

China-Mideast conundrum

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The explosion of turmoil in Israel is just an indication of greater conflicts looming. This violence has rallied radical Arab support behind the Palestinians. Additionally, countries like China are proliferating weapons and technology into the Middle East in return for vital oil.

These two trends are simultaneously occurring, and the failure of policy-makers to focus on that convergence is placing the United States and Israel in an exceptionally vulnerable position. President G.W. Bush can work on this problem, if his upcoming fall trip to China happens, to neutralize future confrontation.

The tension currently afflicting Israel has not been seen since before the war in 1973. Continued Palestinian discontent has affected life in the region on an economic, security, and sociopolitical plane. Reflecting this are reports that Israeli exports have declined by more than \$1,200 per capita, tourism has decreased 79 percent, and investment in Israeli bonds and real estate has diminished.

Furthermore, Israeli Security Forces face up to \$610 million budget deficits, and their ability to retaliate is constricted for fear of losing international support.

These issues pale in comparison, though, to the reality that men, women, and children are targets for indiscriminate violence. It is difficult for civilians, on either side, to travel in Israel without becoming endangered. As a result of the interconnectivity of these factors, the process of finding a solution to the imbroglio has reached an apparent impasse.

While all of these acts of terrorism occur, Saddam Hussein professes himself to be the champion of the Palestinians and defender of Jerusalem. Iraqi, and international media sources have confirmed that Saddam has begun to train tens of thousands of volunteers for a Jerusalem Army with millions more pledging to fight alongside the Palestinians. It is essential that the United States acknowledge this Jerusalem Army for two reasons. First, Saddam will do anything to restore the Babylonian hegemony to which he aspires. Secondly, while "freedom fighters" from Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iran and Syrian are already fighting with the Palestinians, an army comprised of ostensibly one-third of Iraq's population demands serious attention.

An expanding oil-for-weapons program carried out between Iraq and China compounds this Iraqi initiative. As such, Chinese foreign policy has aligned itself on a collision course with the US vis-a-vis Israel. Ironically, as recently as 1999 the Chinese asked Israel to sell them AWACS air-defense systems, and now they are building networks for use against Israel.

To illustrate China's growing energy dependence, an oil expert, Milton Copulos, estimates that by 2010 Chinese oil imports will reach 80 percent from the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the U.S. Energy Department reports, the Chinese's oil-based energy infrastructure has exceeded domestic production

since 1993. Now, with the inexpensive nature of Iraqi oil, this program turns out to be quite beneficial for both parties. The point becomes that Iraqi exportation of oil to China would be done knowingly in violation of U.N. sanctions, as would implementing an upgraded Chinese air defense system in Iraq.

China's starvation for oil has forced it to go beyond their Asian sphere to places as far as Sudan. While doing so, most U.S. officials have missed the cascading nature of the Chinese proliferation that follows from this oil trade, as in Sudan's case. This February's bombings of Iraqi air defense installations marked the third time the United States had complained to China about their improvements of Iraqi anti-aircraft system links.

Moreover, the Chinese condemned U.S. policy toward Iraq, which they insist has resulted in massive civilian casualties and the erosion of Iraq's sovereignty. China's abstention from voting on U.N. Security Council policies against Iraq underscores that Chinese oil needs may surpass cogent decisions.

The creation of the Jerusalem Army is allowing Chinese proliferation to fuel growing Arab enmity toward hard-line Israeli policy. This trend is linking the diametrically opposed pursuits of the United States and China. China's craven need for cheap oil cannot be allowed to denigrate U.S. interests like encouraging repression of extremist Palestinian agitators, and preventing the expansion and modernization of Iraqi military infrastructure with their programs for weapons of mass destruction.

Many in Washington fail to see that the Chinese upgrade of Iraqi air defense and early-warning radar detection not only poses a threat to U.S. planes engaged in Operations Northern and Southern Watch, but also presents intensified problems to Israel's future ability to defend itself against Arab attacks.

The bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade caused the past administration to walk on eggshells in order to avoid addressing the Chinese as a foe. The Bush administration has already witnessed China's hostile posture with its weapons systems in Iraq, the confrontation between a U.S. Navy Oceanographic Survey ship and a Chinese naval ship in the Yellow Sea, and the U.S. Navy EP-3 surveillance jet incident in the South China Sea.

Contrary to former President Clinton, President Bush correctly states, China must now be viewed as a "competitor," mostly because its agitating military-industrial complex is "the tail that wags the dog." While the leadership of China may think it has the right to object to U.N. and U.S. actions, its current selfish actions clearly demonstrate that the United States can no longer afford to ignore the multidimensional threat China poses to us and Israel. Therefore, it is imperative that the America step back and assess China's expanding role in the Middle East.

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