

The Road Not To Be Taken (With Thanks to Robert Frost)

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By Robbie Friedmann

The war in Iraq is not even officially over and yet criticism for the looting of its national museum are already leveled at the U.S. for "failing to protect" this site while "protecting the building of the oil ministry." It is not even clear whether it was a mob looting or whether it was an organized robbery by the regime itself. Irrespective of what will be confirmed, the blame and the responsibility lie with Iraq whether the mob or its government did it ("An Iraqi Tragedy," Daniel Pipes, *New York Post*, April 22, 2003).

Iraq may have been liberated from its ruthless despot but not yet from the deep hate for Israel. Not to what Israel *does*, but to Israel -- *period*. Recent demonstrations in Karbala were copycats of Iranian denouncement of Israel and in all likelihood instigated by their Shiite *brothers* from Iran ("The chronic despair of an optimist," *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 24, 2003).

As the Shiite clergy is vying to fill in the leadership vacuum it is imperative to cleanse Iraq not just from a deck of cards of 54 *most wanted* but from the thousands of bureaucrats who made that regime possible. Nothing short of a repeat of the de-Nazification that followed WWII is now essential in Iraq for what used to be the Baath ruling party ("Draining Iraq's Baath: Regime change isn't enough. We must make sure the party's over," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2003). The resemblance to Nazism is not coincidental by any means. The name of the party stands (not only in Iraq but also in several other Arab countries) for national socialism, which is what the [Nazis](#) avowed.

Indeed, strong criticism against a sister Baath regime was leveled recently by Arab sources, ("[Kuwaiti Paper Criticizes Syria: Assad's Regime More Criminal than Saddam's Regime](#)," MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Kuwait/Syria, April 22, 2003, No. 495) arguing Syria has no hope of change and if it is inclined to follow the example of Iraq it may share its fate.

That is why comments by Secretary Rumsfeld that the U.S. will not allow an Islamist government in Iraq are welcome. While historically there was no love lost between Iraq and Syria, in the same manner that Iraq found a welcoming home for its never returned airplanes in Iran (with which it had a bloody war a decade earlier), the Syrians have offered support for the Iraqi war effort, also a safe haven for Iraqi war criminals and weapons of mass destruction. Syrian media criticized the U.S. as "defying international legitimacy," and charged that America's actions are genocide, war crimes, terrorism, and Nazi actions; media claimed that in attacking Iraq, the U.S. was doing Israel's bidding and completely ignored the fall of Baghdad ("Syrian Government and Media on the War in Iraq," Steven Stalinsky and Eli Carmeli, MEMRI, Inquiry & Analysis - Syria/Iraq, April 21, 2003, No. 134).

Charges that the U.S.'s real interests in Iraq were driven by oil are by now old - and still repeated - mantras. It was indeed a factor but with a twist: Oil was the bribe Saddam paid to France, Russia, and China and that is why these countries opposed the war against Iraq ("No Oil for

Blood," Dick Morris, *New York Post*, April 22, 2003) - and the lifting of U.N. sanctions now - yet conveniently it was the U.S. who got stuck with the charge.

Many other charges against the anti-Iraq Coalition focused on its "colonial and imperial character" and reading much of the Western, and particularly European press, one might think the U.S. is the culprit in Iraq. It is worth reviewing how these arguments are debunked one by one ("Wrong and wronger," Bret Stephens, *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 16, 2003).

It is rather surprising to find a respected analyst going so far as to suggest that with the demise of Iraq (as a military entity) Israel is no longer in danger of having an *eastern front* - led by Iraq - against her ("A Passover Miracle," Pesach = Passover, R.F., Ehud Ya'ari, *The Jerusalem Report*, May 5, 2003): "Given that Egypt, so far as one can predict, is committed to a *cold peace* with Israel, Iraq's exit from the circle of belligerency leaves Syria alone, or to be more accurate, with only its distant ally and neighbor, Iran. And that alliance presents only a modest threat to Israel as long as Iran does not obtain nuclear capability."

In this case the devil is not in the details but in the qualifiers. "So far as one can predict Egypt is committed to cold peace;" the remaining alliance (Syria and Iran) "presents only a modest threat...as long as Iran does not obtain nuclear capability." This is like saying a dangerous homicidal maniac is out there in the streets and poses no danger unless he kills again ... Yaari seems to minimize the likelihood - or better say speed - of Iran' growing nuclear capabilities.

Perhaps it takes a non-expert to provide the logical counterpoint. While Yaari may be splitting hairs as to when (or even "if") Iran will pose a nuclear threat, others argue its nuclear capability has passed the point of no return ("Thinking the Unthinkable: The Iranian nuclear program may now have passed the point of no return, shifting the balance of power to Israel's enormous disadvantage," David Horowitz, *The Jerusalem Report*, May 5, 2003): "In the *best case* scenario, it is a regime that, barring intervention, will have nuclear weapons within two years, but there are pessimists in the international intelligence community who believe it has gone nuclear already... Terrorism is an undeniable element in the Teheran strategic armory. The regime orchestrated the two Buenos Aires bombings in 1992 and 1994. It inspires, trains and arms Hizbullah. It encourages and supports Hamas... The existential concern for Israel relates to similarly cold-hearted strategists in Iran, calculating whether, in a nuclear confrontation, they might be able to wipe out Israel while sacrificing only a proportion of their populace. However unthinkable that may sound, with Iran now so dangerously empowered and the West unwilling and perhaps unable to counter that threat, the only factor preventing such a scenario is the purported pragmatism of the regime in Teheran."

Part of the problem of post-Iraq *nation building* is the insistence on keeping Iraq as a *unified country*. Given its history, its ethnic composition, and internal rivalries it is worth examining other alternatives than keeping Iraq "under one roof." In a sense the solution to the Iraqi problem may have direct positive implications to the Palestinian problem, but also to the predicament of Jordan ("Jordan is Palestine and Iraq," Yosef Goell, *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 20, 2003): "After creating an independent or autonomous Kurdistan in the north, the southern two thirds of Iraq should be merged with Jordan under the Hashemite crown as payment for its own readiness to incorporate the Palestinian territories and population...It could in time also serve to resettle the

Palestinian refugees from their sordid, dehumanizing camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria, a problem the Roadmap fails to address."

Can we survive the week without input from Tom Friedman? One could wish. Friedman had two pieces this week showing how dangerous it is to give a pen to someone who likes to shoot from the hip.

First he makes the ludicrous suggestion ("[The Third Bubble](#)," Thomas L. Friedman, *The New York Times*, April 20, 2003) that "the terrorism bubble was the product of a kind of temporary insanity, in which basic norms were ignored and excessive behavior was justified by new theories." In other words, he believes we have just witnessed nothing short of the end to terrorism. Obviously from now on terrorists will no longer resort to *excessive behavior* or have to plead *temporary insanity*. They will just ride buses instead of blowing them up and take the elevators in skyscrapers instead of ramming planes into them. Perhaps hard-pressed politicians (for votes) might resort to such irresponsible statements but from a sober commentator? Will he swallow his pen and paper when the next major terrorism event happens (he defines *major* only against the U.S.; for him a bus bombing in Israel is probably *normal*). Do not hold your breath. I heard Middle Eastern experts suggesting they will resign from their prestigious university if their analysis will prove to be wrong and they are still there writing additional scholarly and popular articles not letting reality bother them a bit. So will Friedman. Yet, he ought to be reminded when the next terror event takes place.

Then he comes out with yet another pearl. For him post Iraq improvement depends on an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. He is offering a regime change for the Palestinians - which is a rather welcome proposition, until one sees that Friedman limits his regime change to "easing Arafat out ("[Regime Change, Part 2](#)," Thomas L. Friedman, *The New York Times*, April 20, 2003) and not trying to de-Nazify the regime itself: "In the near future once Iraqi politics really resume the ability of any Iraqi politician to be openly pro-U.S. will be restricted if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict burns on and the Bush team is seen as siding only with Ariel Sharon and doing nothing to defuse the situation."

Yet, reading his article one could get two more impressions: first that Sharon is the biggest obstacle to peace in the Middle East and that Iraq is not responsible enough with the business of nation building unless they are given a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. That was one of the arguments against the war as well, namely, that the issue will have to be resolved prior to attacking Iraq. It was wrong then and it is wrong now. Yet it is typical to Friedman's shallowness: "The Europeans and Arabs missed their chance to be part of Saddam's removal. But they can contribute now by being part of the easing aside of Mr. Arafat. At the same time, U.S. conservatives who supported war against Iraq need to understand that if they miss this chance to help nurture an alternative Palestinian leadership by refusing to make demands on Mr. Sharon not only will Israel be less safe in the long run, but the chances of President Bush succeeding in Iraq will be diminished." Friedman must have forgotten the concessions Israel made, which only resulted in more violence. Perhaps he ought to take a long vacation. It will allow the *New York Times* to publish some articles by Yasser Arafat.

Friedman is standing right there with CNN in terms of losing credibility as a reporter. Perhaps that is why he is now a *columnist*. As one writer suggested, Friedman is guilty of concealing information in a very similar manner ("Trading truth for access?" Jeff Jacoby, *The Boston Globe*, 4/17/2003): "When 'the name of the game' becomes keeping on good terms with the world's most evil men, journalism turns into something awfully hard to distinguish from collaboration. It did not start with Eason Jordan, and it did not end in Baghdad."

So what are the implications of the victory in Iraq on the looming Israeli -Palestinian negotiations? One expert suggests its outcome depends on the amount of pressure the U.S. may be able to exert on the Palestinians for political reform ("What does victory mean?" Barry Rubin, *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 15, 2003):

"The issue has perhaps less to do with the Iraq war itself than the accompanying American analysis of pressuring the Palestinians for political reform that would result in a leadership willing to make a compromise peace with Israel." The real question is not the amount of American pressure but the Palestinians' own willingness and capability to reform.

The Roadmap continues to hover in the background and will in all likelihood be unfolded in early May 2003. The problem is the map is unrealistic and the road is not one to be taken even if it was less traveled by (with homage to "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost). It may be so complex that a road map is needed to read the Roadmap ("Reading the road map," Barry Rubin, *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 22, 2003).

If diplomacy is complicated, there is an added element of religion and religious interest in the outcome that cannot, should not, and probably will not be ignored. That actually adds some hope to the predicament in which Israel finds herself given the imposed never-ending demands for concessions that eventually pose existential risks ("For a 'Christian road map,'" Michael D. Evans, *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 21, 2003).

The Palestinian charade continues unabated. Arafat and Abu Mazen played out their brinkmanship to the last minute when they agreed to "cooperate and form the cabinet the latter proposed and the former approved ("Arafat, Abbas agree on new Palestinian government," Margaret Coker, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 4/24/03). But not before the *irrelevant* Arafat managed to Humpty-Dumpty himself again into a position of influence *forcing* various world and Arab leaders to call and beg/threaten him to *agree* to the new cabinet, or else. Thus Arafat regained his posture of power without having to lift a finger and is likely to continue to sabotage any efforts at real peace.

This was a classical game of *good cop bad cop* (with apologies to cops for dragging them into this metaphor). Abu Mazen may not have blood on his hands and Israelis may feel more comfortable with him as an enemy than with Arafat but the fact remains, he has a history replete with Holocaust denial and support of terrorism. Now he displays tactical differences with Arafat but with complete agreement about the end-goal: The destruction of Israel ('Mahmoud Abbas's task,' Editorial, *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 25, 2003).

Abu Mazen simply believes - as he himself stated - their goal can be obtained without resorting to terrorism. To date he has not condemned terrorism for its inherent evil but condemned it

because it has not obtained the Palestinian goals (as of yet). Thus Israel finds herself in cycles of violence and cycles of peace. Not between her and the Palestinians but between one Palestinian tactic and another.

The reality is that even today Palestinian terrorism continues unabated. The fact that Israel had *only one* suicide bomber last week is not due to lack of trying. Concurrently, the Palestinian campaign of hate indoctrination also continues unabated. In their systematic campaign of lies and deceit their education system and official propaganda produced several hate videos showing the *torture* of a Palestinian Prisoner (Palestinian Media Watch, Multi-media Bulletin, April 24, 2003), a music video depicting Israelis as terrorist murderers, and one showing how Palestinian children can destroy Judaism.

Antisemitism is alive and well in Arab and Muslim societies. In fact, it is flourishing to such an extent it is putting to shame its predecessors in Czarist Russia, Communism and Nazism combined. As Simon Wiesenthal said: "[there is more antisemitism today than we experienced in the 1930s.](#)" Yet, some detect changes for the better in these horrendous practices ("Harbingers of Change in the Antisemitic Discourse in the Arab World," Yigal Carmon, MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis - Arab Antisemitism Documentation Project, April 23, 2003, No. 135).

The focus of *new* Arab discourse on the manifestation of antisemitism is fairly new and is limited to the last two years, which are arguably the worse in expressions of antisemitism at an unprecedented scale and scope. Carmon sites examples such as the "calls to cancel the Beirut Holocaust Deniers' Conference," the Saudi Editor who "apologized for publishing blood libel," "criticism of antisemitic series on Egyptian television," and the "new recommendation by Al-Azhar: Stop Calling Jews 'Apes and Pigs'"

While there is some public discourse condemning the manifestations of antisemitism it is important to note two important elements. First, the focus is on the manifestations of antisemitism yet not on antisemitism itself. Second, this discourse demonstrates a nuance shift of tactics and not of strategy. The best examples to support this point is in the contradictory fatwas issued by Al Azhar and the series of articles written by a top Egyptian diplomat (see the section on Osama Al-Baz in "E-Letter 157: Yet another year of the terrorists," January 5, 2003).

If Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria are examples of the vulgar antisemitism that is government-issued and controlled, other Arab countries are in danger of shifting to that line of extremism and Morocco is a good example of how undercurrents of Islamism could topple a moderate monarchy by adopting the narrative that includes the historical vilification of Jews ("[Islamism, Moroccan-Style: The Ideas of Sheikh Yassine,](#)" Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Middle East Forum*, Winter 2003).

While many may be tired of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, hoping war and terrorism are over, the shift of tectonic plates has only just begun. The great American wrote about the road not taken and the post-war Roadmap that is supposed to bring settlement to the Middle East is a road not to be taken. In a sense there is another road that could and even should be taken and that road is the one that does not reward terrorism, that promotes total regime change for the Palestinians accompanied with the total eradication of hateful indoctrination, stipulates a long waiting period

to verify that terrorism is over, and most important, points to an actual possibility of the end-to-the-conflict. Anything short of that will bring about even more terrorism - and not only for Israel. This, simply because of the verifiable perception that terrorism pays. It will also allow tricks such as the Oslo Accords or the current Roadmap to absolve the Palestinians from any responsibility for genuine change.

An American-educated Saudi banker was interviewed on National Public radio (NPR) and she lamented about how bad the current American behavior is and what it is the U.S. needs to be doing to win over Arab and Muslim hearts. As long as this arrogant one-way *thinking* will be prevalent no resolution of any conflict is possible. Not for Israel and not for the U.S. A solution requires the participation of both sides and the Arabs and Muslims have only shown their destructive side so far. It is high time to change this equation.