



From Jenin to Baghdad

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The average Israeli is not particularly interested in the US-led war in Iraq. As far as most Israelis are concerned, that war, going on just a few hundred kilometers from our borders, might as well be taking place in outer space. It simply doesn't seem connected to our local reality of the Palestinian-Iranian and Lebanese-Iranian jihad. Although greeted with sadness, the daily news updates on US and Iraqi casualties seem to bear no tangible relation to us.

Conversely, most Americans do not think that the war being fought against Israel is linked to the war in Iraq. Both the Bush administration's efforts to limit IDF operations against the Palestinians and Hizbullah and the US media's generally hostile portrayal of the war against Israel lead most Americans to share the Israeli view that the wars our

nations fight are separate, distinct ones. And so, as far as most Israelis and Americans are concerned, Americans have nothing to learn from Israel's war and Israelis have nothing to learn from their war.

But the truth is far different. Indirectly, US President George W. Bush's address Wednesday night on the new direction the war in Iraq will soon take was a testament to this truth.

Although expected to announce a radical change in his administration's strategy in Iraq, in Wednesday's speech Bush did no such thing. In essence the president restated his long held view that victory in Iraq will come with the stabilization of a unified, democratic Iraqi regime and the parallel defeat of both the Sunni and Shi'ite insurgencies. Conversely, the enemy

forces, operating under Syrian and Iranian sponsorship, fight precisely to prevent the stabilization of the regime and undermine the unity of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious Republic of Iraq.

Bush's plan to implement a "surge and hold" strategy for taking and maintaining control over Baghdad and the al-Qaida infested Anbar Province is based on a new realization that establishing and maintaining a modicum of security for the country's citizens is a precondition for any subsequent moves towards stabilizing Iraq politically.

For Israeli ears, the most notable aspect of Bush's "surge and hold" strategy is its striking.

There is little doubt that the US has much greater leeway in its operations in Iraq than the IDF enjoys in its efforts against the Palestinians or Hizbullah. Their ability to cultivate and empower Iraqis who share their strategic outlook while weakening others who oppose them is far greater than Israel's ability today to influence the Palestinians or the Lebanese.

But for all that, the fact is that after nearly four years fighting in Iraq, the US essentially embraced the counter-insurgency strategy that Israel adopted in Judea and Samaria five years ago. And similar to the US operations in Iraq until now, Israel only adopted its surge and hold strategy in Judea and Samaria after two years of absorbing unrelenting and ever-escalating Palestinian terrorist attacks. Until Defensive

Shield, Israel responded to the war being waged against its society by carrying out brief incursions into Palestinian towns, conducting arrests and swiftly retreating.

Indeed, if the Americans want to get a sense of the president's new plan's prospects for success they would do well to study developments in Israel since Operation Defensive Shield.

Bush warned that his new plan will not end the violence in Iraq. As he put it, "This new strategy will not yield an immediate end to suicide bombings, assassinations, or IED attacks. Our enemies in Iraq will make every effort to ensure that our television screens are filled with images of death and suffering. Yet over time, we can expect to see Iraqi troops chasing down murderers, fewer brazen acts of terror, and growing trust and cooperation from Baghdad's residents."

Ariel Sharon's voice echoes deeply in Bush's statement. After Defensive Shield failed to end Palestinian terrorist attacks, Sharon repeatedly stated that we couldn't expect for terror to end. And it is not surprising that the president's message was so familiar. His plan for Baghdad gives the same opportunities and places the same strategic limitations on success in Iraq that Defensive Shield placed on Israel's chances of ending the Palestinian jihad.

In both cases, the chosen strategy works to prevent terrorists located in specific, limited areas from rebuilding their capabilities by first defeating them and then remaining

in place to block them from rearming or operating openly. Israel's experience since April 2002 in Judea and Samaria demonstrates its success. By maintaining IDF control over the areas, Israel has succeeded in limiting and delaying the development of the Palestinians' fighting capabilities in Judea and Samaria.

If US forces do surge and hold Baghdad, the Americans can safely assume that in the months to come Baghdad will experience a steep and sustainable drop in violence.

But by the same token, the Israeli experience also informs us of the price of adopting a strategy limited to an isolated front. Neither the war in Iraq, which is sponsored by Iran and Syria, nor the Palestinian war against Israel, which is sponsored by Iran, Syria and Egypt, are isolated, singular campaigns. And yet both the Israeli and the American surge and hold strategies treat them as if they are isolated, distinct, non-regional wars.

While IDF units capably tie down the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, they are incapable of wiping out the Palestinian terror infrastructure. Outside of Judea and Samaria, in places like Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Iran, our enemies continue to develop and diversify their capabilities and today those capabilities span the terror and weapons of mass destruction spectrums. Indeed, by refusing to attach its operations in Judea and Samaria to a regional strategy for victory, the government has rendered the forces in Judea and Samaria powerless to achieve true

victory in the areas. If the Israeli government is ever foolish enough to order the IDF to stand down, those terror forces will immediately rebuild their capabilities.

Israel's refusal to recognize the regional nature of the Palestinian war against it stems from the strategic blindness of Israel's leaders. Sharon and his successors Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, together with the opinion makers in the local media who back them, all refuse to recognize the regional nature of the war being waged against us. Ignoring the overwhelming evidence that the Palestinians - from Hamas to Islamic Jihad to Fatah - take their marching orders from Teheran, our leaders irrelevantly and dangerously work to establish a Fatah-led terror state in Judea and Samaria. That is, they seek to create a new Iranian-run terror state that will operate side-by-side with the Hamas-led Iranian-run terror state in Gaza.

While the Olmert government's decision to fork over guns, ammunition and \$100 million to Fatah makes clear that it will not change its current course, Bush's address Wednesday gave hope that his administration may actually not ignore the regional character of the war it faces in Iraq. After presenting his plan for Baghdad and the Anbar Province, Bush spoke forthrightly about the ideological and regional nature of the war. Pointing an accusatory finger at Iran and Syria for their support for the insurgents in Iraq, Bush announced his intention to take action to end to their inter-

ference. He even hinted that the US may take military action against Iran's nuclear facilities saying, "I recently ordered the deployment of an additional carrier strike group to the region."

But there is also cause for concern. As Bush gave a clear warning to Iran and Syria, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was preparing her next trip to the Middle East. Thursday *Ma'ariv* reported that Rice will devote her time here next week to pressuring Israel to agree to withdraw its forces from Judea and Samaria and so enable Fatah to establish a terror state there. Rice's reported plans indicate that far from acknowledging the regional nature of the war, the administration continues its slavish adherence to the view that war's various fronts are wholly unrelated, and that an Israeli defeat will either not impact or advance the chances for an American victory in Iraq.

In addition to the battlefield constraints the limited strategic approach imposes, it also causes damage on the home front. During Operation Defensive Shield, the Sharon government prevented the IDF from destroying the Palestinian Authority or even mounting a similar operation in Gaza. By so acting, the government ensured that the Palestinian war against Israel would continue on.

Yet at the same time, the unprecedented scale of the IDF's counter-terror offensive and Sharon's own rhetoric led the Israeli public to believe that after two years of stalling

during which war had been waged against Israeli society, the government was finally ordering the IDF to win the war and defeat our enemies and so secure us from yet more massacres and terror. When the limited offensive did not bring about a sustained victory, Israeli society began to lose faith in the IDF's ability to defend it.

Similarly, the humiliating results of last summer's war with Hizbullah caused the public immense disappointment which only served to intensify its sense of despair. That disillusionment and despair also goes a long way towards explaining how the Kadima Party - which ran its election campaign last year under the banner of "pragmatic" defeatism - was able to win in the general elections. And it is the same despair that feeds our enemies' growing faith in their ultimate ability to destroy Israel.

In the US, the fact that the Bush administration's limited strategy in Iraq has taken a toll on the public's faith that victory will ultimately be achieved was demonstrated even more starkly in last November's Congressional elections. The Democrats won those elections while running as the anti-war party that will "Bring the Boys Home," from Iraq. Bush's attempt Wednesday to lower the public's expectations for victory by including statements like, "There will be no surrender ceremony on the deck of a battleship," in his speech, risked making the Democrats' defeatist message for them.

At the same time, by finally acknowledging the Iranian and Syrian role in the war in Iraq and implicitly widening the battlefield to encompass them, Bush's address presented the first cause for hope in recent memory that the US may actually stop its current policy of acting like Israel and fighting a regional war by playing defense on one front. For

the first time since 2004, Bush gave reason to believe that Iran should be worried today.

Sadly, as long as Israel's current government remains in power, Israel has no chance of sharing what may well be America's new clarity of vision.