

# SADDAM PLAYED IN ISRAELI HANDS

**BRUZONSKY:** And why do you think that the geo-strategic reasons are that Iraq had to be destroyed; and wasn't it really America and Israel together that decided this?

**PELED:** Well, of course Israel wanted it very much; and Israel even wanted to participate in it. The great frustration in Israel is that we weren't allowed to participate in Iraq's destruction.

**B:** Saddam's mistake wasn't just invading Kuwait. He tried to change the rules of the game...the price of oil, the control of oil, the flow of money to banks....

**P:** Right, and this was his big mistake, and he was severely punished for that. A month-long air bombardment...had absolutely no military justification. Militarily it was unnecessary. But it was a way to punish someone who transgressed things as set up by the boss.

**B:** It's sort of like we showed the Latins with Allende what happens when you cross the US; we showed this also with Ortega; we isolated Fidel (Castro); and now we've shown the Arabs that no one better try to change the rules of the American empire.

**P:** And knowingly the American air force demolished all the industry, all the utilities...which had absolutely nothing to do with military efficiency and military capabilities. Ninety percent of the work-force today is unemployed because they don't have any place to work.

**B:** So why didn't Saddam, at least by January, see this coming; and did he really calculate to the very end that...

**P:** I personally think that he's a man with very limited intellectual capabilities.

**B:** Do you think the Americans purposefully mislead him; do you think he was tricked into Kuwait in the first place?

**P:** Maybe.... But you see the crisis developed over two years. And during those two years between August 1988 and August 1990 the American policy was really that of the famous three monkeys: they heard nothing, they saw nothing, they said nothing. And they knew that the conflict was developing because Iraq ended the (eight-year) war with a tremendous debt....

**B:** But somehow I see the hand of Israel manipulating the American involvement....

**P:** No doubt. No doubt. Israel wanted the United States to demolish Iraq, to eliminate Iraq. And now the bit difference between Israel and the United States is that the United States realised at the last moment that to

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## Washington

eliminate Iraq is too dangerous for the entire region and is too dangerous for the interests of the United States. The United States wanted the systems that came about since World War I to remain; Israel wanted to eliminate Iraq.

**B:** Also for Israel if people start discussing other problems in the region, if there are more problems of many kinds, then the Palestinian problem becomes just another issue, not THE central issue.

**P:** I think that if it were up to Israel it would create a Kurdish state and thereby cut slices from Iran and Turkey and Iraq. But of course this is far-fetched and nobody will believe that is possible. But anyway all these troubles...are certainly in Israel's interest. And therefore Israel pushed all the time in that direction.

**B:** And Israel's influence in Washington is extreme.

**P:** Maybe. But still I think that the Americans take decisions on their own and they knew what they were doing and they knew that Iraq had set a very dangerous agenda and they set out to punish it and they punished.

Militarily, of course, the whole operation was a farce, a joke. First of all they built up the image of the Iraqi army as invincible and then they compared (General Norman) Schwarzkopf to Hannibal because he managed to defeat an army which we all saw fighting for eight years and everybody knew that it was a poorly-trained and a poorly led army. Fighting eight years with Iran was a disgrace to that army. And then all of a sudden we started hearing that it was an invincible army and the Republican Guards... goodness, what did they do with the Republican Guards! Until the moment when the Republican Guards kneeled at the feet of the American soldiers and then the

As the first part of this discussion published on this page last Wednesday has already made quite clear, Mattiyahu "Matti" Peled is a very interesting and credible political analyst. From an army career in which he rose to serve as a general on the Israeli army general staff during the 1967 War and then to be the first military governor of the Gaza Strip, at mid-life Peled turned to Arabic literature and politics. Peled still teaches at Tel Aviv University. But it is his political evolution - in and out of the Knesset advocating a Palestinian State, championing the PLO, and leading the formation of Israel's first Jewish-Arab party -- for which he is best known. This is the second part of a lengthy conversation that recently took place at Jerusalem's Notre Dame Hotel. Here Peled gives his views about the recent conflict with Iraq.

reality was revealed....

**B:** Did the Israelis also manipulate the issue of gas warfare? Were Israeli leaders really glad about needing the gas masks?

**P:** Oh yes. The whole (Israeli) decision to distribute the gas masks was a political decision that had absolutely no justification in reality. We knew, and they knew, that Iraq did not have a chemical warhead for the Scud missiles. They knew. Of course they knew.

**B:** For sure?

**P:** Absolutely for sure.

**B:** How are you so sure of that?

**P:** The Iraqis had chemical warheads for the Frog missiles which go about 30 or 40 kilometres. The Scud is an entirely different situation and it goes up hundred kilometres.

**B:** But how are you, out of office and out of the military, so sure that the Americans and the Israelis knew that the Iraqis have any chemical warheads?

**P:** First of all you can't have such a weapon without testing it. And you cannot test such a weapon secretly; you have to test it in the open for everybody to see. No one today can test ballistic missiles secretly. And there was no record of any test of this nature. Secondly, particularly after all the experts left Iraq and they were questioned by various governments, no one said that he was employed on developing a chemical warhead for the Scuds.

**B:** So it was all a public relations gimmick.

**P:** Right...

**B:** ...to scare the American public and to propagandise the Israeli public. Did you put on a gas mask?

**P:** Well, I had a gas mask to home. My theory was that in the first place there was no chance that a Scud would be sent at Jerusalem because it might hit Al-Aqsa by chance and I was sure that Saddam Hussein wouldn't take that risk. And secondly I said that you first have to hear the boom and then to put.

**B:** Yes, the Israeli authorities could have easily said to everyone just to have their gas masks ready but since nothing has ever been used we will instruct you by radio....

**P:** But they preferred, it was so much more effective to say, put on the mask and wait for the order to take it off.

**B:** And were there discussions in the Israeli press that this was all being done for public relations.

**P:** I think I was the only one in an interview in *Hadashot* that it was all a bluff, that there was absolutely no substance in it, and the people read me and I got reactions that I was very bold to say this.

### TOMORROW

In the concluding part of the extended discussion Peled talks about the Jewish lobby in Washington and the predicament of the Palestinians