

# Americans more confused than changing

**A**MERICANS are wondering these days just what is going on in the Mid-east. But this shouldn't be mistaken, at least not yet, for a huge and determined movement to change traditional American policies in the region as too many analysts seem to be suggesting.

Rather, there's simply a great deal of confusion and uncertainty. And just as has happened many times in the past new public relations strategies by the Israelis and their friends, and by the Arabs and their friends, will largely determine in coming months just how this situation will play itself out eventually in the political arena.

It's no wonder, of course, why average Americans are bewildered.

From the limited and sheltered American vantage point, a "deranged" Israeli massacres Palestinians in a small community near Tel Aviv, and the Arab world erupts in an uncalled for torrent of criticism against the US.

The next day, in Amman, Jordan, thousands of demonstrators head towards the US embassy. Then the Arab press explodes with anti-American sentiments.

Palestinian leaders in the occupied Jerusalem go on a hunger strike and state: "The American administration, which speaks morning and evening about human rights everywhere around the world but disregards the rights of the Palestinian human being, must share a large portion of the responsibility for the deterioration of conditions in the occupied Palestinian lands as a result of continuing its one-sided support of Israel economically, politically and diplomatically."

And the head of the Jerusalem Press Service in another statement declares: "We hold the US partially responsible for the massacre. The US cannot behave like an ostrich — provide arms, funds, political support, and other forms of assistance to Israel and claim that it is not responsible for Israeli behaviour."

Blaming the US is something Americans have heard before, of course. Over the past few decades the public here has gotten used to frustrating airport security procedures; new security blockades near the Congress and White House; growing fear of overseas travel; and periodic anti-American spasms from Islamabad to Beirut to occupied Jerusalem and other Arab capitals.

But at the same time, there are two other crucial factors that must be appreciated in order to understand the American Weltanschauung if you will.

First, the average American is extremely removed from these Mid-east events, as well as from the reporting of these events. Images get through, especially now that there is the Cable News Net-

work (CNN); but the details, and especially the weak and usually misleading analysis, rarely penetrate the average American's consciousness.

Secondly, the US government is constantly sweet-talking its citizens, constantly reinforcing the mistaken image that we Americans truly do stand for peace, human rights, and democracy while "they" are radicals, crazies, and fanatics. Americans are constantly bombarded with official statements about the "peace process" for which we stand; while those who are against us are terrorists and lunatics, only interested in violence.

Few Americans ever take the time, or have the time or the resources, to reflect

Palestinians over just the past ten years is very revealing and goes a long way to explain contemporary developments.

- Israel bombed Iraq in 1981. The US protested but increased aid to Israel and signed an agreement for "strategic co-operation" and pre-positioning of American military supplies in Israel.

- "Strategic co-operation" in hand, the next year Israel invaded Lebanon and besieged Beirut. The US protested in public, but behind-the-scenes had encouraged Israel's attempt to "restructure" Lebanon and then even sent American forces to try to help. Result: tens of thousands of Palestinians killed, wounded, became homeless.

**During this past decade Israel attacked Tunis twice, the first time attempting to assassinate Arafat (left) and the second time assassinating his deputy, Abu Jihad (right). The US protested; and increased aid to Israel.**



Arafat



Abu Jihad

on this situation. And the establishment press rarely provides either the historical awareness or sufficient analysis that would make it possible for Americans to understand why all this has taken place as it is. Hence, confusion itself remains the predominant emotion here rather than any mass movement for policy changes.

And consequently any public relations campaign designed to interact with this situation, to "exploit" this situation if you will, needs to repeatedly drive home a number of points:

First, that there are good reasons for anti-American sentiments these days in the Mid-east.

Second, that the historical record of American actions is in considerable opposition to American words.

And third, that America's own professed values, as well as self-interests, necessitate a major change in US policies.

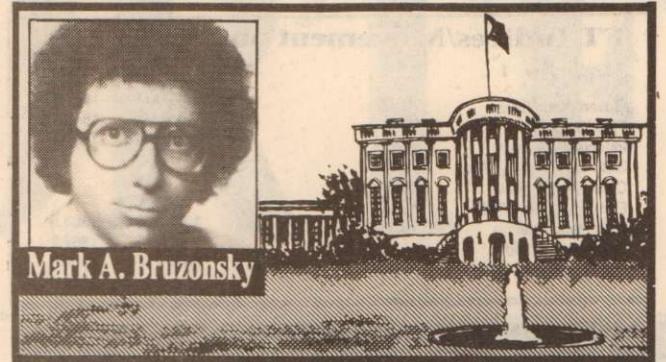
Even a rather cursory review of American policies regarding Israel and the

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- During these years the Jonathan Pollard spy scandal caught Israel red-handed and Israeli complicity (possibly instigation) of the Irangate and Contragate scandals were partially uncovered. The US criticised Israel; but further increased aid and support.

- Two years ago, Yasser Arafat complied with long-standing American demands to recognise Israel and be willing to negotiate with Israel. The US responded with ponderous and unproductive public talks in Tunis, violated international law refusing to allow Arafat to come to the UN and then did another behind-the-scenes deal with Israel leading to Shamir's alternate "peace plan" — a plan now widely understood around the world to be a ruse.
- During the Palestinian Intifada wide-

## From



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spread violations of human rights — even resulting in war-crimes according to respected Israelis — have become even more systematic and widespread than before. The US has occasionally engaged in a kind of diplomatic wrist-slapping; but aid to Israel has been increased

- Earlier this year Israeli settlers took over a major Christian building near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the occupied Jerusalem and the Israeli Finance Ministry had supplied most of the money. The US protested, but more aid to Israel is about to be approved.

- Just in the past few weeks the Israeli Knesset has allocated another \$20 million for more settlements in the occupied territories. The US continually says such steps "harm the peace process" but prepares to further increase American assistance to Israel.

- The Israeli government says it is outraged by the recent massacre of Palestinians but purposely creates the very atmosphere of murder and torture that has been well-documented now by many human rights organisations including Amnesty International. The State Department expresses its regret, but no new American policies are detectable.

If this American track-record were put before the American people in a thoughtful and repeated manner Americans might well finally be able to understand why they are sometimes treated as the enemy rather than as the champion of the "peace process."

Furthermore, to clarify matters even further Americans constantly need to be asked some clear and pointed questions:

If you Americans truly are concerned with human rights, how come you continue to make possible bankrolling Israeli policies with your huge amounts of aid and how come you tolerate your greatest aid recipient also being among the greatest violator of human rights?

If you Americans are truly in favour of democracy how come you continue to support with your guns and dollars Israel's 23-year-old occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem and policies that are dispossessing the Palestinians of their lands and homes?

If you Americans are so much in favour of peace, how come you continue to support Israel's complete refusal to even negotiate with the PLO behind the subterfuge that Palestinians are terrorists and Israelis are victims?

Without a carefully crafted public relations campaign to metamorphosise American public confusion into loud demands for changes in Washington's policies, this fluid time in worldwide political relationships is likely to pass without any serious changes in American-Israeli-Arab relations.