

## Our World: Defending the defensible

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For the past week, former US secretary of state James Baker has defended his Iraq Study Group's recommendation that the US negotiate with Iran and Syria from myriad criticisms. While acknowledging that Iran and Syria may not respond positively to US attempts to appease them, Baker said that even rejection will be helpful. If they refuse an American hand extended in partnership then they will stand exposed as enemies, he promises grandly.

But exposed to whom? Who is supposed to care if Iran and Syria are unmasked? They already are unmasked.

Everyone knows that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. Everyone knows that Iran and Syria are the primary engines of the insurgency in Iraq. Everyone knows that they instigated and commanded Hizbullah's war against Israel this summer and continue to arm Hizbullah and prepare for the next round of fighting. Everyone knows that like Hizbullah, the Palestinians today act as Iranian proxies.

Everyone knows that Syria engineered the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005 and the murder of Lebanese Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel last month. And everyone knows that Iran and Syria are currently working to overthrow the pro-Western, democratic government of Lebanon.

And everybody knows that everybody knows. The problem isn't whether people know. The problem is that the Europeans, the UN, the Russians, Chinese and the Arabs either do not care or wish them well in their endeavors.

The so-called international community knows that appeasement will not work with Iran and Syria. And it also knows that since it doesn't wish to take action against either Iran or Syria, its members will oppose the US and Israel in their attempts to combat them while pretending that they don't know that Iran and Syria are aggressors and threats to international security.

UNFORTUNATELY, Baker is not the only one who supports embracing delusion over reality in as a foundation for policymaking. The Bush administration also supports making believe that the world is not as it is. For the past three years, the Bush administration has abdicated responsibility for contending with Iran's nuclear program to the UN and its subordinate bodies. Administration officials have justified the move by saying that if the UN refuses to take action, it will prove itself irrelevant and so pave the way for the US to strike out on its own and contend with Iran's nuclear program.

Albert Einstein defined insanity as repeating the same experiment and expecting to receive different results. In the months before the US-led Coalition deposed Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in 2003, the US tried this exercise with the UN and it failed - twice. Not only did the UN refuse to act, for the past three years the UN has done everything in its power to undermine US efforts to bring democracy and security to Iraq. Far from becoming irrelevant, the UN has made itself relevant as a major adversary of the US in Iraq.

There are two possible explanations for policymakers preferring to base their policies on delusion and wishful thinking rather than reality. The first is cynicism. By maintaining that the failure of a misguided policy will be blamed on the other side, Baker and the Bush administration seek to block debate on the wisdom of the actual policy by making the wisdom seem unimportant.

The second explanation is naivete bordering on stupidity. Although it is difficult to imagine that Baker is acting from innocence, it may explain the Bush administration's decision to empower the UN to hold America's policy on Iran captive to the vagaries of the Security Council.

UNFORTUNATELY, the embrace of fantasy is not a neurosis unique to American policymakers. Ahead of his visit to Rome this week, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert expressed willingness to consider agreeing to Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi's offer to deploy European troops to Gaza. As Olmert put it in an interview with Italian television, "If Italy is willing to allow its army to fight on a daily basis against terrorist activities by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other terrorist groups that operate in the Strip that could be interesting news. I would be willing to contemplate that." Olmert's willingness to contemplate the deployment of European forces in Gaza as well as Judea and Samaria is as bizarre as the Baker team's recommendation that the US negotiate with Syria and Iran. Unless Olmert has been asleep for the past 12 years, he knows the Italians and their European colleagues will never fight Israel's enemies.

Since 1994, Europeans have been deployed in Hebron in the Temporary International Presence in Hebron. Throughout that period, the TIPH has either done nothing or worked to delegitimize and undermine Israel's right and ability to defend itself.

IN GAZA European forces have been deployed at the international terminal at Rafah joining Egypt with Gaza since November 2005. Those forces have refused to lift a finger to prevent or even to protest the massive, illicit inundation of Gaza with Iranian weaponry transiting through Egypt. In turning a blind eye to the weapons smuggling, the Europeans have facilitated Gaza's transformation into one of the most active bases for global jihad in the world.

Then of course there are the European forces deployed in UNIFIL in Lebanon. While the French have distinguished themselves by daily threatening to shoot down IAF jets, UNIFIL has generally done everything in its power to defend Hizbullah and undermine Israel's national security.

Shortly after the cease-fire came into effect, UNIFIL forced Israel to end its naval blockade of the Lebanese coast and to open Lebanese airspace. This paved the way for Hizbullah's rearmament.

Last month UNIFIL was a key force in coercing the Olmert government to agree to remove IDF forces from the northern half of the village of Ghajar. Ghajar, with its unfortunate demarcation as half in Israel and half in Lebanon served as Hizbullah's main intelligence base and the epicenter of its drug smuggling operations into Israel until this summer the IDF took over control of the entire town. By making IDF forces leave the northern side of the town, UNIFIL has facilitated Ghajar's reversion to its previous status. Finally, UNIFIL has turned a blind eye to Hizbullah's reassertion of control over the border towns in southern Lebanon.

And now Olmert is ready to discuss allowing European forces to deploy in Gaza, Judea and Samaria.

In light of Europe's ferocious hostility towards Israel that has become full blown since the outbreak of the Palestinian jihad in 2000, it is all but impossible for an Israeli leader to be naive about Europe's position. Indeed, at this juncture, naivete becomes a mere synonym for stupidity.

So is Olmert cynical or stupid? Olmert's address to high school students last week in Nahariya where he justified his decision to accept a cease-fire in Lebanon without first securing the release of IDF soldiers Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser from Hizbullah captivity was a sign that he may be stupid. Olmert told the students that he accepted a cease-fire because he didn't want other soldiers to die just to get them home a little faster. They can wait a little longer, he said.

As the reservist brigade and battalion commanders noted in their reaction to his speech, Olmert displayed a shocking lack of moral fiber and honor in that statement. Indeed it was so detached from even the lowest standards for leadership that it bordered on idiocy.

But then, there is something deeply cynical in his insistence on publicly portraying UNIFIL as a positive force in the region and in acting as though Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi and his European colleagues are friends of Israel. By so doing, Olmert, echoing Baker, seeks to deflect criticism and stifle debate about his failure to defend Israel either militarily or diplomatically from the tightening circle of hostility bearing down on it.

The basic fact that is missed by Baker, the Bush administration, and Olmert in their repeated attempts to make leopards change their spots is that no one ever built support for his own agenda by advocating the agenda of his adversaries. If the Americans aren't willing to make the case for defeating Iran and Syria, no one will make it for them regardless of how self-evident that case is. So too, if Olmert wants the Europeans to face up to the fact of Palestinian aggression, barbarism and corruption, he won't be able to do so by rewarding their refusal to acknowledge it.

The world we inhabit becomes more dangerous by the day. The time has long passed when we could afford to embrace wishful thinking as a substitute for reality-based policies.



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