

The Cause of Hatred and Distrust in the Middle East

The war in Iraq is further poisoning the already noxious political atmosphere between Arabs and Americans. It has intensified and increased dangerous feelings of humiliation and outrage among the Arab public, while paranoid rhetoric about Western attacks against Islam elsewhere is spreading from the religious fringe to the mainstream. It is simplistic and self-serving for political leaders in the West to tell us that the terrorists attacks happen because they "hate freedom," or "hate our democratic values" or "they despise our love of liberty." Many, in fact, hate what they perceive as materialistic Western values, but this is not what leads them to kill themselves in suicide bombings, or to murder thousands of innocent civilians. The main source of Arabs' anger, since the end of British occupation in the Middle East to the end of the Iraq conflict, stems from the partitioning of Palestine, American aid to the Arabs' enemies, Israel, Israel's control of sites holy to Muslims as well as Israel's work in developing the "Ethnic Bomb", and the United Nations' sanction on Iraqi people for more than a decade.

The beginning of the current conflict can be traced back to when the partitioning process took place. According to CIA data: "After World War II, the British withdrew from their mandate of Palestine, and the UN partitioned the area into Arab and Jewish states, an arrangement rejected by the Arabs. Subsequently, the Israelis defeated the Arabs in a series of wars without ending the deep tensions between the two sides." (CIA par.1) As of the year 2000, the Muslim population of the world was about 1.2 billion, the Jewish population about 13 million, and the Christian population about 1.1 billion. This means that about 20% of the world's population is Muslim, 18% Christian, and 2.1% Jewish. Of the 13 million Jews in the world, about 5.8 million live in the United States

and about 4.8 million live in Israel. This boils down to the fact that about 80% of the population in Israel is Jewish and about 20% (or 1.1 million) is Arab Muslims. The population in the West Bank (a dry, land-locked area of about 5,860 square miles right smack in the middle of Israel) is about two million, of which Palestinian Arabs comprise 83% (1.7 million) and Jews comprise about 17% (340,000). The predominant religions in the West Bank are thus about 75% Muslim and 17% Jewish (with the balance being mostly Christians). Basically there are about two million Arab Muslims surrounded by about 4.8 million Jews. The Arabs and the Jews hate each other and have been fighting since the United Nations had the "brilliant" idea of partitioning the country in this insane manner in 1947 (CIA par.3).

Also, U.S. aid to Israel has played a major role in tension between Arabs and America and between Arabs and Israel. On Ted Koppel's (NIGHTLINE), Henry Sigman said: "The U.S. is seen as a sort of an insensitive hegemony, with arrogance that seeks to impose its own values on the rest of the world. It is seen as an uncritical supporter of the State of Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians and the combination of the two does not make for U.S. popularity in that part of the world." This unwavering support is reviewed negatively by countries who feel that the Palestinians are being mistreated. There are two major forms of American aid to Israel. Israel attacks prominent Palestinian militants using American equipment, such as helicopters, guns, ships, and missiles provided for free by the U.S. Thus, the U.S. unilaterally insures and maintains Israel's interests, therefore showing partiality, and blocking Palestinian aspirations. Next, is the amount of financial aid the U.S. gives to Israel, unparalleled in the history of U.S. foreign policy. Israel usually receives roughly one third of the entire foreign aid budget, despite the fact

that Israel comprises less than .001 of the world's population and already has one of the world's higher per capita incomes. In other words, Israel, a country of approximately 6 million people, is currently receiving more U.S. aid than all of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean combined when you take out Egypt and Colombia (Zunes, Malthaner, and Curtiss page1). Because of the Israeli occupation of the holy city of Jerusalem, tensions will ultimately remain high among the Palestinian people. As mentioned above, the holy city of Jerusalem remains a symbolic religious center for Muslims abroad, and should be free of military occupation. Jerusalem should acquire peaceful resolve, since it is the holy city for Jewish, Muslim and Christian people.

In addition, Israel's control over holy sites for many years has heated the tension to its maximum level. At stake is administration of the Muslim sites in the Old City, principally the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa mosque, both located in the Haram Al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary), known to Israelis as the Temple Mount. Muslim attachment to the sites rests on three principal bases. First, because Islam recognizes biblical prophets as Muslim messengers, the location of Solomon's temple is considered an important Islamic site. Jerusalem is intimately linked to important events in the lives of other Islamic prophets, including Abraham, Lot, David, Moses and Jesus. Jerusalem was also the first qibla, or direction of prayer, for the Muslim community of the Prophet Muhammad. Some sixteen months after his hijra, or flight to Medina, the Prophet received a revelation instructing him to turn toward the Ka'ba at Mecca instead, but Jerusalem, or Beit al-Maqdis ("The Holy House," from Solomon's temple) as it was called, is still revered as "the first qibla." Finally, Masjid Al Aqsa ("the Furthest Mosque") was where the Prophet was taken by a winged steed, Buraq, before ascending

to and returning from Paradise during the Night Journey, or Isra' wal-Mi'raj. The incident is related in the Qur'an, which refers to "the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts we have blessed." Jerusalem fell to the Muslims in 637, five years after the death of the Prophet, when the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab came to the city to arrange a pact with the city's Christian inhabitants. Umar constructed a mosque near the site of the Rock, which had been covered with debris. The great Dome of the Rock was built by the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik in 691-92, with the mosque known as Al Aqsa completed shortly afterward at the southern edge of the Haram. A voluminous body of medieval Islamic literature was produced on the fada'il ("blessings") of Jerusalem, discussing the Muslim history of the holy city, the benefits of prayer at Al Aqsa and the events associated with the Day of Judgment that are to take place at the Rock. The holy sites have remained in Muslim hands since the time of Umar, with the exception of the years 1099-1187, when the Crusaders captured all of Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock was converted into a church. Al-Quds, as the city became to be called, passed from one Muslim dynasty to another until 1917, when British troops conquered Jerusalem from the Ottoman Turks during World War I (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China page1) after partition Al-Quds went to Israeli control, furthering inflaming the hatred.

Furthermore, the Arab world believes that Israel is working on an "ethnically targeted" biological weapon that would harm or kill Arabs but not Jews, according to Israeli military and western intelligence sources. In developing this "ethno-bomb," the British paper went on, Israeli scientists are trying to exploit medical advances by identifying distinctive genes carried by some Arabs, and then create a genetically modified bacterium or virus. The goal is to use the ability of viruses and certain bacteria

to alter the DNA inside the host's living cells. The scientists are trying to engineer deadly microorganisms that attack only those bearing the distinctive genes. The secret Israel program is based at the Institute for Biological Research in Nes Tziona, a small town southeast of Tel Aviv, the main research facility for Israel's clandestine arsenal of chemical and biological weapons. A scientist there said the task is very complicated because both Arabs and Jews are of Semitic origin. But he added: "They have, however, succeeded in pinpointing a particular characteristic in the genetic profile of certain Arab communities." Diseases could be spread by spraying organisms into the air or putting them in water supplies (Margolis page1).

Finally, the fifth source of Arab anger at America has to do with sanctions against Iraq. The United Nations Security Council maintained comprehensive economic sanctions on Iraq since August 6, 1990. The international community increasingly views the sanctions as punitive and illegitimate. Humanitarian suffering in Iraq is well-documented. Doubts about the sanctions' effectiveness and their legal basis under international humanitarian and human rights law are widespread. Policy makers initially saw comprehensive economic sanctions, imposed under Resolution 687, as an ethical and non-violent policy tool. Though Iraq sanctions produced some significant disarmament results, they failed to achieve all the policy goals and they have deeply harmed powerless and vulnerable Iraqi citizens. For example, the American –led sanctions resulted in the death of more than one million Iraqi children (BBC page1). Security Council members received warnings of the humanitarian emergency in Iraq and the damage done by sanctions immediately after the Gulf War. Warnings came from three U.N. Secretary Generals, agencies including UNICEF, WHO and WFP, and two humanitarian

coordinators, who resigned in protest. A Select Committee of the British House of Commons offered this negative judgment: "The U.N. Security Council shares responsibility for the humanitarian crisis." The United States and the United Kingdom, who use their veto power to prolong the U.N. sanctions, bear special responsibility for the U.N. action. The Security Council implicitly accepts such a negative assessment, since it no longer uses comprehensive economic sanctions in security crises elsewhere in the world. Civilian suffering in Iraq is not an unexpected collateral effect, but a predictable result of the sanctions policy. No-fly zones, periodic U.S. military attacks, and U.S. threats of regime-change block peaceful outcomes, as do vilification of Saddam Hussein, pro-sanctions propaganda, and other politicization of the crisis (BBC News page1).

It is essential that our government move quickly and decisively to ensure that Israel's colonial occupation is ended, and that the United States is seen as a driving force in freeing the Palestinian people. Without this step, it may be impossible to convince most Arabs that American foreign policy has anything to offer them other than war, occupation and humiliation. These steps must be serious and sustained, and require far more than unpublished road maps and unelected prime ministers of non-existent states. Without a complete and final end to Israel's occupation, no amount of success in post-conflict Iraq will mean anything positive for the region, and no substantial healing of the wounds can begin.

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