

Editor's Corner

by Mackubin T. Owens

In These Pages

Orbis is honored to publish as a special section five papers prepared for the 50th anniversary of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS), in cooperation with Duke University's Program in American Grand Strategy and the Strategic Studies Institute at the Army War College, examining the grand strategy debates in the United States after major wars. In his introduction to the section, Peter Feaver, professor of political science at Duke and Director of TISS, lays out five themes of grand strategy that these papers address.

Wilson Miscamble of Notre Dame begins the series of articles by examining the U.S. grand strategy debate during the transition from World War II to the Cold War. William Stueck of the University of Georgia follows with a discussion of the grand strategy debate following the Korean War. Mark Moyar of the Marine Corps University addresses the often contentious U.S. grand strategy debate during the politically polarized period following Vietnam. Jeremi Suri of the University of Wisconsin looks at how the events of 9/11 changed the terms of the

debate once again. And finally, Sarah Kreps of Cornell University addresses the current U.S. grand strategy debate in the wake of the still unfinished wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition to the special section on American Grand Strategy after War, Peter Liotta and James Miskel examine the security aspects of "megacities," a phenomenon that has also been described as "feral cities," huge urban areas in which state authority is severely circumscribed. Theo Farrell, a professor in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London and Stuart Gordon, a senior lecturer at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, look at the performance of British forces in a counterinsurgency, looking especially at the situation the British faced in Afghanistan's Helmand Province. They take issue with the argument advanced by David Betz and Stuart Cormack in the spring 2009 issue of *Orbis*, which argued that the counterinsurgency performance of the British Army, once considered the exemplar of such operations, has declined in recent years. Finally, Steven Grogan discusses China, nuclear security, and terrorism.

Impromptus and Asides: Embracing Our Enemies, Stiff-Arming Our Friends

Despite his campaign rhetoric, President Obama has discovered that the reality of the terrorist threat to U.S. interests requires him to cleave to the security path established by his predecessor, e.g. not immediately closing the terrorist detention facility at Guantanamo, treatment of what were once called “unlawful combatants,” and surveillance programs. But in terms of his broader approach to foreign policy, Obama has demonstrated a disturbing propensity to curry favor with our adversaries and enemies at the expense of our friends. The Czechs and Poles are rightly concerned that they will be sacrificed on the altar of better U.S. relations with Russia. And the Israelis fear that the Obama administration’s desired opening to the “Muslim world” will be achieved at the expense of the State of Israel. Obama’s attempted bullying of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a case in point.

Netanyahu was sworn in as Israel’s prime minister on March 31. Shortly thereafter, the Obama administration confronted him in a very public way regarding Israel’s settlements in the West Bank, an extremely unusual way for an American president to greet the new leader of a liberal democracy and close friend of the United States. Not satisfied with a series of understandings crafted by the Bush administration that, while not freezing settlements, had nonetheless achieved a significant reduction in

settlement construction, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced during a May press conference with the Egyptian foreign minister that President Obama “wants to see a stop to settlements—not some settlements, not outposts, not natural-growth exceptions.”

Subsequently, the president demanded that Israel freeze construction in East Jerusalem. Of course, Netanyahu rejected Obama’s demand out of hand. He declared that Jerusalem is an open, undivided city “that has no separation according to religion or national affiliation.” Netanyahu added that “we cannot accept the idea that Jews will not have the right to live and purchase in all parts of Jerusalem.” If Jews were prohibited from buying property in New York, London, Paris or Rome, there would be an international outcry. Why, he wondered, should that not be the case when Jews buy property in Jerusalem? He might have added that the idea that an Israeli prime minister would oversee the creation of a *judenrein* Jerusalem to please President Obama and the Palestinian Arabs is absurd.

The president is woefully wrong if he believes that this sort of confrontation will provide an incentive for the Palestinian Arabs and the members of Arab League to resolve the Arab-Israeli dispute. It will instead simply reinforce the longstanding Arab belief that the United States can “deliver” Israel if it only has the will to do so, thereby reducing Arab incentives to make concessions in direct negotiations

with Israel. As if on cue, Mahmoud Abbas, leader of the Palestinian Authority, announced that he would not negotiate on any issue with the new Israeli government until the Obama administration's settlement conditions are met.

In addition to the building freeze in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Abbas insisted on four other unilateral concessions by Israel: 1) an independent Palestinian state; 2) Israel shrunk to its pre-June 1967 borders, minus a Palestinian land-bridge between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; 3) a Palestinian "right of return" to Israel; 4) and resolution of all permanent status issues on the basis of the 2002 Abdullah plan. These are non-negotiable on Israel's part, but Obama's pressure on Israel encourages such ploys by the Palestinian Arabs, reducing the likelihood that Israel will be inclined to make concessions.

If Obama seeks a Palestinian Arab state, he is going about it the wrong way. The fact is that Netanyahu has endorsed a two-state solution and an end to the expansion of settlements in the West Bank as long as the Palestinian Arabs accept Israel as a legitimate Jewish state and cannot militarily threaten it. Indeed, Israel has been willing to accept a two-state solution since the United Nations partition resolution for Palestine in 1947, but the Arabs have refused. The reason is simple. They are not interested in creating a separate Palestinian Arab state but in destroying Israel as a Jewish state.

The Obama approach in the Middle East is predicated on what might be called the Arab "grievance narrative," which holds that Israel was created as a result of Western guilt about the Holocaust. It is also based on the idea that, as the president said in his Cairo speech, there is moral equivalence between the Holocaust and Palestinian Arab "dislocation." Such language illustrates an inability to make necessary distinctions. The fact is that the Arabs launched a war against self-determination for Jews and later the State of Israel decades before any "occupation." And when Israel seized land in a defensive war, it was the Arabs, not the Israelis, who kept Palestinian Arab "refugees" in limbo for three generations pending Israel's destruction.

As Netanyahu reminded Obama during his response to the latter's Cairo speech, the Arab claim that Israel was a land-grab by the great powers to salve the collective conscience of the West after the Holocaust is a slander. On the contrary, he observed, Israel's right to its homeland rests on the longstanding historical connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel, updated and ratified by the unanimous and uniquely legitimizing votes of the League of Nations and the UN Security Council's permanent members, and validated by the acquired rights of more than sixty years of successful democratic statehood.

The nonsense about Israel's "right to exist" was exposed by Abba Eban in 1981 when he wrote, "Israel's right to exist, like that of

the United States, Saudi Arabia, and 152 other states, is axiomatic and unreserved. Israel's legitimacy is not suspended in midair, awaiting acknowledgment. . . . There is certainly no other state, big or small, young or old, that would consider mere recognition of its 'right to exist' a favor, or a negotiable concession."

Netanyahu might also have added that Israel's control of the West Bank (which should properly be called "disputed" rather than "occupied" territory) was the result of defeating the Arab powers who initiated the Six-Day War of 1967. The status of aggressors and defenders is not interchangeable. Neither is the status of victorious powers and defeated ones.

Nonetheless, it is also true that Israel has taken unilateral steps toward peace, steps not reciprocated by the Palestinian Arabs. When Israel unilaterally disengaged from the Gaza Strip, dismantling 21 settlements and displacing over 9,000 residents, thereby conducting the most comprehensive test of the "land for peace" concept in the history of Israeli-Palestinian Arab relations, it was rewarded with the

creation of a terrorist enclave governed by Hamas, rather than the peaceful, responsible neighbor Israel would need to accept a Palestinian Arab state. Unlike Hamas, the corrupt Palestinian Authority that hold sway in the West Bank has nominally accepted Israel's right to exist but has never given up the "right of return" for Palestinian "refugees," which, if implemented, would mean the end of Israel's existence as a Jewish state.

Obama should understand that peace between the Israelis and the Palestinian Arabs requires compromises on both sides. U.S. American pressure on Israel with nothing expected from the Palestinian Arabs will not achieve the desired outcome. The president famously (or infamously) justified his decision initially to downplay even rhetorical U.S. support for the protesters who confronted the Iranian government in the wake of fraudulent elections earlier this year because he did not wish for it to appear that the United States was "meddling" in Iranian affairs. He apparently feels no similar constraint when it comes to Israel.

