

Sharon plays the Iraq card to get close to President Bush

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writes from Princeton

ISRAEL'S Prime Minister Ariel Sharon inherited an embarrassing problem. American Jews had backed the wrong horse in last November's election; they had voted overwhelmingly for Al Gore. Surely the Prime Minister could not come calling to the White House and demand payback from President George Bush. Instead, he dispatched "three wise men," Moshe Arens, Zalman Shoval and Dore Gold to America to discuss the urgent "threat" posed to both America and Israel by Iraq. Israel's wise men know that if anything ratchets up papa Bush's and by derivation son Bush's ire, it is the mention of Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Israel's propaganda machine went into overdrive immediately. The day after the Israeli election, February 7, Benjamin Netanyahu wrote an op-ed page article in the New York Times, entitled "Israel's Vote for Safe Peace," in which he blasted Ehud Barak for making too many concessions to the Palestinians.

"Barak failed to understand what it is that cannot be compromised." (Such as division of Jerusalem and the sharing of Haram al-Sharif). Praising Sharon as someone "who has devoted much of his life to defending Israel," dapper Netanyahu predicted that Sharon will be "putting Israel back on a steadier, more certain path towards peace." "While the people of Israel are prepared to pay a heavy price for peace, we are not prepared to pay any price. Our enduring conflict with the Palestinians is rooted in a dispute not over borders of the Jewish state but over its very existence," he said.

Ridiculing Yasir Arafat as someone who has "spoken out of both sides of his mouth," Netanyahu contended that by rejecting Barak's offer of a West Bank state with East Jerusalem as its capital, "he (Arafat) proved that what he really wants is not a state next to Israel, but a state instead of Israel." As to what to expect under Sharon, Netanyahu offered: "Until our adversaries recognize not only Israel's existence but also its legitimacy, Israel can afford to make only agreements based on security and defence." In the words of Shimon Peres (before he joined Sharon's cabinet), Sharon wants to make peace with the Arabs, without the Arabs! Israel received all the benefits of Oslo up front, with normal relations with China, India and some Arab countries, and a soaring standard of living. The Palestinians received more Jewish settlements on their

land, more Palestinian dead bodies and a catastrophic decline in the standards of living.

The real media hit man for Israel in the US is the New York Times columnist William Safire. Ecstatic over Sharon's victory, in a recent column he hailed Sharon as "The Unifier," labeled the Oslo Accord as "Oslo Fraud," ridiculed peaceniks Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilin as "arch-appeasers," and dismissed Barak-Clinton's peace overtures as "naïve, self-defeating Clinton-Barak bridge to nowhere." Safire is fond of quoting his telephone conversations with Sharon. In one of those Sharon reportedly offered to give the Palestinians less than half of the West Bank for a contiguous state. Having rejected 95 per cent, Safire believes the Palestinians will, nevertheless, be satisfied with the 40 per cent they currently hold because Sharon "can deliver what he promises."

"I asked (Sharon) about Iraq," says Safire. Sharon's reply: "Not a

backward people, but an insane country. With plutonium from Russia and uninspected by the UN, Saddam's scientists could have a nuclear bomb next year; that would profoundly affect strategy both in the US and Israel." Notice how quickly Israel is latching on to Bush administration's wariness about Russia, Iran and Bush's determination for a controversial missile defense. Adds Safire:

"I suspect former Defense Minister Arens will be discussing global missile defense this week at the Pentagon. Arafat's intifada may be a migraine headache but Saddam's bomb would be an existential threat. Sharon, who speaks fluent Russian, is aware of Iran's tacit agreement with Russia not to supply Islamic Chechen rebels even as Vladimir Putin pays off by advancing Iran's nuclear development. Though Sharon would like to provide the US an economic and technological bridge to Russia, "Israel will remain Western and American in orientation. We have to take into consideration President Bush's policy about Russia."

Such cozying up to America, buttering America really, would have

been funny if it was not so self-serving and hypocritical. Incensed by senior President George Bush's statement in March 1992 that Jerusalem was a disputed city (which led to the fall of the rightwing Yitzhak Shamir's government and the election of Yitzhak Rabin), William Safire, a lifelong Nixon Republican, stated in a New York Times column before the November 1992 Presidential election that he was going to vote for Democrat Bill Clinton, and against Republican incumbent President George Bush! Until he retired last year, Safire's fellow columnist and Israeli hawk, A. M. Rosenthal (supposedly another "Republican"), kept on referring to elder President George Bush and his Secretary of State James Baker in his columns as "bushbaker," a bastardized version of their names typed in lower case, considered extremely insulting to the former President and his Secretary of State. The junior Bush ought to remember who the Bush family's

assassinate Rabin in 1995. In the general election that followed a few months later, whom do the Israeli voters elect? Benjamin Netanyahu, of course! In the aftermath of the Camp David summit last summer, things were moving nicely on the peace front. Suddenly, to forestall a challenge from Netanyahu to his Likud leadership, Ariel Sharon triumphantly visited the Haram al-Sharif to lay claim to it. Violence that erupted has not ceased since. So what do the Israeli voters do? They elect the person responsible for triggering the violence (Sharon), and throw out the person who genuinely sought peace (Barak)!

The Israeli right-wingers display an unacceptable degree of arrogance in their normal discourse. In the Israeli Knesset the Palestinians are routinely demonized as "vermins". Recently, Sharon recalled his meeting with US National Security Advisor, 46-year old, good-looking Africa-America

"Why are we against the Israeli Government and its Wars", the ad read: "In the aftermath of the elections in Israel it has become a commonplace that religious Jews and their parties supported a candidate who was in favour of slowing down or stopping the peace process. The impression has been created that the ultraorthodox Jewry, in accordance with the traditional Torah belief are the staunchest supporters of maintaining Israel's sovereignty over the "territories" and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth."

"Two thousand years ago, at the time of the Temple's destruction, the Jewish people were forbidden by the Creator (Kesubos 111a) to exercise sovereignty over the Holy Land prior to the Messianic era. They were further forbidden to wage any form of war against other nations during their exile. Rather, the paradigm of Jewish existence in the Diaspora is to behave in a civil,

left and right-wing Zionists, are all an irrelevancy, since the whole existence of the state of Israel is in violation of the Jewish religion. And it is certainly absurd to sacrifice even one human life for this illegitimate state."

"Recently, much militant rhetoric has been heard from those who describe themselves as "religious Zionists." Sadly their stance is in violation of the millennial beliefs of Torah sages and masses of Jewry. The goal of Torah Jewry is to live in quiet piety and dwell peacefully with all nations and peoples. Those following this Divine agenda are not linked to any wars that are falsely depicted as Jewish wars but are, in reality Zionist wars." There you have it!

With the election of Sharon, the moment of truth has arrived. Starting with the Sharon-inspired massacres of the Palestinians in 1948 through the 1982 massacre of Palestinians at the Shabra and Shatilla refugee camps of Lebanon under Sharon's watch, to the current Sharon-instigated Al Aqsa intifada, no Israeli has caused more sufferings to the Palestinians than Ariel Sharon. Now that Sharon has achieved his lifelong ambition of becoming Israel's unquestioned leader, he will either make real peace with the Palestinians, or more likely, because of his thuggish inclinations will trigger a war in which one of the parties will be permanently wounded.

Although one can have no sympathy for Zionists like Sharon, one does feel for the second generation Israelis who are victims of Zionism's original sin, the creation of Israel. Ever since 1996, the Israelis have been voting in a new Prime Minister with huge plurality every eighteen or twenty months. Sharon's staggering margin of victory earlier this month is not really a mandate for Sharon; it is an act of desperation by the intifada-weary Israeli voters, who are ready to try anything, anyone new. It is as though Israeli television airs only horror movies on all channels. Instead of airing "The Silence of the Lambs" or "Hannibal," the channels feature the intifada-fighting "heroics" of the governments of Netanyahu, Barak and Sharon. The viewers switch channels frequently (Netanyahu/Barak/Sharon) in a desperate search for less gore. Unfortunately, they cannot switch off the television.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

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real friends are, and who are their real enemies, now masquerading as friends!

A concerted media blitz is being conducted by the Israeli agents in the USA to rewrite the recent history just as it has successfully rewritten the history of the creation of Israel, which actually occurred by the expulsion of the native Palestinians. The blame for the latest violence in Palestine has been placed squarely on the shoulders of the Palestinians. Thanks to the relentless Israeli propaganda, the fact that Ariel Sharon's visit to Haram al-Sharif (Islam's third holiest Al Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock compound) on September 28, 2000 triggered the violence, is beginning to fade from American memory.

You have to hand it to the Israeli voters. They have a habit of rewarding the instigators of violence. After the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo Accord with Yasir Arafat in 1993, the then Opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu repeatedly blasted Rabin as a traitor to Israel, inside and outside the Knesset, thus encouraging a Jewish extremist to

women, Condoleezza Rice: "I have to confess, it was hard for me to concentrate in the conversation with Condoleezza Rice because she has very nice legs." Could he have gotten away so easily if he had praised former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's legs? Israel offers two types of leaders: humble and peace-prone doves such as Rabin, Peres and Barak, and arrogant warmongers such as Shamir, Netanyahu and Sharon. One has a natural tendency to sympathize with the former and stand up to the latter. In order to present a gentler and kinder face of his government to the world, especially to the US, Sharon succeeded in co-opting the Labour Party into his national unity government, offering Barak and Peres, the two Israelis America admire, the portfolios of Defence and Foreign ministry respectively. The former rejected the offer; the latter accepted it.

Contrary to Israeli propaganda, not all Jews accept Israel. On Sunday February 11, The Central Rabbinical Congress of the USA and Canada took out an ad in the New York Times. Under the caption:

honest and grateful manner towards their hosts throughout the world. There were no plans or efforts ever made to wrest the Holy Land from its rulers in the long history of Jewish exile. The sole means employed by Jewry to end their exile throughout the ages were prayer, penance and good deeds. This uniformity of belief and practice remained intact until about a hundred years ago with the advent of Zionism. Zionists, representing a tiny movement, sought the metaphysically impossible. Their stated goal was to reverse the Divine Decree of exile."

"Zionism, by its very nature, rejects the concept of Divinely imposed exile. In addition, it has been consistently indifferent to the sufferings and dangers to which it and its embodiment, the State of Israel, have inflicted upon Jew and Gentile. Zionism represents a total and radical break with the beliefs and practices of the Jewish people throughout history. It is only logical that during the Israeli State's 52 year of existence, its most passionate and consistent opponents have been traditional Torah Jews. Thus, the internecine squabbles between

Excerpts from the 'declassified' main report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission

POLITICAL BACKGROUND: XV

DURING the first round of meetings between the President and Shaikh Mujibur Rahman the proposals of the Shaikh apparently were; that Martial Law be lifted immediately, that the National Assembly should start functioning both as a Constituent Assembly and as a legislature, and that power be transferred immediately at both the National and provincial levels.

We say apparently for the only direct witness we have on the point is of General Yahya himself whose narration of events on this point is somewhat confused. In any case in the meeting of the President's aides and the Awami Leaguers on the 17th March these were the former's instructions. Subject to the concurrence of the West Wing politicians,

specially the Pakistan Peoples party, Gen Yahya seemed to have agreed to this except as to the immediate lifting of Martial Law, apparently on the ground that with the lifting of Martial Law there would be a legal lacuna as the Martial Law was then the only source of power. We are, frankly unable to appreciate the argument. Martial Law had been imposed by the announced will of General Yahya himself. A proclamation by the same person with the consent of the leaders of the two largest parties of an Assembly competent to frame a constitution, with that very Assembly starting to function immediately, would surely have at least as much legal authority.

It is presumably on this account that the White Paper issued by

Government some months later on the crisis in East Pakistan states that the proposals which emerged from the Yahya-Mujib meeting were:

Martial Law be withdrawn immediately, power be transferred in the five provinces, no transfer of power for the time being should take place at the Centre, the National Assembly be divided into two Committees, one for each wing, and that the National Assembly should thereafter meet in its entirety and frame a Constitution in accordance with the reports of the two Committees. It might be noted that until the National Assembly met finally, the East Wing was to have autonomy on the basis of Six-Points while the West would still be governed in accordance with the division of powers laid down in the 1962 Constitution.

To these proposals General Yahya agreed subject to the concurrence, of the Pakistan Peoples Party and, if possible, all the others from the West. A message was sent to Mr Bhutto on the 19th to the effect that the Shaikh was willing to talk with him and that he should come to Dacca as soon as possible.

Mr Bhutto reached Dacca on the afternoon of the 21st and met the President, at 7.30pm that day. According to Pakistan People's Party the proposals were far from being acceptable, primarily because the idea of the assembly meeting in two sections, apart from the practical consequences to which it would lead, was even in principle fraught with the concept of a confederation, if not two actual separate countries. Mr Bhutto had some consultations

with his own party later that night and the next morning went to President's House to meet General Yahya and Mujibur Rahman. Mr Mujibur Rahman is reported to have turned to the President and asked whether approval has been accorded to the Awami League proposals and when the latter remarked that it was necessary for Mr Bhutto also to agree and that he had been invited for that reason, Mr Mujibur Rahman took the attitude that the proposals had been conveyed to General Yahya and it was up to the latter to convince Mr Bhutto. According to Mr Bhutto, although he was tense Shaikh Mujibur Rahman was courteous throughout but insisted that General Yahya was the channel of communication between himself and Mr Bhutto.

On more than one occasion it happened that the President's team having been briefed by the President would start a discussion on some point to which the representatives of the Awami League would say that the point had already been settled by the President with Shaikh Mujibur Rahman. Since there were no written records maintained of the discussions between General Yahya and Mujibur Rahman it only highlights the wholly unsatisfactory manner in which these negotiations were being carried on.

Besides these, there were also talks between the President and other leaders from West Pakistan, as for instance, Khan Wali Khan, Mian Mumtaz Muhammad Khan Daultana, Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan, Maulana Mufti Mahmood, Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani and also between them and Shaikh Mujibur Rahman. While these leaders were undoubtedly more friendly towards Mujibur Rahman and, in some degree, perhaps more sympathetic to his proposals there is no doubt that they also could not go so far as to accept a confederation or any kind of constitution which would clearly lead to secession. In the absence of a joint conference of all concerned it is not clear as to which proposal emanated from whom. For instance, General Yahya Khan spoke of the two committee proposals as having emanated from

Shaikh Mujibur Rahman while Khan Wali Khan deposes that in his conversation with Shaikh Mujibur Rahman the latter claimed that the idea came from General Yahya Khan himself. Khan Wali Khan states that when he spoke of this to Mujibur Rahman the latter went so far as to show him a letter from General Yahya Khan in which the General offered Mujibur Rahman a solution which would more than satisfy him, one that would be in excess of the Six Points. One is left wondering what such a solution could be short of complete secession. General Yahya of course categorically denies having sent any such letter and in the nature of things we have not seen such a document.

What is more important to note is that there is not only now no means of checking as to what was the correct version, things were so managed, at the time, that it was not possible for any of the people concerned so to check up. To say, there was a misunderstanding on this and similar points, is to take the most charitable of the possible views; we are, however, left with a strong feeling that General Yahya played out a game in which no clear cut decisions could be reached.

These consultations between the Awami League leaders and President's advisers continued for long hours on the 23rd and 24th of March and during this, the Awami League position hardened even more in that they wanted not merely two committees of the National Assembly separately but two constitutional conventions, one consisting of the members of the National Assembly from East Pakistan and the other of such members from West Pakistan and formally, for the first time used the expression "confederation of Pakistan." The Central government, if it could be called such, was to have in effect no control or power at all and on the evening of 24th Mr Tajuddin Ahmed, General Secretary of the Awami League issued a press statement saying that the Awami League has given its final position to General Yahya Khan and that there was nothing left to negotiate.

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