

American Policy  
In  
The Middle East

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The United States interest in the Middle East region may have started with Christians traveling to the Holy Land in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to trace the footsteps of Jesus Christ. But as this American interest was being developed, Zionism was emerging as a national movement to claim Palestine as the historical home of the Jews. As a result, “it seemed wholly appropriate to an America steeped in biblical teachings that Jews should return to the Holy Land,” wrote Kathleen Christison in the CounterPunch. American interest in biblical studies, ignorance of the Arab and Muslim peoples in general, and Zionist propaganda, led most Americans to view Arabs and Muslims as alien to the Holy Land and largely inferior human beings.

However, the roots of the current United States policy in the Middle East are to be found in the early years of the post-WW I era, which witnessed the emergence of the United States as the wealthiest and strongest western power. This policy has continued to evolve, but became clear with definitive objectives during the Cold War years following the end of WW II. These were years that witnessed the height of antagonism and hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union on the one hand and the birth of the State of Israel in Palestine on the other. American Middle East policy, nevertheless, emerged slowly and largely in reaction to five major developments that affected the United States position in the world and influenced the process of foreign policy making in Washington.

1. The discovery of oil in large quantities in the Arab Gulf states in the early decades of the twentieth century on the one hand, and the transformation of the United States from a major oil exporter in the 1950s into a major oil importer in the 1960s and beyond.
2. The emergence of an effective Jewish lobby in the United States, which subsequently led to transforming American foreign policy in the Middle East into matters of domestic politics rather than issues of national security concerns.

3. The rise of the Soviet Union as a superpower following the end of WW II and its adoption of policies meant to undermine the western way of life, American hegemony and the capitalistic socioeconomic system in general.
4. The failure of the Arab states, individually and collectively, to understand the magnitude and the real meaning of international developments of the post-WWII era and to define and defend their national interests accordingly.
5. The failure of the Arab states in general and the Arab League in particular to play an active role in influencing American public opinion and counter the growing Jewish influence over the political process and the American national media.

## The Role of Gulf Oil

The discovery of oil in the early twentieth century in the Middle East caused American interest in the Arab region to take an unexpected turn; oil was first discovered in Iran in 1908 and later in Iraq in 1927. Britain tried but failed at the time to exclude American companies from having a share in the oil riches of the Gulf states. The United States, being the strongest and richest western power would not accept a minor role in Gulf affairs or be content with a small share in its oil wealth. The US administration forced the British government to give American oil companies a large stake in the Gulf oil industry; and when oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia the American companies got the lion's share of it. In 1953, the US Central Intelligence Agency engineered the coup that ended the rule of Muhammed Musaddiq, the nationalist Iranian leader who nationalized the Iranian oil industry. Subsequently, power in Iran was restored to the deposed Shah who agreed to play by the rules set by the US government, which became his main supporter and the protector of his regime.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the oil potential of the Arab Gulf states became more apparent. The New oil fields that were discovered in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates added huge reserves to those that had already been discovered in both Iran and Iraq. Oil reserves in the Gulf region represent today about two-thirds of the world proven oil reserves. And as more oil and oil reserves were being discovered in other Arab countries, the

United States oil imports were rising at a fast pace. The development of a huge consumer market for the car industry had increased oil consumption tremendously, transforming the United States from a major oil exporter in the early 1950s, to a major oil importer a decade later. American dependence on Gulf oil has continued to rise, making access to the region's oil supplies and protecting such supplies from a possible Soviet threat one of America's highest priorities. Consequently, the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular acquired strategic importance, leading the United States to commit itself to protecting the region and defending its Arab and non-Arab allies in the Middle East.

The Carter Doctrine, issued in 1980 in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, committed the United States to defending the Gulf region against external threats, which were perceived at the time as emanating from the Soviet Union. In the wake of the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the call of the Iranian leadership for the overthrow of the Arab regimes of the Gulf states, President Reagan expanded the Carter Doctrine to include internal threats as well. Such threats were perceived as emanating from Iran, Iraq and other indigenous forces calling for political change and socioeconomic transformation.

During the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-88, and in an attempt to stop the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, the US government provided the Iraqi regime with much needed military technology and intelligence to launch a successful attack against Iran. At the same time, and in another attempt to deny Iraq victory, the United States provided Iran through Israel with sophisticated military hardware to fight the Iraqi army and stop its advance. In so doing, the United States tried and succeeded in containing the Islamic threat of Iran and the potential nationalist threat of Iraq. But by supporting both antagonists and prolonging the war, the US government had caused human casualties to increase tremendously and led both regional powers to emerge from the war totally exhausted and much weakened. This Gulf policy toward Iran and Iraq, which continued throughout the eight years of the Clinton administration, was later called "dual containment." And while the military and economic powers of both Iran and Iraq were being undermined, US allies in the Gulf region were becoming more and more dependent on American political support and military protection than ever before.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, declared the annexation of Kuwaiti territory and refused to withdraw its forces despite international pressure and UN resolutions and Arab condemnation. Subsequently, the United States of America led an international military coalition to liberate Kuwait and enable its people to regain lost independence. The 1991 Gulf war gave the United States a golden opportunity and a legitimate pretext to strengthen its military presence in the Gulf region and further weaken both Iran and Iraq. The war was instrumental in decapitating the Iraqi military power to the point where it could no longer threaten the security of its neighbors; it also served to weaken the Iraqi economy to the point where it could no longer meet the basic needs for the Iraqi people. The war also intimidated Iran, causing its potential military threat and political influence to become largely insignificant. Consequently, the Arab oil exporting states were incorporated into the American sphere of political and military influence and made to subordinate their national interests to those of the US. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has in fact strengthened American military presence in the Gulf and deepened Arab divisions and the Arab people's sense of defeat, anger and helplessness.

To justify the war against Iraq and gain the support of world public opinion, the US president invoked strategic, legal and moral claims. While the strategic claims were understandable and rather acceptable, most Arabs and Muslims perceived the legal and moral claims as ill intended and offensive. In view of the long-standing pro-Israeli American policy in the Middle East, the raising of the moral question was instrumental in exposing the duplicity of US policy in the region. While rightfully insisting on the right of the Kuwaiti people to self-determination and to live freely in their country and lead a normal life without fear, the United States continued to deny the Palestinian people the same rights. And while demonstrating an unwavering commitment to go to war to implement UN resolutions regarding the Iraqi aggression, the United States continued to back Israeli aggression and occupation of Arab lands in contravention of several UN resolutions and international law.

UN records indicate that the United States has used its veto power in the UN Security Council 6 out of every 7 times to protect Israel, defend Israeli violations of international law and human rights, and prevent the UN from condemning Israeli crimes against the Palestinian

people. The United States has also used its veto power constantly to block the implementation of UN resolutions that the US government had voted for and supposedly continues to support regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States does not only lack the courage and moral principles to right the wrongs in the Middle East only; it also uses its sheer power and resources to prevent other nations and international organizations from initiating actions to restore Palestinian rights and end Israeli occupation of Arab lands.

From an American point of view, the Middle East region was in the past, still is today, and is expected to be in the future a home for both an indispensable source of energy and an Israeli strategic ally. To protect the security of both Israel and oil, American policymakers maintain that the region must be made stable, hospitable to American interests and military presence, and free from hostile forces. Stability and security, in turn, require that potential forces calling for genuine socio-political change in the region be eliminated or substantially contained.

While Iran was being contained and made to live under constant American threat, American forces invaded and occupied Iraq in March 2003 and put an end to Saddam Hussein's regime and the military potential it represented. In the process, however, US forces caused tremendous damage to Iraq's infrastructure and cultural heritage and killed thousands of Iraqis. The American mishandling of the Iraqi situation, which became apparent few months after the invasion, has given rise to violence and armed resistance that continues to claim the lives of American soldiers, Iraqi policemen, UN personnel and other innocent civilians. Terrorism, which was being fought in Afghanistan and contained in other parts of the world, was given a new life and a new incentive; it spread to Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Indonesia, Spain and other countries, claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent people.

Meanwhile, and since 1967, successive US administrations invested no real effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in its entirety. Americans were only able to engage themselves in conflict management to reduce the intensity of the conflict as much as possible, rather than resolve it and establish peace and stability in the region. And while doing so, Americans have continued to protect Israel and defend its expansionist policies and even crimes against the Palestinian people. Ariel Sharon, who is best known for facilitating and helping commit the

1982 Sabra and Shatilla massacres in Lebanon, was given a free hand by the Bush administration to resume and intensify his crimes against the Palestinian people. Palestinian cries for international help and intervention have largely been ignored; and lacking the power to stop Sharon themselves, Palestinians are forced to fight on their own; some resorting to suicide bombing of Israeli military and civilian targets.

In May 2004, Amnesty International wrote in its annual report, “some of those (Israeli) acts of destruction amount to grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention and are war crimes.” And since such acts and conditions, which the US government has condoned and even helped create, seem to facilitate the achievement of American and Israeli regional goals, the overall objective of the US Middle East policy has become one of maintaining rather than changing the status quo. As a result, the region has failed to achieve the desired peace or political stability, or even enough economic progress to ameliorate poverty and reduce the level and incentive of violence.

### The Israeli Lobby

Hours after the leaders of the Zionist organization in Palestine proclaimed independence in 1948, president Harry Truman extended US diplomatic recognition to the newly created Jewish state. The president’s almost instantaneous recognition of the State of Israel, however, was neither recommended nor approved by his advisors. Virtually all foreign affairs advisors, including the secretaries of state and defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine from the standpoint of the American national interests. They argued that the creation of such a state violates the principle of self-determination for the Palestinian Arabs and, if taken, would destabilize the entire Middle East region. Nonetheless, President Truman ignored the advice of his aids, recognized Israel and, to justify his move, said: “I am sorry gentlemen, but I have to answer to the hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism. I do not have thousands of Arabs among my constituents.”

It is worth noting, however, that President Truman had initially expressed opposition to the idea of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine because he feared that such an act might require

sending tens of thousands of American troops to the region to protect the new state. But Jewish leaders, fearing the consequences, intensified their lobbying efforts and threatened to muster Jewish votes against Truman in the 1948 presidential elections, which he needed to win in order to stay in the White House. Consequently, Truman rejected the advice of his advisors and acted to advance his personal interests rather than defend his political convictions.

Many American and European writers have since argued that the action taking by Truman to support Zionism had unjustly led to displacing another entire population—the Palestinians people who lived on the land Truman helped give away. A few days later, President Truman gave Israel \$100 million loan, while the estimated 800,000 displaced, dispossessed and homeless Palestinians received neither economic assistance nor political or moral support from the Truman administration. The only contribution the United States made to help the Palestinian people cope with the Jewish-inflicted tragedy came later in the form of financial contribution to the UNRWA, which was created by the United Nations to provide food and shelter for the homeless Palestinian refugees.

But by the time Truman took his decision to recognize the Jewish state, supporting the aim of Zionism to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine had become part of the American mindset. In fact, President Wilson and the US Congress had endorsed the Balfour declaration more than 25 years earlier. The Balfour Declaration was a commitment made in November 1917 by the British government to leaders of the Zionist organization to facilitate the establishment of a homeland for Jews in Palestine. The Truman administration's decision to recognize Israel, therefore, was a political move motivated by domestic political considerations and personal ambitions and dictated by a biased political, cultural and religious view of the Arabs. It is a view that continues today to denigrate Arabs and Muslims in general, belittle their feelings, and ignore their grievances.

While the Truman's words and deeds gave Zionism a monumental victory, his misguided decision to support the creation of a Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinian nation had served to legitimize the practice of putting the political ambitions of elected officials ahead of moral considerations and the US national interest. A precedent thus was established allowing

minorities and special interests groups to form political lobbies with the intention of exerting pressure on decision makers and influence foreign policy making in their favor. Since the decision to support Zionism came at the expense of the Palestinian people who lost their homes, land and means of survival, it also served to subordinate moral principles to personal political considerations. And despite the many active lobbies and special interest groups that were established since then in the United States, the Jewish lobby, known as the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, remains by far the most active and influential political lobby.

As the number and influence of the many Jewish organizations increased in the United States, American political support and economic and military aid to Israel increased as well. The Johnson administration, for example, moved in June 1967 to sanction Israeli occupation of lands belonging to three Arab states in addition to occupying the rest of Palestine, areas known today as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The United States, moreover, used its veto power at the UN in 1967 to ensure that UN Security Council Resolution 242, which called for a cease-fire, would not include a call for the fighting forces to withdraw to the prewar lines. And since then, US commitment to defend Israel and advance its political interests and support its expansionist policies has continued to intensify and deepen year after year.

Israel's need for American economic and military assistance on the one hand, and America's need for an effective foreign policy instrument during the Cold War years on the other, and continued lobbying by AIPAC have served to push the two states into an unholy alliance. While US support of Israel intensified, economic and military aid to the Jewish state doubled or tripled year after year, reaching some \$5 billion annually in the mid-1980s. Total American military and economic aid to the Jewish state since its inception in 1948, is estimated to have exceeded \$200 billion. Today, and for the last 25 years, America has been giving Israel in military, economic and financial aid an average of \$10,000 per minute, \$600,000 per hour, and about \$14 million per day.

American-Israeli relations in general and American aid to the Jewish state in particular have largely been the result of the following major factors:

1. The willingness of successive Israel governments to place their military and intelligence forces at the service of the United States to help fight communism and to do a lot of dirty work on behalf of the United States, particularly in Africa and Latin America.
2. The ability of a well-organized and persistent Jewish lobby to influence American elections, manipulate domestic politics and public opinion, and pressure decision makers and elected officials, particularly members of Congress, to support every Israeli policy and approve every Israeli request for economic and military aid.
3. A growing numbers of American Jews placed in key political and legislative positions in the US government, where strategies are planned, strategic decisions are made, and policies are articulated and carried out.
4. A tremendous increase in Jewish influence over the American media where the image of Israel and Jews in general is formulated and continuously polished, while the image of Muslims in general and Arabs in particular is continuously tarnished. In fact, every little improvement in Israel's image has come at the expense of the Arab image; every piece of propaganda to legitimize Israeli claims in Palestine has been an act to delegitimize Palestinian historical rights and grievances.

## The Soviet Union and the Cold War

At the end of WW II, the United States of America and the Soviet Union emerged as the only superpowers competing for global dominance. The two superpowers adopted different, largely contradictory, socioeconomic systems and sociopolitical philosophies. Followers of each superpower were led to believe that their economic system, way of life, and sociopolitical orientation negates that of the other and that peaceful coexistence between American capitalism and Soviet socialism was not possible. As a result, the two superpowers found themselves engaged in a cold war that lasted more than four decades. However, a mutual desire to avoid direct confrontation and escape nuclear war, led both superpowers to transfer their conflict to third countries where the war was very hot, not cold; it caused the death of

millions of innocent people, most of whom were, to use an American cynical expression, collateral damage. Since most of the East-West battles were fought on foreign lands, people of the Third World were made to pay a heavy price for a war they did not cause and had nothing to gain from. In fact, it is estimated that the Cold War and the conflicts it caused or exacerbated have claimed the lives of some 25 million innocent people in the Third World.

At the end of WW II, communism emerged as a radical idea of socioeconomic transformation whose major objective was to change the status quo and end all real and perceived social ills of capitalism and European colonialism. Consequently, communism was viewed and diligently pursued by its followers as a revolutionary, anti-establishment, anti-West movement. And this, in turn, led the Soviet Union to adopt an offensive policy to change the status quo through the incitement of Third World nations to revolt against capitalism, colonialism and western powers in general, and to reject their way of life and socioeconomic system in particular. And to achieve its objectives, the Soviet Union began to compete aggressively with the United States for global dominance.

The American system of capitalism and democracy, on the other hand, was the product of a western life experience that proved its utility and viability over time. American attachment to that experience was an expression of a strongly held belief in the soundness of western values, socioeconomic system, and political organization. Consequently, the United States and its European allies adopted a defensive policy to preserve the status quo and strengthen the foundations of their systems. They formed NATO as a collective security pact, formed other military pacts with allies around the globe, initiated new social programs in their countries, and committed themselves to protecting western interests and way of life. It was a policy meant to contain Soviet political influence, undermine communism, and force the Soviet Union into an arms race it could not win.

However, an American policy to protect the status quo and defend the postcolonial arrangements was in effect a policy to oppose change in the Third World, even change instigated by indigenous forces calling for genuine socio-political transformation and respect for human rights. In fact, the United State and its western allies tended to perceive every change

in the Third World during most of the Cold War years as a negative strategic development requiring immediate and decisive action. As a result, many Third World dictators flourished, social and economic problems were deepened, political instability became endemic, human rights suffered, opportunities and national resources wasted, and the Arab-Israeli conflict was prolonged and made very costly and harder to resolve.

The United States, being the leader of the western world, began to act as an international policeman whose job was to keep law and order around the globe, regardless of the causes of breaking the old law and the consequences of enforcing the law and policing the scene. And to contain communism and weaken its appeal, the United States began to cultivate new friends and allies in the Third World and to create client states and regional forces to help fight communism and abort change. But by acting as a policeman in a dangerous neighborhood, the United States found itself oftentimes in collusion with many repressive regimes and regressive, largely criminal dictators. And this in turn, served unintentionally to sanction repression in many Third World countries including the Arab world, and damage the US reputation as a moral power and a compassionate nation.

Arab states, being politically divided, militarily weak, and technologically and economically underdeveloped, were deemed unreliable allies and of little strategic importance to the United States in its fight against communism. As a result, most decision makers in Washington, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, saw Israel as the only regional power capable of aiding the United States to stop a possible Soviet invasion of the Gulf region. And that in turn served to enable Israel to get substantial American military and economic aid to build a military force capable of intimidating and repeatedly defeating its Arab neighbors and denying the Palestinian people their legitimate national and human rights. American decision makers seem to have concluded that the only meaningful contribution Arab states could make to foster US global strategy was to continue to make oil available at reasonable prices and offer their territories as military bases for American troops to defend the oilfields against any Soviet threat. After the Cold War had ended and the Soviet Union disintegrated, the US turned its attention to containing the Iranian and Iraqi potential threat to oil supplies and regional political stability.

Though US policy in the Middle East has sought to maintain political stability, it had in fact contributed to causing the several Arab-Israeli wars and the first, second and third Gulf wars as well. It has also contributed to the deepening of the economic, political and social crisis in the Arab world, as well as to the spread of terrorism and anti-Americanism in most Arab and Muslim countries. "By not understanding and taking to account the Palestinian perspective equally with the Israeli perspective, the United States has actually created the conditions that have led to most, or perhaps all, the region's wars," wrote Christison, a retired CIA analyst.

### Arab Failure to Define and Protect their National Interest

Arab states in general have failed not only to protect their national interests, but also to define such interests in clear terms and develop individual and collective strategies to pursue them with diligence. Arab states, being weak and divided and having no strategy to defend their rights or develop their societies, were taken for granted by the US government, which felt that Arab interests could be ignored without consequences. The only collective action Arab took to defend their national interests and pressure the West to change its pro-Israel policy came in 1973 when the oil exporting Arab states reduced oil production in general and imposed an oil embargo on oil shipments to the United States, the Netherlands, and few other countries.

While most politicians and intellectuals associated with Arab regimes have argued that the 1973 oil embargo was a failure and therefore, it should not have happened, the truth is much more complicated than that. In the wake of the embargo, for example, members of the European Community opened a dialogue with Arab states aimed at reaching a common ground on a wide range of political, economic, social and cultural issues. But while the Europeans took the Arabs seriously, Arabs, unfortunately, failed to take themselves seriously; inter-Arab divisions resurfaced, bilateral deals were negotiated in secrecy, and the entire exercise ended, with the Europeans getting what they intended to get without having to give anything of value in return.

At the end of the Cold War in 1989, many Arab analysts and policy makers thought that Israel would lose its status as an American strategic ally and, consequently, would be viewed by

US decision makers as a liability rather than an asset. But things were not as simple or rosy as many Arabs had thought and wished. In fact, at the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Israel emerged stronger than ever before and more able to influence decision making in the United States. The removal of the Soviet military threat and the demise of communism have served to free US policymakers from the Cold War constraints and the previously perceived need to appease certain Arab regimes and seek their friendship. And this, in turn, gave Israel and its American backers the opportunity to press their demands and tighten their control of policy making in Washington. By the mid-1990s Israeli political influence reached the point of near total control of the process of making policy regarding the Middle East.

During the Clinton administration, for example, every US official dealing with the Middle East at the State Department and at the National Security Council, including those involved in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiation had become Jewish-American. In addition, every undersecretary of state has also become Jewish-American. All such Jewish Americans were at the time and continue to be today strong supporters of the Jewish state and enthusiastic admirers of Israeli policies that promote expansionism, practice racism, and refuse to engage the Palestinians in a genuine peace process. As a consequence, US Middle East policy has become irrational, seeing every issue through Israeli eyes and justifying every Israeli policy, regardless of its illegal nature and negative ramifications on the American image and the US national interest. Such a policy, however, could not have been constructed or implemented without ignoring Arab concerns and belittling all Palestinian rights and grievances.

Christison says, Americans “approached peace negotiations and policymaking in general from an Israeli perspective.” Because of such perspective, “not only does the fact of Palestinian dispossession in 1948 remain an unrecognizable episode, but the fact of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem is now a new unrecognizable reality---mentioned rarely by the media, even more rarely by policymakers. And Israel still enjoys overwhelming predominance in US policy considerations, a reality magnified under the Bush administration.” The anti-Arab, anti-Moslem American mindset has, unfortunately, become a frame of reference

that works today to inspire American political thinking and policymaking towards the Arabs, Moslems and the Palestinians people.

Despite the tragic impact of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, they have had no discernible impact on US Middle East policy. Israel has continued to claim that it is America's closest ally in the Middle East and its partner in the war on terrorism. And America has continued to provide the Jewish state with the means to carry its criminal policies in the occupied Palestinian territories.

But regardless of what Israeli and American politicians claim, Israel can no longer fool an honest US policy maker into believing that it is capable of fighting international terrorism. Israeli forces, as the last decade's experience has shown, have failed to prevent attacks by radical Palestinian groups and stop suicidal bombers from reaching Israeli targets. Despite Israeli success in assassinating tens of Palestinian leaders, committing daily massacres, and closing almost all Palestinian towns and villages and building a racist and inhumane wall around itself at the expense of the Palestinian people and their livelihood, suicide attacks have continued. Since Israel knows these facts very well, its agents and backers in the United States have launched one of the most vicious political and media campaigns to date to discredit both Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the eyes of the US Congress and the American people, accusing them of supporting Islamic radicalism.

The fight against international terrorism and the role Arabs could play in its execution give the Arab states a unique opportunity to win, for the first time, an important argument in Washington or at least to improve their image in the United States. The war against terrorism, as President Bush had acknowledged, is going to be long and tough; it will also require patience and perseverance and international cooperation. But instead of asking for Arab help and partnership in the fight against terrorism, the Bush administration has joined the Israeli hate campaign to discredit most Arab regimes and prepare the grounds for what it calls "strategic changes in the Middle East." As part of its plan, the Bush administration invaded Iraq in 2003 and removed Saddam Hussein; gave Sharon a free hand to commit as many massacres as he

wished in Palestine, and promote a badly conceived program for strategic change in what it calls the Greater Middle East region.

## American Policy since the End of the Cold War

After the Cold War had ended, most political analysts thought that the Middle East conflict would become a US priority and a solution for it would be found soon. Such analysts reasoned that US interests in the region require that political stability and peace prevail and cooperation rather than conflict between the regions many states become a reality. They also thought that the promises made to Arab leaders in exchange for their participation in the military campaign against Saddam Hussein in 1991 dictate that the US uses its prestige and influence to pressure all parties concerned to accept a comprehensive and fair solution to the conflict. Most political analysts, particularly Arab analysts, also thought that US military aid and political support for Israel would diminish since the dirty role Israel played previously on behalf of America in Africa and Latin America was no longer needed. The disappearance of the Soviet Union did not only eliminate the Soviet military threat; it also vastly reduced the strategic importance of most Third World states. But such predictions, as far as Israel is concerned, were proven misplaced.

At the time the Cold War had ended, Jewish influence over the decision making process in Washington and Jewish control of the American media had become so tight that no rational American politician would have dared to seriously challenge the Israeli lobby. Using the memory of the Holocaust tragedy and Jewish voters, the national media, and financial contributions to political campaigns, the Jewish lobby was able to determine the future of most elected US politicians and manipulate American public opinion with ease. And through the US government, Israel was also able to intimidate the UN and other major European states and organizations that called for ending the Israeli occupation of Arab land and domination of the Palestinian People.

The Clinton administration, which inherited the Madrid peace process inaugurated by President George Bush in 1991, tried to follow the same path and use the same mediating team that had failed to advance the peace process a single inch. Disappointment with American

mediation and an uprising by the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories in 1987 forced both the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to negotiate the Oslo Accords in 1993. The Clinton administration could do nothing but bless the agreement and encourage both parties to honor their obligations enunciated in the Oslo Accords and in the interim agreements Israelis and Palestinians subsequently signed. However, the American team of mediators provided no new ideas to facilitate further progress or even insure that signed agreements are implemented; and when the US president intervened in the late 1990s to save the peace process from collapse, he failed to use the carrots and sticks needed to obtain binding commitments from Israel.

In fact, continued American military and economic aid to Israel, and protection of the Jewish state from international criticism and condemnation have given Israel no incentive to behave rationally or morally and end its occupation of Arab lands. They have also provided Israel with the assurances it needed to defy all UN resolutions and abort all attempts to solve the conflict peacefully. In addition, US failure to address the issue of Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories indicated that the US government was biased and could not be trusted to play the role of an honest broker. American and Israeli decision makers, moreover, have long favored the step-by-step diplomatic approach because it leaves them in total control of the peace process. The Clinton administration has allowed Israel to choose when and how to negotiate or not to negotiate according to its perceived security requirements, regardless of the impact of such an approach on further peace negotiations, Mid-East stability and American credibility in the region.

Coming on the heels of the Clinton administration's failure to broker an Israeli-Palestinian deal, the Bush administration moved to reduce and downgrade American involvement in the search for Middle East peace. And instead of trying to identify and overcome the reasons for Clinton's failure, the Bush administration moved to give Israel its unequivocal support. While all previous US administrations have recognized the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem as occupied territories, Donald Rumsfeld, the US secretary of defense said in one of his misguided pronouncements, "what occupation." But by so doing, the Bush administration has

unintentionally caused the search for an Israeli-Palestinian peaceful solution to become more complicated and the conflict to become intractable. And in view of the Arab states' failure to articulate their grievances and press their demands, the US government could not see the urgent need to address the issue and find a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States, while claiming that it is working hard to achieve peace in the Middle East, its efforts so far have only served to achieve Israeli objectives, frustrate Arabs in general, and deny the Palestinian people the opportunity to attain any of their legitimate rights. It has also destroyed its credibility in most Arab and Muslim eyes and encouraged terrorism.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, the US administration felt that it needed to renew and invigorate its involvement in the search for peace in the Middle East. Secretary of State Colin Powell, in a major speech made November 19, 2001, reiterated America's commitment to peace and stability in the Middle East and talked about ending occupation; President Bush, on the other hand, talked about the establishment of a Palestinian state. In his presentation of the United States National Security Strategy in September 2002, President Bush said, "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is critical because of the toll of human suffering, and because of America's close relationship with the State of Israel and key Arab states. There can be no peace for either side without freedom for both sides. America stands committed to an independent and democratic Palestine, living beside Israel in peace and security."

However, after months of the president's speech and declared commitments to end occupation and establish an independent and democratic Palestinian state, the US has done almost nothing to move the process on the path it outlined. In fact, the best that the Bush administration could do is to give Sharon a free hand to continue his daily massacres of innocent Palestinians, confiscate more of their land and build more Jewish colonies on it. The building of the "security wall" serves to confiscate about 60% of the West Bank, and other policies implemented against the Palestinian people represent some of harshest collective punishment measures the world has ever known. And after the Israeli Prime Minister committed a grave massacre in Jenin in 2002, President Bush called Mr. Sharon "a man of

peace,” as if to say congratulations, this is the way to peace that America approves and is committed to support.

Nevertheless, The US, the UN, Russia and the European Union produced in December 2002 a “Road Map” as a plan to approach peacemaking in the Middle East. The plan calls for creating a Palestinian state in Palestine by the year 2005, the immediate dismantling of Jewish settlements build since March 2001, and negotiations to settle the thorny issues of the conflict. It was a plan the Bush administration was soon to forget in favor of a Sharon plan to withdraw from Gaza unilaterally and dismantle Jewish settlements there by the end of 2005. But in reaction to the Road Map plan Sharon asked Mr. Bush first to postpone its publication, then asked for many modifications and then placed several conditions that Palestinians have to meet for peace negotiations to resume.

However, when it became evident in April 2003 that the Bush administration would make the plan public the Israeli government announced that it intended to resist American pressure to comply. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli finance minister and former Israeli Prime Minister said, “Pressure is expected, but we can and must resist. It is in our power to affect American policy towards Israel and towards the Palestinians.” (Quoted by the New York Times on April 25, 2003). In August 2003, and after the Palestine National Authority accepted the US demands for change and appointed a prime minister for the first time, and arranged for a unilateral declaration of a cease fire by the Palestinian militant forces, Sharon launched one of his most vicious military campaigns against Palestinian targets, civilian and non-civilian. This was done in the name of fighting terrorism but intended to bury the road map and end all hopes for a peaceful Arab-Israeli settlement.

Sharon, after having taken his decision to withdraw from Gaza and dismantle Jewish settlement there, ordered his forces to commit untold atrocities in Gaza Strip particularly in the Rafah refugee camp, killing hundreds, injuring thousands, destroying hundreds of homes and buildings and leaving more than a thousand families homeless. Amnesty International called some of the measures Israel used in Gaza “war crimes.” So, instead of leaving the Gaza people in peace and give the Palestinian Authority a chance to regroup and rebuild its institutions that

Israel kept destroying, Sharon decided to inflict as much damage in the Palestinian territories as possible and enrich his criminal record. And despite all of these atrocities, the Bush administration could not gather enough courage and join the rest of the world to condemn Sharon's tactics and acts.

In an editorial published May 18, 2004, the Washington Post said, "Mr. Powell conceded that the administration finds itself in the uncomfortable position of waiting to see whether Mr. Sharon will take action to revive his Gaza withdrawal plan—with part of the United States' standing in the Middle East, and Iraq, hanging on the outcome. Normally, a US president might be expected to insist that his ally deliver on his promises instead of launching an offensive that only makes matters worse. But that has not been Mr. Bush's habit with Mr. Sharon." Sharon has received no criticism from Mr. Bush, only encouragement, praise and admiration.

The following are considered the most important considerations that have influenced US policy in ways favorable to Israel and unfavorable to the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians

1. Cultural bias against Arabs in general built by Americans over the years since the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the one hand, and the sympathy they developed for Jews due to the suffering they experienced in Europe on the other;
2. US strategic and geopolitical interests that sought to contain the Soviet threat and undermine communism during the Cold War era, using the Middle East, its people, states, and land as instruments of US foreign policy;
3. Actions and activities of a powerful Israeli lobby that sought to manipulate domestic politics, dominate the process of Middle East policy making in Washington, and control the American media, particularly its handling of issues important to Israel and Jews in general; and
4. Actions and reactions of Arab states towards US designs and policies in the region, which tended to accept American pronouncements without much questioning, and ignore the need to understand decision making processes in Washington and use their resources to influence them.

## Conclusion

American commitment to arm, defend and protect the Arab oil exporting countries of the Gulf is expected to continue and strengthen. But such a commitment, while capable of protecting friendly Arab regimes from outside threats, cannot protect them from popular anger and domestic discontent that seem to grow with the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, the continued deterioration of economic conditions, and the increasing suffering of the Palestinian and Iraqi peoples. Meanwhile, the US military invasion and occupation of Iraq and the destruction it caused to Iraq's infrastructure and cultural heritage have heightened Arab fear and resentment. If current US Middle East policy continues unchanged, it would ultimately lead to more terrorism, more poverty and human rights abuses, and possibly to domestic violence in several Arab states.

Generally speaking, the foreign policy of great powers is a function of geopolitical considerations and domestic politics. While both considerations seldom change drastically in the short run, domestic politics, particularly in democratic states, are subject to election cycles and election politics, and thus to the influence exerted by special interest groups and lobbies during election seasons. Since objectives sought by the many special interest groups are usually contradictory, foreign policies of great powers in general have become increasingly less flexible and consistent, lacking a strong moral foundation and a long-term view. Great powers, moreover, have to maintain political influence and, sometimes, military presence in many parts of the world and pursue several goals with varied, oftentimes contradictory objectives at once; they also have to appease and please many states and leaders in the world whose objectives and demands are often irreconcilable.

Nevertheless, the US ability to project power around the globe seems to have elevated certain domestic issues and policies into rules of international law to be enforced by American military and economic power. Most states in the world, and in the Arab world in particular are being forced today to observe US rules oftentimes against their will. In addition, due to domestic politics and election cycles, the United States is seldom able to engage in conflict resolution required by most international conflicts. It is only able to engage in crisis

management, sometimes in conflict management to moderate the severity of serious conflicts and change their direction in ways that serve US interests. But as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has demonstrated, such an approach can only lead to increasing violence and mounting human suffering, to prolonging conflicts, and making them more acrimonious and largely intractable.

During the Cold War years, 'containment' served as the organizing principle of US foreign policy. All efforts were directed towards containing the military power of the Soviet Union, undermining communism, and maintaining a balance of military power between the two superpowers. During those years, Arab territories in general were considered a cheap source of energy and a battleground to fight communism, nothing more and nothing less. Arabs, as a result, lost five decades of social, economic and political development, tremendous financial resources, and hundreds of thousands of innocent people in wars caused by superpowers antagonism and in defense of their perceived interests. And since US Middle East policy has not changed despite the demise of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the suffering of Arabs and the hindering of their development have not been eased.

In the wake of the Cold War in 1990, US foreign policy lost its organizing principle. And despite remaining the supreme military and economic power in the world, the United States under President Clinton failed to develop a global strategy. And in the absence of a serious foreign threat, US domestic politics, driven by special interest groups and foreign lobbies, particularly the Israeli lobby, assumed more importance than ever before. This change in particular has largely been at the expense of the Arab image in the US, Palestinian rights, and the hopes and aspirations of future generations of the peoples of the Middle East.

As President Bush assumed power in 2001, he began to consider perceived American interests pursued through unilateralism as a theme around which to organize US foreign policy, which led him to withdraw from or cause the abortion of six international treaties within six months. But the September 11 tragedy changed US perceptions, causing 'war on terrorism' to emerge as a powerful theme around which to organize foreign policy. President Bush asked all nations to join in the fight against international terrorism warning that nations that fail to join the United States and accept its dictates would be considered supporters of terrorism. This

attitude, consequently, led to increasing and deepening anti-Americanism in most parts of the world, including, of course, Arab and Muslim countries. A poll taken in February 2003 in England indicated that a majority of the British people saw the United States as the most dangerous nation in the world, ahead of North Korea and Iraq, which was at the time ruled by Saddam Hussein. A poll taken later in Europe identified Israel and the United States as the first and second most dangerous nations in the world that threaten world peace.

In view of the above, Arabs may have a slim but real opportunity to make their case heard in Washington. Worldwide anti-Americanism on the one hand, and American need for Arab help to fight terrorism on the other strengthen the Arab argument that, in exchange for Arab support of US plans, Arabs need American understanding of their grievances. Arabs, therefore, should insist on being treated with respect and not be considered just an instrument of US foreign policy; Arabs are an interested party that has its own national interest and legitimate objectives. In fact, if Arab regimes continue to accept American dictates, join the fight against international terrorism according to American plans and get nothing in return, the consequences are more likely to be grave not only for Arab regimes but for the United States as well.

The September tragedy, the “war on terrorism,” and American success in removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq provide the Bush administration with a rare opportunity to restructure its Middle East policy. A sound policy based on moral principles in tune with international law and more respectful of Arab interests and dignity would transform the Middle East and America’s image in Arab and Muslim countries and eventually contain terrorism. A continuation of the current US policy that lacks morality and legality and ignores geopolitical considerations for the sake of Israeli whims and personal political gains is a good recipe for more anti-Americanism, more terrorism and increased damage to America’s interests and image in the world. Arabs, Israelis and Americans have a lot to gain from a new policy that provides for Israel’s security, that brings an end to Israeli occupation of Arab land and recognizes the legitimate political and human rights of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, it would be safe to say that the making of American policy towards the Middle East has evolved over a century and was subject to changing domestic politics and fast evolving international developments. Consequently, the policy was led to adopt several objectives, starting with the protection of oil supplies from the Gulf, to supporting Israel, to fighting terrorism. And while such objectives were evolving, American officials did not stop to think about where the Middle East was going, how to secure America's long term interests and protect its image in that region, or how to build a better understanding of the Arab peoples and their culture. As a result, we all are paying a heavy price today: in higher oil prices, in more killings, in spread of extremism, in more terrorism and in loss of American credibility everywhere.

As for the primary objectives of US Middle East policy, they can be summarized as follows:

1. Guaranteeing access to the oil resources of the Arabian Gulf and securing the free flow of oil supplies to the West at reasonable prices;
2. Protecting the security of Israel and supporting its policies and maintaining Israeli military edge over all neighboring Arab states;
3. Defending the Gulf states, particularly the oil exporting ones, against internal and external forces of instability, and preventing the emergence of a regional power capable of dominating the region or threatening perceived American interests in that part of the world; and
4. Protecting the status quo and legitimizing the current regional balance of power, especially between Israel and its neighboring Arab states.

However, other, less important objectives were added after the Cold War had ended and the Soviet threat was eliminated and more acts of terrorism were committed. Such objectives include the following:

1. Fighting international terrorism;
2. Preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction;

3. Promoting democracy and the free market system;
4. Promoting American private investment; and
5. Changing Arab culture to become hospitable to securing American interests and western ideas, regardless of the impact such a policy may have on the power base of America's traditional friends.

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