Conference: From Gulf War I to Gulf War II

The American Offensive in Iraq

Israelis breathed a collective sigh of relief with the removal from power of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq. The Gulf War was the second time in twelve years that Israelis had prepared for a U.S.-Iraq confrontation by taking out their gas masks, stocking up on bottled water, and taping up their windows.

In January the BESA Center sought to assess the similarities and differences between the Gulf confrontation of 1991 and the impending confrontation of 2003. In June, the Center convened a major symposium on “The Middle East after Saddam”.

The January symposium was headlined by Major General Amos Yadlin, Commander of IDF Colleges and a senior Israel Air Force officer, who delivered a detailed and fascinating presentation on the impressive American air war of 1991.

Looking ahead to the impending 2003 U.S.-Iraq showdown, Col. (ret.) Prof. Andrew Bacevich of Boston University delineated the outlines of America’s new “imperial” approach to regimes that threaten the West and seek to develop weapons of mass destruction. Maj. Gen. (res.) Zeev Livne of the IDF and Nachman Shai, then-Chairman of the Israel Broadcasting Authority, sought to sketch the parameters needed for Israel’s military and media preparations for the war by comparing the situation to 1991, when they were personally involved.

What Saudi Oil Power?

by Dr. Max Singer

Here are five myths about oil that distort American policy in the Middle East.

Myth No. 1: Most of the world’s oil reserves are in the Middle East.

Wrong. That is only true for “conventional” oil (i.e., the stuff that flows easily). When you count “unconventional” oil Canada has larger oil reserves than Saudi Arabia.

In this article, abridged from The Weekly Standard (August 18, 2003), Max Singer punctures five myths about oil that distort American policy in the Middle East. The U.S., he concludes, need not be so deferential to Saudi Arabia; it does not have the power to ruin America’s economy.

People are used to ignoring unconventional oil because until technological developments of the last 10 years it cost too much to produce. Now a million barrels a day of unconventional oil is being produced profitably; and 30 mil/bbls/day of new production can be added by 2020 with costs below $15/bbl.

Myth No. 2: The world can’t get the increased oil supply it will need in coming years without having to buy a larger share from the Persian Gulf. Wrong. There are many potential sources of increased oil supply – in addition to unconventional oil; in 2020 the PG may supply even less than the 23% of the world total it provided last year.

New oil production technology – such as the use of computers to reduce finding costs, and directional drilling to reduce production cost – has greatly expanded the amount of oil available outside the PG region. And the end of the Soviet Union started a process of opening large deposits in Russia and the Caspian Basin.

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Myth No. 3: The low production cost of PG oil lets the PG countries determine how much of world demand they will supply. Wrong. Where the world’s future oil supply comes from depends on where oil companies decide to drill wells and make other investments. Right now there is practically no investment being made in increasing – or even maintaining – oil production capacity in the PG region; instead almost all drilling is being done in other parts of the world. Low production costs in the PG where governments control the oil don’t give companies an incentive to invest in producing PG oil; and oil producers have strong incentives to avoid sources that are as politically vulnerable as the PG seems to be.

Myth No. 4: The US and other consumers need PG oil much more than the PG countries need the money paid for the oil. Wrong. Most of the PG countries have become very dependent on their oil income, which provides almost all their foreign currency. The oil consuming countries get less than a quarter of their oil from the PG and have stockpiles of oil that could replace PG supply for six months or more.

Myth No. 5: Saudi Arabia has the power to determine how much the world has to pay for oil and therefore the power to help or hurt Western economies. Mostly wrong. Although in periods of tight supply Saudi Arabia can bring down prices so long as it keeps the capacity quickly to produce more oil than it is selling. But the Saudis and other PG suppliers don’t determine whether supply is tight. That depends on decisions that oil producing companies had taken two to ten years earlier about how much to invest in new wells and other facilities. If Western oil companies invest enough there is nothing the PG countries can do to make supply tight enough to sustain high prices.

The main conclusion that American policy-makers have been drawing from the myths – or outdated ideas – about oil is that the US had better be deferential to Saudi Arabia because it has the power to ruin our economy.

Saudi policy to the US is based on its perception of our fear of their oil power. That is why they have felt safe enough to allow more than $50 billion of Saudi oil money to be exported to stir up hatred of the US, in the last twenty years.

If we understand that the facts have changed, and we believe that we do not have to accept aggressive use of an “oil weapon” against us, they will not risk their fate on the basis of calculation of the balance of oil power.

If the Saudis are removed from their pedestal and treated like a normal country, American leaders will ask whether a small, defenseless government, with little support from its own people, and great unpopularity in the Moslem world, could really think of trying to deliberately harm the wealthiest, most powerful country in the world.

In other words, Saudi power over the US is a house of cards that can be blown away by fresh thinking based on a realistic understanding of the current oil business.

The second conclusion is that there is no strategic imperative for the US to reduce its “dependency” on imported oil by reducing oil consumption. We should make sure that world oil production capacity stays comfortably ahead of world demand for oil. And we should ensure that there are large stockpiles of oil to improve the short-term balance of supply and demand. And we need to stop feeling dependent when we are not.

With new fluidity in Middle Eastern politics, and increased understanding of the massive effect of Saudi oil money on the rise of militant Islam throughout the world, weaning ourselves from the myths about oil so that we can examine policy freshly is becoming an urgent need.
In May, the BESA Center hosted a high-profile two-day international conference on “The Religious Dimension in World Politics”. Among the topics discussed were: Christian Zionism in the U.S. Congress; religiosity and foreign policy preferences in Turkey; the Islamization of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Hamas and Islamic Jihad; and the threat of international Islamic radical terrorism.

Also discussed were: the Holy See’s policy towards the Middle East; peace values in Islam; religion and nationalism in Iran; religion and nationality as the glue between Israeli Arabs and the PA; changes in attitudes towards the Arab-Israeli conflict among religious Jews in Israel; and changing Jewish halachic discourse on armed conflict.

Lecturers from abroad included Prof. Tanja Ellingsen of the Norwegian U. of Science and Technology, Dr. Faisal Al-Rfouh of the U. of Jordan, Prof. Leonard Weinberg of the U. of Nevada, Prof. Ali Carkoglu of Sabanci U., Prof. Brenda Shaffer (Harvard U. and Hebrew U.), Dr. Hillel Frisch (BESA), Prof. Kenneth Wald (Florida U.), Dr. Elizabeth Oldmixon (U. of North Texas) and Prof. Cathal Nolan (Boston U.).

Israeli participants included BESA Center associates Dr. Ze’ev Maghen, Dr. Hillel Frisch, Prof. Stuart Cohen, Dr. Jonathan Rynhold, Prof. Gerald Steinberg, Prof. Amikam Nahmani, and Dr. Mordechai Kedar; along with Dr. Boaz Ganor (ICT), Dr. Yehudith Auerbach (BIU), Prof. Jacob Landau (Hebrew U.), Sergio Minerbi, Prof. Moshe Gat (BIU), Prof. Gabriel Ben-Dor (Haifa U.), Prof. Aharon Klieman (TAU), Prof. Shlomo Sionim (Hebrew U.), and Dr. Meir Litvak (TAU).

The conference proved its own importance. Participants were in agreement that social scientists have failed to pay sufficient attention to the role of religion in world politics and that much more research needs to be carried out in this field.

At dinner (from r. to l.): Prof. Leonard Weinberg (U. of Nevada), Prof. Ali Carkoglu (Sabanci U.), Prof. Brenda Shaffer (Harvard U. and Hebrew U.), Dr. Hillel Frisch (BESA), Prof. Kenneth Wald (Florida U.), Dr. Elizabeth Oldmixon (U. of North Texas) and Prof. Cathal Nolan (Boston U.)

Prof. Aharon Klieman of Tel Aviv U. (at the podium) with (from left) Prof. Moshe Gat of BIU, Prof. Gabriel Ben-Dor of Haifa U., Prof. Cathal Nolan of Boston U. and Dr. Jonathan Rynhold of the BESA Center

Dr. Brenda Shaffer of Hebrew and Harvard universities, Prof. Leonard Weinberg of the U. of Nevada, Prof. Kenneth Wald of the U. of Florida and Dr. Elizabeth Oldmixon of the University of North Texas, Effie Fokas of the London School of Economics, Prof. Cathal Nolan of Boston U., Prof. Ali Carkoglu of Sabanci U., Prof. Kemal Kirisci of Bosphorus U., and Dr. Faisal Al-Rfouh of the U. of Jordan.

Discussing the theoretical and historical underpinnings of the religious dimension in world politics: Dr. Brenda Shaffer of the Hebrew U. (at the podium), with (from left) Prof. Efraim Inbar, Prof. Shmuel Sandler, Dr. Jonathan Fox, and Prof. Tanja Ellingsen of the Norwegian U. of Science and Technology

Discussing the role of religion in the Arab-Israeli conflict (from left): Prof. Inbar, Prof. Ali Carkoglu of Sabanci U., Prof. Kemal Kirisci of Bosphorus U., Drs. Ze’ev Maghen and Hillel Frisch of the BESA Center, and Prof. Jacob Landau of the Hebrew U.
The Necessary Separation Fence
by Prof. Gerald M. Steinberg

In this survey, abridged from “Jerusalem Viewpoints” published by JCPA (No. 502, August 2003), Gerald Steinberg argues that the security barrier Israel is building will provide an effective layer of security and have important, positive political and economic impacts.

Three years ago, the “Oslo peace process” ended in a wave of terrorism and catastrophe. Instead of agreement on two states, living in peace, Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian leadership demonstrated the huge gap between their demands on core identity issues such as Jerusalem and refugee claims, and any conceivable terms that Israel could accept. This process showed that the fundamental Palestinian objective of the destruction of the Jewish state had not changed since the Arab rejection of the 1947 UN Partition resolution.

With the differences so great, the chances that the post-Oslo comprehensive peace plan – known as the “road map” – can resolve this conflict by the stated goal of 2005 are extremely small. Similarly, the record from many other formal efforts to negotiate peace in protracted ethno-national conflicts (Bosnia, Kosovo, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, etc.) is not encouraging.

As a result, and because the status quo in the wake of failure of Oslo leaves Israel in a very vulnerable and untenable position, workable alternatives are necessary. To minimize the dangers of another and potentially more deadly terror campaign, the Israeli consensus (over 80% of the population, according to public opinion polls) supports the construction of a full-length separation barrier.

Construction began shortly after the 2002 Passover seder massacre in Netanya, and within a year, a significant portion of the barrier has been completed, covering over 140 kilometers along the northern section of Samaria (protecting Israel’s coastal cities), and around parts of Jerusalem. The rest of the construction process should be completed by the middle of 2004.

While the primary goal is to provide security, the barrier will also have important political and economic impacts and constitute a de facto border. This border will also thwart the Palestinian demographic strategy, designed to maintain a single political entity from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, in which the majority population will soon be Arab. The intense Palestinian propaganda campaign against the construction of this barrier (including the use of the vocabulary of demonization, such as “apartheid” and “racist”) is a reflection of this strategy. In contrast, physical and political separation will allow Israel to remain a culturally Jewish and democratic society.

The key policy issues, both in Israel, and for the Bush Administration, concern the pace of construction and the route to be taken for the remaining sections. Options include a minimalist 300 kilometer route following the 1949 armistice line (the “Green Line”, and often erroneously referred to as “the 1967 border”), a 600 kilometer alternative that would include most Israeli settlements but would be difficult to defend, and a pragmatic middle route including Gush Etzion, the area surrounding Ben Gurion airport (to prevent the firing of missiles at aircraft) and a corridor to the city of Ariel. Based on an analysis of the security, demographic, economic and political factors, the pragmatic route provides the optimum mix under present circumstances.

Beyond the immediate benefits, the strategy of unilateral separation also provides a realistic alternative to the dead-end approach of formal negotiations run by teams of lawyers who end up contributing more points of conflict and contention. Without a basis for compromise and agreement, the best and only realistic objective is “conflict management”, including the reduction of friction and the potential for violence. In Cyprus, following a bitter war in 1974, the unilateral construction of a separation wall has allowed for a new generation on both sides of the divide to grow up without the hatreds and violence of previous decades. When the wall was opened in mid-2003, Greek and Turkish Cypriots began to mingle and build new relationships, without the old hatreds.

If followed in the Israeli-Palestinian case, this approach could eventually lead to mutual acceptance and gradual development of a real peace between the two peoples.

Europe and Israel: What Went Wrong?
Dr. Dimitris Keridis delivered the Seventh Annual Madeleine Feher European Scholar-in-Residence Lecture at the BESA Center in May. Keridis teaches Balkan politics at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, directs the Kokkalis Foundation in Athens, and chairs the advisory board of the Kokkalis Program on Southeastern Europe at Harvard University. According to Keridis, growing cultural differences between Europe and Israel, changing threat perceptions, growing anti-Americanism, and the fading of the shadow of the Holocaust – explain much of the increased rancor in the Europe-Israel relationship.
The ongoing Palestinian war of terror is a direct and inevitable consequence of the 1993 Oslo accords — “the worst blunder in Israel’s history”. So concludes Prof. Efraim Karsh, head of the Mediterranean Studies Programme at King's College London, in a just-published, special BESA Center Hebrew study to mark the tenth anniversary of the Oslo Accords, entitled “The Oslo War: A Tale of Self-Delusion”.

Karsh recounts in painful detail the follies of Oslo’s architects. “Just over a decade after destroying the PLO’s military infrastructure in Lebanon, the Rabin-Peres government asked the Palestinian organization, which was still formally committed to Israel’s destruction by virtue of its covenant, to establish a firm political and military presence right on its doorstep. And not only this, it was prepared to arm thousands of (hopefully reformed) terrorists who would be incorporated into newly established police and security forces charged with asserting the PLO’s authority throughout the territories”, Karsh writes.

In the words of prominent PLO leader Faisal Husseini, Israel was willingly introducing into its midst a “Trojan Horse” designed to promote the PLO's strategic goal of “Palestine from the [Jordan] river to the [Mediterranean] sea” - that is, a Palestine in place of Israel.

Karsh writes that from the moment of Arafat’s arrival in Gaza in July 1994, the PLO chieftain set out to build up an extensive terrorist infrastructure in flagrant violation of the Oslo accords. He systematically failed to disarm the terrorist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad as required by the Oslo accords, and tacitly approved the murder of hundreds of Israelis by these groups; created a far larger Palestinian army (the so-called police force) than was permitted by the accords; reconstructed the PLO’s old terrorist apparatus, mainly under the auspices of Tanzim, Fatah’s military arm; and frantically acquired prohibited weapons through the use of large sums of money donated to the Palestinian Authority by the international community for the benefit of the civilian Palestinian population.

Eventually, Arafat resorted to outright mass violence: first, in September 1996 to publicly discredit the newly-elected Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; and then in September 2000 with the launch of his war of terror -- shortly after being offered by Netanyahu’s successor, Ehud Barak, the creation of an independent Palestinian state in 92 percent of the West Bank and 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

According to Karsh, what enabled Arafat to pursue his war preparations with impunity was a combination of international sympathy for his cause and Israeli self-delusion.

"Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, the extent of the Israeli leap of faith in Oslo appears nothing short of mind-boggling. There were no ultimate goals set for the negotiating team, no road map to follow. There were no serious discussions over the direction of the entire process, not even awareness among the negotiators and their superiors of each other's vision of peace".

Karsh quotes Oslo godfather Shimon Peres who said: “I think what is really important for a peace process is the creation of a partner, more than a plan. Because plans don’t create partners but if you have a partner then you negotiate a plan.” But what if the partner would not act out the role ascribed to him? 
The new panacea prescribed by the Israeli Left for calming the conflict with the Palestinians is an international trusteeship, which means the transfer of governmental responsibility in Judea, Samaria and Gaza to a US-led alliance and the introduction of American forces to keep the peace. It is a bad idea.

Figures such as former Meretz head Yossi Sarid and former Barak-era foreign minister Shlomo Ben-Ami have finally understood that it is not possible to reach a solution to the conflict in the near future. Thus, in their despair, they have turned to the Americans to settle the dispute between the natives.

In this opinion article, reprinted from The Jerusalem Post (June 26, 2003), Efraim Inbar decries the newest idea for pacifying the Israel-Palestinian conflict: the transfer of governmental responsibility in the territories to a U.S.-led alliance and the introduction of American forces in the area to keep the peace.

It is not at all clear whether the Americans are prepared for an involvement of this kind. Logically, they will first try to complete their missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Washington’s priorities prior to dealing with Palestinian terror apparently require focusing attention on Iran and North Korea, states with a nuclear potential and with far-reaching consequences for international security. The assumption of the Left that solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is of the utmost urgency is not shared by the U.S. especially with election year approaching.

Even if it were possible to lure the Americans into taking on the responsibility of ruling the continued on page 7
Palestinians their chances of success would not be great. A historical survey of the last few decades on the use of foreign forces for peacemaking -- as opposed to peacekeeping -- is not encouraging, to say the least.

Peacemaking forces are put in place after an agreement between two sides, generally following exhaustion (Bosnia) or the defeat of one side (the Serbs in Kosovo). Moreover, the relative success in the former Yugoslavia and East Timor came after the large waves of ethnic cleansing that led to reduced friction between the rival populations.

In contrast, the Palestinians, especially the extremists, still have considerable energy and there is no separation between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Furthermore, the proposed foreign forces are to come in place of a bilateral agreement. In addition, the Arab-Israeli arena has illustrated the failure of peacekeeping forces: UN forces placed on the Egyptian border were evacuated upon Egyptian demand in 1967, with Israel’s opinion ignored. UNIFIL forces in South Lebanon have also been unsuccessful in providing an efficient buffer.

Nor has the Americans’ attempt at peacemaking been promising. They retreated from Lebanon in 1982 and from Somalia in 1992 due to local resistance. The short military involvement of the U.S. in Haiti in 1994 did not achieve its goal. The US takeover of Afghanistan did not totally eradicate terror centers, and in fact, the number of American forces there has dropped, due to replacement by soldiers from other countries, without stability being achieved.

A U.S. military presence in Palestine will undoubtedly face suicide attacks by Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the large support for these organizations by Palestinian society. U.S. forces would lack the good intelligence vital for fighting terror. And their deployment could not create a continuous buffer against terrorists.

The American failure in foiling terror activities would be an unavoidable source of tension between Israel and the U.S. Predictably, there also disagreements over the need would be for Israeli military action to prevent attacks. Thus, bringing in American forces as a buffer between Palestinians and Israelis would put one of the pillars of Israeli national security -- the strategic partnership with the U.S. -- at risk. American losses in defending Israel would erode support for the Jewish state.

International involvement would enable the Palestinians to avoid dismantling the terror infrastructure and spare them the need to negotiate with Israel the limitations on their state.

Worst of all, the trusteeship plan is an attempt to bypass the democratic process in Israel, and force -- withdrawal to the 1967 borders and evacuation of all Jewish settlements. The majority of the people in Israel do not support this plan, and there is no chance of a government in Israel agreeing to such a plan any time soon.


Efrain Inbar published “Turkey’s New Strategic Partner: Israel” in Michael Radu, ed., Contemporary Issues in Turkey’s Foreign Relations (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2003); and edited a special issue of The Review of International Affairs on “Democracies and Small Wars” (also published as a volume in the BESA Center/Frank Cass series). He lectured in March on “The Regional Ramifications of an American Attack on Iraq” at MIT; on “Israeli Targeted Killing” at a March seminar on “Democracies and Dirty Wars: Hard Cases in Military Ethics” held under the auspices of the Cantigny Conference Series in Chicago (co-sponsored by Boston U., the McKinnock Foundation and the BESA Center); on “Israel’s Strategic Environment” at Kingstone University; on “Turkey’s Middle East Foreign Policy” at an April Truman Institute Conference on Turkey and the Middle East; on “The Midast as Source of International Instability” at a trilateral Israel-Taiwan-US conference in Taipei; and in August on “The Regional Ramifications of the American War in Iraq” at the Institute for Defense and Strategic Studies in Singapore.

Shlomo Shpiro published “The CIA as Middle East Peace-Broker” in Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs (4:2, Summer 2003); “Intelligence, Peacekeeping and Peacemaking in the Middle East,” in Plate W. & de Jong B., Peace Process in Israel (New Leaf Press, USA). He lectured on “The Mideast and the Jewish political tradition”, in Democratization in the Middle East: Lessons from the European Experience in Justice and Home Affairs Cooperation” (Tel Aviv U. Steinmetz Center, 2002). He lectured on “The Roles and Responsibilities of Peace-Makers in the International War Against Terrorism” at the German Foreign Ministry annual Global Forum in Berlin, and convened and chaired a panel on “Intelligence and Political Change” at the annual conference of the International Intelligence History Association (IIHA) in July.

Dany Shoham published “The Anthrax Evidence Points to Iraq” in the International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence (16:1); and “The Islamic Chemical and Biological Weapons Threat” in The Strategic Threat of Islam, D. Buka, ed. (New Leaf Press, USA). He also published “Biological Threats Emerging in the Arab Countries, Iran and Radical Organizations” at a Tel Aviv U. conference on bio-terrorism, and is working on a book about CBW in the Middle East.

Gerald Steinberg published “Democratic peace” and the Jewish political tradition”, in Democratization in the Middle East: Experiences, Challenges edited by Amin Saikal and Albrecht Schnabel (United Nations University Press, 2003); and “Dual Use Aspects of Space Technology and the Implications for the Middle East”, in Toward Fusion of Air and Space: Surveying Developments and Assessing Choices for Small and Middle Powers, Dana J. Johnson and Ariel E. Levite, editors (RAND, Santa Monica, 2003). He lectured on “The Lessons of the Oslo Process” at the University of Chicago, Program on International Security Policy; and on “The Nexus between CWMD and NATO” at a conference on NATO and the Middle East at the Royal United Services Institute, London.

Avi Kohler published “Western Democracies in Low-Intensity Conflict: Some Postmodern Aspects” in The Review of International Affairs (2:3, Spring 2003); and “Israel Military Thinking as Reflected in Mararachat Articles, 1948-2000” in Armed Forces & Society (30:1, Fall 2003). He lectured on “The Iraq War: Military Aspects” at a workshop on “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and International Relations” organized by the IAIS at Tel Aviv U. in May, and on “Is Settlement with Syria Possible?” at a BESA Center conference in June.