

WATER AS A STRATEGIC FLANK

Wherein Clinton Failed

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Obviously, there remain aspects of President Clinton's discussions with Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat which I do not know. That notwithstanding, I am nonetheless well situated to judge a more limited part of those negotiations. I focus here on what I do know with certainty: the specific nature of the President's awful strategic blunder of omission, in his stating publicly his relevant Middle East policy.

President Clinton has been, and presumably still is, an exceptionally intelligent fellow among our recently elected Presidents, and, in some respects, an unusually capable politician. On both counts, he has been the most intelligent, if certainly not the most effective President since John F. Kennedy. Among his failings, he lacks a competent approach to strategic thinking. He showed his best side in the Treaty of Westphalia-modelled "exit strategy" he had proposed for getting out of the 1999 Balkan war. Unfortunately, in that case, as in other instances, his inclination to be ineffective, was demonstrated by the way in which he abandoned his own exit strategy, once the bombing had ended.

In the matter of the Middle East peace negotiations, his potentially fatal strategic blunder ought to be obvious to any competent strategic thinker; it was obvious to me, and has been to numerous other senior specialists with relevant knowledge of the situation. Lest one might otherwise doubt that view, we have a taste of the threatened outcome of that strategic failure, in the subsequent recent political developments inside Israel itself.

However, despite the damage done, there is still the possibility of salvaging the situation, although, admittedly,

the crippled intellects of either Vice-President Al Gore or Governor George W. Bush, like either Secretary of State Albright or Condoleezza Rice, would do their utmost to sabotage the President undertaking any sensible approach to that situation. This report presents that much-needed strategic option which dangerous fools like Bush and Gore would attempt to prevent.

Recent events have shown, once again, that the possibility of a peace within the domain of Israel and Palestine, is not a result which could be decided by the Israelis and Palestinians alone, nor even in simple concert with the President of the U.S.A. The issue lies, most immediately, in the hands of a large number of peoples and governments, covering the territory from the borders of Iran and Turkey, westward to the Atlantic coast of North Africa. That is to say, not only the Middle East, but the entirety of northern Africa.

In addition to the immediately interested parties of that combined Middle East and North Africa area, there are weighty influences from outside the domain of Arab and Hebrew-speaking nations, most notably those from the governments ruled by Her Britannic Majesty (most notably the U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and political factions controlling the candidacies of both Governor Bush and Vice-President Gore inside the U.S.A. For these Anglo-American, outside meddlers, the Middle East exists only as a geopolitical pawn of both global petroleum interests and also the vast mineral resources of Central Asia. For these outside interests, the object is to keep the Middle East as inherently unstable as possible, to continue to serve the global geopoliticians as a perpetually unstable flank on the region of Turkey, Iran, Transcaucasia, and beyond.

Thus, to bring about a workable peace within the present territory of Israel and Palestine, these larger realities must be addressed directly, and with most efficient forcefulness. Otherwise, every time an outbreak of peace between Israel and the Palestinians is threatened, a powerful concert of outside forces will intervene to prevent that peace from coming about. There will be interventions by interested factions, for and against such a peace, from within the sweep of the region of the Middle East and North Africa; there will be more notable interventions from the indicated Anglo-American, “geopolitical” interests.

These have been the realities of the Middle East region, since the Napoleonic wars and the beginning of the British monarchy’s interventions into the break-up of the otherwise self-doomed Ottoman Empire. These have been the geopolitical realities of the region since Britain’s Admiral Fisher and the backers of Halford Mackinder added specific emphasis on the “geopolitics of petroleum.”

In such a situation, every competent strategist recommends, “You must outflank these enemies.” President Clinton, Ehud Barak, and Yasser Arafat were sitting in a foxhole called Camp David; there they sat and talked, while the Anglo-American geopoliticians were merrily dropping political mortar-shells and hand grenades into the foxhole at leisure. Without a suitable flanking strategy, President Clinton’s efforts, whatever their merits otherwise, were doomed.

Water: The Political Flank

During recent weeks, my associates and I have once again restated the desalination-based economic development program we first presented to relevant Arabs, Israelis, and others a quarter-century ago. Most notable such proffers have been the “Oasis Plan” presented nearly two decades ago, and our proposed inclusion of such development in both the “Productive Triangle” plan of 1989-1990 and the “Eurasian Land-Bridge” extension of the “Productive Triangle” plan, launched in 1992-1993.

I do not intend to restate that Middle East development policy in full, again, here. I limit our attention to a few points which supply the bench-marks for the strategic approach to be taken at the present critical juncture.

Without an immediate and massive infusion of a complex of projects of building large-scale development of basic economic infrastructure—notably water-management, power development and distribution, and public transportation of freight and passengers, no durable peace can be foreseen for the Middle East region during the course of the decades ahead. In light of the character of the terrain, all effective such development, and therefore all possibility of durable peace, depends absolutely on very large scale desalination.

In most of the region, and especially for the largest portions of the area, there simply do not exist sources of supply of usable water sufficient to meet the elementary

needs of the population. Hence, without large-scale desalination programs being put immediately into operation, there is no hope for durable peaceful relations among the populations of this region. To propose peace without such desalination programs, is like recommending deep-breathing exercises to people living within a vacuum.

Any attempt to separate the issue of large-scale desalination from Israel-Arab peace negotiations, foredooms the peace-negotiations either to a failure at the outset, or to a breakdown of any agreement reached temporarily.

The political connections ought to have been obvious from before the Camp David talks began.

In any discussions between Palestinians and Israelis on the ground in the Middle East, the crucial margin of political forces affecting the negotiations, is among Jews and Arabs living outside the territory of Israel and Palestine.

As we have seen in the instances of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rabin and comparable threats to Prime Minister Barak, the principal source of threats to Middle East peace from the Israeli side, come from foreign-based, violence-prone, right-wing Zionists, many fairly described as irrational fanatics, who are the key factor in the extreme right within Israeli politics itself. These right-wing foreign intervenors include key elements of the backing of, and even control over Governor Bush and Vice-President Gore.

In the case of the Palestinian party, we have a parallel situation. Palestinians living in exile, and both various Arab governments and their political parties and factions, have an influence over Yasser Arafat’s freedom to negotiate more or less comparable to the foreign pressures on the Knesset.

Therefore, unless effective steps are taken to outflank politically the anti-peace foreign influences, the chances continue to be poor, even negligible, that a durable Middle East peace agreement could actually be reached. In such a situation, in which decades of bloodied hatred have accumulated, not only between Israelis and Arabs, but among contending factions within each of those sides, only a formula modelled upon the success of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia could succeed.

For the Israeli and Arab populations of that region generally, the human conditions of life of the majority have been declining ever since the Mont Pelerin Society’s Milton Friedman introduced his ruinous, Bush-like, Gore-like, Thatcher-like policies to Israel during the course of the 1970s. Only a reversal of that Thatcherite-like decline in the conditions of life of most of the population of the region, can supply the fertile ground of cultural optimism, upon which those steeped in decades of hatred will give up those lusts for vengeance, which dominate the region, that for the sake of the blessings of peaceful progress for themselves and, more important, their children and grandchildren.

There can be no peace, under such circumstances, in that region, without large-scale, rapid growth in public works

of basic economic infrastructure. No such program could function without massive infusion of large-scale programs of production and regional distribution of desalinated water.

Only in an environment premised upon a better life for the families of the region, a political-economic environment premised upon that U.S. constitutional commitment to that general welfare which both Governor Bush and Vice-President Gore have repudiated, can any U.S. President hope to be believed when he speaks of his desire for Middle East peace.

As in military history, as for Alexander the Great, for Hannibal at Cannae, and elsewhere, the principle of the strategic flank lies essentially in the relatively superior state of mind

of the greater commander. To induce Israelis and the relevant non-Palestinian Arab governments and factions to come, however reluctantly, into the camp of peace, a new state of mind must be rallied from among the peoples of the region. Such a state of mind can be evoked in but one way: the credible promise of a program of regional development, a development not possible without early large-scale public works in building basic economic infrastructure, a program of public works which would be futile without the inclusion of leading emphasis on producing, by massive desalination programs, the water which is not presently available otherwise from any source within the region.

Otherwise, peace will die of thirst. Lacking water, it will thirst for what remains to be had, blood.