

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 19, 2001

**SECRETARY POWELL'S SPEECH ON THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: AN
ASSESSMENT**

EDITOR'S NOTE

Secretary of State Colin Powell delivered a major address on Monday, November 19, 2001. Long in coming, it had been billed ahead of time as likely to be a major foreign policy speech on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The venue was the University of Louisville in Kentucky. In the aftermath, a team of specialists was invited by the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine in Washington, D.C. to assess the Secretary's remarks. The four were: a former Ambassador to Jordan and Director of the Department of State's Office of Counter-Terrorism; a former Ambassador to Egypt, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates as well as Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs; a former Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth; and GulfWire Publisher Dr. John Duke Anthony. The entire presentation was televised live on C-SPAN [see below for replay information]. In this special edition, GulfWire includes here Dr. Anthony's remarks to the forum.

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SECRETARY POWELL'S SPEECH ON THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: AN ASSESSMENT

By
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Washington, D.C.

(Washington - November 21, 2001) The context for this analyst's reaction to Secretary of State Powell's long-awaited remarks on the Palestine Question at the University of Louisville on November 19 is as follows. Many welcomed his statement that the Israeli occupation must end and his emphasis on the continuing damage caused by Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories.

Yet many had expected the speech to go some distance beyond what in recent days has been President Bush's stated vision. The President has stated that he envisions "a two-state solution, consisting of the states of Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders."

In the run-up to the Louisville event, specialists involved in drafting the speech believed the Secretary would say he foresaw that "the capitals of both states would be located in Jerusalem, which would remain an undivided

city." Had Powell done so, this alone would have been significant. It would have been an important addition to the evolving and still unclear picture of what will be the Administration's strategy, goals, and timeline, if any, beyond implementing the earlier recommendations of the Mitchell Commission, and the security cooperation forged by CIA Director Tenet.

That no such statement, phrase, or even any reference to Jerusalem appeared in the Secretary's remarks was, to many, a big disappointment and leaves one to conclude one of two things. Either the widespread assumption that the Secretary would make such a statement was false, or he intended to address this issue up until the last minute, when his staff or the White House advised him not to do so. If the former is the case, a charitable response would be not to fault the Secretary for failing to say what he did not intend to say in the first place.

The Senate Weighs In

If the latter is the case, which seems more likely, what kind of pressure might the Secretary have received? Among the likely answers is that, shortly before Powell left for Louisville, President Bush received a letter from 89 Senators that bore the unmistakable imprint of input and comment from pro-Israel lobbyists.

The letter, inspired after a senator met with an assembly of Jewish leaders only days before, extolled the virtues of Israel. It had nothing positive to say about the Palestinians. In tone, the letter implied that it would be wrong for the Administration to exert any pressure on Israel. Worse, it would be a mistake to give favorable consideration to changing U.S. policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at this time.

If this was the case, it will be difficult to deny the implications. For members of the Israeli peace camp and Palestinian moderates, it will appear that, for reasons owing to the Bush Administration's fear of presumed negative consequences on the domestic legislative, political, and media fronts, the United States decided to miss an opportunity to exert the strongest leadership possible in the cause of peace and justice.

If so, the Administration, in effect, opted to postpone for now the chance to further clarify its objectives. In so doing, it elected to forego what many believe was a golden opportunity. The Louisville speech was a tailor-made forum for generating much needed public support for the millions of Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, and others who long to see the Arab-Israeli conflict brought to an end as quickly as possible.

Reactions and Rebuttals

Whenever statesmen let pass an opportunity to further the prospects for peace, or to enhance international stability and security, consequences ensue. In this instance, many already have begun to ask, "What proof is there that the United States intends to do much more than utter well-meaning platitudes and sending still more envoys to the region to talk with the parties?"

As one of Israel's more ardent American supporters stated several weeks ago, "However strong an Administration speech on this issue may be, if it is not followed up with tangible action that is taken seriously by the main parties to the dispute, it is unlikely to change Israeli attitudes or policies."

Similar conclusions appear to have been reached by what passes for established thought and considered opinion in the mainstream media. The tone and focus of commentary that followed in prominent editorials and op-ed essays in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe, the Los Angeles Times, and the Washington Times gave no indication that anything momentous had occurred. On the contrary, all seemed to indicate that the advance hype regarding the potential for imminent policy breakthroughs in the Secretary's speech was premature, if not misleading.

A Propitious Moment

If so, many will regard this as unfortunate. The reason: an unprecedented opportunity presently exists for the exercise of effective American leadership. The focus: an issue of great importance not just to the principal Israeli and Palestinian protagonists and to the United States and its allies, but to much of humankind. Such moments are few and far between. The present moment needs to be seized quickly, at the latest before the end of February.

The latter time frame is traditionally the point at which, in even-numbered years, media pundits and politicians become preoccupied with November elections and, from that point forward, often dismissive of the prospects for any path-breaking movement towards Mideast peace.

If the necessary bold and decisive American leadership has not begun by then, chances are that, like countless previous opportunities to end the Arab-Israeli conflict that the United States has failed to seize or has walked away from, the present opportunity will be lost.

And if this one, too, disappears, all bets for near-term manifestation of the necessary U.S. leadership aimed towards reducing violence against Israelis and Palestinians, on one hand, and diminishing the nature and number of attacks against Americans and the interests of the United States and its principal allies, on the other, will be off.

Why? Because the present multifaceted chance to make headway against a major propellant of international terrorism will have been dealt a serious tactical defeat - this, when the present moment, from a variety of perspectives that follow, could hardly be more favorable.

For many, the present unprecedented opportunity for effective leadership towards putting this issue to rest is embedded in the following facts, forces, and factors currently in play.

Point One: Neither Israel or the United States is presently weighted down by the dynamics and demands of major elections. On numerous past occasions when American and Israeli leaders have abdicated their responsibility to pursue peace, they have regularly repeated, "Nothing can be done until after the elections," as justification for their self-imposed political paralysis. If nothing or too little is done between now and the end of February, one can expect to hear this refrain again;

Point Two: The President currently enjoys as high a public approval rating for his domestic and foreign policy leadership, and for his having

repeatedly vowed to "do whatever is necessary to protect Americans and the interests of the United States," as any President in recent memory.

Would-be Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers view such a standing as much more than mere information of interest; they view it as an essential tool for the President moving expeditiously to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Like all high domestic acceptance standings for the occupant of the Oval Office, the one President Bush currently enjoys will not be sustained for long;

Point Three: In the most recent American election, upwards of 90% of the voters inclined to support the Israeli leadership's preference for not withdrawing from the Occupied Territories or dismantling the settlements, raised funds, campaigned, and voted against President Bush.

This places the President in the potentially fortuitous opposite situation from the one that President Truman confronted and cited as his rationale for overturning American policy towards the Palestine Question in 1947. Truman recalled all of the United States Ambassadors to the Arab world to Washington to explain why he would shortly reverse Roosevelt's pledge to pursue a balanced approach to the Question.

A close paraphrasing of what Truman said was, "Gentlemen, as you know, I am running for election to the highest office in the land. I am responsive to thousands of Americans who are anxious for the success of political Zionism. I have no Arabs among my constituents. I am sorry."

What is profoundly different in the present case is that Americans of Arab ancestry, in addition to American Muslims, voted overwhelmingly for President Bush and were one among other vital keys to his victory;

Point Four: Every one of the United States' four fellow Permanent Members on the United Nations Security Council would enthusiastically support the President were he to work for the earliest possible enforcement of Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which call for Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories.

The other Permanent Members would also extend to the President all necessary support if he were to insist that Israel uphold the UN Charter's dictum of the "inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force." And they would respond the same if he were to call for the immediate and effective application of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which the United States, Israel, and most other countries are signatories.

The Convention minces no words in prohibiting an occupying power from doing certain things. It prohibits the expropriation of land, the exploitation of resources, the imposition of physical harm or other damage to the land, resources, and other possessions (e.g., the houses, orchards, vineyards, olive groves, etc.) of the indigenous people in the occupied territories, all of which has occurred repeatedly from the onset of the Israeli occupation in June 1967 until the present;

Point Five: The heads of every major international, regional, and sub-regional organization in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world - regions in which the

United States has vital interests, pivotal relations, and important foreign policy objectives -- would endorse the exercise of decisive American Presidential leadership on this issue and do whatever they could to support him;

Point Six: The United States and Russia, the leaders of the previous failed peace process, presently enjoy an almost unprecedented degree of mutual trust and confidence on matters related to waging the international campaign against global terrorism.

It is in the vital strategic interests of Washington and Moscow that this long-festering conflict - indeed, this particular conflict that more than once has brought them close to war with one another -- be solved as quickly as possible once and for all;

Point Seven: The United States and its allies are currently in need, and for years to come will require, extensive strategic, economic, political, commercial, and defense assistance from the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Such assistance is critical to what, all acknowledge, will be a long-term and complex campaign against the practitioners and targets of terrorism, for which an early durable and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict is key; and

Point Eight: Former Israeli officials and many others in the Israeli and Palestinian peace camps, together with prominent American Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders, acknowledge the over-arching need, especially at this crucial juncture in regional and world affairs, for United States actions and inaction to cease being a major reason for the conflict's prolongation.

The need's corollary: for the Bush Administration to recognize and act swiftly -- from knowledge that now is the most auspicious moment to have come along in a very long time in which the United States has every reason and requirement to exercise its maximum influence to bring about an end to the conflict.

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What Is and Is Not at Issue and at Stake?

What is at issue and at stake in this litany of extraordinary opportunities to achieve an effective Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement are multifaceted matters of no small moment.

At stake is whether the President is truly saying what he means, and meaning what he says, in pledging, as he has done repeatedly, to "do whatever is necessary to protect Americans and United States interests." Few believe that he will be able to come anywhere near fulfilling this vow if he fails to address effectively the roots of the largest, oldest, and most pervasive reason for the steady loss of goodwill towards the United States, and the denial of what would otherwise be the gain of goodwill towards Israel and Israelis, in such a vitally important region.

What is not at stake is the existence of Israel and its safety and security within recognized borders. Rather, at stake is a satisfactory settlement to a

conflict that endangers Americans and United States interests alike, a conflict that has deeply and tragically scarred half a century of Israelis and Palestinians while denying safety and security to both.

At issue is not still further territorial and resource compromise to be demanded and extracted by Israel from the Palestinians. Pursuant to what they had with reason hoped would by now have been an end to the conflict, Palestinians have already made an historic compromise of profound dimensions in formally yielding to Israel 78% of what had belonged to the grandparents of the present generation of Palestinians.

To insist that Palestinians must cease and desist from their lawful right to further resist the illegal foreign military occupation, or that they must surrender still more land, water, and other strategic resources obtained illegally by the occupier, would carry with it a potentially even greater injustice and adverse consequences to the world as a whole.

To do so would be the same as insisting that all the UN Security Council Resolutions, all the relevant international law, and all the norms and boundaries of international legitimacy that have applied to this issue for more than half a century are for naught. It would be tantamount to turning a blind eye towards all the attendant dangerous global implications that this would indicate for the future in the event that other countries were to emulate such an example.

In the final analysis, what is at issue and at stake is not just a comprehensive and durable Israeli peace agreement with the Palestinians -- but vice versa. There can be no doubt that the Palestinians, with the United States at their side, are the one people, more than any other, that hold the key to Israel's long-term national security and regional acceptance, and also to a potentially dramatic lessening of animosity and distrust toward supporters of Israel in the region and beyond.

Conversely, the Israelis, with the United States at their side, are the one people, more than any other, with whom the Palestinians are bound to reach an agreement for the sake of their people's legitimate long-term needs, concerns, and interests, including their most elemental human rights and dignity, an end to their occupation, and the achievement of their national independence in a state that is viable.

Simultaneously, also at stake are the nature and extent of the relationship between Israel and the United States, Israel's unrivalled protector, supporter, and material benefactor, on one hand, and, on the other, the far more numerous and multifaceted relationships between the United States and the 22 Arab countries and 56 Islamic nations, from which the United States has long derived benefits that are the envy of all of its competitors.

And, not least, what is additionally at stake is the international political and moral image of Israel and the United States, both separately and together, in the minds of millions the world over. In this regard, it is fair to ask whether it benefits either country to continue to be seen a single day longer in the way that both are viewed in the eyes of perhaps a majority of the world's peoples.

That is, in the eyes of millions of educated, moderate, and sophisticated people in every corner of the planet, the United States and Israel alike are often seen differently than many Americans and Israelis see themselves and would have others view and judge them.

With particular reference to the Question of Palestine more than any other single international issue, both countries' leaders are regrettably viewed all too often as persistent practitioners not of foreign policies that, placed under the microscope, are seen as reasonable, fair-minded, and inspired by democratic principles.

Rather, through a window that looks out onto a tragedy of an altogether different kind, both are all too frequently seen as practitioners of policies regarding Palestine, and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, that reflect what some Americans and Israelis admit but most do not: namely, the unbridled Machiavellian maxims of "Might makes right," "That's what power is all about," "To the victor go the spoils," and "That's just the way it is."

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In this light, or in this darkness, it needs to be asked, "What are the winning strategic, moral, economic, and political arguments against the United States moving swiftly and decisively to do what is right at this moment. Why should the United States not now exercise the necessary leadership to end one of the longest and most protracted of all international conflicts?

Given what is at stake, if not the United States, then who? And, given that Americans and United States interests will otherwise continue to be placed at grave risk, and that the clear and present dangers to regional and global stability will persist, if not now, then when?"

Unseized, the present opportunity, and the constellation of phenomena in support of the United States leading on this issue, and leading decisively and successfully, will prove fleeting. A chance unlike any other, by definition, is one that does not come again. Time, great ideas, and historically propitious moments wait for no one.

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