



THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT: THE RECORD OF ITS FIRST FOUR YEARS

By Robert O. Freedman*

This article analyzes the policy of the Bush Administration toward Arab-Israeli issues during its first term. The factors shaping its strategy derived in large part from the perceptions of its predecessors' failures, along with the dramatic events of September 11 and the drive toward war with Iraq. The assessment was that activism would not produce results, though other considerations required a continued effort to show engagement on the issue.

With the completion of its first four-year term, the basic factors that have influenced the Bush Administration in its policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict are now clear.

First, after initially wishing to keep a "hands-off" policy toward the issue, in part due to Clinton's failures in that area, the Bush Administration pursued an activist policy on four different occasions--only to see its policy initiatives fail, primarily because of outbreaks of Palestinian terrorism.

Second, the al-Qa'ida terrorist attack on the United States of September 11, 2001, had a defining impact on the administration. This worked to the disadvantage of the Palestinians because by June 2002 Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat's links to terrorism had made him *persona non grata* to the administration.

Third, serious divisions at the top of the administration, especially the split between Secretary of State Colin Powell on one hand and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Richard Cheney on the other, created a certain amount of incoherence in Middle East policy.

Fourth, the U.S. effort to build an alliance to wage war against Iraq was to influence its policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict.

FROM THE INAUGURATION UNTIL 9/11

Incoming U.S. President George W. Bush had witnessed the immense political capital which Clinton invested in trying to secure an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and the very meager return on that investment. Even if Bush had had the inclination to pursue energetically an Arab-Israeli settlement, looking at Clinton's record would have caused him to reconsider the idea.

When the Bush Administration took office on January 20, 2001, it took a long time to get senior-level executives in place, especially for dealing with the Middle East, for which an assistant secretary of state was not approved until late May. In addition, the administration was beset by an extraordinary number of public disagreements over such issues as whether to strengthen sanctions against Iraq (Secretary of State Colin Powell) or weaken them (Vice-President Richard Cheney), whether to take a more aggressive military stance against Iraq (Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz - yes; Powell-no) and whether to pull U.S. peace keeping forces out of the multinational force in the Sinai (Rumsfeld-yes; Powell-no); as well as on negotiations with North Korea (Powell-yes,

Bush-no), pulling U.S. forces out of Balkan peacekeeping missions (Powell-no, Rumsfeld-yes) and drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Environmental Protection Agency head Christy Whitman-no, Bush-yes)--to mention only a few of the disputes. These types of dispute were to persist throughout all four years of the Administration and would, from time to time, present problems of coherence for U.S. policy in the Middle East.(1)

Another problem the Administration had to deal with was the significant degree of optimism in the Arab world, and especially among Palestinians, that Bush, following in the steps of his father who had clashed openly with then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir would take a much tougher stance toward Israel than Clinton had done. In this they were to be sorely mistaken. At first, Bush essentially followed a "not Clinton" policy and refused to get personally involved in trying to settle the conflict. Secretary of State Powell repeatedly emphasized the primary responsibility of the parties themselves to solve the conflict. "We will facilitate, but at the end of the day, it will have to be the parties in the region who will have to find the solution."(2)

In this, perhaps, they were hoping for a return to the situation that prevailed during the Oslo I and Oslo II agreements which were negotiated directly between Israelis and Palestinians without significant U.S. intervention. The Bush Administration followed up its word with deeds that emphasized the new "hands-off" policy, the first of which being that when Special Middle East Envoy Dennis Ross retired in January 2001, no replacement was named and it was not until late May and the rapid escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that a "Special Assistant" for the Middle East, William Burns, was appointed.

Second, the U.S. did not send a representative to the Israeli-Palestinian

negotiations at Taba which took place at the end of January, just before the February 7, 2001 Israeli elections.(3) Third, the U.S. ended CIA mediation efforts between Israel and the Palestinians, which had begun as part of the Wye Plantation agreement of October 1998. Finally, and much to the displeasure of the Palestinians, Bush supported the Israeli position that the offers made by Israel's Labor government at Camp David II and at Taba, were "off the table" once a new Israeli government, headed by Likud leader Ariel Sharon, was elected on February 7, 2001.

Despite the effort to play down the U.S. role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the first foreign trip undertaken by the newly appointed U.S. Secretary of State was to the Middle East. Powell's purpose, however, was not to deal directly with the al-Aqsa Intifada, but rather to convince the Arab states to support his plans for "smart sanctions" against Iraq. However, his Arab hosts, including not only Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia but also Syria, did not want to agree to changes on Iraq and instead urged the Bush Administration to become actively involved in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict. Powell called for a renewal of peace talks after a reduction in violence--not the total cessation of violence demanded by Sharon.(4) However, Powell was to move closer to the Israeli position several weeks later.

On the eve of the Sharon visit to Washington in mid-March 2001, Powell gave a major speech on the Middle East to a conference of the pro-Israeli AIPAC lobbying organization. In it, he moved to support Sharon's position on the violence, noting that the starting point for talks had to be the end of violence. In a clear slap at Arafat, Powell publicly stated that "leaders have the responsibility to denounce violence, strip it of legitimacy [and] stop it." Powell also repeated the Bush Administration's position that the United States would assist, but not

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impose a peace agreement: "The United States stands ready to assist, not insist. Peace arrived at voluntarily by the partners themselves is likely to prove more robust ... than a peace widely viewed as developed by others, or worse yet, imposed."(5)

When Sharon met with Bush several days later, he was again reassured that the United States would facilitate, not force, the peace process. Bush also sought to enlist Sharon in his campaign to develop a national missile defense system, something to which the Israeli leader, whose country was a prime target of such "rogue" states as Iran and Iraq, was happy to agree. Sharon pressed Bush not to invite Arafat to the White House unless he publicly called for an end to the violence, a request endorsed by nearly 300 members of Congress (87 senators and 209 House members) who also called on Bush to close the PLO's Washington office and cut U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) if the violence did not cease.(6)

Yet the Sharon visit, as successful as it was, was not without its problems. On the eve of the visit, Sharon had authorized the construction of more Jewish housing in the East Jerusalem suburb of Har Homa, near Bethlehem, a development criticized by State Department spokesman Richard Boucher as a unilateral act "not contributing to peace and stability."(7) In addition, Rumsfeld told Sharon that the U.S. wanted to withdraw U.S. forces serving as peace keepers in the multinational force in the Sinai Desert.(8)

Still, the Sharon visit was clearly a success and marked a high point in the U.S.-Israeli relationship. At the end of March, the United States vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for a UN observer force on the West Bank and Gaza as "unbalanced and unworkable."(9) Bush, in a news conference, took a tough stance on the Palestinian leadership:

The Palestinian Authority should speak out publicly and forcibly in a language that the Palestinian people [understand] to condemn violence and terrorism ...The signal I am sending to the Palestinians is stop the violence and I can't make it any more clear. (10)

While during their visits to Washington in late March and early April, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Jordanian King Abdallah II called for a more active U.S. role, the Bush Administration continued to insist that the Israelis and Palestinians had to bear the primary responsibility for coming to an agreement. Unfortunately for Bush, however, an upsurge of Israeli-Palestinian fighting was to call into question the U.S. strategy.

Arafat was escalating the violence, with the number of attacks within Israel bringing record-high Israeli civilian casualties. As Israeli forces went into the Gaza Strip and West Bank in larger numbers and for longer periods of time, Powell termed the Israeli action "excessive and disproportionate." The forces soon withdrew. Powell also blamed the Palestinians for precipitating the Israeli attack with "provocative" mortar attacks on Israeli territory.(11) The United States, however, disappointed Israel when the State Department's annual terrorist report did not brand the PA as directly responsible for sponsoring the violence but only noted that the Israeli government had accused the PA of facilitating terrorist attacks.(12)

Meanwhile, as Palestinian mortar and other attacks against Israel continued to increase, Israel stepped up its retaliatory raids into PA-controlled territories in Gaza, although quickly withdrawing each time. The United States condemned both the Palestinian attacks and Israel's retaliations with State Department spokesman Boucher noting that the Israeli responses represented "a serious escalation that causes concern that

makes it harder to resolve this." Boucher also criticized the Palestinians who "have to immediately end provocative acts of violence." (13) Meanwhile, possibly as a response to Palestinian actions, Sharon justified settlement expansion. (14) This prompted a denunciation from the State Department, with spokesman Phillip Reeker saying, "This activity risks further inflaming the already volatile situation in the region and is provocative." (15)

As the fighting escalated further, with terrorist attacks by Palestinians responded to with increasingly severe Israeli reprisals, the Bush Administration awaited publication of the Mitchell Report in mid-May to suggest a new approach. Conceived at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in October 2000 as a concession to Arafat's demand, the commission, headed by former Senator George Mitchell, was supposed to determine the causes of the Intifada and find ways to bring the fighting to a halt. The report, which did not assign blame, merely described each side's positions. It also listed a series of steps the Israelis and Palestinians should take to resume negotiations. (16)

These included: 1) a 100 percent effort to stop the violence; 2) the immediate resumption of security cooperation; 3) the exchange of confidence-building measures; and 4) the speedy return to serious negotiations. In many ways the Mitchell Report was supportive of the Israeli position in the conflict. It called for a ceasefire before negotiations, for the PA to condemn incitement and denounce terrorism and arrest terrorists and for it to prevent gunmen from using Palestinian populated areas to fire upon Israeli populated areas and Israeli military positions. It also did not blame Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif for precipitating the Intifada.

At the same time, the report called for freezing all settlement activity as a necessary confidence-building measure. Sharon, while

having reservations about the settlement issue, ordered a ceasefire for Israeli forces. The Palestinians, while also accepting the report in principle, made it contingent on Israel stopping the building of settlements. Still, a series of terrorist attacks were mounted against Israel in Hadera and Jerusalem along with the killing of Jews in the West Bank and Gaza, which the PA could not, or would not, stop. Meanwhile, Powell, who warmly praised the Mitchell Report, appointed a "special assistant" to help implement it. William Burns, the U.S. ambassador to Jordan who had been nominated to become the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, was given the task of trying to establish a "time line" of Israeli and Palestinian confidence-building measures that might bring about the unconditional cease-fire urged by the Mitchell Report. (17)

Powell continued to argue that the United States would not directly intervene to put forth its own comprehensive solution to the conflict. This was to change with the June 2001 bombing of the Dolphinarium discotheque in Tel Aviv in which 21 people, mostly teenagers, were killed. Bush said the attack, "Illustrates the urgent need for an immediate, unconditional cessation of violence." (18) German Foreign Minister Joscha Fischer warned Arafat that the terrorist act had cost the Palestinians dearly in public opinion in Europe. (19) Under such heavy pressure from both the U.S. and Germany and with Israel likely to launch a massive retaliatory attack on the PA-governed territory, Arafat called for a ceasefire. Bush followed this by sending CIA Chief George Tenet to the Middle East to consolidate the ceasefire, something achieved, on paper at least, on June 13.

Almost immediately, however, the ceasefire began to break down as Arafat could not, or would not, prevent further attacks on Israel. Neither Hamas leader Abdel

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Aziz Rantisi nor Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, supported the ceasefire.(20) To prevent the situation from deteriorating further Bush sent Powell to the Middle East. During a visit by Sharon to Washington, Bush stated, "Progress has been made toward controlling the violence."(21) But the Powell trip proved a failure, as violence not only continued but escalated during the summer, including Palestinian drive-by shootings, mortar attacks, and suicide bombings.

With the United States concluding that no progress could be made for the time being and Europe unwilling to bring the desired diplomatic pressure on Arafat, Sharon turned to a military offensive which included sending forces into PA-ruled territory and assassinating Palestinians whom Israel believed planned terrorist attacks. There was mixed U.S. reaction to the Israeli assassination policy. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher condemned it, stating "Israel needs to understand that targeted killings of Palestinians don't end the violence but are only inflaming an already volatile situation and making it much harder to restore calm."(22) Taking an opposing view was Vice-President Cheney who stated in August that if Israel had evidence of a group planning a suicide bomber attack and hard evidence of those responsible and their location, "I think there's some justification in their trying to protect themselves by preempting."(23)

Meanwhile, Bush insisted that Arafat must "put 100 percent effort into stopping the terrorist activity" before the beginning of peace talks and "do a better job of quashing violence."(24) Despite calls by America's Arab allies, such as Egypt, for the United States to take a more active role because "America is the only sponsor of the peace process," and French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine caustically comparing Bush to Pontius Pilate, washing his hands of the Middle East, U.S. policymakers concluded

that Arafat would not implement any ceasefire or help make real progress toward peace.(25)

THE BUSH POLICY FROM 9/11 TO THE KARINE-A EPISODE

Immediately after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the United States sought to build a coalition, including Muslim states, against Usama bin Ladin and his al-Qa'ida terrorist organization. In an effort to gain Arab support, the United States announced its support of a Palestinian state and pressed Sharon to agree to a meeting between Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Arafat to establish yet another ceasefire, despite the fact that Palestinian violence had not stopped as Sharon had demanded as the price for talks.

Since the violence continued after the talks, including a terrorist bombing in Jerusalem and an attack on a Jewish settlement in Gaza, there was some question as to the long-term effect of the Peres-Arafat meeting and the U.S. strategy. Sharon called it the equivalent of British and French policy at the 1938 Munich Conference when Czechoslovakia had been sold out to the Nazis. His comments drew a retort from the White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer calling them "unacceptable."(26) While Sharon was later to apologize, claiming his words were misinterpreted, the basic issue remained unresolved and was a cause of friction in U.S.-Israeli relations, albeit only a temporary one.

Meanwhile, Palestinian attacks on Israel escalated, and so did retaliation by the Israeli army. In the latter part of October, Israeli Cabinet Minister Rehavam Zeevi was assassinated in a Jerusalem hotel, precipitating a move by the Israeli army into six major Palestinian cities to search for the assassins because, as Sharon asserted, Arafat continued to refuse to arrest Palestinians who attacked Israelis. The Israelis also stepped up

their policy of killing or capturing suspected terrorists. Israelis compared their actions to that of the United States in Afghanistan, arguing that just as the U.S. was justified in attacking the Taliban for harboring the al-Qaeda terrorists, so, too, was Israel in invading the Palestinian areas to look for terrorists.(27)

The State Department, however, had a different view. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker, noting the Palestinian casualties resulting from Israeli incursions, stated that Israeli forces "should be withdrawn immediately from all Palestinian-controlled areas. We deeply regret and deplore Israeli defense force actions that had killed numerous Palestinian civilians over the weekend." He also stated that Israel should abstain from further incursions.(28)

President Bush, separating himself from the State Department, was a bit milder in his criticism, noting "I would hope that Israelis would move their troops as quickly as possible." Bush balanced the criticism of Israel with criticism of Arafat: "We continue to call upon Chairman Arafat to do everything he can to bring the killer to justice. It is very important that he arrest the person who did this act--and continue to arrest those who would disrupt and harm Israeli citizens. He must show the resolve necessary to bring peace to the region."(29)

This, however, was to be the low point in the U.S.-Israeli relationship through the end of 2001. Beginning in November the United States scored a series of military victories in Afghanistan.(30) The Taliban became increasingly discredited as did Usama Bin Laden whose call for the Muslim world to rise up against the United States received little active support.

In this atmosphere of military victory, the United States embarked on a two-fold strategy. The first, to try to reinvigorate the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, was warmly greeted by its European allies and by pro-

U.S. governments in the Arab world. The second, to threaten to carry the war from Afghanistan to other supporters of terror, especially Iraq, met with far less support. However, as will be shown below, U.S. efforts to build a coalition for an invasion of Iraq were to significantly influence its policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The U.S. effort to invigorate the Israeli-Palestine peace process began with a speech by Bush at the UN in November 2001 in which he said, "We are working for the day when two states--Israel and Palestine--live peacefully together within secure and recognized boundaries." However, in a clear warning to Arafat to crack down on terrorists, he also noted, "Peace will come when all have sworn off forever incitement, violence and terror. There is no such thing as a good terrorist."(31) Bush also pointedly did not meet Arafat at the UN. Condoleezza Rice, his national security advisor, noted, "You cannot help us with al-Qaeda, and hug Hezbollah or Hamas. And so the President makes that clear to Mr. Arafat."(32) The United States added Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah to the post September 11th terrorist list.

The next step in the U.S. peace effort came on November 19 with a major speech by Powell on the U.S. view of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (33) Powell strongly condemned Palestinian terrorism, noting that the Intifada was now mired in "self-defeating violence." He also stated that while the United States believed that there should be a two-state solution to the conflict, with Palestine and Israel living side by side within secure and recognized borders, the Palestinians must make a 100 percent effort to stop terrorism in which actions, not words, were required and terrorists must be arrested. He emphasized that "no wrong can ever justify the murder of the innocent," that terror and violence must stop now and Palestinians must realize their goals by negotiations, not violence. He further asserted, possibly in

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response to Arafat's call for the more than 3 million Palestinian refugees to return to Israel and change the nature of that state, that the Palestinians must accept the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state.

As far as Israel was concerned, while emphasizing the close ties between the two countries "bound together by democratic tradition," and that the United States had an "enduring and iron-clad commitment to Israeli security," Powell indicated that Israel, too, had to make concessions for peace to be possible. These included a stop to settlement activity and an end to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza that "causes humiliation and the killing of innocents." In conclusion he stated that the United States would do everything it could to facilitate the peace process "but at the end of the day the peoples have to make peace"--a position similar to the one Powell held when he took office almost a year before.

In order to implement the U.S. vision of peace Powell announced, in addition to promises of economic aid, the dispatch of Assistant Secretary of State William Burns and former Marine General Anthony Zinni to meet with Israeli and Palestinian delegations to reach a ceasefire that would lay the basis for the resumption of peace negotiations. In an effort to facilitate the Zinni mission, Bush put his personal prestige on the line by writing to five important Arab leaders, King Abdullah II of Jordan, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, King Muhammad VI of Morocco, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah (who had publicly praised Powell's speech), and President Ben-Ali of Tunisia, asking for their help in persuading, "The Palestinian leadership to take action to end violence and get the peace process back on track." (34) For his part, Zinni stated that his goal was to achieve a ceasefire, which would allow for the implementation of the Mitchell plan, and that he would stay in the region "as long as needed" to complete his mission. (35)

Unfortunately for Zinni it was to be a most ill-fated mission that would leave not only the peace process but also U.S.-Palestinian relations close to collapse.

Almost upon arrival, Zinni had to confront Palestinian terrorism--the very thing that both Bush and Powell had asked Arafat to prevent. On November 27 two Palestinian terrorists, one of whom was a member of Arafat's Fatah organization (the other was from Islamic Jihad), killed three Israelis and wounded 30 others in Afula, a town in northern Israel. Zinni responded to the violence in a balanced way, stating "this is why we need a ceasefire. Both sides have suffered too much." (36) Zinni then met with Arafat, asking him to end the violence, but even as they were meeting, Palestinian gunmen fired at the Israeli Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo from the neighboring Palestinian suburb of Beit Jala--despite an explicit promise in October by Palestinian leaders not to do so. (37)

The next day three more Israelis were killed as a suicide bomber exploded on a public bus near the Israeli city of Hadera. (38) This time Zinni's response was much stronger, as he asserted, "The groups that do this are clearly trying to make my mission fail. There's no justification, no rationale, no sets of conditions that will ever made terrorist acts a right way to respond." (39) Zinni's words, however, did not stem the tide of terrorism as two days later suicide bombers killed ten Israeli teenagers at the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall in Jerusalem. This time Arafat condemned the attacks but only by stressing the negative political effect the suicide bombers were having on the Palestinian world image and implying they were really being carried out by Israel, "The goal of the attacks has been to destroy the American peace efforts. These attacks cause great damage to our people in international public opinion and the Palestinian Authority will do everything in its power to catch those

responsible. It pays its condolences to the Israeli people."(40)

Zinni, by now furious as he saw his mission literally going up in flames, demanded that "those responsible for planning and carrying out these attacks must be found and brought to justice. This is an urgent task and there can be no delay or excuses for not acting decisively. The deepest evil one can imagine is to attack young people and children."(41) Bush, whose prestige had been put on the line by the Zinni mission, also responded strongly. "Now more than ever chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority must demonstrate through their actions and not merely their words, their commitment to fight terror."(42)

Bush's words, however, did not suffice to stop the terrorism. One day later, 15 Israelis were killed in a suicide bomber attack on an Israeli bus in Haifa. This time when Israel retaliated against the Palestinian Authority--by destroying Arafat's helicopters and the airport runway in Gaza and by attacking facilities of PA security services--the United States did not criticize these actions. Israel also reimposed the closure on Palestinian West Bank towns that it had removed as a gesture to the United States when Zinni began his visit. Presidential spokesman Ari Fleisher noted, "Obviously Israel has the right to defend herself, and the president understands that clearly."(43) In addition, in reinforcing the U.S. demand that Arafat imprison the terrorists and keep them in jail, Fleisher noted, "The president thinks it is very important that Palestinian jails not only have bars on the front, but no longer have revolving doors at the back."(44)

As the pressure built, Arafat began to announce the arrests of a few terrorists. Meanwhile, yet another Palestine suicide bomber struck in Haifa, blowing himself up before boarding a bus. Three days later, 10 Israelis were killed when Hamas detonated

bombs under a bus traveling in the West Bank and shot passengers trying to flee.(45) An exasperated Israeli government announced "Chairman Arafat has made himself irrelevant as far as Israel is concerned," and that it was breaking all contact with him.(46) Then, as a further blow to Arafat, Israeli tanks surrounded his compound in Ramallah, and Israeli troops blew up the main transmission tower of the Palestine Broadcasting Company while also hitting offices of Arafat's Fatah organization in Gaza, Ramallah and Jenin.(47)

It was clear that the United States and especially Bush was thoroughly exasperated by Arafat who had done nothing to prevent Palestinian terrorists from destroying Zinni's mission. While Powell stated diplomatically that the United States, "Really can't give up hope, we can't walk away from this, the stakes are too high,"he also warned that Hamas was "more likely to destroy the Palestinian cause than to destroy the State of Israel," and stated that the "burden" was on Arafat to stop the spiral of violence.(48)

Arafat seemed to belatedly get the message from U.S. political pressure and from Israeli military pressure. On December 16 he said he was calling for an immediate ceasefire, condemning both suicide and mortar attacks.(49) Nonetheless the Palestinian leader merely negotiated a tenuous truce with Hamas and Islamic Jihad, leaving their armed groups intact and not punishing past perpetrators of attacks (a tactic to be repeated by Abu Mazin in June 2003). Unsatisfied, the Israeli government kept him penned up in Ramallah.

While saying that the United States would remain involved in trying to mediate the conflict, Powell brought Zinni, the man who said he would stay as long as needed to solve the crisis, home.(50) Powell himself began to devote his time to trying to prevent a war between India and Pakistan, both of whom had nuclear weapons, following a December

13 attack on the Indian legislature by Muslim terrorists whom India claimed were backed by Pakistan.(51)

Meanwhile, Arafat's tenuous truce began to break down almost immediately. In early January 2002 Israeli forces captured a ship, the *Karine-A*, with 50 tons of weapons including C-4 explosives and Katusha rockets which would have greatly escalated the fighting if successfully delivered. Arafat's inaccurate denial that the Palestinian Authority had anything to do with the vessel further undermined his credibility with the United States.(52) Hamas broke the truce by attacking an Israeli military outpost in Gaza, killing four Israeli soldiers in what it claimed was retaliation for Israel's seizure of the weapons ship.(53) Israel's response was not long in coming. It first hit a series of Palestinian naval targets, setting a fuel depot and a barracks on fire and destroying a number of boats docked in Gaza, then destroyed a series of Palestinian homes in a refugee camp which it claimed gave cover to the Hamas attacker. Finally it ripped up the runway of the Palestinian airport in Gaza as yet another symbolic act against Arafat, although the action drew criticism from European Union officials since the EU had paid for construction of the airport.(54) In contrast, Powell called the Israeli actions defensive in nature and warned Arafat that if he did not take action against those involved in the arms smuggling, it would "complicate enormously" relations between Arafat and the United States.(55)

Violence continued to escalate. Israeli forces killed Raed Karmi, a Palestinian Fatah militia leader who had killed a number of Israelis in the past few months.(56) Palestinian terrorists linked to Arafat's own Tanzim militia responded by killing six Israeli civilians and wounding more than 30 at a Bat Mitzvah party in the Israeli town of Hadera.(57) The Israeli response was to move its tanks to within one hundred meters

of Arafat's compound in Ramallah and then to destroy the main Palestinian radio transmitter.(58) Meanwhile, Colin Powell, sensing the atmosphere was not ripe, called off a planned visit by Zinni to the Middle East.(59)

Thus ended the first year of the Bush Administration's efforts to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite two major U.S. actions, one in June and one in November-December 2001, Palestinian terrorism which Arafat was unable or, more likely, unwilling to control, sabotaged two U.S. efforts to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This pattern was to continue over the next three years as the Bush Administration was to make two additional attempts to solve the conflict, one in March-April 2002 and another with the publication of the "Road Map" in April 2003.

FROM THE KARINE-A INCIDENT UNTIL THE BUSH SPEECH OF JUNE 24, 2002

Following the failure of the Zinni mission and the *Karine-A* episode, the United States again pulled back from active involvement in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. In mid-February 2002, Abu Ala, head of the Palestinian Legislative Council, tried to stop the escalation on the Palestinian side, noting, "Let's be honest. Everyone who visits us or we visit them holds the same opinion--the Palestinians are the source of the tension. I believe that we must also consider the rightward shift that Israeli public opinion has taken. Some of the actions that harm us need to stop."(60) Abu Ala, however, was not running the Palestinian Authority, Arafat was, and fighting continued to escalate despite a tentative peace plan worked out by Abu Ala and former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres calling for a ceasefire and the declaration of a Palestinian state whose borders would be worked out within a year.(61) Another effort to make peace came from Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, who in

an apparent trial balloon, told *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman that in return for Israel's withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 borders, he felt that all 22 members of the Arab League would normalize relations with Israel.(62)

Meanwhile, despite these efforts at achieving peace, the violence kept escalating with Palestinian suicide bombing and Israeli reprisals. While the United States deplored the rising violence, there appeared little it could do to stop it. Indeed in a remarkably frank interview on February 28, 2002 Powell stated that the United States still wanted to help negotiate peace but did not accept the notion that U.S. engagement must mean to "Go and force the Israelis to do something." Powell also praised the Saudi peace plan but said it was something that had to be "fleshed out," and said Vice-President Cheney would undertake this task during his March 2002 visit to the Middle East.(63)

The primary purpose of the Cheney visit was, however, to build support for a planned U.S. attack on Iraq, one of three nations dubbed the "axis of evil" in President Bush's State of the Union speech in January 2002. He was met, however, with strong Arab calls for the United States to work for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before engaging in a war with Iraq, and this apparently convinced Bush to send Zinni back for another try at achieving a ceasefire. To facilitate the Zinni visit, Sharon made a major concession by lifting his demand for seven days of no violence before talks could resume. The atmosphere of the visit was further improved by the announcement that the peace plan suggested by Saudi Arabia would be introduced at the Arab summit scheduled for the end of March in Beirut. To help reinforce the momentum for peace the United States pushed a new U.N. Security Council Resolution, No. 1397, on March 13, 2002 which called for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the end of

violence, incitement and terrorism and the resumption of negotiations based on the Tenet and Mitchell plans.(64)

Diplomatic momentum was once again shattered. Another series of Palestinian terrorist attacks occurred just as Zinni was seeking a ceasefire and the Arab summit was taking place in Beirut. On March 27, the first night of the Jewish holiday of Passover, 29 Jews were murdered and more than 100 were wounded at a religious ceremony in the coastal resort town of Netanya. This was followed by suicide bombings in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa over the next three days killing an additional 17 people and wounding 84. These events precipitated an Israeli attack on Arafat's compound in Ramallah, followed by a sweep into the major Palestinian cities of the West Bank in what was called "Operation Defensive Shield."

As these events began to unfold, the U.S. at first strongly backed Israel, with Powell noting, "Sharon made concessions, while Arafat backed terrorism."(65) Then mass demonstrations broke out in the Arab world, which may have worried Bush as he stepped-up preparations for an attack on Iraq. In a major speech on April 4, after first denouncing terrorism and pointedly noting that "the chairman of the Palestinian Authority has not consistently opposed or confronted terrorists nor has he renounced terror as he agreed to do at Oslo," Bush called for the Israelis to withdraw from the cities they had occupied.(66) Bush also announced that he was sending Powell to the Middle East to work towards a ceasefire. Several days later he urged the Israelis to withdraw "without delay."(67)

A key factor prompting Bush to change his position was Arafat's continued sponsorship of terrorism. When Arafat's wife came out in support of suicide bombings as legitimate resistance against Israeli occupation, and the Israelis gave the U.S. government documents showing Arafat had

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helped finance the terrorism, Bush further turned against the Palestinian leader. On May 26, Bush noted that Arafat "hasn't delivered. He had a chance to secure the peace as a result of the hard work of President Clinton and he didn't. He had a chance to fight terrorism and he hasn't."(68)

As Palestinian terrorist attacks continued to proliferate, Sharon, who had pulled Israeli forces out of the cities of the West Bank in May 2002 sent them back in June, this time to only minimal criticism from the United States. In a major speech on June 24, Bush called for "a new and different Palestinian leadership"--new leaders not compromised by terror--so that a Palestinian state could be born. In the most anti-Arafat speech of his presidency, Bush stated:

I call on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror. I call upon them to build a practicing democracy, based on tolerance and liberty. If the Palestinian people actively pursue these goals, America and the world will actively support their efforts. If the Palestinian people meet these goals, they will be able to reach agreement with Israel and Egypt and Jordan on security and other arrangements for independence. And when the Palestinian people have new leaders, new institutions and new security arrangements with their neighbors, the United States of America will support the creation of a Palestinian state whose borders and certain aspects of its sovereignty will be provisional until resolved as part of a final settlement in the Middle East.

Today, Palestinian authorities are encouraging, not opposing, terrorism. This is unacceptable and the United States will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure. This will require an externally supervised effort to rebuild and reform the

Palestinian security services. The security system must have clear lines of authority and accountability and a unified chain of command.(69)

He then called on Israel to respond to a new Palestinian leadership when it was formed:

As new Palestinian institutions and new leaders emerge, demonstrating real performance on reform, I expect Israel to respond and work toward a final status agreement. With intensive security and effort by all this agreement could be reached within three years from now. And I and my country will actively lead toward that goal...

As we make progress towards security, Israeli forces need to withdraw fully to positions they held prior to September 28, 2000. And consistent with the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee, Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories must stop.(70)

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY, JULY 2002-OCTOBER 2003

Following the Bush speech of June 24, the United States adopted a two-track policy in the region. The first was to work with the European Union, Russia and the UN as a "Quartet" to fashion a "Road Map" leading to a Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement. The second policy was to build as large as possible a coalition to prepare for war with Iraq.

In preparing the Road Map with the EU, Russia and the UN, the Bush Administration faced a major problem. While it had written off Arafat as a suitable partner for peace, the other three members of the Quartet had not. In addition, the publication of the Road Map which the Quartet began discussing in July 2002 was delayed on numerous occasions and not made public until the completion of the major combat phase of the Anglo-American war on Iraq at the end of April

2003. In the run-up to the war in September 2002, when the Israelis laid siege to Arafat's compound in Ramallah following a series of brutal suicide bombings, the United States chose to abstain on, rather than veto, a UN resolution condemning the Israeli action without dealing with the terrorism that had caused it. Condoleeza Rice reportedly told the Israeli government that the U.S. expected a speedy resolution of the siege because it "doesn't help" U.S. efforts to galvanize support for the campaign against Iraq.(71)

In any case, following delays for the Israeli elections of January 2003 (in which Sharon's Likud party scored an impressive victory) and for the war against Iraq which began in late March, the Road Map was finally published on April 30, 2003. The Road Map proposed a three-phase plan ultimately leading to a Palestinian state.(72) In phase one, the Palestinians had to "declare an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism and end incitement against Israel and undertake visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning attacks on Israelis anywhere." The Palestinians also had to appoint an "empowered" prime minister and establish a government based on a strong parliamentary democracy and cabinet and have only three security services which would report to the empowered prime minister. By these measures, U.S. policy hoped to weaken, if not eliminate, Arafat's power and create an "empowered" prime minister who would be a partner for peace with Israel.

For their part, under phase one, Israel had to refrain from deportation, attacks on civilians and the confiscation or demolition of Palestinian homes and property. As the "comprehensive security performance" of the Palestinians moved forward, the Israeli military had to "withdraw progressively" from areas occupied since September 28, 2000, dismantle settlement outposts erected

since March 2001, and "freeze all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements)."

Given this international consensus and the U.S. military victory in Iraq, Arafat created the post of prime minister and appointed to it a senior Palestinian leader, and critic of his policies, Abu Mazin. Yet this quickly appeared to be just a ploy as it became evident that Abu Mazin was not an "empowered" prime minister since Arafat retained control over Palestinian security forces. Moreover, neither the Islamist groups-- Hamas and Islamic Jihad--or important parts of Fatah--the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and the Tanzim-- accepted the Road Map and Arafat made no move to force their compliance. In addition, the Road Map was criticized by 88 U.S. senators, who said that it did not take as strong a position against Palestinian terrorism as had Bush's statement of June 24, 2002.(73)

Nevertheless, Bush again invested his personal prestige in an effort to expedite the peace process, meeting with King Abdullah II of Jordan, Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, King Hamad al Khalifa of Bahrain and Abu Mazin at Sharm el-Sheikh to get Arab support for the Road Map. The next day he met with Sharon and Abu Mazin in Aqaba Jordan.

While the visits were strong on photo opportunities, nothing much happened on the ground. Palestinian terrorist attacks, followed by Israeli reprisals, continued until June 29 when Abu Mazin succeeded in eliciting the promise of a 90-day *hudna*, or truce, from the leaders of Hamas, the Tanzim and Islamic Jihad, although not from the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. While Israeli military leaders worried that the terrorist groups would use the 90-day period to rebuild their forces and armaments (especially the Qassem rockets that had been fired from Gaza into Israel), Sharon proved willing to take a chance on the *hudna* by withdrawing Israeli

forces from northern Gaza and Bethlehem, closing some checkpoints hindering traffic between Palestinian villages and cities, shutting down some illegal outposts on the West Bank (although other outposts were set up), releasing some Palestinian prisoners including an elderly terrorist who had killed 14 Israelis in 1975 (although far fewer prisoners than the Palestinians wanted), and allowing more Palestinians to work in Israel.

Bush sought to move the peace process ahead by meeting with both Abu Mazin and Sharon in Washington in July 2000, although differences over Israel's construction of its security wall proved problematic during Bush's talks with the two leaders.(74) Meanwhile, despite the *hudna*, attacks on Israel, including the murder of Israeli civilians, continued, although the number was down. However, Bush's key demand, that Abu Mazin crack down on the terrorists, was not met, primarily because Arafat refused to allow it. When a terrorist attack in Jerusalem on August 19, 2003 killed 21 Israelis, including a number of children, Sharon stepped up his retaliations on the terrorists, leading Hamas to openly declare an end to the *hudna* that had not been implemented.

The end of the *hudna* jeopardized the position of Abu Mazin, who resigned on September 6, as did an unwise appeal by Powell directly to Arafat to help Abu Mazin end the violence, a statement which seemed to undermine Bush's attempt to isolate Arafat. The end of the *hudna* and the resignation of Abu Mazin who was replaced by Abu Ala, appeared to bring the Road Map to a halt if not yet to a dead end. Indeed, in mid-September 2003 following Bush's talks with Jordan's King Abdullah, in which the U.S. president strongly condemned Arafat for the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Condoleezza Rice stated that the peace process was in a "lull," while the U.S. waited to see if Abu Ala could bring the terrorist groups under control.(75)

Abu Ala demanded concessions from Sharon before he would agree to resume negotiations, and Sharon refused. Nonetheless, the fear of international pressure and his reading of long-term trends led Sharon to a new strategy--a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip--that would set the tone for Arab-Israeli diplomacy in the final year of the Bush Administration's first term.(76)

THE SHARON DISENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE AND U.S. POLICY, NOVEMBER 2003-NOVEMBER 2004

Sharon's decision to disengage from the Gaza Strip and dismantle settlements both there and in part of the West Bank, was largely seen by the Bush Administration as a step in the right direction.(77) The United States was also urging the Israeli government to move the counter-terrorist security fence it was building to lines closer to the pre-1967 borders. The fence was moved as a result of both U.S. pressure and Israeli court decisions.

An external factor in the equation was the growing U.S. concern over events in Iraq where a war was being waged against the U.S. presence and new, post-Saddam government. Powell noted that there was some connection between the two issues, stating in February 2004,

"We fully understand that this conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis is a source of a great deal of the anti-American feelings that exist in that part of the world and does affect what we're doing in Iraq."(78)

The United States, he added, wanted to know more about Sharon's plan and how it would be implemented.(79) In a speech a few days later, he noted, "It is difficult for us...to put...pressure on the Israeli side as long as terrorism is seen as a legitimate political act on the part of the Palestinians. It is not--it can't be, not in this post-9/11 age."(80) At the same time, in the words of a senior official, the United States hoped that the withdrawal

would "re-energize" political and other reforms on the Palestinian side.(81)

The end result of the bargaining was a meeting between Sharon and Bush in Washington in mid-April 2004 structured to reinforce the Sharon disengagement initiative. Bush welcomed Sharon's disengagement plan. Bush urged that any peace agreement would require the establishment of a Palestinian state and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel.(82) He also stated: "In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949." Finally, Bush reaffirmed Israel's right to self-defense against terrorism

During his meeting with Sharon, Bush also made a number of gestures to the Palestinians, reaffirming his commitment to a two-state solution and calling on Israel to freeze settlement activity and remove unauthorized outposts. He also asserted that Israel's security fence should: not be a political one, be temporary, take into account its impact on Palestinians, and not determine the final borders.

In May 2004, Bush got a Quartet meeting to endorse the plan as a "rare moment of opportunity in the search for peace in the Middle East," and in early June obtained the support of the G8 nations for it. The G8 meeting endorsed the Bush anti-terrorist platform, urging a rebuilding of the Palestinian Authority security services "so that they enforce the rule of law, mount effective opposition against all forms of terrorism, and report to an empowered interior minister and prime minister."(83) In his speech to the UN in September, Bush repeated his main themes calling on Israel to impose a settlement freeze and dismantle unauthorized outposts while denouncing Palestinian terrorism and calling for a new

Palestinian leadership. He also called on world leaders to "withdraw all favor and support from any Palestinian ruler who fails his people and betrays their cause," adding:

Peace will not be achieved by Palestinian rulers who intimidate opposition, tolerate corruption and maintain ties to terrorist groupsThose who would lead a new Palestinian state should adopt peaceful means to achieve the rights of their people and create...institutions of a stable democracy.(84)

He also called on the Arab states to end incitement, to cut off public and private funding for terrorism, and establish normal relations with Israel.

In late September, a new Israeli offensive took place in the Gaza Strip both responding to cross-border attacks and to weaken the terrorist infrastructure to reduce future such operations and the likelihood that an Israeli withdrawal could be portrayed as a victory for those groups. While the State Department, in commenting on the Israeli move, stressed that Israel had the right to self-defense, it also stated that the Israeli military forces should seek to "minimize the humanitarian consequences of their actions."(85) The United States vetoed a UN resolution criticizing Israel because it failed to mention the Palestinian rocket attacks that triggered the action." (86)

For the Bush Administration during its first term, there was an initial determination not to become involved in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, having witnessed the failure of Clinton's efforts, Bush nonetheless got drawn into it on four occasions. These were the major ceasefire effort commencing in June 2001; following the September 11, 2001 attacks; in March-April 2002; and in conjunction with the Road Map after April 2003. He also became involved regarding the Israeli redeployment plan and regarding the

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security fence issue, but all of President Bush's efforts foundered on the shoals of Palestinian terrorism. Soon after the President's reelection in early November came the death of Yasir Arafat. Whether Arafat's successor, Abu Mazin, will do what is necessary to curb Palestinian terrorism, and thereby earn US support, remains to be seen.

**Dr. Robert O. Freedman is Peggy Meyerhoff Pearlstone Professor of Political Science at Baltimore Hebrew University, and Visiting Professor of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East Since 1970; Moscow and the Middle East: Soviet Policy Since the Invasion of Afghanistan; Soviet-Israel Relations Under Gorbachev and The Middle East Enters the 21st Century.*

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