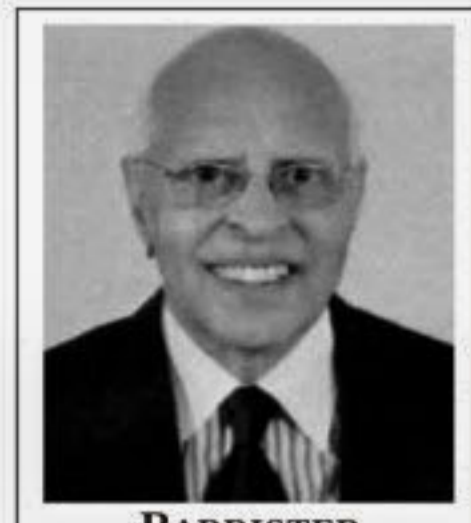


BOTTOM LINE

Israel's peace opportunity with Palestinians



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

It is difficult to speak on the impact of what we are witnessing in the Arab world, but it is possible to say that

before new governments emerge in Egypt and neighbours of Israel, Israel should take a pragmatic initiative to make peace with Palestinians.

An American columnist, Thomas Friedman, writes: "Israel today has the most out of touch, inbred, unimaginative and cliché ridden cabinet it has ever had. It is the dynamic Egypt, not the dead stable Egypt of Mubarak, that Israel should want, because that is a country that will be focused primarily on catching up with a world that has left its people behind."

It may be recalled that former prime minister of Malaysia Dr. Mahathir Mohammed, in October 2003, criticised and also praised Jews. He reportedly said that Jews ruled the world and got others to fight and die for them, arguing the Jewish people had "survived 2,000 years of pogroms not by hitting back, but by thinking."

Mahathir said: "They invented socialism, communism, human rights and democracy, so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong, so that they can enjoy equal rights with others. With these they have gained control of the most powerful countries and they, this

tiny community, have become a world power."

A key part of that programme of the Jewish lobby has been the steady diet of images fed to the general American population. For better or worse, a large majority of the general American public get their impressions and opinions about the world at large from fiction -- movies, television shows, and novels.

For half a century, thanks to many of the people who sit on the boards of directors and in the executive suites of studios and networks, they have been fed a constant stream of messages around certain core themes: (a) poor, brave, misunderstood little Israel as America's only true friend in the world; (b) the dirty, dangerous, barbaric, and malevolent Arabs; and (c) more recently, Islam through Islamic terrorists as the only direct threat to Israel, the United States, and Western civilisation and culture generally.

Israel is not a democratic state because its citizens are not treated as equals. Arab Israelis are treated as second-class citizens and their political role is marginalised. Some hardline Israeli ministers want to expel the Arab Israelis from Israel. This is the real face of Israel under the guise of democracy. It calls itself a Jewish state and has turned into a bellicose Jewish theocracy. However, big powers ignore these facts about Israel because of the strong Jewish lobby in the US and Western countries.

When the Egyptian revolution was taking place, a few countries



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supported the rule of Mubarak, with Israel being one of them. Israel describes itself as a democratic state among the neighbouring authoritarian states, and when a neighbour wants to become a democratic country Israel opposes it because of its strategic concerns. Israel does not look for long-term interests.

Standing still is no more an option for Israel, given the present scenario in the Middle East. In the 1990s, President Shimon Peres and other advocates of coexistence argued that if Israel made peace with Palestinians, a more prosperous and enlightened region would emerge.

Events of the past five years -- the takeover of Gaza by Hamas, the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran's influence in Iraq, the shift by Turkey toward Iran and Syria, and now Egypt soon to be under a new government -- have put the fear in many Israelis that with the passage of time more neighbouring countries will go against Israel.

The people of the Arab nations which are in turmoil will eventually demand that their new governments pursue a vigorous new foreign policy, including re-examination of their relationship with Israel.

The peace between Egypt and Israel under the 1979 Treaty is often described as a "Cold Peace," with many in Egypt sceptical about its effectiveness. The Arab-Israeli conflict has kept relations cool and anti-Semitic incitement is prevalent in the Egyptian media.

US diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks suggest that the Egyptian military continues to see Israel as its primary adversary. In 2008, the Egyptian army conducted simulated military exercises against an "enemy" Israel.

The Egyptian Revolution of 2011 has led to fears in Israel about the future of the treaty, although the Israeli prime minister stated that he expected any new Egyptian government to keep the peace treaty with Israel, as it has served both countries well. After the Egyptian army took over power on February 11, it announced that Egypt would continue to abide by all its international and regional treaties. However, Ayman Nour, an influential

Egyptian opposition figure and likely presidential candidate, called for Cairo's peace treaty with Israel to be "reassessed."

The question that is foremost is whether expansion of illegal Jewish settlement in the Palestinian occupied lands is consistent with the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979. It is argued that the construction of illegal settlements is contrary to the preamble of the Treaty, which calls for "just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East in accordance with Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338."

Israel should not wait for the new Egyptian government and should view the changes in the Middle East (especially in Jordan) as an opportunity and propose a diplomatic initiative to make peace with Palestinians. Israel should declare that it is ready to be a part of the new reality.

Meanwhile, the fact that the Obama administration is not concerned with the human rights of Palestinians was confirmed when Washington vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution on February 18 against Israeli settlement-building in occupied Palestinian territory, opposing all other 14 Security Council members.

A dimension of equity in this case is the single standard of morality and law for all countries in the region. One law is for Israel and another for Palestinians will never work.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

US and Europe ramp up intervention

BARRY GREY

WITH dictator Muammar Gaddafi's control over the country ebbing, the United States and its European allies are stepping up their intervention into the Libyan crisis. Their aim is to ensure that any new regime will be equally subservient to their economic and geostrategic interests.

Behind the rhetoric about democracy and humanitarian concerns, Washington and the European powers are seeking to exploit the brutality of Gaddafi to condition public opinion to accept a colonial-style intervention and the reassertion of imperialist control over the country's oil fields.

Over the weekend, Gaddafi's hold on power was further eroded by the defection of additional political and military figures and the capture of more key cities by the opposition. Most significant was the fall to the rebels of Zawiyah, an oil port and refinery city thirty miles to the west of the capital, Tripoli. The capture of Zawiyah signified the spread of the rebellion, heretofore centered in the east of the country, to the west.

Although Gaddafi's army has reportedly surrounded Zawiyah, as of early Monday it had not attempted to retake the town of 200,000 people. The areas remaining under the dictator's control have reportedly been reduced to Tripoli and Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte.

Gaddafi's dwindling domain has only accelerated the imperialist drive to intervene, including by military means. Over the weekend, the British military carried out two raids into the Libyan desert to transport British nationals out of the country. The first, carried out Saturday by SAS special forces using Hercules planes, rescued 150 people, mostly British oil workers, and flew them to Malta. The second, on Sunday, involved three Royal Air Force planes and picked up another 150 civilians.

On Sunday, the German military carried out its own raid. Two military planes landed on a private runway belonging to the Wintershall AG company, evacuating 22 Germans and 112 others and

flying them to Crete.

These raids mark the first open use of military assets in the Libyan crisis, but they are likely to be followed by more aggressive actions. There are growing calls in the US and Europe for the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya, to be policed to US warplanes, and other military measures to aid the anti-Gaddafi forces.

The main concern in Washington is the prospect of either a protracted civil war, which would further inflame world oil prices and destabilise other oil-producing dictatorships in North Africa and the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, or a political vacuum over which the US would exert little influence.

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The New York Times published a front-page article Sunday under the headline "The Vacuum After Qaddafi." The article noted that the US exerts far less control over the Libyan army and other institutions than it does in Egypt and Tunisia, and ended by suggesting the possibility of a military occupation under the cover of humanitarian needs.

"Some experts," the Times wrote, "wonder if Libya might become the first experiment in the use of the 'responsibility to protect' -- the idea that a United Nations force would be deployed to prevent civilian

deaths in the event of widespread violence...

"With the country now split badly between east and west, an outside protection force would lend time for Tripoli to reassert itself as the capital and establish control."

A raft of measures have been taken over the past several days by the US and Europe to isolate Gaddafi and pave the way for a major military intervention. After announcing Friday the closure of the US embassy in Tripoli and the imposition of unilateral US sanctions, President Obama on Saturday for the first time called for Gaddafi to resign. The White House published an account of a telephone call to German Chancellor Angela

ring Gaddafi and his key aides for prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Nato secretary general, held an emergency meeting of Nato ambassadors on Friday to discuss possible military assistance for evacuation efforts.

The British Guardian newspaper on Saturday cited unconfirmed reports that former prime minister Tony Blair had telephoned Gaddafi warning that Nato troops might be sent in. The claims were made by one of Gaddafi's sons, Saadi, in a telephone interview from Tripoli.

The New York Times on Saturday quoted Tom Malinowski, the director of the Washington office of

as saying: "It's one of the possibilities we're working on. We are in contact with EU member states to see whether their facilities, civilian and military, can be deployed for this."

In taped interviews from Cairo broadcast on Sunday's television talk shows, Republican Senator John McCain and Independent Senator Joseph Lieberman -- who was the Democratic vice presidential candidate in 2000 -- attacked Obama for not going far enough in Libya. They called for a no-fly zone and military aid to the opposition.

The two noted that while the US had sent only a ferry to collect American civilians, Britain had sent a warship and Hercules aircraft.

Later on Sunday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton suggested the administration was open to such moves, declaring that it was "reaching out" to opposition groups and was prepared to offer "any kind of assistance" to Libyans seeking to overthrow the regime.

The crocodile tears being shed by the US and its European allies over Gaddafi's atrocities against protesters are utterly cynical. For days Obama and his European counterparts were silent over the massacres carried out by Gaddafi in Benghazi, Tripoli and other cities. Having established the closest relations with the regime over the past decade, which had allowed them free rein to once again exploit Libya's oil resources, they hoped that Gaddafi would be able to quickly crush the uprising and restore order.

Only when it became clear that was not about to happen and the crisis began to seriously disrupt oil production and spark a panic rise in global market prices did they shift gears and denounce their former ally. Obama, Clinton, Sarkozy and company had all feted the dictator in recent months, following Tony Blair's 2004 "deal in the sand" with Gaddafi and the Bush administration's restoration of full diplomatic relations in 2008.

They had conveniently dropped the issue of Gaddafi's role in the 1988 terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, which crashed in Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 innocent civilians, mainly



GETTY IMAGE

Merkel in which Obama called for Gaddafi to "leave now."

Obama is to meet Monday in Washington with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to discuss further actions against the Libyan regime. Secretary Hillary Clinton is to speak in Geneva before the UN Human Rights Council, which over the weekend voted unanimously to suspend Libya's membership.

The United Nations Security Council on Saturday unanimously passed a resolution imposing economic sanctions on Libya and refer-

ring Human Rights Watch, as saying: "Even if people aren't explicitly talking about no-fly zones, the fact that Nato met today suggests there is more on people's minds than diplomacy... I sense military contingencies are on the table." Malinowski has participated in White House meetings on the Libyan crisis.

The Financial Times on Saturday wrote that European officials have raised the possibility of armed rescues of the thousands of EU nationals still stranded in Libya. The newspaper quoted a "senior EU official"

Americans. Exposing the fraud of the "war on terror" and its function as a cover for the aggressive pursuit of US imperialist interests around the world, Washington converted the former "mad dog" and "rogue" into an ally in the anti-terror cause and force for stability in the region.

Only last November, the International Monetary Fund issued a glowing report on Libya, praising the regime for its aggressive pursuit of neoliberal, pro-market policies. The IMF praised Gaddafi's "continued efforts to modernise and diversify the economy," commending in particular "efforts to enhance the role of the private sector in the economy."

These very policies led to mounting economic hardship for the working class and rural poor, fueling the social anger that erupted earlier this month.

Gaddafi is a criminal who deserves to be brought to justice, but none of the imperialist leaders currently denouncing him have any standing to point the finger elsewhere. They are all complicit in wars of aggression and colonial-style occupations that have killed hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq and Afghanistan and are implicated in all of the attendant crimes, including torture, rendition and indefinite detention.

The staggering hypocrisy of the US government is summed up by the fact that it supports bringing Gaddafi before the International Criminal Court, but refuses to sign on to the court and rejects its authority over Americans. It asserts the right of US officials to commit war crimes with impunity.

In the UN Security Council resolution against Libya passed Saturday, the US insisted on a clause declaring that people from countries not signed up to the International Criminal Court could not be punished by it for crimes in the Libyan attacks. American officials insisted on the paragraph to prevent setting a precedent for prosecution by the ICC of American soldiers and officials.

Courtesy: Countercurrents