

The Delusional World of the Realists

By Sarah N. Stern

In memory of Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, who did not suffer fools or despots gladly.

“Alice: There is no use trying...one can't believe impossible things.

The Queen: I dare say you haven't had much practice. Why sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

-----Lewis Carroll, “Alice in Wonderland”

The Bush administration is in a difficult spot. Even the most ardent supporters of the War in Iraq are admitting to the fact that the war has been a much more arduous battle than they had originally contemplated. Many political strategists on both sides have been taking the mid-term defeat of many congressional republicans as a referendum not only on the Iraqi War, but on the entire Bush foreign policy agenda, including his ideas of bringing democracy to the Middle East, and his suspicion of various contemporary Muslim leaders.

Americans do not like long wars. The body count is reaching almost 3,000 American lives. None of us like the prospect of our sons or daughters arriving home in body bags. We would all like a quick fix, a silver bullet, something to extract us from this deadly, long, expensive war that is splitting apart the nation.

This December, with a great deal of fanfare and Washington showmanship, former Secretary of State James Baker III and former congressman Lee Hamilton made a dramatic re-entrance into the field of public policy with their much touted Iraqi Study Group (ISG) Report. The quite proficient public relations firm of Edelman had generated quite a public “buzz” before, during and after the immediate release of the results of collective wisdom of this venerable group, which includes many of the Washington elite from a few decades ago.

Much has been made of the fact that the study was produced by a bipartisan group of authors. This is a distinction that is almost routinely admired. One might do well to ask himself, however, if the spirit of bipartisanship is necessary to pass laws and get the business of government done in Washington, is this process the best way to arrive at a meaningful policy analysis of and prescription for a rather complex situation? Do we, instead, find ourselves, as a result of this process, with the least common denominator for agreement, and in terms of policy does that make for a resolute way forward, or rather, does it make for a sort of “dummying down” by consensus? Has the analysis actually been carefully studied, and do the prescriptions actually remedy the illness, or does it rather simply disguise the true problems that America now faces?

The cancer of radical Islamicism has been metastasizing for quite some time now. Its roots may be in the Middle East, but, as has been well documented by now¹, it has branches that have sprung up robustly, throughout the Western world, particularly in Europe.

The original tumor has its roots in the Muslim world. As Bernard Lewis points out in his seminal 1990 article, “The Roots of Muslim Rage”², the Islamicist believes that, eventually, the glory of Islam and a world-wide Islamic *caliphate* will be restored. It is, according to Lewis, “due to a feeling of humiliation—a growing awareness, among the heirs of an old proud and long dominant civilization, of having been overtaken, overborne, and overwhelmed by those whom they regard as their inferiors.”³

Why is this tumor spreading so rapidly? What makes these cells so aggressive?

Fundamental to winning any battle is the understanding of the perceptions of those with whom we are at war. The root of any revolution is *ideas*. It is *ideas* that motivate conduct. No one is born wanting to strap a belt of dynamite around his waist and blow him or herself up. It is counter-Darwinian, and counter to the biological hard-wiring with which we come into the world.

We are dealing with what cytologists would categorize as “Type A” virulence. Radical Islamists feel that they are riding out on the nascent crests of a wave, upon a rising tide of Islamic glory. They resent and scorn as anti-Godlike the secularism of the West, including all of our technological and scientific advances. They look with particular disdain at our culture coming out of Hollywood, and mock it as depraved. They do not believe there should be a separation of church or, rather, mosque and state, and they are confident that, in time, the glory that was Islam, will, once again be restored.

Radical Islamists were responsible for the 1979 Khomeini revolution in Iran; they chased the Americans out of Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983; they chased the Russians out of Afghanistan on February of 1989; they chased the Israelis out of Southern Lebanon in May of 2000, and the Israelis out of Gaza in the summer of 2005.

The perception is that America is the “Great Satan”, and Israel is the “Minor Satan”. As an eastern outpost of Western democratic values, Israel is reviled not only for itself, but as an extension of the revulsion that the Islamic fundamentalist feels against America and the West.

We are in the midst of a long, brutal, difficult war, what might well be described, as Eliot Cohen has, as “World War IV”, (World War III being the cold war).⁴

¹ See for example, Steyn, Mark , *America Alone*, Regnery Press, Washington, 2006.

² Lewis, Bernard, “The Roots of Muslim Rage”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990

³ *Ibid*, p.9

⁴ Cohen, Eliot, “No Way to Win a War”, *the Wall Street Journal*, December 7, 2006

Valid questions have emerged and are being debated concerning the nature of our national intelligence and security apparatus, concerning whether or not there really had been weapons of mass destruction, and whether or not we should have been there in the first place. This sort of debate is not only warranted but critical to a healthy democracy.

But the simple truth is that now we *are* there. The question is can we eventually exit Iraq without handing the radical Islamists, with whom we are at war, the perception of a victory against “The Great Satan”?

The Iraq Study Group Report opens with a grim analyses. “The situation in Iraq”, they write, “is grave and deteriorating.” They proceed to describe the internecine sectarian battles, the Sunni insurgencies, and the Shiite militias and death squads, as well as the presence of al Qaeda, and the breakdown of Iraqi civil society.

All of this may be descriptively accurate, and one certainly should not simply be a cheerleader of the war, glossing over the huge sacrifice, or the gravity of the situation.

However, it is worth questioning whether or not the prescriptions that follow are going to actually ameliorate the situation, or if, in the desperate effort to find a way out of a difficult spot, they would actually make matters a great deal worse.

In the Executive Summary of the Report, the authors write:

“The United States should immediately launch a new diplomatic offensive to build an international consensus for stability in Iraq and the region. This diplomatic offensive should include every country that has an interest in avoiding a chaotic Iraq, including all of Iraq’s neighbors. Iraq’s neighbors and key states in and outside the region should form a support group to reinforce security and national reconciliation within Iraq, neither of which Iraq can achieve. Given the ability of Iran and Syria to influence events within Iraq, and their interest in avoiding chaos in Iraq, the United States should try to engage them constructively.”⁵

First off, where did the authors of the ISG report ever come up with the information that Iran and Syria are interested in stability? It is Iran that is today fomenting the most instability in the region, and around the globe, altering the delicate balance of nuclear power by continuing with its uranium enrichment activity, making every Middle Eastern despot with their internecine Sunni-Shiite, let alone tribal rivalries, desirous of a nuclear bomb under every tent.

Although at first blush it would appear that the Shiite Muslims would stand the most to gain by Saddam’s over-throw, the Shiite militias of Iraq have been a substantial part of the unrest, as part of the Mahdi army of Maqtada al-Sadr.

Iran has been a key player in the Iraqi chaos that we see flashing across our television screens daily, and to the maiming and murdering of American and coalition forces. It is

⁵ Baker, James, Hamilton, Lee, “The Iraq Study Group Report” (Vintage Books, New York.), p.XV

Iran that has produced the I.E.D.'s (Improvised Explosive Devices) that are responsible for the brutal maiming and murdering of American and coalition forces, as well as Iraqi civilians.

As the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran is making transparently bellicose statements towards both America and towards Israel, is working on its uranium enrichment activity, and is, as I write these words, convening a conference on Holocaust denial., how can we possibly describe these behaviors as the manifestations of a desire for regional stability? Sitting down with evil does nothing more than empower that evil.

Syria, for many years now, has been a highly nefarious player. It has enabled the efficient and uninterrupted delivery system of weapons and militia from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Hizballah in Beirut for many years, now. It has made its mark within the netherworld of terrorists and common criminals by offering refuge to every terrorist group known to mankind, by money laundering, narcotics smuggling, counterfeiting, and by generally fomenting regional chaos and instability. It is through the porous border of Iraq with Syria that many of the most lethal militia and equipment have passed through to Iraq, murdering and brutally wounding our American and coalition forces.

Why would we possibly want to reward this sort of behavior? These recommendations simply serve to embolden these bad actors and to elevate them on the global stage.

Recommendation number 15, concerning Syria, includes it's full adherence to UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which allows Lebanon to become a sovereign nation, Syria's cooperation with all investigations into political assassinations in Lebanon, especially those of Rafyk Hariri and Pierre Gemayal, a verifiable cessation of Syrian aid to Hizballah and Hamas, a Syrian commitment to help obtain from Hamas an acknowledgement of Israel's right to exist, and to use their influence with Hamas and Hizballah for the release of the captured Israeli Defense Force soldiers, a cessation of arms shipments through Syria to Hamas or Hizballah ,sealing of the borders with Iraq.⁶

What would motivate Basher Assad now, to abide with United Nations Resolution 1701, allowing Lebanon to become a sovereign nation? What would possibly, now, motivate him to cooperate with the investigation of the murder of Rafyk Hariri?

James Baker himself has admonished Americans to take the report in its entirety. He stated, "I hope we don't treat this as a fruit salad and say, "I like this but I don't like that."⁷

In exchange for the aforementioned conditions, and in the context of a full and a secure peace agreement the authors of the report have the colossal audacity to recommend that the Israelis should return the Golan Heights. Have the authors even consulted an Israeli who is a member of the current Israeli administration? Has American blood been shed in

⁶ Ibid, p. 56

⁷ December 8, 2006

a defensive war of 1967 in order to gain control of this territory? Is it ours to give away? Did they consider, when they wrote this report, how weakened Israel would become without control of the strategic high-ground?

Would an Israel without the Golan Heights be able to defend its own sovereignty without the help of international, or of American troops? How would this alter the relationship between Israel and the troop donating nations? If, indeed, young men and women would be forced to put themselves in a position where they might be asked to make the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the Jewish state, how would that bode for the issue of world-wide anti-Semitism? One must ultimately ask, do the authors even care?

Rather than enhancing American prestige, Mahmoud Ahmadinajad must be sitting in Tehran and relishing his new position of power. He gets to have his enemy, Saddam Hussein, overthrown at the enormous sacrifice of almost 3,000 American lives, and he is also now getting a say in the determination of the outcome of Iraq.

Again, with what can only be attributed to colossal Western naïveté, the authors of the report recommend that “Iran should stem the flow of arms and training to Iraq, respect Iraq’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and use its influence over Iraqi Shia groups to encourage national reconciliation.”⁸

Where do the empirical data lie for such an optimistic set of prescriptions? They certainly do not reside in Tehran or Damascus.

The ISG’s recommendations with regard to local Middle Eastern players amount to little more than wishful thinking. What would possibly motivate Mahmoud Ahmadinajad or Bashir Assad *to want to* help America sort out of the mess in Iraq? Ultimately, the ISG report is simply a mere projection of our Western wish for stability. And, as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once said, “We in the West make a great mistake when we transpose our values onto the rest of the world.”

Let’s take a look at some of the other potential solutions to the Iraq problem that the ISG report recommends:

“The United States cannot achieve its goals in the Middle East unless it deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict and regional instability. There must be a renewed and sustained commitment by the United States to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts: Lebanon, Syria and President Bush’s June 2002 commitment to a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.”

Americans knows that we are currently in a very unpopular position. We are hungry to gain the love of the approximately 1.3 billion Muslims in the world, and to regain our credibility within the international community. In short, we desperately want to be loved again.

⁸ Ibid

To this, the ISG report offers a quick and easy solution: Divert the global focus away from Iraq, and concentrate the attention of the world to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. If there is one thing that a Sunni Egyptian sitting in a café in Cairo and a Shia cleric sitting in a madrassa in Tehran might be able to agree upon, (thanks in great part to Al Jazeera and Al Arabia), it is their support for the Palestinian issue. As an Egyptian friend recently told me, “People all over the Middle East are driving their cars with bumper stickers saying “Palestine is the issue.”

Both the Quartet and the Road map have established guidelines that have been agreed upon,. The very first is a recognition of Israel’s right to exist and a cessation of all violence. In direct opposition to these goals, the Palestinian people went to the polls in January of 2006 and freely elected Hamas, a terrorist group to represent them. The fact that Israel withdrew from every inch of territory from Gaza in July of 2005, and from Lebanon in May of 2000, yet those were the very territories used to kidnap the three soldiers this past summer, and to initiate the attack against Israel, should remind the world that the conflict is not about the 1967 borders, but about the 1948 borders: In other words, about the future of Israel’s very existence.

Before one gets to the point of a regional conference, (a recycled idea from when Baker had been Secretary of State), it would be a reasonable suggestion to ask the parties whether or not they vow to recognize the existence of the state of Israel, and actually want a two-state solution, with ever player recognizing the right to exist of both Israel *and* Palestine. Otherwise the whole concept is simply a non-starter. The Madrid conference of 1991 had already been convened, and it produced a sham of empty promises that led to Oslo, and those empty promises eventually evaporated into oblivion, leaving a trail of high expectations and the subsequent carnage in its wake. Madrid and Oslo both only served to raise the expectations of the parties involved, and the greater the expectation, the greater the disappointment, and the greater the rage.

There might well be a perception in the region that the Bush administration has not done enough on the Israeli-Palestinian front. However, satisfying perceptions for an instant feel good sensation of gratification is akin to Hollywood stars jumping into bed with one another and vowing marriage in order to increase ticket sales at the box office. What are the actual probabilities that this type of marriage will last? They are not high...and if they were, one would not guarantee a life of marital bliss, peace and tranquility.

In other words, before any sort of negotiations are made, it is essential that both parties share the same objective. In this case it would be along the lines of President Bush’s June of 2002 address, “two states living side by side in peace and democracy.”

Essential to any agreement with any of the parties is the recognition of Israel’s right to exist. That is not some bargaining chip, but is an essential precondition that should be spelled out before the subjects ever sit down to negotiations. It should not be a formulaic utterance made in order to achieve some sought after popular recognition, like the

marriage vows uttered perfunctorily by our Hollywood celebrities in order to increase sales at the box office. This would be a wise tactical move on the part of some actors on the Arab street, immediately shifting the onus onto Israel. The pledges, the commitments the promises for two states living side by side in peace and democracy have got to be *real*.

One might ask, how might one measure intentions, an invisible construct? The answer is simple, but the solution is tremendously complex. One can measure intentions only by looking at verifiable behaviors. And the best way of measuring peaceful intentions is by examining the content of what the parties are teaching their children.

The moment the Jew, the Israeli, the Zionist, the Christian, the American and the West is no longer demonized in the textbooks that they are teaching their children with, in newspapers, on television programs, in the sermons from the mosques, and in practically every mode of communication and instruction available, then we will know that their intentions are sincere.

Getting to that point is not simple. It cannot be imposed from the outside, (at least not obviously), because every effort made by the West to obtain a change of the hearts and minds in the region is regarded with a great deal of suspicion. The parties are going to have to want to do it themselves.

Promises alone to instruct their children otherwise in the future, do not cut it. Until the day comes that there is verifiable proof positive that this is actually occurring, both America and Israel will have no choice but to hunker down, to be strong, and to prevail. Ideas are the heart of what matters, after all. As President John F. Kennedy once said, "Peace does not exist in signed documents and treaties alone, but in the hearts and minds of the people."

A sham conference, or a paper peace that ignores the contents of the hearts and minds of the people in the region will most likely be compared by the Islamicists with the promise that the prophet Mohammad had made in the seventh century with the stronger tribe of Koreish in order to have them trust him, and then eventually have them totally vanquished. In fact, this is how Arafat explained his actions on Jordanian radio the night after he signed the Oslo Accords, as the *Habidiya Accords*,

This brings us back home to America: We entered Iraq with the best of intentions, to pursue a course of bringing democracy to the Middle East. Things have not gone well. Are we now about to sacrifice our one proven democratic ally that we already have in the region to win back the popularity because of some mistakes that have been made during the war? Israel has, until this very day, had to fight six defensive wars, and has never asked for international troop support. Are we now going to whittle Israel down to a size where she will have to depend on the goodness of others for her very survival?

At the beginning of the War in Iraq, President Bush had said that the road to peace in the Middle East runs through Baghdad. Today, we are hearing that the road to peace in

Baghdad runs through Jerusalem. A weakened Israel will not enhance the perception of America, not in the region, not anywhere else in the world. Like it or not, sometimes for reasons not of America's or of Israel's choosing, but simply because they are both free and open democracies, in the minds the radical Islamicist, Israel and the United States are webbed at the hip.

There is a great danger, that under the current conditions, in our desperation to win back the love of the world, Western leaders might take their fingers to the wind in the Middle East today, to score some easy popularity points, and exert enormous pressure upon Israel to retreat to the 1948 armistice lines. In that case, the enormous appetite of the radical Islamicist will be whetted, and Israel will become the Sudentenland of this whole sorry saga. This would almost certainly guarantee a weakened America, and a weakened free world.