support in England, which had colonized much of the Middle East after WWI, when the Ottoman Empire was disestablished, and in 1922 received a mandate from the League of Nations for Jordan and Palestine. Under the Balfour Agreement, they started allowing Jews to immigrate to Palestine, allegedly on the condition that "...nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities." It is difficult to believe that British authorities expected the migration to proceed peacefully. The British established quotas but these were largely ignored and by the late 1930s, a flood of Jews had come to Palestine, many to escape the Nazis. The facts surrounding the settlement of these immigrants are disputable, but as they took land and established settlements, many of the Palestinians resented them and violence broke out. The British put down the unrest and by the end of WWII, about 500,000 Jews were in Palestine.

As the horrors of the Holocaust became known, Jews received much sympathy and support for a homeland increased. Some plans suggested a homeland in Eastern Africa, but for religious reasons Zionists insisted on their "Promised Land". This view received support in the United States, especially from fundamentalist Christian groups who interpret the Bible literally. In 1947, the U.N. General Assembly approved a plan to partition Palestine into Jewish and Palestinian (for the non-Jewish population) States. The Palestinians in particular and Arab states in general, voted against the plan, with Britain abstaining. The U.S. voted for the plan, which gave the Arabs the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. On May 15 1948, the British gave up their mandate over Palestine and the Jews declared the State of Israel. . President Truman immediately recognized Israel, although Secretary of State Marshall thought it a serious mistake. Five Arab armies immediately attacked Israel, but after 15 months of fighting the Arabs agreed to a cease-fire. Israel had gained additional territory, which they kept.

By 1960, there were almost two million Jews in Israel and the Arab population had decreased to 165,000. Most of the Arabs had moved to refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza, or to Lebanon and other Arab States. As the population increased, the Arab countries grew increasingly disturbed with many unwilling to accept the state of Israel. In 1967, Israel claimed the Arab armies were massing for an attack to eliminate them as a state and they made a pre-emptive attack, occupying the West Bank and the Sinai Peninsula (including the Gaza Strip). The U.N. passed Resolution 242, which called on Israel to move back to the pre 1967 borders, but Israel has continued to refuse. A subsequent treaty with Egypt returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, and left the Gaza Strip to the Palestinians. The Israelis retreated from much of the West Bank, but established settlements across the area. They have continued to expand those settlements and today they number over 150. The Israelis control movements between the Palestinian areas.

Several attempts have been made to achieve a permanent peace accord between the parties, but little progress has been made. The reasons are complex. There are extremists on both sides. Some Zionists believe God promised them the entire "land of Canaan", which includes the West Bank. Some fundamentalist religious groups in the U.S. support that position. Some Palestinians refuse to accept any state of Israel. Others say they will accept two sovereign states side by side. President Clinton thought he had an agreement worked out in 2000, but it fell through for various reasons. About that time, the Israelis elected Ariel Sharon, one of the hard-liners who apparently intends to settle the entire West Bank. During the election campaign, he took 1,000 Israeli soldiers and marched up to a sector of Jerusalem that the Palestinians claim to

be theirs. This triggered violence that has continued to this day and has led to the current form of terrorism.

The U.N., and most of the world, views the Israeli occupation—and settlements—of the West Bank to be illegal. Moreover, they believe that the ability of Israel to defy the world community is made possible by the U.S. support of Israel. We not only provide Israel military equipment; we also veto U.N. resolutions that would force Israel to move back to the pre-1967 borders. Israel, on the other hand, believes they are fighting for their survival. They believe the Arabs will never accept them and are bent on “pushing them into the sea”. The political climate in the U.S. is overwhelmingly in favor of Israel. This is not likely to change.

Personally, I believe the creation of a Jewish nation was a fundamental mistake. It was based largely on religious beliefs and resulted in the displacement of millions of people whose ancestors had lived in Palestine for thousands of years. I’m not sure the Arab world—and perhaps the Islamic world—will ever accept the legitimacy of Israel. However, this is a fait accompli in my opinion and we need to look for a solution that gives the Palestinian refugees some justice. Allowing Israel to create a “Greater Israel” that includes the West Bank will, in my opinion, ensure permanent conflict between the U.S./Israel and the Arab world, supported by Muslims around the world. While most of those people will not participate in terrorist actions against the U.S., they will sympathize with the terrorists and give them havens. The rest of the world will have little sympathy for the U.S.

## **WHAT SHOULD WE DO?**

The U.S. should support U.N. Resolution 242 and force the Israelis to pull back to the 1967 borders. This should be done NOW, with no more of these delaying tactics that allow the Israelis to continue to build settlements in the occupied territories. Working through the U.N., we should guarantee the territorial integrity of Israel. Next, we need to provide a Marshall Plan to build a viable Palestinian State. To date, the U.S. has funneled billions of dollars to Israel, but little to Palestinians. Europe has supported the Palestinians.

I do not believe the current policies of Israel and the U.S. are in the long-term interests of the United States, Israel—or the world Jewish community. They are polarizing the world, leading to increasing hatred that will not go away easily. Moreover, in my opinion, the policies are immoral. They are denying Palestinians justice based on biblical claims that a small percentage of the world accepts. If we continue the current policies, we will invite Armageddon. “Might makes Right” is not the proper strategy. Henry Kissinger comments at the end of his book *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?*, “America’s ultimate challenge is to transfer its power into a moral consensus, promoting its values not by imposition, but by their willing acceptance.” Joseph Nye makes the same argument in his recent book, “The Paradox of American Democracy: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go it Alone.” Currently, our refusal to listen to the rest of the world prevents us from achieving international moral consensus. This is especially true regarding our plans to attack Iraq. This is a diversion and will further polarize the world. It is pitting Israel and us against the rest of the world.

What are the chances we will change our policies? Small to none. We are in the grips of emotion that constricts our thinking. Dissent is labeled as unpatriotic at best and more often, as treasonous. The following *apocryphal* quote might be a reminder of such a condition:

**"Beware the leader who bangs the drums of war in order to whip the citizenry into a patriotic fervor, for patriotism is indeed a double-edged sword.**

**It both emboldens the blood, just as it narrows the mind. And when the drums of war have reached a fever pitch and the blood boils with hate and the mind has closed, the leader will have no need in seizing the rights of the citizenry. Rather, the citizenry, infused with fear and blinded by patriotism, will offer up all of their rights unto the leader and gladly so. How do I know? For this is what I have done. And I am Caesar."** Julius Caesar

The authenticity of that quote is irrelevant—it is descriptive of what is happening today. I believe our minds have been narrowed to a dangerous extent. It reminds me of the McCarthy era.

I have written a separate essay on the Iraqi issue, but it is related to this problem. I believe the real motive behind the urge to topple Saddam Hussein is to remove the only military threat to Israeli. Iraq is a threat to Israel and they want him removed. While Israel may have a legitimate complaint, **unilateral war with Iraq will be one of the greatest blunders ever made by the United States.**

I hope I am proven wrong in my analysis, but this is the way I see it.

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