

There is a mistaken notion in the political air, one propagated by those who have a self-interest to do so, that the current American-arranged, American-inspired, and American-led 'peace talks' between Israel, the Palestinians, and many of the Arab countries are both good for the Palestinians and good for peace

- Not only is this wishful thinking, it is mostly illusory thinking.
- Not only is this notion an illusion, it represents an analysis failure of considerable proportions.
- Not only is this notion misguided, it is also deceptive and dangerous.

From



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TROJAN NEGOTIATIONS

The basic realities of the situation are more along the following lines:

The US

WITH the Intifada still not crushed, and in the wake of the war with Iraq and what naturally followed -- all the hoopla about international law and order, Security Council resolutions, and the coming of the "New World Order" -- the Bush administration felt it had to do something at least to change its image, buy more time, and get it through the 1992 election.

Since that something when it came to Israel and the Palestinians could not be -- as far as the Americans were concerned -- to enforce international law, to apply Security Council resolutions, or to breath serious life into the rhetoric of the "New World Order", something else was needed to defuse growing pressures and gain more political time.

Additionally, the Americans have another important and increasingly "strategic" concern that has been creeping up on them for some years now as U.S. "interests" in the Mid-eastern region -- primarily economic of course except for the domestic political necessity to remain supportive of Israel -- expand. This pervasive new concern is to keep increasingly threatened friendly Arab regimes not only in place but in a position to politically defend themselves against those who claim the US should be pushed out of its central position in the region.

And so all of these factors -- combined and substantially magnified after the unprecedented American military intervention in Arab affairs -- made it necessary for the Bush administration to give the impression of really doing something while actually sticking pretty much to the same policies of old. After all, as Professor Noam Chomsky, an astute independent analyst of American foreign policies, likes to put it: "The New World Order is pretty much the Old World Order redressed in new rhetoric".

George Bush and entourage, of course, have become master political rhetoricians constantly proclaiming that their old, stale, bankrupt and unproductive policies are really new, vibrant, innovative, courageous policies. Yet just look at the American economy after a decade of Reagan-Bush efforts -- just look at the American banking system, American healthcare, American psyche. The underpinnings of

American Mid-eastern policies these days may in reality be no more solid.

Palestinian establishment

AS for the Palestinians, as well as many of the Arab states, there are other basic considerations.

Impotent politically, militarily, and for a while cut off from financial handouts they'd come to rely upon, the Palestinian leadership --aristocratic in the occupied territories and increasingly bourgeois on the outside -- has been led from one diplomatic cul-de-sac to another in recent years.

Fearful of the growth in popular support for anti-Fatah political elements in the West Bank, and especially in Gaza; and lulled into sloppy thinking by the sweet-talking American Secretary of State James Baker; the Palestinian leaders found themselves isolated and trapped with only bad choices. Just as the Palestinians have lost every military encounter and been forced from one capital to another; so they have as well been routed in every diplomatic encounter finding themselves deceived and manipulated from one dead-end to another.

The Palestinians ended up in Madrid, and now in Washington, because they and their Arab partners were never able to sustain a diplomatic offensive of their own but have instead had to defend themselves from diplomatic offensives from the other side. In the end, to further defy the American need for talks would have risked not only further alienating the US but the partially renewed largesse of America's regional surrogates as well.

Consequently the Palestinian aristocrats -- usually from the same class and often from the same leading families as the generations before that were unable to stand up to Western and Israeli designs -- decided that the best of all the miserable choices was to play the American game and hope for the best. True, it's a game they've always lost before. True as well that they have a lot of people trying to persuade them, erroneously of course, that they've come of age diplomatically and should welcome the rematch.

This is basically how, in the aftermath of the Iraqi war, the Palestinians ended up working in tandem for many months with the Americans and their regional allies to find some kind of face-saving formula that would make it possible for the Americans to hide

behind the current round of Trojan peace talks. To make Madrid possible one rationalisation after another was finally accepted -- even though in the end the Palestinians were still treated like lepers, forced to get in the back of the bus and to stand hoping for any handouts.

Since then, of course, the Americans, the Israelis, and others as well, have all used the "talks" as a mechanism to claim progress and legitimacy. The Palestinians, once got onto the bus, have in a sense trapped themselves -- for the American bus driver has no intention of giving them a chance to get off and any attempt to jump off at high-speed could be even more suicidal than staying on board. Furthermore, in view of the general Arab position, it seems many Palestinians decided they really had no choice but to play the "only game in town". Yet, of course, the very reason that this is the "only game in town" is because even now -- nearly a century after encountering the West and the beginning of "The Arab Awakening" (recall George Antonius) -- Arab leaders still continue to respond rather than initiate.

The Arabs

IT's becoming more and more difficult to use the term "The Arabs" any longer. In the midst of a variety of basic class, financial, and political schisms within their own fold; the West, with Israel as an appendage, has succeeded brilliantly in dividing and co-opting.

Overall the Arab establishment has increasingly turned to Washington for the kinds of relationships. Chomsky rightly calls this "The Arab facade", and the overall strategy goes way back to the period of British domination of the region.

Especially in the wake of American intervention against Iraq, maintaining "the Arab facade" has increasingly required a more "giving" attitude by the Arab establishment towards American concerns that the situation with Israel be defused, even if it can't be resolved. In short that's how the recent road of public negotiations through Madrid, Washington and Moscow has been paved.

Yet the actual American policy is more one of imagery than substance. In a sense the Americans are borrowing against the future again, this time to gain time possibly in hopes that something new and unforeseen will come

along to resolve the dangerous stalemate. Just as in the Reagan-Bush years the overall economic policy as been one of deficit borrowing and hoping that things will be better in the future, so too when it comes to Israel-Arab relations. While the underlying causes of the conflict have remained largely untreated, the Americans have pursued one policy after another to put things off, to avoid making basic decisions -- all at the expense that the roots of future conflict are being buried more deeply than ever.

Politics, people like to repeat in this town, is the art of the possible rather than the desirable, the just or the wise. In that sense, one can have a bit of sympathy and understanding of the Reagan and Bush administrations in dealing with the Israeli-Arab conflict.

But politics as it is increasingly practised in Washington has also become the art of delaying decisions as long as possible, pushing off basic problems into the future in order to get through one's term as unbloodied as possible. Be it in economic matters or political ones, the Bush administration has mastered this form of politic chicanery and is leaving a legacy of financial and political deficits for which future leaders, and future generations, may have to pay dearly.

Whatever the future holds, the current Trojan peace negotiations about to resume in the corridors of the State Department should be clearly understood at this point as being far more for the benefit of both the US and Israel than anyone else.

While the US empire continues its imperialistic ways in the region -- a classic combination of divide-and-rule and economic hegemony -- at the same time it presents itself around the world, and more crucially here at home in an election year, as "peacemaker". Now without any opposing superpower -- while Europe simply awaits a future chance to regain its own leverage in the region -- the Americans use kind-hearted rhetoric as a mask for brutally repressive policies.

And while Israel rushes forward to finalise its hold on all the occupied lands -- with ever more amounts of money and arms from the US -- the stalemated negotiations give it just the kind of cover it needs while allowing the Americans to say one thing to one side, something else to the other.