

# CLINTON WATCH

## UN SANCTIONS

### AGAINST ISRAEL?



BILL Clinton is in a pickle.

In a few days he's finally President of the USA — a position he's been eyeing ever since his Oxford days back in the late 1960s.

His basic commitments — those which got him elected and which may well determine what happens to him in 1996 — are to rebuild the country, create jobs, repair the infrastructure, save the environment, reduce the deficit, and so on and so forth.

Yet this most challenging "domestic agenda" is being pressed daily by an entanglement of foreign issues Clinton is being left saddled with both by the outgoing administration's policies and commitments as well as by certain turns of the historical dice.

Even before taking office the governor of Arkansas and president-elect is having to grapple with three difficult military imbroglios that are sure to take considerable amounts of his time and energy in the early days of his presidency.

In Somalia the American people were told US forces would go in, clean up the situation, and quickly come home. But that's not likely to happen. The US is going to find itself immersed in Somalia for some time to come.

In the Gulf, whether Saddam Hussein remains alive and in power in Iraq will not change the overall geopolitical situation throughout the region. During the Bush years the US intervened with military force in Arab affairs as never before in history, essentially becoming a key player in a multi-dimensional Arab civil war that is increasingly complex and

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which is likely to continue in one form or another for some time to come.

As former head of the National Security Agency, General William Odum, has been repeating to the US press willing to listen that American military intervention has left the Gulf region less "stable" than it was before. His own views were that the line should have been drawn and the US should not have tangled with Iraq as it did. But having done so, Odum concludes, the region has been destabilised and there are future battles to come that the US may not be psychologically prepared for.

Whatever the veracity of Odum's analysis — and he is one of the most astute and informed independent analysts publicly commenting these days — whether through covert means or out-front military means, the US is now stuck in the quicksand of the Mid-east and is likely to be called upon in the future to step in to deter one move or another, to prevent or undue a coup here or there, to keep those working with

Washington in power while preventing those not in concert with the West from achieving power.

This is the traditional role of an imperial or colonial power — an image that the US does not have of itself and a responsibility the US will be increasingly hard-pressed to always consistently live up to.

In the Balkans, pressures for American military involvement continue to grow quite literally every day. Unless there is some unlikely diplomatic breakthrough through the possibility of some form of UN-European-American intervention against Serbia — one likely to be called a Nato action — seems more and more inevitable. And here too, even on European soil, only the Americans really have the kinds of military forces that can effectively be projected against a still well-armed adversary like the former Yugoslav army.

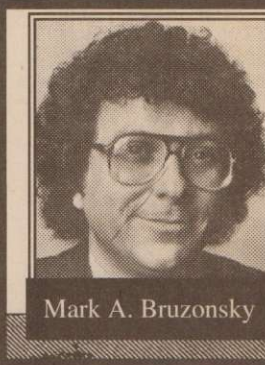
But it is in another part of the world — a place where direct American military force isn't contemplated but where behind-the-scenes US involvement is considerable — where Bill Clinton may face his most trying test and may find his energies most severely drained and his abilities most resolutely tested.

Unless the Rabin government backs down, or the Palestinians loose their nerve, the "Camp Of Return" Palestinians stranded in the no-man's land of southern Lebanon may finally embarrass the Security Council into finally acting against Israel.

For the past few years now, the idea that the UN Security Council should put teeth into its resolutions, that it should in one way or another "enforce" its decisions, has taken hold.

First there was the end of the cold war making it possible for the UN to be manipulated by Western powers that control the Security Council. The new prostrate Russia could now be effectively brought on board with economic deals or threats; and China too has been unwilling to defy the West by

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## Washington

wielding its veto as the old Soviet Union used to do.

Thus the formula of the 1940s that gave the five permanent members of the Security Council authority to control the real power of the United Nations now creates, in these new circumstances, a kind of Pax Americana UN-style. Since it is obvious to all that of the three Western powers — Britain, France, and the US — the Americans are by far the dominant partner, it is in Washington rather than New York where most key decisions are really taken.

Then just two years ago there was the Coalition War in the Gulf which gave the Security Council a new kind of vitality, for good or bad, and a new image. With the Bush administration using the Security Council to sanction not only the liberation of Kuwait but the destruction of Iraq, a notion has been planted in the collective mind of the international community that resolutions of the Security Council are actually to be taken seriously. The situation in Somalia in recent weeks and further acted to underscore this imagery.

But when it comes to Israel, the UN Security Council never does more than verbally express itself.

Just a few years ago, at the time of the massacre at the Dome of the Rock, the Security Council was even shown a smuggled-out video of the lawlessness and murder perpetrated by the Israeli army at one of Islam's holiest sites. It passed a resolution of condemnation that mandated a UN representative to be sent to investigate. The Israelis wouldn't even accept his visit or the investigation. The Security Council, pushed around as it always is these days by the US, did nothing.

Of course the basic reason for this Security Council impotence when it comes to Israel is the fact that Washington either waters down or vetoes resolutions that go against Israel. No matter what the UN might like to do or say, the Americans

are always there to step in on Israel's behalf. This situation has gone on for some decades now.

Of course occasionally the US joins in on a resolution criticising Israel. But even when this occurs the US does so to publicly convey a false impression of "even-handedness" while in private it works overtime to soften the resolution while threatening a veto if the resolution is too bold or implies any real action.

Now, in a few days, Clinton will be getting unpacked at the White House at a time when the Israelis are in clear defiance of international law and Security Council resolutions in front of the whole world to see. The unprecedented expulsion of over 400 Palestinians, coupled with the unexpected events that have followed, have set the stage for a serious confrontation.

The secretary general has already sent two UN envoys to Israel warning the Israelis that they must relent. They have not. Indeed the repression in the occupied territories of the Palestinians has been stepped up not only in recent weeks but ever since Yitzhak Rabin came to power.

Will the Security Council finally, this time, take at least symbolic action in the form of at least symbolic sanctions against Israel?

If any one man will determine the outcome it's the new American president — one publicly and loudly pledged to human rights, international law, and democracy

But don't bet on the Security Council to act in this case. Don't expect UN observers (as in Lebanon) no-fly zones (as in Bosnia), trade and travel sanctions (as in Libya), relief convoys (as in Somalia), or lots of guns and tanks (as in Iraq). For Clinton and his men are already hard at work applying the traditional American double-standard to Israel's behaviour.

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