

Column One: James Baker's disciples

Caroline Glick , THE JERUSALEM POST

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Ahead of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's trip to the White House on June 19, the Bush administration is pressuring Israel to endanger itself on at least two fronts.

First, the Americans are pressuring the Olmert government to agree to Palestinian Authority and Fatah chief Mahmoud Abbas's request to bring millions of bullets, thousands of Kalashnikov assault rifles, RPGs, antitank missiles and armored personnel carriers into Gaza from Egypt.

The government has yet to respond to the request. Those who oppose it argue that Fatah forces in Gaza are too weak and incompetent to battle Hamas, and so any weaponry transferred to Fatah militias will likely end up in Hamas's hands.

This logic is correct, but incomplete. It is true that Fatah forces are unwilling and presumably unable to defeat Hamas forces. But it is also true that Fatah forces use their arms to attack Israel. So even if there was no chance of Hamas laying its hands on the weapons, allowing Fatah to receive them would still endanger Israel.

The same limited logic informs Israel's strenuous objection to the Pentagon's intention to sell Saudi Arabia Joint Direct Attack Munition satellite-guided "smart bombs," or JDAMS. The government claims that while it has no quarrel with the Saudis, it fears for the stability of the regime. If the House of Saud falls, Osama bin Laden would get the bombs.

Yet like Fatah, the Saudis aren't simply vulnerable. They are culpable. In addition to being the creators of al-Qaida and Hamas's largest financial backers, the Saudis themselves directly threaten Israel.

In direct contravention of their commitment to the US (and the US's commitment to Israel), the Saudis have deployed F-15 fighter jets at Tabuk air base, located 150 km. from Eilat. On May 13, the Saudi Air Force held an air show at Tabuk for the benefit of King Abdullah and senior princes where the F-15s were ostentatiously displayed.

The timing of the show was interesting. It took place the day before Abdullah hosted US Vice President Richard Cheney at Tabuk.

The Bush administration is not just asking Israel to facilitate the arming of its enemies. It is also placing restrictions on Israel's ability to arm itself. As *The Jerusalem Post* reported on Wednesday, the Pentagon has yet to respond to Israel's request to purchase the F-22 stealth bomber. Moreover, the US seems to be torpedoing Israel's acquisition of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. The Pentagon recently voiced its objection to Israel's plan to install Israeli technology in the jets that are to be supplied starting in 2014. Israel's installation of its own electronic warfare systems in its F-16s and F-15s is what has allowed the IAF to maintain its qualitative edge over Arab states that have also purchased the aircraft.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S display of hostility toward Israel is unfortunately not an aberration. It is the result of a policy shift that occurred immediately after the Republican Party's defeat in the Congressional elections in November.

After the defeat, the administration embraced former secretary of state James Baker's foreign policy paradigm, which is based on the belief that it is possible and desirable to reach a stable balance of power in the Middle East.

As Baker sees it, this balance can be reached by forcing Israel to shrink to its "natural" proportions and assisting supposedly moderate and stable states like Egypt and Saudi Arabia to grow into their "natural" proportions. Once the states of the region (including Syria and Iran, which Baker wishes to appease) have settled into their proper proportions, stability will be ensured.

Baker fleshed on his view in the Iraq Study Group's recommendations that were published immediately after the elections. Although President George W. Bush rejected the ISG's recommendations, the day after the elections he sacked defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld and replaced him with Robert Gates, who served on the ISG. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is a disciple of Baker's ally, former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft.

The problem with the Baker paradigm is that it has never been borne out by reality. It collapsed during the Cold War, both as the Soviet Union worked tirelessly to destabilize countries allied with the US and when the states of East-Central Europe revolted against the teetering empire and gained their freedom with its collapse.

In the 1990s, Baker's stability paradigm failed to foresee the post-nationalist movements that swept through Western Europe and the Muslim world, and embraced the Soviet goal of weakening the US. Baker still denies the phenomenon and ignores its policy implications.

Today, the notion that stability is a realistic aim is even more far-fetched. Specifically, the willingness of Muslim secularists to form strategic relations with jihadists and the willingness of Shi'ites to form strategic partnerships with Sunnis was unimaginable 20 years ago. Aside from that, the specter of a nuclear-armed Iran throws a monkey wrench into any thought of regional stability. A look around the region shows just how absurd Baker's notions truly are.

In Lebanon today, Fatah al-Islam, which is apparently allied with al-Qaida, is fighting the Lebanese army in a bid to bring down the Saniora government at the behest of its sponsor - the secular Ba'athist regime in Damascus. Fatah al-Islam is also aligned with Hizbullah, which shares its goal of bringing down the Lebanese government, and with Iran, which gives the Syrians their marching orders.

This state of affairs is also the name of the game in Iraq, where Iran and Syria support both Muqtada al-Sadr's Shi'ite Mehdi army and al-Qaida's Sunni death squads. It repeats itself in Afghanistan, where Iran is arming the Taliban, and in the Palestinian Authority.

Furthermore, the paragons of moderation and stability in Egypt and Saudi Arabia that Baker and his followers are so keen to strengthen are neither stable nor moderate. Both Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Saudi King Abdullah are old men of uncertain health. To "stabilize" their regimes, they wrought unholy alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wahabis, the only forces in Egyptian and Saudi societies that have not been flattened under their jackboots.

This week, Channel 10 reported that the Bush administration recently informed Israel and the Gulf states that it

has no intention of launching military strikes against Iran's nuclear installations. The Americans explained that they need Iranian assistance in stabilizing Iraq to pave the way for an American withdrawal from the country before Bush leaves office. Under Baker's regency, the administration apparently now subscribes to the belief that they will be better off out of Iraq and with a nuclear-armed Iran, than in Iraq without a nuclear-armed Iran.

For their part, the Arabs have demonstrated clearly that they do not share the administration's newfound faith that a nuclear-armed Iran will reach a stable equilibrium in a Bakesque Middle Eastern balance of powers. Their stated aim to build nuclear reactors is a clear sign that they recognize the danger of a nuclear-armed Iran. The administration's support for the Arabs' quest for nuclear reactors makes clear that it is now willing to have a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race.

THIS BRINGS us back to Israel, which is situated smack in the middle of the regional chaos. How is Israel contending with this threatening state of affairs?

The IDF seems to be contending fairly well, at least with regard to Syria and Lebanon. The IDF's decision to have television crews film Israeli soldiers fighting in mock Syrian villages this week, like Chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi's announcement that the IDF is prepared to fight on two fronts simultaneously, are signs that the IDF recognizes that its only safe bet is to prepare for all contingencies. Were the IDF to complement these actions with warnings to Iran and operational plans to attack Iran's nuclear installations and distribute gas masks to the public, the General Staff would go a long way toward proving that it is adopting the only reasonable strategic posture available, given the cards Israel has been dealt.

Yet not only is the IDF not warning Iran, the Olmert government is undermining the army's correct posture toward Syria and Lebanon. Indeed, on every front, including toward Israel itself, Olmert has himself adopted Baker's failed paradigm.

Rather than publicly explain that in light of Syria's position as an Iranian client state with regards to Lebanon, Iraq and Israel, there is nothing for Israel to talk to Syria about, Olmert announced Wednesday that he wishes to open negotiations on an Israeli surrender of the Golan Heights to the Syrians.

The Syrians, for their part, cornered Olmert on Thursday by agreeing to his offer. As Karl Moor and David Rivkin explained in Thursday's *Post*, it is not true, as Olmert and his minions claim, that Israel has nothing to lose by negotiating with Syria. Given Israel's perceived weakness in the wake of last summer's war and Syria's perceived strength, speaking to Damascus about an Israeli surrender of the Golan Heights will only encourage Syrian belligerence.

And as with the Syrians, so too with the Palestinians, the Olmert government acts as Baker's water boy. Rather than waging a rational military campaign to defeat the jihadist front that has seeded itself in Gaza, Olmert issues near daily statements telling the Palestinians that Israel will cause them no harm. He defends this policy by declaiming on the importance of strengthening the "stability" of the Palestinian Authority.

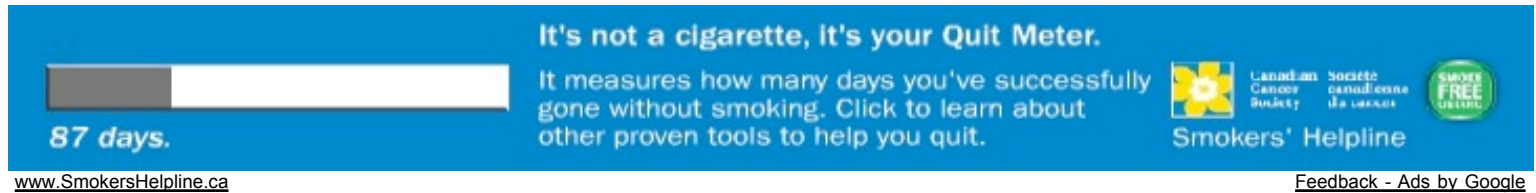
Then there is the daily brown-nosing Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni engage in toward the Egyptians and Saudis. Israel praises both as "moderates" while Egypt vows publicly not to act to stop the transfer of weapons from Sinai to Gaza and the Saudis bankroll Hamas and demand that Israel implement their "peace plan" that calls for Israel's destruction.

Yet all of this incompetent bumbling pales in comparison to Israel's weakness toward Iran. Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz's assertion this week to the *Post* that he does not "think it is right today to talk about military options" toward Iran because he thinks that sanctions can still convince the mullahs to give up their

nuclear ambitions comes dangerously close to an Israeli collapse in the face of an existential threat. The fact that Mofaz made this statement the same week that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that Teheran had crossed the nuclear threshold only exacerbates the perception of Israeli strategic disarray.

Sooner or later the US will pay a price for the Bush administration's decision to embrace the delusion of stability as its strategic goal. With jihadist forces growing stronger around the globe, if the Americans leave Iraq without victory, there is no doubt that Iraq (and Iran and Syria) will come to them.

But whatever the consequences of America's behavior for America, the price that Israel will pay for embracing Baker's myths of stability will be unspeakable.

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