

*Lawrence Davidson*

## Bush and Kerry in Baghdad and Jerusalem: Is There a Difference?

by  
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When the smoke from the 2004 election clears many Americans hope John Kerry will be president and big foreign policy changes will result. Unfortunately these hopes are not likely and here are two reasons why: first, the interest group generated pressures that set broad parameters for policy tend to remain constant no matter who occupies the White House; and second, because this is so, policy formulation is not simply a function of the personal preferences of political leaders. Policy goals are set largely on the basis of which domestic subgroups an elected official and his or her party seeks to satisfy. On the other hand, the choice of tactics used to implement policy can be influenced by individual preference.

What follows is a comparison of foreign policy goals and tactics pursued in the cases of Iraq and Israel/Palestine, first under President Bush, and then under a projected Kerry administration. While there is overlap in the interest groups the two men respond to on these issues, they are not exactly the same. And, as we will see, their lobby alliances are contributing factors to what differences we will find between them.

### **President Bush and his “Forward Strategy of Freedom”**

IN THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, FOREIGN POLICY promoting economic expansion abroad is a constant theme. These economic pursuits, in turn, are overlain by claims of mythic altruism and idealism. For many citizens, foreign policies facilitating economic interests go hand in hand with the notions of America as a purveyor of freedom and democracy, a builder of prosperity and modernity. Or, as George W. Bush puts it, we aim to bring God’s gift of liberty to “every human being in the world.” Of course, this popular idealism hides the contradictions that exist between

itself and the tactics of exploitation inherent in much of American foreign policy.

When it comes to such tactics there is a continuum that runs from diplomacy and the use of various non-military pressure tactics all the way to the marines extolling victory in the “Halls of Montezuma.” As long as the Soviet Union was a competitor for world wide influence, conditions were such that an informal American preference existed for the relatively low risk end of the tactical spectrum. Coups, invasions and the like were second tier options undertaken only after consideration of their impact on important variables: Soviet reaction had to be taken into account, alliances existed that had to be paid attention to, treaties were to be adhered to, and international law was to be respected at least to the point where it could be used in the propaganda wars that labeled the Communists horrible and our side all goodness and light.

Now the Soviet Union is no more. And when it went the way of the Dodo, so it seems did America’s preference for low risk tactics. Those who had always favored the muscular end of the tactical spectrum now felt liberated. A thousand years of Pax Americana seemed possible if only the country could find the will to sustain a “forward strategy of freedom” (aka send in the marines). The world could thus be made safe for the interests of all those influential American subgroups “doing business” abroad.

This is no fairy tale. One can find a strategy for this interventionist posture on the website of the now infamous *Project for the New American Century*. The neo-conservative ideologues who put forth this strategy are one of the major lobby groups President Bush is allied with and, as a consequence, they now command the country’s foreign policy from their offices in the Bush administration. Their ambitions were greatly enhanced by the tragedy of September 11, 2001. The 9/11 attacks were themselves the result of American interventionist policies in the Middle East and support for Israeli colonialism, but any recognition of this connection was a direct challenge to the interests that had shaped those policies. Within weeks of the attack, such questions as “why do they hate us?” which suggested the need for national self-reflection and a thorough policy review, were dismissed as “blame the victim” sentiment on the part of the unpatriotic. Thus, instead of being taken as a warning that intervention in the Arab world and the subsidization of Israeli expansion had dangerous

“blowback” potential, the attacks were used by the neo-conservatives as an excuse to implement extremist foreign policy tactics which relied on military aggression. And what have been the results? Let us take a look at the Bush administration’s “forward strategy of freedom” in the two important cases of Iraq and Israel/Palestine.

### **I. War on Terror Equals War on Iraq**

The attacks of September 11 did not occur because Islamists hate American freedoms. In truth, they do not care how we behave in our own country. They do, however, care about how Americans behave in their countries. And we have not behaved well in the last 50 or so years. Americans are oblivious to this fact. Most believe that U.S. foreign policy is a selfless, if overly expensive, effort to project outward our own idealized domestic freedoms. That is why most Americans believe that we are in Iraq to give the ungrateful locals democracy among other wonderful things. The true history and consequences of U.S. support for countless dictators (including Saddam Hussein), and our support for an Israel that most of the world sees as a wretched apartheid state, is absent from the mind and media of America.

Soon after the September 11 attacks the Bush administration declared the War on Terror and, following a brief diversionary move in the direction of Osama bin Laden, the president began portraying Saddam’s Iraq as the main enemy. To establish this connection the Bush administration lied to the American people, and the press uncritically swallowed the ruse. So successful was this warmongering propaganda that by September 2003, 70% of the American people falsely believed that Saddam Hussein was behind the September 11 attacks (that was up from 3% right after the 2001 tragedy).

This lie and others, such as the false claim about weapons of mass destruction, were used to create popular fear of Iraq, and thus support for the subsequent U.S. invasion. Once the invasion was under way, other lies, such as our alleged desire to bring democracy to Iraq, were put forward. This latter claim is hardly believable if one has insight into the attitudes of the voting public in that country (or most of the Middle East for that matter). A free and fair election in Iraq would certainly bring to power a

popular *anti-American* government. The problem is that the Americans know nothing about Arab or Muslim perceptions or the causes of them. Thus they can be deluded into thinking that a puppet government in Iraq whose main purpose is to facilitate our exploitation of their resources and maintain a friendly attitude toward Israel, is meant to be a step toward democracy. The consequence of this deceitful policy, and the heavy handed tactics being used to carry it out, is the fiasco that is now American occupied Iraq.

## **II. A Roadmap to Hell**

What about the on-going strife in Israel and Palestine? In 2002 President George W. Bush offered his “peace plan” for this conflict. He did so in response to mainstream Jewish and Christian expectations. However, the plan was carefully crafted not to interfere with the ambitions of more hardline Zionist lobbies. Dubbed the Roadmap, it put forth a three phase program for the creation of a “Palestinian state” existing in peace alongside Israel. As it turns out, a state for Palestine has about as much meaningfulness as democracy for Iraq.

In Phase One the Palestinians were to declare a unilateral cease fire. The logic operating here is that the occupying Israeli forces are the ones in need of relief, and the Palestinians resisting occupation are the aggressors. Thus the Roadmap stipulates that the best way to begin any “peace process” is to end resistance to a harsh and illegal occupation.

In addition, Phase One demanded that the Palestinians “immediately undertake a comprehensive political reform in preparation for statehood including...free, fair, and open elections.” Again, the assumption is that the Palestinian Authority, with its infrastructure systematically undermined by Israel, is corrupt and needs to prove itself capable of holding open elections and governing competently. The PA does have problems with corruption the cause of which, at least in part, is the breakdown of order that accompanies occupation. On the face of it, to demand that honest and efficient government be demonstrated, and open elections held, all in the midst of Israeli sponsored chaos, is absurd.

In the unlikely case that the Palestinians did all of this, Israel was to pull

its forces back to where they were in September 2000 (not to the Green line), freeze settlement activity (but remove only “outposts” and not settlements) and cease its slaughter of civilians and the destruction of their property. But again, the Roadmap requires this of the Israelis only after the Palestinians perform what is, for all intents and purposes, a self-inflicted castration. And that is just Phase One.

In Phase Two the Palestinian Authority was to “act decisively against terror.” In other words, having talked Hamas and others into a cease fire, the PA was now to wage civil war to destroy these resistance movements. If they succeeded in doing so they would be rewarded with a state with “provisional borders.” Given the extensive illegal colonization that Israel has engaged in, this could only mean a series of tenuously connected bantustans on approximately 43 percent of the occupied territories. In this rump state, surrounded by Israeli walls, tanks and soldiers, disarmed and economically dominated, subject to periodic incursions at the discretion of their enemy, the Palestinians were to demonstrate a “willingness and ability to build a practicing democracy.”

It was only in Phase Three, after the Palestinian resistance was eliminated, that “permanent status” talks were to be held. Here, according to the Roadmap, the problems of borders, Jerusalem, settlements, and refugees were to be dealt with. Symbolic of the Phase Three environment, however, was the fact that Israel’s prime minister has already declared that a precondition of any talks on refugees is a Palestinian renunciation of the right of return.

As a pseudo peace plan the Roadmap has historical precedents. All came in the form of dictates such as the U.S. dealings with the native Indians and Mexico in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the German and Russian dealings with Poland in the 20<sup>th</sup>. These are what the Bush plan resembles. It is dressed up like a plan for reform and democracy in Palestine leading to peace with Israel, but that is just sleight of hand. Like so much else that the Bush administration does, this bit of foreign policy is built on lies.

### **John Kerry: Our Next Diplomat and Chief?**

IF GEORGE W. BUSH IS AN IDEOLOGUE WHOSE BELIEF SYSTEM (largely fashioned by the notions of Christian Fundamentalism) resonates with neo-conservative triumphalism, John Kerry is more a mainstream politician of Clintonesque style. His connections to lobbies with interests in the Middle East are not, in all but one case, as pronounced as Mr. Bush's. The Bush family has well known links to the oil cartels that seek control of Iraqi oil. Kerry and the Democrats also pay attention to these interests, but are not beholden to them in such an incestuous way. Vice President Cheney is "embedded" with the arms manufacturers, construction firms, and mercenary security firms now playing a major role in Iraq. Again, the Democrats want to keep most of these elements relatively satisfied but do not have the profligate connections of the present administration. And Bush himself is a devotee of the interests of Jewish and Christian Zionists who insist that the U.S. government lend uncritical support to Israel. Here, as we shall see, Kerry and the Democrats are, for different reasons, as ensnared as is Bush. With these differences in mind, what can we expect of a Kerry administration when it comes to Iraq, Israel and Palestine?

### **I. War on Iraq – "I don't believe in a cut and run philosophy"**

Mr. Kerry, unlike George W. Bush, is not a "chicken hawk." He is a veteran of combat in Viet Nam. He served there without question but, upon discharge, came home and raised concerns about the war's efficacy. This may seem a bit backwards but it does indicate that Mr. Kerry is capable of changing his mind, once he has "done his duty."

However, it is a mistake to think that Kerry as president will bring the Iraq war to a quick end. Kerry is a professional politician and thus, like Richard Nixon seeking "peace with honor" in Viet Nam, he feels it would be political suicide and a dereliction of duty to "cut and run." Despite connections to a broad range of interest groups, Kerry has, rightly or wrongly, decided that the voting public *he needs to be elected president* wants the war in Iraq to continue, though with less overall risk to Americans. Thus, he will not pull out of that country until he has appeared to have "done his duty" and a more broad-based anti-war sentiment than exists at present gives him political cover. On the other hand, not being a neo-conservative ideologue, he is more flexible than George Bush when it

comes to tactics.

It is likely then that Kerry will initially restrict changes in Iraq to the tactical level. He favors a multilateral approach and will try to involve the United Nations and NATO more deeply in Iraq. He will accomplish this by being a “hands-on, engaged, diplomat-in-chief” who “knows how to bring these [hoped for allied] countries to the table.” To achieve this goal he is ready to throw overboard the Bush administration’s arrogant demeanor. As a result, he predicts that at the end of his first term “foreign forces” will have replaced most of America’s 140,000 troops now in Iraq. It is to be noted that Kerry’s hidden assumption is that a simple change in approach will obligate others to join us in the mayhem we have created in Iraq. However, there seems no obvious reason why other countries should rush to our aid in Iraq, only to risk their own public facilities being attacked (a la Spain), their nationals kidnaped and beheaded, and perhaps their governments voted out of office. Within two or three years of his election, Kerry’s new strategy will probably prove a failure. At that point, having “done his duty” and drawing on the support of interest groups pushing for more resources for domestic programs, he may prove willing and capable of winding down the Iraq war.

What is absent from the Kerry orientation (as it is from that of Mr. Bush) is any questioning of the war’s justice or necessity. Kerry seems uninterested in the fact that the war was started on the basis of lies and deceptions, and has publically declared that he would have voted to give Bush war authority even if he had known there were no WMDs in Saddam’s arsenal. He talks of withdrawal coming only after achieving stability in Iraq which is really impossible since it is the American led occupation that is the source of instability. He says little about the corrupt practices of American profiteers in Iraq. And, he certainly does not admit to the need for a thorough review of those past American policies in the Middle East that have brought us to this sorry position.

The bottom line in any comparison of Bush and Kerry on Iraq, is that with either man becoming the next president, the people of Iraq are going to continue to die, be maimed, lose their property and their livelihoods. The real difference between the two lies in how long such madness is likely to last. To some extent this difference reflects the interest groups the two men respond to. With Mr. Bush’s reelection war will become open-ended.

For Bush and his backers the War on Terror is a war between good and evil. Evil must be conquered not only in Iraq, but also in lands beyond. Bush shares the perceptions of Christian fundamentalists, Likud Zionists, and neo-conservative aspirants to empire, as well as avaricious elements of big business such as Haliburton, Bechtel, the arms producers and mercenary security firms. These, along with the oil companies, are the lobby groups that urge on his muscular, neo-Prussian tactics. Thus blinkered, he and his associates will soldier on forever if given the opportunity. Mr. Kerry's lobby connections are broader: small as well as big business, labor unions, professional organizations and other interests that prioritize resources for domestic use rather than foreign warfare. On the other hand, Kerry also responds to the Jewish (though not the Christian) Zionists. The fact that Mr. Kerry responds to a broader mix of interest groups suggests that, as president, he is less likely to wage open-ended war. That may mean less Americans, Iraqis and other Arabs suffer and die in the long run. It does not mean that they will stop suffering and dying in the short run.

## **II. Israel-Palestine – “What is important, obviously, is the security of the state of Israel”**

There is one area where Mr. Kerry completely supports the murderous tactics of Mr. Bush, and that is in his uncritical support of Israel. Kerry does not do so because, like Bush, he thinks God gave Palestine to the Israelites and we must support Zionist expansionism to hasten the second coming of Christ or, like the neo-cons, because of a perverse admiration for Israeli aggressiveness. Mr. Kerry's surrender of American interests (that is, sacrificing of the good will of almost all Arabs and Muslims) to the interests of Israeli colonists is simply a recognition of the power of the Jewish Zionist lobby—a recognition that it is one of the most formidable interest groups to now walk the marbled halls of American government. And, indeed, this Zionist lobby has for decades bought and bullied the Democratic Party to an even greater extent than its Republican rival. So it should come as no surprise to hear John Kerry competing with the Bush administration for Zionist favor by making the following public pronouncements:

A) *“I will never force Israel to make concessions that cost or*

*compromise any of Israel's security.*" Since 1967 Israeli governments have insisted that controlling the occupied territories is important to their security. In truth the Israelis are using the security argument as a cover for illegal colonization, for the fact is that occupation is demonstratively the source of their insecurity. However, in American politics, there is great political risk in saying this publically, while there is political benefit in adhering to the Israeli line.

B) *"We will never expect Israel to negotiate without a credible partner,"* and *"Palestinians must stop the violence—this is the fundamental building block of the peace process."* As we have seen with the Roadmap, which Kerry sees as "an acceptable approach for reinvigorating the peace process," the notion of a "credible partner" means a Palestinian Quisling who will destroy resistance to Israel's destruction of Palestinian society. As the game of American politics is now played, if the destruction of Palestinian society is a desire of dominant interest groups, it will be facilitated and rationalized by our government. That is what has been happening since 1967 and it will continue to happen when and if Kerry replaces Bush in the White House.

C) *Israel's security fence is a legitimate act of self-defense.*" Back in October of 2003, in a rare moment of clarity and frankness, John Kerry told an audience at the Arab-American Institute that the "security fence" was a "provocative and counterproductive measure." It did not take long for the America's Zionist lobbies to make clear the political costs of maintaining such a "radical" position. Kerry quickly reversed himself. There are some Arab Americans, such as James Zogby, who believe that Kerry's real beliefs are expressed in his statement to the Arab Americans, and that his eventual Middle East policy will reflect this. While this hope is understandable, it is also wishful thinking. The same political pressures which persuaded John Kerry to kowtow to the Zionists for the sake of his election campaign, will still exist when and if he becomes president. As president he will face a Congress that continues to be rabidly pro-Zionist, leaders of his own party who are on the Zionist political payroll and a State Department purged of all Arabists. Mr. Kerry, remember, is a professional politician. Real peace for him is maintaining a domestic climate

that allows for his reelection.

- D) *“Israel is our ally, the only true democracy in this troubled region, and we know that Israel as a partner is fundamental to our security.”* Both statements are propaganda pieces designed to create a sense of pseudo-reality simply by being repeated ad nauseam. Israel is a democracy in the same way that America’s southern states were democracies prior to the civil rights movement. In Israel today, as in the American South in the 1940s and 1950s, minorities (in this case non-Jews) are systematically discriminated against both in law and custom. And, in what sense is Israel “fundamental to our security?” Support for Israel over the decades, which Mr. Kerry (just like Bush) asserts is “a central keystone of American foreign policy,” has helped create a security crisis for the United States by unnecessarily alienating billions of Muslims and creating hatred toward the U.S. throughout the Arab world.
- E) *“In the first days of a Kerry administration, I will appoint a presidential ambassador to the peace process.”* Kerry’s spokesmen have also told us he “would never send anyone [as a Middle East envoy] who doesn’t have the confidence of Israel and the Jewish community.” And, given the fact that Kerry initially suggested Jimmy Carter for this post but withdrew the idea immediately upon drawing Zionist ire, we can only assume that the Zionists will have a veto on who his “presidential ambassador” will be. As Catherine Cook, a senior analyst at the Washington based Middle East Information and Research Project, has observed “John Kerry could appoint Desmond Tutu as the U.S. envoy, but unless his mandate differed from that allowed by current U.S. policy, Tutu would fail.”
- F) *“I’ve always felt that the right of return is contrary to the viability of a Jewish state, and that’s what Israel is.”* In other words, Kerry has put Israel’s right to maintain its discriminatory ethnocentric nature above the rights of millions of Palestinians held under international law. He agrees with President Bush that Israel must be allowed to keep its major West Bank colonies. He has labeled Yasser Arafat a “failed leader” and said he would not deal with

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him. And, he has written that we must “reaffirm our belief that the cause of Israel is the cause of America.” So, just what, beyond Palestinian surrender, is Mr. Kerry’s “presidential ambassador to the peace process” going to negotiate?

The bottom line in any comparison of Bush and Kerry on Israel and Palestine, is that with either man becoming the next president, their will be no pressure put on Israel to cease its barbaric behavior in Palestine. Thus, as is the case with Iraqis, Palestinians are going to continue to die, be maimed, lose their property and their livelihoods. And, unfortunately, in this case Kerry will not shorten the time span of this horror any more than Bush. On this issue Kerry is simply someone who will replace Bush’s relatively hands-off, biblically inspired support for Israel, with renewed diplomatic shuffling that has already been proven a failure. No leader, Republican or Democrat, can make a positive difference in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until the Gordian knot connecting this issue to US domestic politics is cut. In other words, the power of the Zionist lobbies (both Jewish and Christian) has to be broken. Neither Kerry nor Bush has any desire to take on this task.

### **Conclusions: The Costs of Disinterest and Ignorance**

GIVEN THE WAY AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IS MADE THERE really is no such thing as “national interests.” There are only the interests of lobby groups with goals that lie outside the country. Achieving sufficient influence, these lobbies can have their own interests portrayed as “the national interest.” The Zionist lobbies and Israel is a case in point. Support for Israel has been a major theme in U.S. foreign policy because the Jewish Zionist lobby, now allied to the Christian Zionists, has been sufficiently well organized and financed to successfully demand such a policy. *As a result American national security is now actually at greater risk.* Yet both Bush and Kerry, as well as numerous other politicians, persist in speaking of Israel’s interests as if they were identical to the American national interest.

It is important to note that the power of the Zionist lobbies has been facilitated by popular disinterest in foreign policy as well as ignorance of

the Middle East and American activities in that region. The void created by this ignorance has been filled by myths and rationalizations. The tragic events of September 11 presented an opportunity for the American people to take an interest in what their government does abroad and question the popular assumptions that those activities are always altruistic. For a moment such an examination seemed possible as the question was raised, “why do they hate us?” But the politicians and interest groups responsible for the behavior that bred the attacks understood the danger of such soul searching and shut down that avenue of investigation. Instead the American people were lied to yet again and, because they know no better, swallowed whole the notion that the September 11 attacks were the products of fanatical Islam (assisted by Saddam’s Iraq) gone crazy with ancient hatred of the West and its “freedoms.” Both Kerry and Bush continue to talk in this misleading way.

The same ignorance allowed the Bush administration to galvanize fear of Iraq based on false assertions. However, the prospect of war and the loss of American lives did provoke a certain level of debate and not all interested parties agreed. However, with Bush in the White House the debate was automatically won by a clique of neo-conservative politicians and intellectuals who shifted the means by which American foreign policy goals are pursued to the extreme aggressive end of the tactical spectrum. If the Democrats had won in 2000, the neo-cons would not be in power and still restricted to misinterpreting history on their web sites. American tactics would have followed a different course. Following September 11<sup>th</sup> the U.S. still would have gone after Osama bin Laden (perhaps more persistently than under Bush) and might even have attacked Afghanistan to get to him. But, given the interest group mix Democrats traditionally respond to, neo-conservative ideas would not have triumphed and Iraq would have been controlled by means other than invasion.

This scenario represents a debate over tactics. And, as important as it certainly is, it should not be mistaken for a difference over policy goals. Be it Clinton, Gore, Kerry, Bush the elder or the younger, the policy goals are the same—to promote American political and economic dominance in a world wherein she is the sole superpower. All the major interest groups referencing foreign policy adhere to this end. The present debate between Democrats and Republicans is a matter of how you want to go about achieving that end—where your preferences lie along the tactical

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spectrum.

The problem is that whatever your tactical preferences, the end—the pursuit of American dominance and its accompanying practices of exploitation—is sustained by the myth that both means and ends are altruistic. It is this distorted world view that politicians like Bush and Kerry promote and that the mainstream media successfully fosters. Therefore, no matter which man wins in November, no matter which party rules, there will be no self-reflection, no self-criticism, no reexamination of the history of American foreign policy in the Middle East, and no revival of that seminal question, “why do they hate us?” Thus, ignorance will continue with the consequence that, sooner or later, more 9/11s will occur.

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