

DISPATCH FROM THE FRONTLINES

## The Israelization of American Policy

“If you fight the weak for too long, you become weak yourself.”

By Marwan Bishara for the *International Herald Tribune*

For the past few months I have watched with bewilderment as America has adopted Israel's mistaken strategy in the Middle East. Will America take as long as Israel to realize that starting a war is nothing like finishing it, and that military occupation does not bring about peace or security?

Two pictures in the *International Herald Tribune* on the same day, June 16, spoke volumes. One showed an Israeli soldier in Hebron pointing his automatic rifle at civilians with their hands in the air, and another of an American soldier doing exactly the same thing in Falluja, Iraq. If there were no captions, you couldn't tell one photograph from the other.

America, like Israel, is getting increasingly bogged down by an open-ended military occupation, as attacks on its troops continue almost daily in Iraq. The situation has been aggravated by America's break-up of state institutions such as the army, rendering millions of Iraqis unemployed.

Powerful but vulnerable, America and Israel seem to bring out the worst in each other. Since the Sept. 11 attacks, Washington has internalized Israel's claustrophobic view of a world full of hatred and terrorism. Its post-Cold War optimism has given way to vengeful pessimism.

President George W. Bush is walking down Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's path as he uses the dramatic events of the past two years to whip up a new theological patriotism to strengthen his governing base and confront those - mostly Muslims - who "hate us for what we are."

Neither Israel nor America is bothering to ask why the Palestinians and Muslims of the Middle East are carrying out suicide attacks, something not previously seen in Islam or Palestine for the last 14 centuries. Have Israeli military occupation and American military domination transformed Middle East killing fields into fertile ground for hatred and conflict that has taken on a religious fervor?

Instead of extracting the source of tension, Washington has added another occupation to the Israeli occupation. Like pyromaniac firemen, U.S. officials are implementing

Sharon's war philosophy of putting out fire with fire.

Israelizing America's war on terrorism means globalizing Sharon's warfare: unprovoked military invasions, covert operations, armed interventions, disproportionate retaliations, extra-judicial assassinations and other measures long considered war crimes and crimes against humanity.

These measures have also proved ineffective. Israel has grown less secure despite its continuous use of force to resolve political disputes.

Today, America risks internalizing the way it fights and those it fights against. As one of Israel's leading military historians, Martin van Creveld, puts it, if you fight the weak for too long, you become weak yourself. Unfortunately, instead of learning from Israel's strategic mistakes, Bush is advising the Palestinians to learn from the lesson of Iraq.

If America continues to Israelize its foreign policy, it will globalize the kind of conflict found in Palestine, with grave consequences not only abroad, but also at home in America.

Israel's experience shows that fear-based national fervor curtails the democratic process, depicting rationalization as justification and tolerance as immoral. Two-thirds more Americans support political assassination today than two decades ago and an increasing number support torture.

Just as there is a diplomatic alternative to Israel's failed policies in Palestine - based on international legality and sustained development, rather than the imbalance of power and exploitation - a better alternative must be found to America's unilateral and muscular foreign policy.

Attaining national security in a transnational world means accepting and respecting interdependence. Once security is understood as a universal right, interdependence becomes a sign of wisdom, not weakness.

If America must draw on another tradition, why not look to the long history of Jewish tolerance and survival, - or to America's own constitutional tradition? It is time to dust off those great documents sitting on the White House shelves.

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# WAR BULLETIN

## Hundreds Protest House's Budget Cuts

By David Nurenberg

"We spend trillions of dollars executing war, and pennies on our children. That must stop," said Boston City Counselor Charles Yancey, one of a dozen speakers at a June 30th rally at the State House in Boston. Several hundred people gathered to protest the House's proposed new budget. For an hour, a dozen speakers, including Yancey's fellow city counselors Felix Arroyo and Chuck Turner, led the crowd in a rousing condemnation of the state's fiscal priorities.

As the national war cost exceeds \$68 billion, over a billion of which will be paid by Massachusetts, state legislators are planning dramatic cuts to many domestic services, from education (including \$225.8 million in local school aid, \$11 million from adult education, \$165 million from higher education) to health care (\$600 million from Medicaid, \$97 million from seniors prescription drug coverage, \$4.2 million from mental health). The state's nationally recognized anti-tobacco program will be eliminated, as will all clean elections funding. Citizens will spend \$700 million in new fee hikes and regressive taxes, and 3000 to 5000 state employees will lose their jobs. As they listened to statistics like these, the crowd alternated between boos and loud applause for the speakers condemning such policies.

Benjamin Balthaser from UAW Local 2322 and one of the rally's organizers, faced challenges in connecting state cuts with the war. "[It's] far more obvious on a federal level - you see programs cut and the military budget rising astronomically. We are going to be receiving less money from the federal government in state aid, so that will mean more services will have to be cut, or more revenues on a state level will have to be raised."

Balthaser helped coordinate more than 20 community and labor organizations to sponsor and plan the day's protest. Demonstrators gathered at 2:00pm and then marched upstairs to the closed doors of the House chamber, where police kept watch as the crowd stood chanting "No more cuts!" and "This is what democracy looks like!" Small groups held parallel demonstrations outside the building from 11:00am onward, continually receiving supporting honks from passing cars.

Leslie Taggart, a Boston Public Schools math teacher attending the rally, said, "the tax cuts raise the question of why we have so much money to spend on weapons and training [for soldiers] but not enough for proper textbooks." Taggart's sister, a social worker, is also affected directly by the cuts. "She has to tell her clients who are suicidal and depressed that they have no help anymore. I have to tell my students that, too."

Balthaser engineered the rally to not be specifically anti-war. "It's necessary to ask the legislature for something



Citizens rally on Beacon Hill over state budget. Photo by Sasha Kopf

they can actually give us," he said. "We are keeping the message simple: stop the cuts, raise revenue fairly." He added, "even this message...challenges the entire logic of war. [The message is] that human needs, social services, education, are the business of government."

During the rally, speakers representing the disadvantaged came forward to call attention to this crisis. Jamie Bissenet of the American Friends Service Committee characterized the cuts as "attacks on our children, our elderly, our weak, our homeless, our poor," perpetrated by a punishing regime which should stir in us as much righteous indignation as any foreign one. "If any of us believe we are not affected, we're wrong."

Balthaser feels that accountability is a vital part of the anti-war movement. "Demanding that our government respond to the needs of the people...is also building the kind of social infrastructure needed to educate, challenging the 'war mentality,' war fever, a war economy." Taggart puts it more plainly. As she walks past white signs that read "Please be quiet in this hallway, thank you," she says, "those people - the homeless, the mentally ill, the schoolchildren - don't have a loud voice. I'm here to speak up for them."

David Nurenberg teaches English at Concord Carlisle High School

### LOCAL CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**Friday 7/4, 2:00pm**, Amherst common (parade formation starts at 1:00pm on Hitchcock Road). Honor the Bill of Rights in the Amherst Fourth of July Parade. The Amherst-based activist group SAGE invites you to march in the July 4th parade, sponsored by local veterans' groups.

**Wednesday 7/9, for time and location details call (413) 773-7427**. Scott Ritter, former chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq and outspoken critic of the US invasion of Iraq is coming back to Western MA. For more about Scott Ritter, go to: [traprockpeace.org/rittercampaign.html](http://traprockpeace.org/rittercampaign.html)

**Daily (except Sundays) thru 7/15, 11:00am-7:00pm**. Pioneer Arts Center of Easthampton (PACE), 41 Union St, Easthampton. Gallery show: local artists respond to the war in Iraq.

**Thursday 7/17, 7:00pm**, Media Education Foundation, 60 Masonic Street, Northampton. Meeting of Western MA Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting who is conducting a campaign to get the nationally syndicated radio program "Democracy Now!" aired on the local NPR affiliate, WFCR.

## Mercenaries Make Millions

Private Companies Taking Over Military Operations at Home and Abroad

By J.F. Jackson

They used to call them mercenaries. These days the polite term is "private military companies." Many of them are owned by Fortune 500 companies such as Lockheed Martin, DynCorp, and Raytheon. Others, like Blackwater USA, MPRI, and International Charter are smaller firms with less lucrative government contracts. They can do almost anything that men and women in the United States armed forces do. And the military is increasingly relying on them to play crucial roles in the war on terrorism.

But many critics of these companies say that their contracts with the federal government places the public interest at risk. Among other concerns, they point to the danger of using private employees for jobs that

Private US military companies enjoy an estimated \$100 billion in revenues throughout the world.

require strictly obeyed chains of command and public accountability. Private military companies require neither.

These for-profit firms enjoy an estimated \$100 billion in revenues throughout the world. In preparation for the recent invasion of Iraq by the U.S. military, private military companies provided weapons training for soldiers in Kuwait, managed mess halls and maintained weapons such as B-2 bombers and F-117 stealth fighter jets. One private firm has been hired to provide security for Afghanistan's new President Hamid Karzai. Other firms fly helicopter gunships and reconnaissance and aerial fumigation planes in Colombia, train ROTC cadets in American universities and write manuals on post-September 11 airport security, all for the Defense Department.

This privatization of military functions dovetails with other efforts by the Bush administration to privatize hundreds of thousands of defense department jobs, social security and other positions and services traditionally offered through the public sector. The 35 private military companies in the U.S. that want this work lobby hard for federal money.

According to a recent article in *Mother Jones*, 17 private military firms have spent more than \$12.4 million since 1999 on congressional and presidential campaign contributions. In 2001, ten firms spent more than \$32 million on lobbying in Washington. The lobbying is made easier because many of the founders and staff are retired military

officials with decades of experience, insider knowledge and lasting ties to friends at the Pentagon. One of the largest of these companies, Military Professionals Resources, Inc., of Virginia, is directed by retired General Carl Vuono, who was Army chief of staff during the first Gulf War.

These connections pay off. Brown and Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton and formerly managed by Vice President Dick Cheney, was recently awarded a \$2.5 billion contract to build and operate military bases.

But what are the implications?

Some allege that the use of private military contracts allows the administration to evade Congressional restrictions and oversight, and ultimately the control of the President.

The case of DynCorp in South America reinforces these criticisms. Until recently, Congress forbade the use of U.S. soldiers in Colombia in counter-insurgency operations and limited their use to anti-narcotic missions. Before President Bush recently rescinded these rules, he authorized, along with President Clinton, the use of DynCorp employees in combat operations against leftist rebels in that country. The 1992 execution of three DynCorp employees, who were shot down in Peru during an anti-narcotics mission, merited only a few lines in major U.S. newspapers.

In 2001, employees of the Aviation Development Corporation in Peru, contracting with the CIA for reconnaissance, identified a plane as a drug-trafficking aircraft. The CIA notified the Peruvian air force, which promptly shot down the plane. The passengers were not drug runners, however, but a U.S. missionary and her baby daughter. Congressional investigations were stymied because CIA and State Department officials cited privacy obligations to the company.

Concerns about accountability of these companies to the public will only grow as their use by the government increases. Today the U.S. military relies on private, for-profit firms to maintain 28 percent of all weapons systems, but the Bush administration wants to increase that number to 58 percent. In the war on terrorism, private soldiers appear to be the military face of globalization here at home.

## Not Just Another Day Off

Remembering the Declaration on Independence Day

By Maia Duerr and Sasha Kopf

This time of year we celebrate Independence Day, a good time to reflect on the relevance of the Declaration of Independence to our lives. On July 4, 1776, delegates from thirteen American colonies signed the Declaration, signifying their separation from the British monarchy and outlining the principles upon which the United States would be founded. They accused George III of England of eroding their rights, charging that, for instance, "He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the Tenure of their Offices, and the Amount and Payment of their Salaries;" "erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people;" and "kept among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies, without the consent of our Legislatures."

Drafted by Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration laid down four principles upon which this new nation was to be built: all men are created equal; they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness; to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it.

While the delegates themselves did not adhere

perfectly to these principles (upholding slavery and the disenfranchisement of women and the poor), the ideas they set forth were radical nonetheless.

The Declaration marked one of the first times in history that a nation was founded on secular ideals and the principle of representative governance (however limited), rather than monarchies based on ancestry and divine right. The document also embraced the idea of justified dissent, stating that when "it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them," they must take such action, however drastic. In a monarchy, kingship assumes a life of its own, more sacred than the life of the government. A working democracy, in contrast, cannot be removed from its constituents, it is a government of, by and for the people. The people create the government for their common good, and the moment the people lose control, government becomes tyranny.

Questions for reflection: In what areas is the current administration acting with or without the "consent of the governed"? (Military? Taxes? Civil Rights?) If the government is the people, what is our responsibility to hold it accountable to the ideals upon which the nation was founded? If you were to write a declaration of independence today, what would be your vision of this country?

## The Pricelessness of Free Speech

Gathering Examines Image of Protesters

By Andrea Burns and Jo Comerford

Through films, photos and testimonials, about 75 people gathered on June 20th to share their experiences protesting the U.S. war against Iraq. The event, called "The Price of Free Speech and the Cost of War," took place at the First Churches in Northampton.

For a movement that grew so quickly, this was an opportunity to watch footage of local events and hear what motivated people to act.

Eric Wasileski, Gulf War veteran and president of the local chapter of Veterans for Peace, spoke about the growing relationship between his organization and the peace movement. He mentioned that the number of veterans against the war in Iraq is larger than people think.

First Churches Minister Kelly Gallagher highlighted the religious diversity among peace activists that came together over the buildup and U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Joe Bridge (pictured), arrested for civil disobedience at both Westover Air Base and Northampton, said about media images of the war, "the ability to know and see the horror of war is being stolen from us."



Photo by Andrea Burns

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