

LOOKING AHEAD A BIT PART II

THE run-up to Madrid took nearly eight months spurred on by Washington's urgent need to refocus attention away from the destruction of Iraq, a desire to capitalise on the ascendancy and assertiveness of forces with greater willingness to openly accommodate US interests, as well as the eclipse of the Soviet Union's independent role in the area.

The Baker shuttle became a process that required, in order for its outcome to take the form it has, the destruction or neutralisation of potentially opposing Arab power — which has meant, in addition to Iraq, ongoing attempts to undermine, frustrate, and demoralise both the nationalist and religious trends in the region.

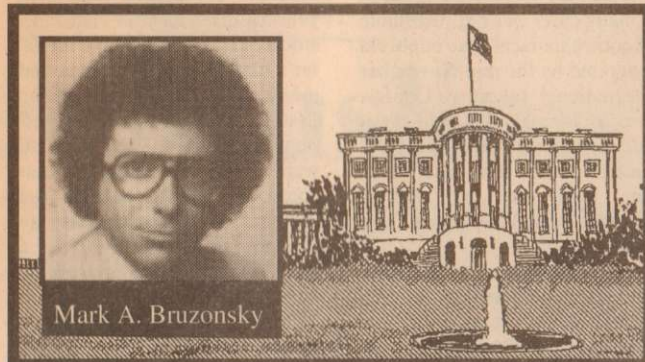
Moreover, of course, all other developments have been accompanied and magnified by the collapse of the alternate superpower that had at least partially balanced American and in some ways Israeli domination of the entire region. Furthermore, Moscow's fate, of course, has allowed for its cooperation — first in regard to the war against Iraq and then in regard to Madrid.

Apparently, what the champions of Arabdom want to be able to count on is an American-inspired peace process which even if unsuccessful will give the impression that Washington is not an enemy of the Arab World. It has become vitally important that at least the perception that the US is primarily Israel's ally and not to be trusted by the Arabs is minimised if not abandoned.

Here of course is where the Baker shuttle, all the talk of "peace process", the Madrid extravaganza, the \$10 billion loan guarantee tension, and all the squabbling with Israel come in. True enough, Washington may still be doing Israel's basic bidding when it comes to strategic alliance, Soviet emigration, non-UN peace process, etc. But after so many years of such excessive American coziness with Israel at least these new developments are designed to kind of take the edge off and create a much more "even-handed" impression.

The Bush administration has convinced the Arabs involved in one or another in the talks that they have no other good choice,

From



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Washington

ON TO
WASHINGTON

This then is the overall framework within which today's diplomatic events are taking place.

And yet, the going is very tough and increasingly complex for Washington; with long-term victory in maintaining the regional status quo definitely not assured at this point.

All of the key parties still have great hesitations and fears. And increasingly they all turn to Washington for reassurances that in their nature have become more and more contradictory.

Since the Madrid spectacle a few weeks ago, just agreeing on a site for continuation of the talks has absorbed another precious month of time and diplomatic energy. Yet while the press applauds, so far very little beyond procedural matters has been accomplished. True, the US has succeeded in positioning the parties for a potential American push forward, but even this positioning is insecure and the push itself is not likely to succeed, even if it does come — which is highly doubtful.

Many believe they can see Camp David II on the political horizon; but even if so it is a ho-

but rather an American-sponsored affair that everyone else is acquiescing in; each with their own calculations of outcome and benefits.

Of course, acquiescence in following America's lead doesn't necessarily mean agreement to the outcome the US may be pursuing. There are important forces who while smiling in public are under the table acting in ways to frustrate American goals. The Palestinian establishment most especially is being pulled in competing directions, and these tensions will almost surely grow more severe as the weeks and months go by and no progress on the key issues becomes evident.

Additionally it has become transparently obvious that the Soviets are simply going along with the whole charade first to encourage American largess, second to enhance the dwindling role of their own central government and Mikhail Gorbachev himself, and third with hopes of enhancing their own involvement with the Gulf regimes. The Soviet central government has little more to lose at this point

and disinformation that could be used to blackmail or at a minimum deeply embarrass the Bush administration that it remains unlikely the US will ever seriously attempt to impose a settlement on the Israelis even should the White House alter decades of US policy and decide it wants to.

Moreover, should the Israelis and the Americans think they will eventually be able to push the Palestinians into a corner — a la what was done to Anwar Sadat — those elements within Palestinian circles willing to legitimise the apartheid-Bantustan arrangement available to them lack the legitimacy to either declare such a deal or hold it together.

Rather, what is most likely ahead is another of many temporary arrangements all of which in the past have worked to Israel's benefit. The history of Israeli diplomatic dealings — similar to its military undertakings — is to await a historic moment of opportunity and then pounce. And so, in the end as was the case at Camp David, if any deal is struck the Israelis are likely to

As election year approaches in the US, even though there are those from the far-Right in Bush's own Republican Party who may knock Israel a bit and push the "America first" line during coming months, the main opposition Democrats have already clearly signalled their intent to challenge Bush from the other direction, for not being sufficiently supportive of Israel

initiative was imperative for everyone involved. The fear that without such steps the forces of nationalism and confrontation might get out of hand remains considerable, though not often publicly discussed.

And yet, looking ahead just a bit, today's bubble of hope and diplomatic mirrors may not last nearly as long as the major players seem to believe.

The American president himself has just experienced a rapid reversal of political fortunes of major proportions; and he is having to back off more and more on foreign matters. Just a few weeks ago, indeed as Madrid opened, Bush was practically planning his second inaugural expecting an easy campaign. Today Bush is running for his political life; and even if he survives awareness of the frailties of his political popularity will remain.

Looking ahead just a bit, the realities of American political life during a presidential campaign period will probably act to further burst today's bubble of hope, whether it is considered real or illusory.

can play the electoral card putting everything on hold again for nearly a year and then emerging with a renewed mandate of its own that will be very difficult to overcome.

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And so, if one steps back a bit and takes a good look ahead the basic realities of the Arab-Israeli stalemate can be seen in a not very optimistic form even through all the obscuring diplomatic smoke.

The Arab states in need of the US for protection, are too internally weak and have no institutionalised stomach for really taking on Israel either militarily or economically. Of course this overall formulation just happens to be the course of action preferred by the Americans.

NURAY BAMANIE

Special to Saudi Gazette

AGONY OF
CHINESE
MUSLIMS

THE Chinese proudly declare that their observance of the Orthodox Marxist-Leninist ideology had maintained stability and security for Chinese and non-Chinese alike since the communist takeover in 1949. In reality China used effective propaganda in giving cultural and religious liberties for its Muslim minority while in reality this Muslim minority of Sinkiang had suffered repression and vigorous control by enforcing party line on this Muslim minority.

Sinkiang, a huge autonomous region in the northwest jutting to the Soviet border, comprising one-sixth of the Chinese territory has about 13 different cultural and ethnic groups of which the Uighurs and the Kazakh are the main ones. Today these people are facing severe repressive measures from Chinese authorities so that they do not get influenced by their independence-seeking brethren across the border in the Soviet Union.

The Muslim region of Sinkiang has been known as the East Turkestan Republic before the Chinese communist takeover in September 1949. This proud province had liberated itself from the Japanese during World War II. As soon as the Chinese took over the province, they divided it into small autonomous regions and put Chinese puppet leader Saifuddin to control this region.

During Saifuddin's era, the Chinese began to purge the Uighurs and the Kazakhs in 1951. Today the Chinese are carrying out similar purges of about 25,000 "professional religious personnel" who are regarded as deviating from the true path of the party and threatening the unity of the nationalities. Schools are accused of propagating nationalist sentiments and people loyal to Chinese interpretation of religion have been put in their place.

The recent purges show a history of intolerance towards other minorities which are not Chinese and do not follow communism. To Marx and Lenin religion was the "opium" of the people which kept them behind. The Chinese still follow this line today in stressing that socialism must be enforced at all levels for the sake of progress. Unlike the Soviets who realised the fallacy of Marxism-Leninism in inhibiting the natural religious and cultural beliefs of peoples, the Chinese are vigorously turning the clock backward by stressing the inevitability of socialism as a "scientific evolution".

China is still thinking today in terms of being a power which proved to be a disaster for the Soviet

in their own self-interest, but to cooperate with American diplomatic attempts to at least defuse, if not resolve, the conflict with Israel, and to do so far more on Israeli than on Arab terms.

Within this geopolitical context lie the threads that link all these overall regional developments with today's diplomatic "peace process".

The Arab establishment is being urged by Washington to accept some kind of deal with Israel that will let the US square the circle of being the best friend and protector to both Israel and the Arab establishment at the same time. This is the necessary next step, so everyone is being told, so that the US can truly stabilise the region and maintain the status quo.

The overall situation today is, as Noam Chomsky has put it in a recent C-Span televised lecture, one in which the old "British facade" of the Arab region has been further enhanced and legitimised in a variety of new ways — including through the structures of the Arab League and the crippled UN.

The great irony of this overall situation is that the US has succeeded in creating these kinds of regional and international arrangements even while Washington affairs are still largely dominated by pro-Israeli institutions and outlooks.

Furthermore, the relative success of the Bush administration to date is that it has managed to bring about this overall Pax Americana situation while pushing the UN aside from Arab-Israeli affairs yet at the same time still managing to invoke UN approval whenever a cloak of international legitimacy has been desirable.

rizon obscured by smoke and clouds with a growing likelihood of political storms with unforeseeable consequences.

For the US, facing so many competing pressures and interests, some kind of new political accommodation between the regional players, including Israel, is becoming increasingly desirable — even one temporary in nature, even one achieved over the protests of nationalists, intellectuals, and religionists, all of whose influence has to be continually held in check.

Almost for sure, the talks begun in Madrid will continue in some form or another for the foreseeable future. This has now become necessary for American credibility both abroad and at home — and all the more so during an election year.

Furthermore, there does linger in the overall political atmosphere a kind of Camp David psychology that suggests to Washington that if the parties can just be kept talking sooner or later some kind of agreement will emerge and that whatever the agreement is it can be hyped and promoted as a historic accomplishment that made possible the new world order.

Yet the underlying realities of the post-Madrid situation are actually quite different than the ways these matters are discussed daily in the mainstream press which has become increasingly dominated by a combination of pro-Israeli institutions in the US and Arab-financed publications overseas.

And it is these deeper, often-obscured, realities that make looking ahead a bit both so difficult and potentially so ominous.

Actually, there really is no international conference at all —

and much in material and diplomatic terms to gain.

Nevertheless not only have the Soviets been eclipsed; but even more so; so have the Europeans and the UN. And this is a state of affairs it is doubtful the stretched American empire can maintain indefinitely — all the more so as the weeks and months pass and there is little tangible for Washington to point to.

The US is attempting through the concept of regional talks — the third part of the American diplomatic blitz — to make a place for the others and to give the impression that all are involved. But in the long run this is unlikely to work so long as the US cannot deliver the long-discussed "comprehensive settlement", including some kind of acceptable solution to the Palestinian nationalist question.

But such an achievement is not likely. The balance of power in the region and the hierarchy of optional aims being pursued by American diplomacy rule out such a clear-cut turn of events.

The basic reality — taking into consideration actual Israeli policies and accompanying political realities in the US, whatever the actual desires of President George Bush — is that there should be no serious expectations at this time of a true settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For one thing the Israelis have all kinds of fall-backs positions and delaying tactics still available to them before they would even consider allowing a true Palestinian state or any process that might lead to that result.

Additionally, it is likely the Israelis continue to keep on ice such a variety of information

true enough the argument will be continually made that Bush will do what has to be done once he wins his second term; but those who hold onto such visions are more dreamers than realists. The overall imbalance of forces between Israel and the Arabs — not just militarily but also in terms of covert capabilities and the ability to manipulate the vital American press — remains considerable. Israeli political generals continue to outrank and outfight their Arab equivalents, even while Yitzhak Shamir acts and speaks in ways that unnecessarily drain Israel's still huge reservoirs of support.

For the Israelis know very well that both the Arabs and the Americans desperately need some kind of new arrangement they can tout as a grand political success; that both the Americans and the Arab establishment need some kind of a new cosmetic regional security arrangement even more than the Israelis do.

Meanwhile the Israeli establishment, even with the ongoing hammering of the public opinion, buttressed with Western money and political cover is determined to continue moving forward towards the final dis-possession of the Palestinian people and towards the further entrenchment of Israeli power on behalf of themselves as well as American interests in the area.

Palestinian intellectuals such as Muhammad Hallaj warn that success with this goal will mean the collapse of the two-state option and a return of the struggle to a zero-sum-game — Zionism against Palestinian nationalism for many years to come.

But the credibility of such a threat is highly questionable as more and more structures within the Arab World show their desire for some kind of defusing accommodation with Israeli and some kind of consolidation of American power in the region.

To sum up, in the aftermath of the massive American military intervention and destruction in the heart of the Arab, some kind of diplomatic process was inevitable, some kind of diplomatic

policy. It's not a very profound strategy, nor one that many independent analysts think is likely to work in the long run. But it is a way of going forward in the short run; it is a way of approaching the situation that does keep hope alive; and it is a way of handling things that does further ingratiate Arabs to the Americans, and that does offer some opportunities to embarrass the Israelis.

As for the real aims of Washington these days, it should be more and more clear that getting talks going has been the big aim in itself for the Americans; for they really have no clear idea just how a genuine and stable peace can be achieved between America's competing allies in the Mid-east.

For at the heart of all of today's diplomacy is the simple reality that America is increasingly being pulled in competing directions by long-time ally Israel, with its powerful lobby in Washington, and long-time Arab allies now out of the closet after the American intervention against Iraq. After all, it was an intervention conceived and manipulated on behalf of Israel.

As the diplomatic process continues ahead lie political storms that will require the diplomatic equivalent of finding more and more fingers to stick in more and more holes in the political dike the West has been building for generations to protect "its" resources, client-regimes, and strategic interests in the region.

But the likelihood of major leaks developing in this construct seems considerable; especially without actual progress on the substance, rather than just on the procedures, of the Israeli-Palestinian quagmire.

power which proved to be a disaster for the Soviet Union. The communist Soviet Union had extended itself so much and alienated more people that the outcome was the current separatism from the empire. By alienating people for decades, the peoples' frustrations reached their maximum. The prohibition of peoples' religious, cultural, and territorial rights could never be erased from their minds. So, the Chinese are going to reap more hatred.

The Chinese Muslims today have not been permitted to develop consciously as their counterparts in the Soviet Union. The Chinese have been more vigorous in their control of this minority through education, economy and cultural programmes all organised by the Communist Party. Clamp-downs and purges by the police ensured that they never call for nationalism or demand independence.

As a result all measures have been used to discourage the feeling of national separatism and to prevent minority groups from becoming centres of opposition. Thus the recent round-ups and purges indicate Chinese quickness of action before the situation gets out of hand.

As Marxism-Leninism has been discredited in the Soviet Union where it was first put to practice, the Chinese are holding on to it even more strongly. The communist ideology only led to misery, division of people, loss of independence in their affairs and a loss of self-identity.

With the Soviet Union cleaning up its image by giving freedoms, China needs to realise that tolerance, and freedoms lead to stability and security that any nation longs for.

The Muslim national minority of China is ethnically, culturally and religiously different from the Chinese but who want to be represented equally as the Chinese and to rule their territory because they are a people with similar aspirations for land and dignity.

If China goes on treating its minorities considering the ethnic Chinese superior people who know what is the best for everybody, it would lose the Muslims as allies in time of need. By recognising the needs of the Muslims and treating them as equal, China can remove the cause of resentment against the Chinese but internationally Beijing will gain respectability and not be condemned for human rights abuse.

Yugoslav war embarrasses EC ahead of union summit

By Patrick Worsnip

UNABLE to stop Europe's worst conflict since World War II, the European Community has been gravely embarrassed by the carnage in Yugoslavia as it struggles to take on a common foreign policy and defence role.

Lord Carrington, chairman of an EC peace conference on Yugoslavia, confessed on Monday to "frustration and irritation" over the warring factions' failure to respect a string of ceasefires the EC arranged so far. "Everybody always says they're going to do something and then in the end they don't do it," the former British foreign secretary said in a radio interview.

Following the collapse of 13 EC ceasefires, the United Nations through its envoy Cyrus Vance brokered a 14th over the weekend but scattered fighting was reported on Monday.

Despite much talk of international peace-keeping forces, neither the EC nor the UN has

been ready to wade into Yugoslavia and separate the fighting Serbs and Croats by force. Frightfully, they insist the Yugoslavs must stop shooting before outside forces go in.

"We can't keep the peace unless there's a peace to keep," is the refrain of Western officials who are reluctant to kill their own coreligionists.

The refusal of the combatants to be bound by ceasefires, the destruction of the Croatian city of Vukovar by Yugoslavia's Serbian Yugoslav army and its march towards Osijek, and reports of atrocities have left EC diplomats in a rare defensive mood.

"It's made us look ineffective in solving the crisis, but I'm not sure anyone could have solved it," one said. "No one's come up with a plausible alternative to our policy. It makes people realise the limitations of European power" in dealing with European issues.

The EC peace conference, aimed at an ami-

able carve-up of Yugoslavia, has been backed more recently by community economic sanctions to try to stop the fighting, but nothing has so far had any effect.

If the latest ceasefire works, the UN could send in a peace force, a move which France urged on Monday that the Security Council should in any case make as soon as possible.

If it fails, the community would like the council to impose an oil embargo, described by Carrington as "the one thing I think that would hurt the Yugoslav army". But non-aligned members are reluctant to set such a precedent.

The civil war raging within 400 kms of Vienna and Venice, and complete with air strikes, tank battles, flattened cities, savage massacres of civilians and streams of refugees, has come at the worst possible time for the community.

This was supposed to be the time for the EC

to emerge as the heart of the new Europe, following the collapse of communism in the Eastern half of the continent over the past two years.

Instead, Western governments have been flooded with protests, especially from the Croats and the powerful Croatian emigre lobby, that Europe has failed to stand up against what Zagreb says is a communist-dominated Serbia and federal army.

Croats from across Europe plan to demonstrate for Croatian independence in the Dutch town of Maastricht, where an EC summit on December 9-10 is due to agree a new treaty on European union, including a common foreign and security policy.

Opinion in the EC is split between those who think a common policy, if adopted earlier, could have helped avert the Yugoslav crisis and those who say the crisis only goes to show how difficult it would be to apply such a

policy.

Germany, backed by Italy and from outside the EC by Austria, has favoured giving diplomatic recognition to Croatia and Slovenia, whose independence declarations on June 25 sparked the crisis. Britain and some other states are dragging their heels.

Britain has argued that to recognise Croatia would imply the duty to give it military aid against attack by Serbia, much as Western states came to the rescue of Kuwait after it was invaded by Iraq in August, 1990.

But most Western states feel that the rights and wrongs of the Serb-Croat dispute are much less clear-cut than in Kuwait — and there are no vital Western oil interests there to defend.

Few West European countries want to fight for Croatia, even if the Maastricht summit creates a new European "defence identity" based on the nine-nation Western European

Union.

But diplomats say the terms of the argument have now changed slightly, with Germany and its allies telling Croatia recognition would not mean military aid. The shift could undermine British opposition to the move.

Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek told the Yugoslavs last month on behalf of the EC that recognition could come if peace was not achieved in two months. Germany says that deadline falls due on December 10, second day of the Maastricht summit.

Diplomats say political pressures could swing the EC towards recognition if the Yugoslav army presses ahead to visit the fate of Vukovar on Osijek and other Croatian towns.

Such a move, implying the Yugoslav conflict was between different countries and not an internal affair, would then place the Yugoslav ball even more firmly in the United Nations court.—REUTERS