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AMERICA'S CREDIBILITY AT STAKE:

ARAB PERCEPTIONS OF US FOREIGN POLICY

by

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Preface

This research paper answers a personal commitment I hold to helping United States military officers and United States government officials better understand the perspectives of Arab citizens. In addition to and even aside from reality, perceptions can enhance warfighting coalitions between the US and its allies, as they can also spark conflict with countries and organizations that are already not friendly with the US. It is paramount that Americans have a better appreciation for how US policies are received in a critical area of the world--the Middle East.

I conceived of this research paper as a military diplomat in Syria, and this essay takes advantage of my unique access to prominent Arabs as the Air Force Attaché in Damascus from summer 1999-summer 2001. There, during regular conversations about US foreign policy toward the Arab world, Syrians and other Arabs regularly complained about what they labeled as America's "biased" foreign policy. As a result of our dialogue, I believe my Arab counterparts and I had a better understanding of each other's opinions and particular situations. I wrote this paper to share with other US military officers and government officials what I learned in the Middle East. More specifically, the aim of this research is to better prepare American military officers for what they will undoubtedly hear from Arabs when the officers take assignments in the Middle East or work on issues relating to the Middle East.

This essay is not about September 11, 2001. While Arabs may identify with some of the same issues that may have motivated extremists to wage an attack on the US, this work is not about those specific issues or about Islamic extremism. Instead, the paper is about the dominant subject areas relating to US foreign policy that aggravate Arabs. This paper does not blame the United States for the rift in its relations with the Arab world or for the problems in the Middle East, nor does it seek to blame the Arabs. My work does not seek to critique or evaluate Arab grievances with US foreign policy. Instead, it seeks to explain, in detail, those grievances. I hope the reader will gain a better appreciation of why Arabs feel the way they do about America's policy.

This paper is dedicated to my wife, Sherry, who spent a fascinating two-year tour with me in Syria. As a representative of our country and our culture, she was unsurpassed. I would also like to thank my former boss and the former US Defense Attaché to Syria, Colonel Bernard Dunn. He is a gifted Arabist, an exceptional leader, and an outstanding mentor. My wife's and my gratitude also goes out to our many Syrian friends, whose warm culture and hospitable attitude made our stay extremely enjoyable.

For funding this study and sponsoring a research trip to Washington, DC, I heartily thank the USAF Institute for National Security Studies at the Air Force Academy. The insight I gathered during interviews in Washington was key to completing the research for this paper. Contacts made during my trip to Washington will pay dividends to the Air Force as I continue to work on Middle East-related issues throughout my career. Finally, I would like to thank my Research Faculty Advisors, Dr. Kathleen Mahoney-Norris of Air Command and Staff College and Dr. David Sorenson of Air War College, who spent hours of their time in discussion with me about this topic.

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Abstract

Arab perceptions of US foreign policy toward the Arab world, particularly since the onset of the second, or Al-Aqsa *intifada*, are abysmal. United States foreign policy is viewed by Arab populaces and Arab governments as biased against the Arabs and in favor of Israel. From the Arab view, two lesser factors that contribute to Arab feelings that US policies are unjust include the long-term American presence in the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf and America giving only lip service to promoting democracy in the Middle East. Two dominant issues that incite Arab opinion against US foreign policy are America's dealings with Iraq over the past decade and America's handling of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This paper seeks to introduce and explain in detail Arab reactions to US foreign policy toward the Arab world.

For his research, the author relied heavily on interviews he conducted and discussions he had during from his tour in Syria and on interviews conducted with subject matter experts in Washington, DC. Finally, the author relied on press reporting from the Arab world and from some US sources.

The author believes that although Arab resentment over US policies is unlikely to become positive in the immediate future, certain proactive US initiatives can more favorably affect Arab opinion over the long term. To better promote its interests in the volatile Middle East, America must adopt an enhanced and integrative approach to fuse together the military, economic, diplomatic, and informational instruments of power.

Chapter 1

Introduction

"We Arabs know American foreign policy is biased toward the Israelis,"[1] remarked an Arab League official to the author in December 2001. Backing up his assertion, he recalled Secretary of State Colin Powell's November 2001 remarks on the "Larry King Live" television program. On that program, Powell stated, "We are pro-Israel." The Arab League official's remembrance of the Secretary's comments is as significant as what he also failed to recall from the very same television program. Immediately after Powell voiced America's support for Israel in front of Larry King, he remarked, "But I'm also pro-humankind. And I am also pro-Palestinian, to the extent that they are human beings, to the extent that they have a desire to see their children grow up in peace." [2] The Arab official's verbal recollection and his perception of the Secretary of State's comments, even if not complete, is both telling and representative of what Arabs think about United States foreign policy. While Arabs might not consider the whole spectrum of US relations toward Arab states and organizations when they evaluate United States foreign policy toward their region, Powell's "pro-Israel" remark further confirms what Arabs in the Arab world have thought for years. Arabs believe that American foreign policy is unjust in its treatment of Arab states and peoples and that the United States is biased against Arabs and in favor of Israel.[3]

Addressing the turmoil in the region, Shibley Telhami writes, "This is not about the objective reality of where the blame lies; it is about entrenched perceptions. The public in the Middle East blames the powers that be, and sees Israel as the most powerful state in the region, an occupier of Arab lands, and the United States as the anchor of that order."[4] Because of America's reliance on Gulf oil, its military presence in the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf, its desire for stability in the Middle East, and because of its role as a mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the United States is inextricably linked to the Arab world. It is important for Americans operating in the Middle East and working on issues concerning the Arab world to understand Arab perceptions of US foreign policy. These perceptions, whether or not they are completely accurate or consider all the facts, will affect America's relations with the Arab world.[5]

Anti-American resentment on the part of Arabs is not a new phenomenon. Christian Science Monitor writer Cameron Barr remarks, "The roots of this anger lie in US political manipulations in the region during the 1950s and 1960s…As the world's only superpower, the US is bound to make some people unhappy at least some of the time."[6] William Quandt, a Middle East expert and a former staff member on the National Security Council, notes that a portion of Arab resentment towards the US derives from America's dominant role in the world. "On the one hand, everyone is awed by US power, but on the other, they distrust it...There is a certain inevitability that Middle Easterners will view the United States with suspicion simply because it is the most powerful country in the world – quite apart from its policies."[7] Similarly, Dr. Shireen Hunter of the Center for Strategic and International Studies who specializes in the Middle

East, Central Asia, and Islam, emphasizes the Arab world's feeling of vulnerability vis-à-vis the West and more specifically the United States.[8]

Beyond general Arab resentment toward the US because of cultural rifts and because of America's status as a superpower, the past few years has witnessed virulent anti-Americanism spreading across the Middle East. Fouad Ajami, in a *Foreign Affairs* piece, draws attention to the "rancid anti-Americanism now evident in the Arab world," and he remarks, "from one end of the Arab world to the other, the drumbeats of anti-Americanism has been steady."[9] Intense anti-US sentiment held by extremist groups was manifested in the attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, the attacks on US military forces in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996, the attacks against the US embassies in Africa in 1998, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000, and most recently the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. While these reprehensible attacks were committed by extremists who are certainly not representative of Arabs as a whole, some of the very same issues--to be covered in this paper--that motivated the extremists also anger Arab governments and peoples in the Middle East.

Examples of recurring themes that irritate Arabs are the US military presence in the Arabian Gulf and America's perceived ambiguous stand on promoting democracy in the Middle East. In a part of the world where history is seldom forgotten, secular and religious Arabs alike draw parallels between the US presence and influence in the region today and that of European crusaders centuries ago.[10] In the spring of 2001, a Saudi Arabian Ambassador assigned to a European country pointedly asked, "When will the United States ends its arrogance and withdraw from the Gulf?"[11] While the details are sketchy and officials on both the Saudi and US sides have intentionally played down the

apparent rift between the countries, since the fall of 2001, it appears that the Saudi royal family and government (generally one and the same) are growing increasingly wary of the US military presence in the Kingdom.[12] The US presence inside a fiercely proud and independent country that bills itself as the keeper of the two holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Medina[13] draws unwanted notice and criticism to the Islamic Saudi government from both non-religiously and religiously motivated societal elements. This opposition has on more than one occasion already waged violent demonstrations against the US and the Saudi governments, as was the case in the 1995 and 1996 bombings. In short, the US military presence in Saudi Arabia threatens the Saudi ruling family's legitimacy.

Another charge levied by Arabs against the US involves America espousing democracy and pluralism while supporting Arab regimes that regularly practice repression. Critics of US foreign policy claim America selectively promotes democracy as it conveniently suits US strategic interests. Arabs charge that America supports regimes like Egypt and Saudi Arabia that promote the status quo and stability, allow the US use of military operating locations, ensure the US access to oil, and crack down themselves on popular Islamic and secular movements.[14]

Beyond pockets of jealously over the US being the world's sole superpower, the resentment caused by the US military footprint in the region, and America's questionable record for supporting democracy in the Middle East, in the past decade two dominant issues associated with US foreign policy have greatly angered Arabs: America's handling of Iraq and America's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. These two paramount issues have caused Arabs from every country in the Middle East, from every religious group, and from every social class to conclude that United States foreign policy

toward the Arab world is unjust and grossly in favor of Israel, at the expense of the Arabs.[15]

This paper explains from the Arab perspective, after extensive research spent delving into the subject, why Arabs perceive United States foreign policy toward the Arab world as unjust and biased. It focuses on the two salient issues: America's dealings with Iraq and America's involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which both drastically handicap American relations with the Arab world in the early part of the twenty-first century. The paper relies heavily on the author's experiences as a Middle East specialist and on his time spent traveling around and living in the region, particularly the two years he spent as the United States Air Force Attaché in Damascus, Syria. There, during both formal diplomatic meetings with Arab officials and informal social gatherings with Arab elites, the author engaged in literally thousands of detailed conversations regarding Arab perceptions of American foreign policy. This paper relies on the impressions of Arab journalists, interviews with both public and private sector Middle East experts, and on the writings of recognized academics. While the arguments presented are not a perspective commonly seen by readers in the United States, it is the authors intention to fill a critical gap in helping Americans better understand Arab views.

Notes

[1] League of Arab States Mission official, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 19 December 2001. Throughout this paper, because the topics are often considered rather politically sensitive, the author does not list the names of the Arab individuals interviewed. Without anonymity, Arab sources might be hesitant to discuss such subjects with a diplomat or with an American military officer, despite the fact that the topics are unclassified. This stems in part from the sources' concern over portraying their own Arab people in a negative light (this relates, in part, to Arab culture) and for fear of their own governments possibly enacting retribution against them.

Notes

[2] "Secretary of State Colin Powell on CNN's 'Larry King Live,'" 26 November 2001, *US State Department web site,* n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://uninfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/01112701.html.

[3] This paper is based mostly upon comments and writings from educated, elite Arabs. By "elite" the author means Arabs generally at the top of Arab society, which is a minority. (There is not a large middle class in Arab countries.) Most Arab elites interviewed for this paper have connections or at least inroads into Arab governments. Arab sources are typically government officials, wealthy private citizens--businessmen or other professionals, and journalists. Many are Western educated, and most have either traveled extensively or lived in the West or in the United States. From his discussion with Arabs, professional readings, and personal experiences in the Middle East, the author contends that the sources' views are representative of dominant opinions in the Arab world. When it comes to the emotional issues discussed in this essay--Iraq and the Arab-Israeli conflict, the author believes the so-called "Arab street," or bulk of Arab citizens, feel very much the same as those in their society who are wealthier or more educated. In fact, because the "Arab street" is less exposed to outside (and various) views, and more subject to government propaganda in places like Syria, the author believes that the general populace feels even more strongly than Arab elites that American policies are biased and unjust. For instance, in the spring of 2000, a poor Syrian policeman (and most are poor) spoke with the author in a street in Damascus. The policeman told the author that he did not like Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and US foreign policy; this was in the wake of the failure of the Arab peace process. The policeman, who was likely exposed mostly to Syria's government-controlled media, could not explain why he did not like US policies, only that he despised them.

[4] Shibley, Telhami, "It's Not About Faith: A Battle for the Soul of the Middle East," *Current History* 100, no. 650 (December 2001): 417.

[5] For purposes of this paper, the "Arab World" stretches from across North Africa, from Morocco to Egypt, through the Levantine states of Jordan, Syria, Israel/Palestine, into the Arabian Peninsula – including the Arabian Gulf countries, and into Iraq. This paper does not include opinion from peoples in Turkey, Iran, South Asia, or Central Asia, although many individuals and states there, in many cases, would likely have similar thoughts. The paper is not concerned with Islamic opinion, per say, although the majority of people in the Arab world are Muslims. Considering Islamic versus Arab opinion toward American foreign policy opens up a separate (although sometimes common) set of concerns based on religion, or interpretation of religion. Instead, this paper seeks to explain complaints common to Arabs of various religions and ethnic sub-groups across the Arab world.

[6] Cameron W. Barr, "US Policy in Mideast under Scrutiny," *Christian Science Monitor Internet Edition*, 13 September 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0913/p2s1-uspo.html.

[7] William Quandt, "New US Policies for a New Middle East?," in *The Middle East and the United States: A Historic and Political Reassessment*, 2nd ed, ed. David W. Lesch (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 432. Quandt was a member of the

Notes

National Security Council during the Nixon and Carter administrations; he was intimately involved in the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt.

[8] Shireen T. Hunter, Director of Islam Program at Center for Strategic and International Studies, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 18 December 2001. Hunter is also an occasional television commentator on Islamic, Middle East, and Central Asian events.

[9] Fouad Ajami, "The Sentry's Solitude," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 6 (November/December 2001): 2-3.

[10] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

[11] Interview, Damascus, Syria, 16 June 2001.

[12] Numerous press items were released on this subject in January 2002. For example, see, David B. Ottaway and Robert G. Kaiser, "Saudis May Seek US Exit," *Washington Post*, 18 January 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A64536-2002Jan17.

[13] Mecca is considered the first most holy city in the Islamic religion, while Medina is the second most holy city. Mecca was the birthplace of Islam's prophet Mohammed Ibn Abdullah al Quraish, and the city is the site of the annual Islamic *haj*, or pilgrimage. In the year 622, Mohammed migrated from Mecca to Medina, and eight years later he triumphantly returned and conquered Mecca. Mecca is the site of the Grand Mosque, while the Great Mosque is located in Medina.

[14] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

[15] Ibid.

Chapter 2

Iraq – "The Innocent Suffer"

In the eyes of Arabs, Iraq is a country that has been damaged by aggressive American policies that have hurt the common people and hardly touch the regime of Saddam Hussein. In the late 1980s, Iraq and its capital, Baghdad, were considered particularly advanced amongst Arab countries. This is not surprising, considering Baghdad had been a major center of Arab culture and learning for centuries and since its citizens were some of the most educated and well-trained people in the Arab world. Rick Francona, an American military officer who worked as a US intelligence liaison with the Iraqi military, visited Baghdad in 1988 and remarked that the city was "a fascinating, vibrant, almost electric place that I grew to enjoy thoroughly." Francona, a well-traveled specialist in Arab politics and language, also noted in 1988 that despite the Iraqi capital city having endured over seven years of war with Iran, "Baghdad remained a beautiful city" with "history, charm, and character," and "Baghdadis were proud of their capital."[1]

The feeling that Baghdad was a pearl and that Iraq was a model country for other Arab states to emulate was shared by Arab citizens from other Middle East states. A professional Syrian educated in economics and with familial ties to the Syrian government, who worked abroad in the Gulf for a few years remarked, "Iraq's economic and social well-being was the envy of most Arabs."[2] Baghdad and Iraqi society have

changed, however, since the Gulf War. The former pearl of the Arab world has become quite tarnished.

In the wake of the Gulf War and after over a decade of sanctions against Iraq, it is obvious from media images and from numerous sources that Saddam and his regime continue to live quite comfortably, while ordinary Iraqi citizens suffer. Syrians with family members in Iraq note that their relatives' lives are materially much worse than before sanctions, while Saddam continues to live in luxury, unchecked.[3] Outside Iraq, the presence of Iraqi taxi drivers, selling cheaply made goods from their dilapidated cars in other Arab cities, garners sympathy in the region for the Iraqi people.

The United States has placed responsibility for Iraq's economic demise squarely on the shoulders of Saddam Hussein, citing Iraqi government intransigence when dealing with the United Nations. Whether or not the Iraqi regime has thumbed its nose at the UN, people from across the Arab world lay most of the blame for the drastic decline of the Iraqi people's living conditions at the feet of America. Arabs feel that common Iraqis are paying an intolerably disproportionate penalty for the acts of the Iraqi regime, especially considering the relative ineffectiveness of UN sanctions that fail to punish Saddam.[4] In a December 2001 commentary, Arab journalist Ahmed Bouzid opined that sanctions have cost "the lives of half a million of our own children, devastating thus a whole generation of Iraqis, and reducing what was once far and ahead the most modern Arab country to a backward nation barely able to subsist."[5] Arab writer and Professor Kamil Mahdi likewise writes, "the consequences of such a catastrophe will be with Iraq and the rest of the region for generations to come."[6] Arabs argue that the resentment

caused over America's hard-line stance that damages Iraqi society will taint Arab, and particularly Iraqi, impressions of US policies for years to come.[7]

Some Arabs are puzzled why US foreign policies continue to target Iraq in such a harsh fashion, especially when Iraq and the US once cooperated rather closely in the Middle East. Arabs are quick to point out that the United States actively supported Saddam Hussein during the 1980s, when Iraq opposed Iran during the Iran-Iraq War.[8]

During the 1980s and just preceding the Gulf War, argue Arabs, "America's Saddam" was every bit as much a dictator as he was in the late 1990s and into the next decade.[9] The fact that Saddam has been ironfisted during his rule in Baghdad is not a matter of contention between Americans and Arabs. Francona noticed the oppressive security environment in Baghdad in 1988 and wrote "Government control was evident everywhere."[10] A Syrian businessman who repeatedly traveled between Iraq and Syria for sales trips in the spring and summer of 2001 reported feeling anxious about the security climate in Baghdad. He regularly feared for his safety during border crossings between Iraq and Syria, and he was even apprehensive in his own Baghdad hotel room. The Syrian businessman remarked that, while in Baghdad, one must even be careful in moving one's eyes when in the vicinity of government buildings and near palaces.[11]

Arabs point out that Saddam's tough rule and treatment of Iraq's people is not an aberration for the way Iraqi leaders have dealt with their people over the course of that country's history.[12] So it is not surprising that when Arabs note that an Iraq and Middle East with or without Saddam is tolerable. One Arab wrote, "Iraqis will be content to live under Saddam as they have for two decades before the sanctions."[13] Some Arabs have argued that it would be better for US foreign policy--and perhaps safer for the region in

light of ongoing Iranian ambitions--for America to work with Saddam instead of against him. Along the same lines, Arabs point out that some of America's key Arab government allies, particularly Saudi Arabia, are no more benevolent or democratic than Saddam when dealing with internal dissent.[14]

In the wake of the Gulf War and after a decade of sanctions, Arabs argue that Saddam no longer possesses a credible military threat to countries aligned with the US and to American interests in the region. They draw attention to the fact that America still seeks to degrade the Iraqi military threat, which was expanded mostly to fight the same enemy that America opposed during the 1980s--Iran. Meanwhile, America's own close ally and recipient of billions of dollars of US military assistance per year, Israel, employs American-made Apache helicopters and F-16 fighter aircraft against Arab citizens without impunity in the Israeli-occupied territories. Additionally, while the US puts no pressure on Israel over its nuclear weapons program, Saddam is regularly lambasted for possessing weapons of mass destruction.[15] Palestinian intellectual Edward Said remarked in a spring 1998 editorial, "The media have been feeding the public a diet of stories about hidden weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which may have them for all I know, but which are neither a threat to anyone nor, in fact, have been proved by anyone to exist. The United States, reserving for itself the right to stand above all the norms of international behavior, is determined to strike if diplomacy does not work."[16]

Arabs in both the Mediterranean and the Arabian Gulf also express their concern that the "Iraq issue" has become a convenient excuse for the United States to maintain a constant and rather robust military presence in the Gulf. As the predominant powerbroker in the region, Arabs argue that America could have easily disposed of

Saddam during or immediately after the Gulf War if the US had truly desired. A Gulf official remarked that a very high percentage of Arabs believe the US is merely playing a "game" with Saddam and that America will not force the Iraqi leader out of power, because that could spell the end of America's desired hegemony in the Gulf.[17]

As a tangible indicator of Arab discontent with US military action in the Middle East against Iraq, frustration over OPERATION DESERT FOX in mid-December 1998[18] resulted in anti-American protests in Arab and Muslim countries.[19] Some of them became very violent, as was the case on 19 December in Damascus. On that day, a crowd of a few thousand individuals pelted the US Embassy in downtown Damascus with stones and ransacked the residence of the American Ambassador, which is separate--approximately a half-mile--from the actual embassy compound. More ominous was the forceful entry and destruction of US government and personal property at the residence of US Ambassador Ryan Crocker, which is located about a half-mile from the actual embassy complex. While it can be argued that rapidly quelling the riots was beyond the capability of the Syrian security services, American diplomats in Damascus felt that the Syrian government was delivering an indirect message to the American government by allowing them to even occur.[20] Very few public events, particularly protests, are truly spontaneous in a country known for its pervasive security environment. Adding more credibility to the theory that the Syrian government turned a blind eye in the early stages of the attack is the fact that the American embassy is located in the same neighborhood that is heavily patrolled by plainclothes Syrian presidential security guards.[21] It is probably no coincidence the violence took place at the same time that the Syrian government was beginning to restore formal economic relations with Baghdad.

In summary, Arab journalist Ahmed Bouzid's plea rings true with both Arab populations and elites throughout the Middle East when he writes, "Why do Americans hate us [Arabs] so much that they would insist on imposing a decade-long embargo that has done nothing but ensure the misery of ordinary civilians?"[22] Arabs uniformly hope what they see as a cruel and hypocritical vendetta against Iraq will come to an end.

Notes

[1] Rick Francona, *Ally to Adversary: An Eyewitness Account of Iraq's Fall from Grace* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 13, 16.

[2] E-mail from Syrian who grew up in Syria and spent extensive time living in the Arabian Gulf, received by author, 13 March 2002.

[3] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, spring 2000.

[4] Interviews with Syrian businessmen, Syrians with family links to the Syrian government, and with Arab diplomats assigned to Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

[5] Ahmed Bouzid, "Why Do They Hate Us So Much?," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 20, no. 9 (December 2001): 14.

[6] Kamil Mahdi, "The Iraq Sanctions Debate: Destruction of a People," *Middle East International*, no. 615 (24 December 1999): 22.

[7] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

[8] Ibid. Francona's *Ally to Adversary* briefly covers the US-Iraqi security relationship during the 1980s, including sharing technical intelligence, 9-30.

[9] Interview with former Iraqi citizen and Defense Language Institute Arabic language instructor, Spring 1994. This instructor's family left Iraq because of political repression. More specifically, Iraqi internal security personnel, who demanded her brother join the military, repeatedly sought him out.

[10] Francona, 17. See pages 14-19 for a good description of Iraq's pervasive security climate.

[11] Interview with Syrian businessman, Damascus, Syria, 22 June 2001.

[12] Interview with Gulf official, December 2001.

[13] E-mail from Syrian cited in footnote number two above.

[14] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Edward W. Said, "Gulliver in the Middle East" (an essay originally appearing in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 February 1998), in *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After,* updated edition, (New York: Vintage, 2001), 241.

[17] Interview with Gulf official, December 2001.

[18] Following Iraq's obstruction of UN weapons inspectors attempting to accomplish their duties, the US military initiated strikes, called OPERATION DESERT FOX, against Iraq on 16 December 1998. Targets included suspected WMD-associated facilities, surface-to-air missile sites, command and control facilities, airfields, and Republican Guard facilities. For additional information about the operation, see Linda D. Kozaryn,

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"Saddam Abused His Last Chance, Clinton Says," *American Forces Information Service News Articles*, 17 December 1998, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec1998/n12171998_9812171.html and Paul Stone, "Desert Fox Target Toll Climbs Past 75 Iraqi Sites," *American Forces Information Service News Articles*, 18 December 1998, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec1998/n12181998_9812182.html.

[19] Arab governments, in general, maintain rather tight control over their societies. "Spur-of-the-moment" protests in Arab states are sometimes allowed by Arab governments as a means to let common citizens vent their anger. Protests are, in effect, a pressure valve meant to dissipate anger toward outside influences and to prevent Arab citizens from turning their frustrations toward their own governments.

[20] Interviews with various US diplomats at US Embassy Syria, Damascus, Syria, June 1999.

[21] The American Embassy in Damascus is located in the upscale Malki/Abu Romani district of Damascus. The Syrian Presidential offices and apartment are located approximately a half-mile away from the embassy.

[22] Bouzid, 14.

Chapter 3

The Arab-Israeli Crisis – The Seminal Issue

"Regarding America's foreign policy toward the Arabs, we don't actually expect the US to be one hundred percent unbiased, but we do wish the US was just ten percent unbiased."[1] This comment by a prominent Syrian businessman with very strong links to the Syrian government accurately highlights an opinion that has strongly resonated for years throughout the Middle East. In fact, what is seen as America's unjust approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict is the most frequently voiced issue unfavorably tainting Arab opinion of the United States, much more so even than the United States position on Iraq. Even before the violent *intifada* erupted in late 2000, Arabs were already very aggravated by what they labeled as a definite American bias toward Israel and against the Arabs. Arabs see Israeli influence in the US government as pervasive at all levels, including within the legislative and executive branches. A journalist writing in a Saudi newspaper commented in a fall 2000 article, "Israel still has the Congress on its side, which always echoes the Israeli position," and "Washington must start to look at the area with a just perspective."[2]

Because of their proximity to Israel and because Israel occupies land once belonging to them, citizens of Syria and Lebanon, perhaps more than any other people from sovereign Arab states, feel they have suffered at the expense of unbalanced, and

even almost unbridled, US support for Israel.[3] From 1999 to 2001, hundreds of government and private Syrians in both official and unofficial forums fervently expressed their opinion to the author that the US has intentionally stacked the cards in the region in favor of Israel and against the Arab states. An educated, professional Jordanian citizen married to a Syrian and living in Damascus commented to the author, "I think that US foreign policy toward the Middle East has always been biased toward Israel. I don't know what the US gets from supporting Israel at the expense of abandoning the Arabs."[4]

Very senior-level Syrian military officers regularly lectured American military attaches, both in public speeches and in private conversations, at Syrian military-sponsored dinners in 2000 and 2001 about the "inherent unevenness and inconsistencies" in US foreign policy toward the Arab countries. Several Syrian generals bluntly stated that it is not in America's strategic interest, especially since the Arabs possess such great oil reserves, to back Israel--a nation of only seventeen million people--at the expense of the Arab states with a composite population of about three hundred million. Astute Syrians pointed out to the author that several prominent US officials, including Secretary of State George Marshall, opposed the US recognizing Israel in 1948 for fear of damaging relations with Arab states.[5]

In the late 1990s and into the next decade, many Syrians attributed what they viewed as anti-Arab policies to the fact that prominent Jewish persons held important positions in the Clinton Administration.[6] This opinion was echoed during a March 2001 US Air War College trip to Damascus, when Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Talas lectured US military officer delegates that the Syrians had heard that President Clinton "loved our people" but several key cabinet posts were held by Jews. Talas expressed his

belief that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had been openly working for the Jews.[7] Most American official visitors to Syria and diplomats accredited to Damascus are regularly subjected to rhetoric about perceived American bias against the Arabs and in favor of the Israelis from the Syrians.

Talas' verbal backlash to the 2001 Air War College delegation can be partially attributed to the collapse of Syrian trust and what Syrians deemed as false hope they placed in the George H. Bush and Clinton administrations. Because of President George H. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker's efforts to closely cooperate with the Arabs, especially during the Gulf War, Syrians and Arabs held those former officials in high esteem. Arabs believed the first Bush was more inclined to side with Arabs than previous American administrations. Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad took a risk and signed on to the coalition against Iraq by contributing troops during the Gulf War. While Iraq had been a rival to Syria, on many level, Hafiz al-Asad's standing with America was extremely controversial with his public. One Syrian doctor remarked, "Just remember us siding with the coalition forces during the Second Gulf War, while the public opinion was against it."[8] Several Syrians told the author that Bush's, and America's, credibility was boosted in the Arab world when, in 1992, Bush attached strict conditions for loan guarantees meant for new Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. This angered Israel.[9] In the eyes of the Arabs, Bush had the courage to stand up to Israel and had dealt with the Arab-Israeli conflict in a more objective manner than many of the US Presidents who came before him.[10]

Syrians were optimistic that Clinton could convince Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, a seemingly more reasonable man than Barak's predecessor, Benjamin

Netanyahu, to negotiate land for peace, as was called for under the Madrid Peace Process formula.[11] In the end, Clinton failed the Syrians in their eyes.[12] The ultimate culmination point of Syrian disappointment with the past administration came at the March 2000 Geneva Summit between Presidents Asad and Clinton. In the lead-up to the summit, Clinton reportedly promised the Syrian president "good news," and the ailing Asad traveled to Switzerland to accept what he hoped would be a promising offer from the Americans and Israelis. Asad believed that Barak was finally ready to propose Israel's complete withdrawal from lands Israel occupied on the Golan Heights, up to the 4 June 1967 line. This was reasonable, since former Prime Minister Rabin, by many accounts, had already made this promise to Asad in 1994, before Rabin's untimely assassination in 1995.

However, as the 1967 "border" was never formally demarcated, the precise location of that line is difficult to ascertain. It was merely a line which Syrian tanks guarded before Israel launched pre-emptive attacks against the Arabs in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. In the Syrian mind, though, that border touched Lake Tiberias (Sea of Galilee) on the northern part of the lake and then ran through the middle of the lake, or at a minimum touched the lake on the east of the body of water. At Geneva, Barak, through Clinton, proposed that the Israelis control not only all of Lake Tiberias' waters, but also maintain a small strip of land on the eastern portion of the lake. Therefore, the Syrians would lose complete control over the shoreline and any right to water.[13]

When they heard nothing new from Clinton regarding the Israeli position, Asad and the Syrians balked, and they left Geneva embittered. The Syrian/Lebanese-Israeli track of the peace process effectively died. In what was seen as a public insult to the

Syrians, Clinton officials charged that Asad had been inflexible, and the ball was in the Syrian President's court. Syrian citizens angrily shot back that the US diplomatic effort was amateurish and that Clinton never should have summoned Asad to Geneva without offering something new.[14] Hafiz al-Asad, who involved Syrian in the peace process since 1991 and who most Syrians argue really did want an "honorable" peace, died in June 2000 and was succeeded by his son, Bashar.

Beyond the Syrian frustration with what they perceive as America failing to deliver a just solution regarding the return of historic, now Israeli-occupied Arab lands, Syrians are also incensed over the US condemning Syria for that country's support to what it considers "liberation" groups. Syrians are angry that backing for Palestinian groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and for Hizballah has landed Syria on the US State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism. Syrian officials and citizens argue that Syria supports popular movements that merely seek to end the Israeli occupation of historic Arab lands. After all, runs the Syrian argument, how can such organizations which maintain offices in Damascus and funnel weapons to "freedom fighters," be considered terrorists if they strive to attain what is called for in United Nations Resolutions 242, 338, and 425? America and its coalition partners fought in 1991, after all, to restore land to Kuwait from Iraq, citing UN resolutions as justification for action. One frustrated Syrian appealed to the author, "They [Israel and the United States] call us terrorists, and expect us to sit and watch them [Israel] occupying our land and humiliating our people."[15]

In reference to Arab forces seeking an end to Israel's occupation of Arab lands, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara' had this to say to the UN General Assembly in

the Fall of 2001: "Syria was the first country to call in 1985 for convening an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations to define terrorism and to differentiate it from the struggle of peoples for national liberation. Israel invented new types of terrorist practices in order to continue its occupation of Arab territories…How could anyone fail to differentiate between terror and resistance? Anyone who would like to target terrorism in our region must target the Israeli terrorism first and foremost, because what Israel does is the utmost form of terrorism that is absolutely shorn of human feeling."[16] Syrians and, for that matter, Arabs in general view American moves to condemn Arab attempts to gain back lands that once belonged to them as hypocritical.

Just a month after the Foreign Minister's appeal in the UN, the Syrian Ambassador to the United States reaffirmed the Syrian and Arab positions on peace and terrorism, stating, "Syria seeks a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in accordance with UN resolutions." Furthermore, "Syria has no connection with terrorism; Syria seeks to uproot terrorism in all its forms"--a direct reference to Israel.[17] Arabs across the Middle East emphatically charge the US with holding double standards for claiming Arab "liberation" groups are terrorists, while Israel continues to brutally treat Arabs in lands where they once ruled.

Perhaps the "liberation" organization that evokes the most pride from Arabs across the Middle East is Hizballah in Lebanon. This group is supported by not only Iran, but also by Syria; and it serves as one of the few remaining pressure points Syria can apply against Israel. Arabs credit Hizballah's military efforts in the 1980s and 1990s as having been the impetus for Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon in the spring of 2000. Most Syrians openly engage in hero worship when they speak about Hizballah's

accomplishments against the Israelis in southern Lebanon, and they note that Hizballah has succeeded where most other Arab organizations have failed at forcing Israelis to concede territories back to Arabs.[18] During a Spring 2001 trip the author took with Syrians through Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, several well-to-do Syrians--most of whom had occasional political contacts with Syrian government officials in Damascus--eagerly donated cash along the road to youths waving Hizballah flags and collecting money for the group. During his two years in Damascus, the author observed no other group that attracted the same level of admiration on the part of private Syrian citizens.[19]

Hizballah's continued actions against Israeli occupation forces in the Sheba Farms area is controversial but continues to receive strong support from Syrians.[20] The UN certified Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon complete in 2000, in accordance with UN Resolution 425. In a move backed by the US, Sheba has been deemed by the UN as part of Israeli-occupied Syria, which is covered under UN Resolution 242. While Israel is no longer technically violating the UN resolutions applying to Lebanon, Arabs claim Sheba is part of Lebanon, and thus in their eyes, Hizballah is warranted to continue attacks there. Syrians do not distinguish between Israeli occupation of Lebanon and Israeli occupation of Syria, and they are prepared to continue the fight. Syrian Ambassador Zoubi predicted, "As long as Israel is not in compliance with UN resolutions, Hizballah will remain active."[21]

During Prime Minister Ehud Barak's time in office as Israel's Prime Minister, Syrian perception of US foreign policy turned from bad to abysmal. In the spring of 1999, after Barak's victory and assumption of office, Syrians believed that a door for peace between Arabs and Israel might finally be opening after the difficult Netanyahu

years. Geneva, however, slammed that door shut, only further confirming to Syrians that the US could not be trusted as an honest broker. Public perception of America in Syria, and across the Arab world, uniformly slipped when the situation in for Palestinians in the Territories and in Israel became grave in late 2000, a subject to be covered in the next chapter.[22]

Syria's Palestinian neighbors to the south are perhaps even less impressed with America's record for acting as an honest broker. Optimistically going into the Oslo Peace Talks in the early 1990s, Sara Roy notes that the Palestinians sought "their own state, which must consist of a contiguous West Bank and Gaza, a connection between them, and only minor adjustments to 1967 borders."[23] Prior to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Arab control extended over East Jerusalem, including Muslim holy sites.[24] By the late 1990s, though, Palestinian and Arab hopes were dashed. Arabs believe that the much-touted, American-supported Oslo agreements were more about "process" and Israeli stalling--while Israel expanded Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories--than about attaining actual peace and prosperity for both parties. In short, the Arab argument goes, the Palestinians had been cruelly manipulated by the Israelis and their American ally, and Oslo created a diversion on Israel's path to gobbling up more and more Palestinian land and rights.[25]

Palestinian intellectual Edward Said's words in a 1998 essay, regarding America's role as a negotiator in the peace process, accurately represented Arab opinion: "It [the United States] can pretend that it can be all things to all parties; that pose has been shown for the miserable ruse that it has always been. The United States has also lost the support of even those Arab and Islamic states who are its supposed allies, so

appallingly insensitive and hypocritical has its behavior been in coddling Israel and at the same time demanding compliance from the Arabs."[26]

In order to more clearly understand Arab perceptions relating to America's involvement in the peace process, a brief overview of Palestinian attitudes towards the peace process and Oslo is warranted. Jerusalem Media and Communication Center public opinion polls' results highlight growing Palestinian dissatisfaction with what they believe have become increasingly fruitless efforts to deal with Israel. In December 1996, Palestinian support for the peace process was recorded at 78%, while support for Oslo stood at 75%. By December 2000, those numbers were 47% for the peace process and 39% in favor of Oslo. The poll's analyst remarked that Palestinians were relatively optimistic in 1996 because they had faith that the peace process and Oslo would "help them achieve their national aspiration of ending occupation and building an independent state." After only a few years, though, support greatly declined because of "the deteriorating political and economic conditions of Palestinians as a result of Israeli violations of Interim agreements, continued Israeli settlement activity and Palestinian land confiscation, closures and restriction of movement of Palestinians, and the fact that most aspects of Palestinian life remained under Israeli control."[27]

Under Oslo, life became more difficult rather than easier for Palestinians. Augustus Richard Norton notes, "[Since Oslo], the quality of life has declined, especially as measured by per capita income, which has shrunk 20 percent in the West Bank…and 25 percent in Gaza. The comparable figure for Israel has increased…11 to 15 times the Palestinian level. Put simply, peace did not produce an economic bonanza for the Palestinians."[28] By the late 1990s, unemployment soared to approximately 20% in the

West Bank and 30% in the Gaza Strip. Palestinians became increasing impoverished and desperate as Oslo "progressed."[29]

Under Oslo, Palestinian wages and the aggregate Palestinian economy declined as Israelis tried to prevent violent Arab acts of extremism by closing Palestinians out of Israeli-occupied areas and out of Israel proper. What this meant is that Palestinians could not transit to and from their jobs, move freely from one Palestinian area to another, or even visit their holy sites in Jerusalem. Israel imposed 342 days of total closure on Palestinians in the Gaza strip and 291 days of total closure on the Palestinians in the West Bank from 1993 to 1996. Less stringent closure rules were applied on other days during those years.[30]

Another serious bone of contention for Palestinians regarding the Oslo Peace Process has involved their lack of physical control over traditional Palestinian land. Under the Palestinian Authority, and as a desired outcome of Oslo in the 1990s, the Palestinians looked forward to the creation of a Palestinian state by 1998 in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Even if that had come to fruition, however, the West Bank and Gaza Strip only represented 22% of pre-1948, historic Palestine.[31] By mid-2000, though, the Palestinians had complete control over only 17.2% of the West Bank, and that land was not all located together. Instead, Israeli roads and settlements resulted in the Palestinian-controlled territory being carved up into small enclaves. Sara Roy notes Palestinian areas "were noncontiguous and remained isolated cantons separated by areas under complete jurisdiction of Israel." So, when the Camp David II summit in July 2000, under the tutelage of President Clinton, failed to offer the Palestinians more than 90% of the West

Bank, again broken up by Israeli roads and settlements, Palestinians and the entire Arab world were naturally frustrated.[32]

A Palestinian negotiator, in a letter to US Congressional members, wrote that the Camp David proposal "fell far short of minimum requirements for a viable, independent Palestinian state." Under the proposal by Israeli Prime Minister Barak, the Israeli offer "would have made Palestine nothing more than Arab 'Bantustans' perpetually at the mercy of Israeli economic and military closures."[33] By the summer of 2000, it was clear that Israel would not withdraw completely from the territories it occupied beginning in 1967. Additionally, Palestinians' economic prospects were dim, and the Palestinians felt socially humiliated. It has been evident from the mass outpouring of Arab emotion, as regularly highlighted in the international press since the fall of 2000, that people from across the Arab world are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and have shared common frustration over Israeli and US policies.

Notes

[1] Interview with Syrian businessman with strong professional and familial links to the Syrian government, Damascus, Syria, 25 May 2001.

[2] Jamal Khashoggi, "War Against Terror: A Saudi Perspective," *Arab View*, Fall 2001 (no date posted), n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.arabview.com/article.asp?artID=105.

[3] Palestinians are not included here, since Palestinians have not achieved governance over a sovereign Palestinian state. Instead, as of early 2002, Palestinians held autonomy over limited territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These are the areas that the Palestinian Authority hopes to incorporate into an actual, recognized state.

[4] E-mail from private Jordanian citizen living in Syria (in response to author's e-mail questions), received by author, 4 November 2001.

[5] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001. For an explanation of prominent US officials who opposed US official recognition of Israel upon creation of that country, see Robert D. Kaplan, *The Arabists: Romance of an American Elite* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 85-87.

[6] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

Notes

[7] Group interview, Syrian Defense Minister LtGen Mustafa Talas, interviewed during visit of US Air Force War College, 14 March 2001.

[8] E-mail from private Syrian (in response to author's e-mail), received by author, 10 November 2001.

[9] William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993),405-407, 411.

[10] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

[11] The land Asad and the Syrians/Lebanese believed they could reacquire from Israel were territories on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and in Southern Lebanon, the return of which is called for in UN Resolutions 242, 338, and 425. Syria exercises tremendous control over Lebanese domestic and foreign policies. Historically, Lebanon was part of Greater Syria, before the colonial British and French powers carved up the Middle East.

[12] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, fall 2000.

[13] Patrick Seale, "Bye-Bye Dennis Ross," *Al Hayat* (English version), 11 November 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.mafhoum.com/press/sealeh2.html. The popular story circulating around Damascus at the time of the Clinton-Asad meeting, and directly thereafter, was that Asad had swam in Lake Tiberias and barbecued on its shore as a child. Asad, however, grew up in a village in the mountains of Syria, far from Lake Tiberias. It is more likely that he never visited the lake as a child. The line of reasoning went that since Syrians had access to the lake at one time, they must again--as a result of the peace process--have access to the lake and its eastern shore.

[14] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, 2000.

[15] E-mail from Syrian cited in footnote number eight above.

[16] Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara', "H.E. Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, at the 56th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 14 November 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.syrianmission.org/fmeb56.htm.

[17] Syrian Ambassador to the United States, H.E. Rustom Al-Zoubi, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 20 December 2001.

[18] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, May-June 2000.

[19] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, April 2000-June 2001.

[20] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, 2001.

[21] Zoubi interview.

[22] Interviews, Damascus, Syria, June 1999-June 2001.

[23] Sara Roy, "Why Peace Failed: An Oslo Autopsy," *Current History* 101, no. 651 (January 2002): 16.

[24] Before the 1967 Arab-Israeli (Six-Day or June) War, Jerusalem was a partitioned city, with Israel controlling West Jerusalem, and Jordan controlling East Jerusalem. Islamic, Jewish, and Christian holy sites were all located in then-Arab territories.

[25] Interviews with Palestinians and Syrians, Damascus, Syria, June 1999- June 2001.

Notes

[26] Edward W. Said, "Gulliver in the Middle East" (an essay originally appearing in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 February 1998), in *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After,* updated edition, (New York: Vintage, 2001), 241-242.

[27] Dr. Lama Jamjoum, "Palestinian Opinion Pulse," from Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, Volume 2, no.4, June 2001, n.p., on line, Internet, available from http://www.jmcc.org/publicpoll/pop/01/jun/pop4.htm.

[28] Augustus Richard Norton, "America's Middle East Peace Crisis," *Current History* 100, no. 642 (January 2001): 5.

[29] Roy, 13.

[30] Ibid., 12-13.

[31] Ibid., 16.

[32] Ibid, 15-16.

[33] Palestinian Peace Process Negotiator quoted in Debrorah Sontag, "The Palestinian Conversation,"*New York Times Magazine,* 3 February 2002, n.p., on-line, Intenet, available from http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/03/magazine/03PALESTINE.html.

Chapter 4

Adding Fuel to the Fire – The Second *Intifada*

Arab outpouring of emotion over the plight of the Palestinians was expressed across the Arab world in the form of pro-Palestinian demonstrations and riots against Israel and the US beginning in the fall of 2000. The a*l-Aqsa*, or second, *intifada* was born following Ariel Sharon's controversial visit to the common site of the Temple Mount and the *al-Aqsa* Mosque in Jerusalem at the end of September 2000.[1] Sharon's act of boldly forcing his way to the site with Israeli police escort into the area of Islam's third holiest site added fuel to a fire that was bound to break out in the wake of what the Palestinians and Arabs already perceived was the end of the peace process.[2] Large and sometimes violent demonstrations protesting Israeli and American policies toward the Palestinians occurred in several Arab capitals and cities in subsequent weeks, including Rabat, Cairo, Manama, Muscat, and Damascus.

Damascus was the site of particularly fierce outbursts aimed at America, as the Syrian regime and new President Bashar al-Asad were willing to allow Arab displeasure to be visibly displayed. Because there are no formal diplomatic relations between Syria and Israel, there is no Israeli Embassy in Damascus. Instead, the American Embassy, as a symbol of both Israeli and American policies in the mind of incensed Arabs, served as a target against which to vent frustration. On 4 October 2001, a crowd of approximately

three thousand Palestinian and Syrian students, mostly in their twenties, rioted outside the walls and attacked the American embassy in Syria with large rocks and bricks. Embassy windows were broken, and one Syrian managed to scale the embassy wall and tear down the US flag from the top of the main building before being subdued by the Marine security guards.[3]

Two days later on the first declared "Palestinian Day of Rage," a hostile crowd of several thousand Palestinian young men from Palestinian refugee camps/neighborhoods in Damascus, along with Syrian young men, staged a particularly violent display against American interests. Demonstrators burned Israeli and American flags in the streets of Damascus. In an attempt to reach the embassy, rioters threw Molotov cocktails and bricks at Syrian riot police blocking their route. Policemen in and around the vicinity of the embassy responded to the crowd with tear gas and warning shots fired in the air. Syrian police bloodied scores of protesters as some were dragged away to custody, unconscious. Several Syrian policemen were also injured. For the next few weeks, additional violent demonstrations followed, although Syrian police protected the US Embassy, and rioters were repelled at a greater distance from the building. As a signal to the US Ambassador and to United States diplomats, and as a means for allowing Syrians and Palestinians to vent their aggression, the Syrian government organized more peaceful protests in October 2000 in Damascus. These orchestrated demonstrations in the vicinity of the US embassy sometimes consisted of more than twenty thousand public sector workers, university students, and high school students ordered to march in the streets near the embassy. Demonstrators carried individuals in the air, covered in shrouds and symbolically representing dead Palestinians killed by Israelis in the Occupied Territories.

Demonstrators also carried banners and large pictures of Palestinian children killed during fighting in Israel, and they shouted anti-US and anti-Israeli slogans while they burned American and Israeli flags. On a busy main street in Damascus, a giant poster of a Palestinian boy, Mohammed al-Dura, who was shot to death by Israeli forces while cowering at his father's side in the early stages of the *intifada* in Palestine, hung for weeks in the vicinity of several embassies and along the route to the American embassy. Without doubt, this poster was placed there with the approval of the Syrian government, since nothing appears on Syrian streets without regime approval.

The demonstrations against the US diplomatic mission in Damascus in the fall of 2000, which were either likely approved or ordered by the government--at least the less violent ones--expressed the sentiment of Arab peoples throughout the Middle East. While most Arabs in the Arab world did not go to the extremes exhibited by the rioters in Damascus, the hatred demonstrated and the excitement for striking out at something American was a perfect manifestation of how Arab citizens feel about the US after years of Palestinian suffering.

During the second *intifada*, Arabs have been particularly distraught with what they view as an Israeli hard-line approach to the Palestinians. They see this Israeli approach as directly backed and funded by the United States. They are also angered by America's willingness to prevent the international community from stepping in and stopping the Israeli slaughter of Palestinian citizens, who have been dying at about three times the rate of Israelis. In addition, America's provision of large amounts of military aid and financial aid to Israel, versus much more conservative amounts for the Palestinians, has been a bone of contention with Arabs. Since the fall of 2000, Israel's

employment of sophisticated US-origin military equipment against the lightly armed Palestinians has outraged Arabs. An official with the Kuwait Information Office, Dr. Shafeeq Ghabra, remarks that Arabs "notice that the Israelis are using American-made Apache helicopters and F-16s."[4] An academic at Cairo University vents, "What has it [the United States] done to stop Israeli acts of terror, which the US makes possible through supplies of state-of-the-art military hardware?"[5]

Also frustrating to Arabs is what they view as American obstruction of UN efforts to create an impartial international monitoring force in the occupied territories. Twice in 2001--the latest of which was in mid-December--the US vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for international monitors to be sent to the West Bank and Gaza. The resolution in December 2001 was sponsored by the Arab countries Egypt and Tunisia, and it also called for a cessation of violence between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as the resumption of peace talks between the two sides. A Palestinian UN official called the US action "unreasonable," saying, "We are the little guys. We are the people under occupation, and it is our right and a duty to come to the body responsible for peace and security, to the United Nations."[6] Between May 1990 and mid-December 2001, the US vetoed six Security Council resolutions. All were related to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

The Al-Aqsa *intifada* has also adversely affected America's relations with the Gulf States. In the past few decades, these countries have not placed a large emphasis on the Arab-Israeli conflict as a theme in their relations with the US. This is changing, though. An American expert with great insight into the Gulf is Dr. John Duke Anthony, President and CEO of the National Council on US-Arab Relations. In testimony

delivered on 31 July 2001 before Congress, Anthony noted that the Palestinian issue has tainted US relations with the Gulf States. Before the House of Representatives he stated, "The simmering disappointment of GCC leaders at the way they see Washington as having treated Palestinian issues has accelerated considerably since the onset of the Al-Aqsa *intifada*…They [GCC peoples] admit to a sense of growing pain in their hearts. Neither the elites nor rank-and–file in any of these countries is oblivious to the implications for domestic and regional stability that flow from the prevailing perception that the United States is anything but 'even-handed' or 'honest,' or an 'honest broker,' when it comes to the question of Palestine."[7]

Dr. Anthony's assertion that the Arab-Israeli conflict evokes deep-seated negative sentiment and is now adversely impacting relations with the Gulf countries was confirmed by two senior US officials in December 2001. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Ryan Crocker, a former US ambassador to several Arab states, acknowledged that the current *intifada*, more than any current issue, has a "corroding effect on American interests" throughout the Middle East.[8] During his March 2002 trip to several Arab states, Vice President Dick Cheney found that several Arab states are hesitant to support, at least publicly, US military initiatives aimed at Iraq until progress is made on the Palestinian-Israeli front.

Colonel Bernard Dunn, US Defense Attaché to Saudi Arabia, noted that, since the beginning of the second *intifada*, the Saudis have been upset with America's handling of the Palestinian-Israeli crisis, and this has hampered US-Saudi security cooperation.[9] Perhaps most damning is a January 2002 statement to the US from the Saudi Crown Prince himself: "I don't see the sense of justice and the sense of righteousness ordained

by God Almighty in what is happening in the [Israeli-occupied, Arab] territories. When you look at your own nation [the United States] and how it was founded, the principles were justice, righteousness, equity, and concern for eliminating evil and decadence and corruption…I have great concern about America's credibility and I care about how America is perceived. As friends and as your allies, we are very proud of our relationship with you. In the current environment, we find it very difficult to defend America, and so we keep our silence. Because to be frank with you, how can we defend America?"[10] Comments critical of US foreign policy not only demonstrate the contempt Arab states and Arab peoples hold for US foreign policy, but they may be an ominous signal of things to come in the US-Arab relationship.

Notes

[1] The first *intifada*, or Palestinian uprising, occurred from 1987-1991. It is often credited with forcing the Israelis to the peace table. Regarding the first *intifada*, Dilip Hiro wrote, "Actions by the Israeli security forces--involving firings, curfews, harassment, arrests and house searches and demolitions--severely disrupted Palestinian life. During the first four years of the intifada 1413 Palestinians were killed…The refusal of the Palestinians to call off the *intifada*, convinced the Israeli government of the futility of continued suppression of them and denial of their national identity and the right to self-rule, and paved the way for the Israeli-Palestinian Liberation Organization Accord in September 1993." Dilip Hiro, *Dictionary of the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 123-124.

[2] The *al-Aqsa* Mosque, from where Muslims believe the prophet Mohammed ascended into heaven, is also in the direct vicinity of the Jews' historic Temple Mount site.

[3] Author personally observed riots and demonstrations in Damascus in October 2000.

[4] Dr. Shafeeq N. Ghabra, "Violent Face of Extremism Unveiled*," Gulfwire: Voices from the Region*, 1 November 2001, n.p., on-line, e-mailed to author. *Gulfwire* located at www.arabialink.com/GulfWire.

[5] Mustafa Kamel El-Sayad, "To An American Friend," *Al-Ahram Weekly On-line*, no. 561, 22-28 November 2001, n.p., on-line, Intenet, available from www.//ahram.org.eg/weekly/2001/561/op10.htm.

Notes

[6] "US Vetoes UN Terror Resolution," *USA Today.com, World*, 15 December 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2001/12/15/us-veto.htm.

[7] Dr. John Duke Anthony, "The Impact of the Palestinian Al-Aqsa *Intifada* on US Relations with Key Arab Countries: The GCC Region," testimony delivered to the US House of Representatives – United States Congress, Washington, DC, 31 July 2001.

[8] Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Ryan C. Crocker, United States State Department, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 21 December 2001.

[9] US Defense Attaché to Saudi Arabia (and former US Defense Attaché to Syria) Col Bernard J. Dunn, interviewed by author, Washington, DC, 22 December 2001.

[10] Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz quoted in Elaine Sciolino, "Saudi Affirms US Ties but Says Bush Ignores Palestinians' Cause," *The New York Times on the Web*, 29 January 2001, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/29/international/middleeast/29SAUD.html.

Chapter 5

Conclusions – Implications and Policy Recommendations to Restore American Credibility in the Eyes of Arabs

Out of utter frustration with the United States, in early January 2002, Syria's press stated that the US is too biased to broker Arab-Israeli peace.[1] Whether from states traditionally at odds with US foreign policy in the Middle East, like Syria, or from historic allies like Saudi Arabia, people from across the Arab world charge that American foreign policy is unjust and unfairly balanced in favor of Israel. In fact, Arab perceptions of US policy toward the Arab world--for the reasons presented in this paper--are worse in early 2002 than they have been in decades.

The fact that a large percentage of Arabs hold US policies in contempt is unlikely to change in the near future. Because of differences between American and Arab positions over Iraq and since the US maintains a special, enduring security relationship with Israel, Arab resentment--particularly with regard to America's stance toward the Palestinian issue--will continue. What can change over time is the level of contempt some Arab states and most Arab populations hold for the United States involvement in their corner of the globe. If the US creatively and patiently modifies its diplomatic stance, and if America employs its power beyond mostly military means, the disdain felt by many Arabs for US foreign policy could begin to subside. And if that distrust

subsides in the near to medium term, then America will have more autonomy to manage its interests across the region over the long run.

America currently finds itself somewhat constrained in the Middle East. As an example, due to the Arabs' poor perception of American policies, Vice President Dick Cheney discovered during his March 2002 trip to the Middle East that America will not be able to act with impunity against Saddam Hussein. If the US initiates military action against the Iraqi regime, the US may have to act unilaterally, and Arab states will certainly make fewer bases available for staging US military forces. Unlike during the Gulf crisis in 1990 and 1991 when the United States put together a remarkably united political and military coalition against Iraq, Arab states even mildly open to the idea of attacking Iraq will have a precondition for conventional military action against Saddam. They will demand that America first more even handedly address the Arab-Israeli conflict. While America's dealings with and over Iraq are important for how the US is perceived in the region, the key issue is how the United States plans to handle the problems of Israel/Palestine.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is indeed the seminal issue that will make or break American credibility in the Arab world at this critical juncture amidst escalating violence in the Israeli-occupied territories. As a wise first step, President Bush and the United States have called for the creation of a Palestinian state. On 12 March 2002, the US put forth a Security Council resolution, which was passed 14-0, "affirming a vision" of a Palestinian state and calling for an end to the violence in Israel/Palestine.[2] If the United States is able to pressure the Israelis to return historic Arab territories back to the Arabs, can help broker a solution over how Jerusalem can be equitably ruled or administered,

and address the Palestinian refugee issue, then the US has a chance of improving its image. Like never before, America's reputation as an impartial broker and negotiator is at stake. If that reputation is not improved, the United States will face embittered Arab leaders and furious Arab populations. Anger will likely translate into additional attacks on American interests, even from secular Arabs, a phenomenon not seen since the Palestinian terrorist groups renounced terrorism and halted operations against Americans in the late 1980s.

Besides working to rectify what the Arabs view as the root cause of Arab discontent toward US policies--the Arab-Israeli conflict--there are other initiatives the US must pursue. To further improve America's image in the Arab world, the US should increasingly and more capably employ the various instruments of power in and toward the Middle East, beyond just the obvious military one. The economic, diplomatic, and informational instruments of power all need to be enhanced and greatly expanded.

Increased economic aid, properly accounted for once it foreign hands, must be granted to give the despondent members of struggling Arab societies hope of a better life. Instead of potentially seeing America as a rich, far-away land that is not concerned with the welfare of the world community, American aid must be earmarked for less fortunate members of the international community. Financially assisting countries like Yemen in a serious and substantial way might even help strengthen Arab governments friendly to the United States. Encouraging in this regard is President George W. Bush's 15 March 2002 speech at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, where he promised a $5 billion increase in official US aid over three budget years, to begin in fiscal year 2004.[3]

While it is debatable if this amount will make a significant difference, the message sent to the Middle East and other developing countries is important.

Beyond trying to negotiate a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, American diplomatic efforts must also be expanded and improved at the informal person-to-person level. The State Department is grossly under-funded when it comes to entertainment funds and budgets. Because reimbursable representational funds are extremely tight for mid-level diplomats sent abroad--perhaps a US State Department diplomat can afford to host a few dinners or two decent functions in his home each year--American diplomats do not have the chance to properly mix in highly social Middle Eastern societies. While opportunities are limitless to spend time with Arabs since they genuinely gregarious and social people, the unwritten rule in upper class Arab society is that you must invite to be invited. In other words, if an American diplomat does not have proper funds to host dinners and functions, and also the inclination to spend extensive time with Arabs in a social setting, then that American will not be consistently invited by Arabs.

Real rapport between American diplomats and Arab foreign nationals, which will help dismantle distrust over time, is not built by official handshakes in front of television cameras. It is built by spending countless late nights together talking, eating Arabic food, and drinking coffee or tea. What might seem to Americans like idle talk and wasted time engaging in informalities builds genuine bridges between Arabs and Americans seeking to help Arabs better understand the constraints and nuances of US foreign policy. Additionally, strong relationships built today between mid-level US diplomats and Arab officials in the Middle East will be the cornerstones of future American-Middle East relations.

Closely tied to diplomacy, and directly related to proactively shaping Arab perceptions of US foreign policy, is the informational instrument of power. American music, movies, and popular culture are popular with Arabs, but the United States has done a rather poor job of explaining and promoting our public position to the Arab world. Since the end of the Cold War, government sponsored media programs, like the Voice of America radio network, have been drastically scaled back. Whether one labels such programs as propaganda, or calls them public awareness, there is currently no concerted or broad effort to explain to the Arabs American foreign policy in a media format that appeals to them.

In today's aggressive multi-media market, the US government needs to project a positive message on television, on the Internet, and on radio, detailing US goals and explaining US perspectives. America must end the somewhat arrogant line of reasoning that the world will "come to us," and we must now "go to them" if we hope to portray our policies in a more favorable light. While the Department of Defense might have been wise to shut down the controversial Office of Strategic Influence over allegations that it would spread misinformation, the US government--principally the State Department and Defense Department--desperately need an honest public relations campaign targeting Arab governments and particularly Arab people.

Perception matters as much as reality in terms of how American foreign policy is received around the globe, and perception is particularly critical now in the Arab world. While the Arab-Israeli conflict rages on and as long as America contends that Saddam Hussein must go, nothing short of America's credibility is at stake as the United States maneuvers to achieve its strategic objectives in the volatile Middle East.

Notes

[1] "Syria Says US is too Biased to Broker Peace," *Reuters* Press Service, 4 January 2002, available through America Online.

[2] "Text of UN Security Council Resolution on Mideast," *Reuters* Press Service, 13 March 2002, available through America Online.

[3] Andrzej Zwaniecki, "President Bush Committed to Development, State's Larson Says," *Washington File, US Department of State International Information Programs*, 18 March 2002, n.p., on-line, Internet, available from www.uninfo.state.gov/cgi-bin/washfile/display.pl?p=/products/washfile/la…/newsitem.shtm 3/18/02.

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