

Palestinians continue to suffer, Palestine continues to disappear

With U.S. aiding and abetting, true Mideast peace is passing us by

EAST JERUSALEM - Secretary of State James Baker came and went twice in recent days while I've been here talking with Palestinian activists and Israeli peaceniks. Israel is said to be under "pressure" once again.

Senator Dole's message about reconsidering Israeli assistance is of course a trial balloon to see just how the political winds are blowing these days on the home front. Bush and Baker obviously want to get an initial reading on just what public opinion and Congressional sentiments will bear; and to find out about the current political battle formations of the infamous Israeli/Jewish lobby.

Such are the daily headlines. The underlying realities, though, are far more complicated and possibly quite different.

In so many ways all that's taking place before us is *deju vu*, of course... a replay of times past. True, few analysts bother these days to put things in historical perspective. Though diplomacy without history is like salad without dressing — untasty and unfinished — the public is continually served large amounts of self-serving statements and provided little serious analysis. The end result is a kind of rhetorical constipation which leaves everyone a bit queasy and confused.

Just in the recent past there was the so-called Ford-Kissinger "reassessment" back in 1975. Then there was the Carter "Palestinian homeland" attempt of 1977 that included a joint U.S./U.S.S.R. plan. And some would add to this list the so-called "Reagan Plan" of September 1982 — though that one was even more political theatrics than usual — maybe more like the situation today.

Furthermore, it wasn't that long ago that there was the previous Baker plan, that one superceded by another initiative named after Hosni Mubarak, and that preceded by one by Shamir himself. In Yiddish, the expression for such goings on is "Oy Ve!", an expression which has no sufficient translation.

Now once again — in the aftermath of Iraq's destruction by a powerful under-the-table U.S.-Israeli-Saudi alliance — the U.S. is pretending to distance itself from Israel with rhetorical flourishes but no serious policy changes.

Once more the State Department is playing the good cop/bad cop game with the Palestinians, this time with Jerusalem's Feisal Hussein the man to have your picture taken with.

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continues unabated. Is the analogy of the orchestra music welcoming the Jewish detainees to their Nazi death camps too brutal?

And even if some so-called "concessions" should soon be forthcoming from Israel in future weeks and months — as they probably will be — the way the political chessboard is now arranged such "concessions" will not truly represent serious changes in either Israeli or American policies.

Could it be, perhaps, that what is really going on in public view is something the U.S. and Israel have actually coordinated together in the darkened, smoke-filled rooms where international intrigue really takes place these days, far from public view?

Anyway, whether by conspiracy or happenstance, the Israelis have positioned themselves, in this ongoing political war, much as they do on the military battlefield. They have prepared many lines of tactical retreat, of possible repositioning, which are now available to them before there is any danger whatsoever of losing the political war and allowing the long discussed "two-state solution" to come forward.

Take, for instance, the current "roadblocks" to negotiations, if we are to believe the Israeli/American version of the present — which the actual history of this conflict, of course, suggests we should rarely do.

The current political hubbub is supposedly over such matters as whether and how often the "regional" conference will reconvene.

Supposedly Foreign Minister David Levy actually agreed with Secretary Baker that every six months such a conference might reconstitute itself to "hear progress reports" — but only if Israel agrees and without any power being given to the conference to take any decisions.

Very frankly, big deal!

The underlying reality is that the Israelis have succeeded in switching the terms of reference from a serious international conference with U.N. Security Council resolutions as its basis — as has been talked about for decades — to some kind of symbolic regional conference which would serve to enhance Israel's image and then quickly reconstitute itself into a series

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Finally, add to this list the basic issue of escalating settlements in the occupied territories — which in today's world has become tied to the idea of unprecedented U.S. "housing guarantees" for Russian immigrants.

Sure enough, restrictions of various kinds will temporarily be put on the huge new American grants and loans and guarantees. But sooner or later today's influx of hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews will help Israel further spill over the green line and absorb what's left of the Palestinians' Palestine. And sooner or later the Israelis will try to get "forgiveness" for today's outstanding loans and guarantees as well. The Americans know this just as well as the Israelis do and the Arabs should. The rest is all theatrics and public opinion manipulation. Yet we are all so gullible and so worn down these days.

In the end, talks, of one kind or another, there will be. But the Israelis, with American help, have positioned themselves so that what they will be trying to sell at a high price will hardly be worth much. Down the road a bit, the world is likely to be told by Washington and Tel

Aviv that important concessions have been made, that U.S. policy in the end is bearing fruit, that Israel in the end is showing considerable "flexibility". Get ready not to believe any of it.

A political blizzard seems to lie ahead. But when it passes there will not be peace. More likely we will then find ourselves living into the next millenium with the rotten fruits of a Camp David II agreement manufactured by the Americans and Israelis which twists beyond recognition the terms that could have made a real peace.

And those Arab leaders who agree to take such a path, for whatever reasons, will probably find themselves commiserating their mistakes along with the late Anwar Sadat.

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Iraq was bombed back a generation or two to uphold "international law" we were just told a few months ago. But somehow when it comes to Israel American policies become all jumbled, deceptive and helplessly feeble — and the will of the international community of little concern.

So while Baker flies hither and yon the flow of monies and arms continues to a Jewish state gone berserk. Under these circumstances it's hardly far-fetched to conclude that only the on-stage political theatrics have changed, not the basic policies.

The overall goal for Washington at this point is really to pacify the various audiences in the Arab world and at home as they watch nightly TV reports and glance through morning newspaper summaries — but to do so without alienating too many of Israel's supporters; without putting the Jewish lobby on a war footing; and without sacrificing Israel's dominance in the region.

Another goal is to position the U.S. to take credit for some new kind of Arab-Israeli deal, a Camp David II if you will, should that result out of the turmoil and repositioning that shakes the region in the aftermath of Iraq's destruction.

The reality of 1991 so far is that what Baker is all about is soothing Arab, European, and some parts of American public opinion — little more.

Baker's comings and goings are purposefully designed to be manipulative of public perceptions without actually shifting basic, long-standing policies that link the U.S. and Israel in symbiotic togetherness. Furthermore, the U.S. now has a more complicated task ahead of it than previously — that of attempting to shore up various Arab regimes that are linked to Washington more closely than ever, while at the same time maintaining Israel as the American gendarme in the area.

The Americans, acting in tandem with Israel whatever the seeming tensions of the moment between them, do want to somehow seize this historic moment when the Arabs are totally divided, confused and bewildered to help Israel extinguish the intifada and to defuse, but not settle, regional tensions.

Whether the difficulties Washington is having are real or feigned — so far the evidence suggests the latter though the images the former — there's little to this point to suggest the Americans have turned over any ground-breaking new leaves.

Meanwhile, the very tangible suffering of the Palestinians continues of course, even worse than before. And all the while the process of absorbing the rest of Palestine into Israel goes on with seemingly renewed vigor.

All this new political dancing has been stepped up to new music orchestrated in Washington as a palliative to public concerns in both the Arab world and the U.S. — concerns aroused by the traumatic events of the past 8 months.

Yet as the music blares, the realities of the slow death of what's left of the Palestinians' Palestine continues.

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of bilateral country to country talks. Surprise, surprise...this is just what the Israelis have wanted for a long time.

So chalk this one up as a major Israeli political victory that the Israelis wisely haven't been crowing about. They have positioned their political armies well, with the help of the Americans, of course.

Then there is the matter of whether or not the Secretary General can send an observer. My God! After decades of U.N. involvement, after the devastation of Iraq and the "liberation" of Kuwait under cover of U.N. resolutions, now the Israel's want to prevent a U.N. "observer"! What utter nonsense! The conference should be, must be, U.N. authorized and supervised; not simply "observed". And even this the Israelis are said to be "resisting".

So chalk another one up for the Jewish State — Israel has positioned itself to eventually appear to be giving something that was until now assumed! And if "observer" is what is eventually accepted the Israelis actually get what they have wanted all along — the U.N. pushed from center stage and put into a subsidiary role.

All this has been done, of course, with the help of the Americans...the same Americans who just used the U.N. Security Council to explain and justify the destruction of Israel's worst enemy.

Then there's the basic issue of the P.L.O. During the previous two decades the Americans repeatedly assured the P.L.O. that if they would just recognize Israel and accept Resolutions 242 and 338 then negotiations would be possible. Then just a few years ago they badgered and cajoled Yasser Arafat to humiliate himself in Geneva by reading a statement written in Washington in order to get a place at the negotiating table.

But it didn't take the Americans long, of course, to wiggle out of the meaningless "dialogue" given to Arafat as his reward. And now the Americans and the Israelis are hard at work to destroy the very underpinnings of Palestinian nationalism by excluding from whatever talks lie ahead, just as they did at Camp David, the very symbol of Palestinian aspirations.

And the same goes for Israel. Again of

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