

## WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

It has become fashionable in peace-loving circles to pounce on Israel upon the advent of every new revival of the long-simmering Peace Process. The Middle East is one of the nastiest neighborhoods on the planet, and has been that way for 5,000 years of recorded history, so perhaps we should remind ourselves once again of some of the place's more salient recent events and cast of unsavory characters.

The Iranian revolution of 1979 against our repressive ally, Shah **Mohammed Reza Pahlawi**, ushered in a popularly elected government. Soon the few secular liberals who championed this "democratic" change were discarded by **Ayatolla Ruholla Homeini**, whose Shari'a-law agenda brooked neither civil liberties nor minority rights.

Our recent Iraqi misadventure began with a bare-faced lie, then veered to the moral high ground of "bringing democracy to the Arabs". In the name of this laudable cliché, we removed **Saddam Hussein's** minority Sunni dictatorship and engineered a "democratic" takeover by the Shi'ite majority. For our money and 5,000-odd dead GIs, we got a repressive regime that tramples on the rights of all minorities; whose ultimate goal is Shari'a law and the abolition of civil society; and whose closest allies are the Shi'ite Ayatollahs of Iran and the Alawite dictator of Syria. Did our "democracy" gambit in Iraq serve our national interest? Or morality?

Next, we supported, willy nilly, the "Arab Spring" in the Maghreb (Tunisia, Lybia). What we got for our trouble is one repressive Islamist government in Tunisia with zero commitment to minority rights or civil society; and a feeble government in Lybia with the Jihadis running roughshod over Benghazi.

Next, we facilitated--indeed connived in--the overthrow of **Hosni Mubarak's** oppressive regime in Egypt, ushering in a democratically-elected Islamist government that soon turned to trampling the rights of the non-Islamist, liberal, secular and Christian minorities. To add insult to injury, we now give lectures on the virtues of democracy to the admittedly-authoritarian Egyptian generals who finally lost their patience and deposed the Islamists. Is our high-minded preaching in our national interest? In the interest of the Egyptian people? Or morality?

In Syria, we are egged on by ideologues of both left and right to support the "democratic" uprising against **Bashar El-Assad's** minority Alawite dictatorship. What will the most likely outcome be of victory by the Syrian rebels, who are dominated by Sunni Jihadis? And whose agenda is--you guessed--Shari'a law and the eradication of civil society.

In Turkey, we stood by as a democratically-elected Islamist government eviscerated the Army--our close ally and guarantor of Turkish civil society since **Ata-Turk's** 1921 revolution. Then **Recep Tayip Erdowan's** Islamist agenda bubbled up--repressing the rights of the secular, Christian and Kurdish minorities in the name of Shari'a law and Islam.

The perennial designated villains of the interminable Middle East "peace process" are the repressive, anti-democratic Israelis and the way they treat their perennially-designated victims, the Palestinians. So just for the record first--I have been unalterably opposed to the Israeli imperial settlement policy since 1967. But Israel's grand Biblical ambitions are driven in part by the complex realities of their neighborhood. In brief:

Two recent attempts by Israel to compromise with the Palestinians were co-sponsored by successive US administrations. The Camp David summit of July 2,000 between Prime Minister **Ehud Barak** and El-Rais **Yasir Arafat** ended with Arafat rejecting the compromise and launching

the bloody second Intifadah. Prime Minister **Ehud Olmert**'s compromise offer at the 2007 Anapolis Conference was likewise rejected by **Mahmud Abbas**. Both offers envisioned Israeli withdrawal from ca. 95% of the West Bank and 100% of Ghaza.

The unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, pushed by Prime Minister **Ehud Barak**, led to the establishment of Hezbollah's mini-state on Israel's northern border, dedicated to the eradication of the State of Israel by all means necessary. Lest one forget, Hezbollah is the strongest political player in Lebanon, voted into power in a democratic election. It is also the armed agent of Iran's Ayatollahs vis-a-vis both Syria and Israel.

The unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Ghaza in 2005, engendered by Prime Minister **Ariel Sharon**, resulted in a takeover by the repressive Islamist Hamas government, an offshoot of the Moslem Brotherhood dedicated to the destruction of the State of Israel. What is more, the last democratic election in the Palestinian territories--West Bank and Ghaza--was won by Hamas.

Given all these facts, can one fault the Israelis for being just a bit skeptical about the latest, manifestly stillborn "peace negotiations" sponsored by a clueless Barack Obama and a self-serving John Kerry? Can one fault them for taking the Iranians at their word when both President **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** and Supreme Leader Ayatollah **Ali Khamenei** broadcast their sacred Islamic mission to wipe "the Zionist Entity" off the face of the earth?

Perhaps more to the point, have we earned the moral right to point fingers at Israel? Do we have skin in their game? Whose children will sit in bomb shelters when Hamas and Hezbollah launch their next Iranian-made rockets? Whose cities will be incinerated when Iran gains its Islamic nuclear bomb? And how Islamic would a Palestinian state be fifteen miles from Tel Aviv and Haifa?

It is always nice when our foreign policy can combine self-interest with morality. Our WW-II involvement was a case in point; as was, perhaps, our "police action" in Korea. But in both, we were still obliged to put up with some rather unsavory allies--Stalin, Chiang Kai-Shek, Singman Rhee, to count but a few.

The world we live in is awash with voracious sharks. When you swim with the sharks, is it wise to make out like the sweet minnow? In a complex world, you are often damned if you do and damned if you don't, and doomed to consort with--and vote for--the lesser of two evils. So it behooves us all to remember how the road to Hell is often paved with perfectly good intentions.