

On Morality and Humiliation

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By Robbie Friedmann

In a recent interview Jimmy Carter stated ("[Self-Appointed Israeli and Palestinian Negotiators Offer a Plan for Middle East Peace](#)," *New York Times*, 2 December 2003) "Had I been elected to a second term, with the prestige and authority and influence and reputation I had in the region, we could have moved to a final solution." Almost three weeks after this atrocious choice of words he is yet to issue an apology or an unequivocal clarification for using the term the Nazis employed as their official policy to exterminate Jews. Carter is risking losing the single political asset he has: morality. If he will not retract the usage of the term, anything he will say in the future will be placing him squarely in the camp of the dark forces. He has crossed the red lines and this time it is neither a beer drinking brother nor lust in his heart that will stain his clean moral image.

Given the continuous rise in antisemitism ("Fears of Antisemitism Sweep Europe: Leftists, intellectuals blaming Israel for world's ills," Veronique Mistiaen, Jody K. Biehl, Elizabeth Bryant, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 December 2003) Carter could (better say should) follow the example of Emile Zola and instead of blaming Israel - or the current U.S. administration for supposedly having a pro-Israel bias, actually accuse the intellectuals, politicians and organizations for their manifestations of antisemitism (see: "J'accuse! Emile Zola, Alfred Dreyfus and the Greatest Newspaper Article in History").

Why is it that Carter - for whom human rights became a moral imperative - is not vocal against one of this flag's grossest violations? Why is he tolerant of horrendous manifestations of hate such as a college film festival that defines Arab humiliation by the mere existence of Israel and its top aspiration as killing Jews ("[College Film Festival: Kill the Jews](#)," Tatiana Menaker, *FrontPageMagazine.com*, 17 December 2003). A true man of morality - which Carter portrays himself to be - does not have a choice of battles. He should fight this egregious conduct with his mind, mouth and pen and he needs to direct it to the right targets.

The results of a recent polling of Americans on Middle East issues indicate that Arab propaganda has made a dent but has not changed the solid support (with a wide margin) Americans show for Israel, the objections they have for antisemitism and for violence. An overwhelming majority believes Israel is genuinely interested in peace while less than half believe Palestinians are sincere about peace with Israel ("[ADL Poll Finds Americans Continue To Strongly Support Israel](#)," *Jerusalem*, 17 December 2003). Still a fairly large percentage of Americans (43%) see Israel and a smaller percentage (37%) see the U.S. as the "greatest threat to peace in the world." It is encouraging to see that Americans realize North Korea is a serious threat but unlike the ADL report which downplays the importance of this findings on Israel and the U.S., such figures should be a source of concern for Americans and Israelis alike.

It is interesting to note that some of the Israel-bashing at the U.N. has crossed lines that even Europeans find unacceptable ("[EU Thwarts PLO's Anti-Israel Move in U.N.](#)," Shlomo

Shamir, *Ha'aretz*, 19 December 2003), thus a Palestinian brazen attempt to challenge Israel's credentials at the U.N. was rejected under the leadership of France (of all nations!). A cynic would suggest that for the Europeans not to have Israel to bash any longer was reason enough for them to reject such a move as disruptive to its own agenda. But why would anyone want to be a cynic when Europeans are concerned?

According to one CIA report the situation in the Middle East is not going to be resolved peacefully for at least another 17 years. Even if one assumes the realities on the ground will develop according to CIA scenarios, it is clear that the next couple of decades are not perceived to be tranquil by any means ("CIA Report: No Full Peace Settlement Before 2020," Amir Oren, *Ha'aretz*, 17 December 2003).

The policy statement by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon last month addressed the lack of diplomatic progress by threatening to take unilateral steps and hence corner the Palestinians, or so he thinks. The problem that both Israel and the U.S. are facing is that the key provision in the Roadmap - the cessation of terror and the dismantling of terror organizations - is not adhered to by the Palestinians, who have not moved in that direction at all and do not seem likely to go there in the foreseeable future ("The Herzliya Initiative," Editorial, *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 December 2003).

The notion of the Roadmap is flawed because it conditions the establishment of a Palestinian state on the cessation/dismantling of terrorism. However, it has also sent a message -albeit unintentional - that three years of violence and terror are rewarded. It is not giving any (even negative) incentive to the Palestinians to actually cease terror.

That is why events in Iraq are so important for Israel and the future of the Middle East. The reaction in the Arab press to the capture of Saddam is complex, artful, and unlike Western thought - it is non-linear . Like oriental poetry and painting, it is structured with many curvatures. Therefore, even in articles in favor of Saddam's demise there are elements of dissatisfaction with his arrest, with who arrested him and with how he was treated ("[The Arab Media Reaction to Saddam's Arrest: Part I](#)," MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Iraq, 16 December 2003, No. 628).

The Iraqi press in general is perhaps far more accepting of Saddam's capture than some comments in Western media or from the Vatican. The wide gamut of reactions ranges from complete acceptance of his capture ("Wielding Pens as Swords, Arabs Finish Off Hussein," Nora Boustany, *The Washington Post*, 19 December 2003) to expressions of grief and humiliation, particularly from Palestinian but also from Egyptian corners ("[The Arab Media Reaction to Saddam's Arrest: Part II](#)," MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Iraq, 17 December 2003, No. 629).

Palestinians mourned his capture and added it to other historical days of defeat. This is fairly understandable considering he was one of their most vocal supporters even if he himself did not practice what he preached ("Palestinians Mark 'Black Day' of Saddam Capture," Mohammed Assadi, Reuters, 14 December 2003). In fact, some have suggested Palestinians should be treated no differently than Saddam's regime ("Blackjack!" Irwin N. Graulich, *Jewishindia*, 16 December 2003).

Perhaps one of the most fascinating (sobering, yet also frustrating) elements in Saddam's capture is how his supporters, sympathizers, relatives and those still fearing him explain away his capture by resorting to various conspiracy theories or simply twist realities to an extent that is clearly inspired by the fertile imagination the likes of [1001 Nights](#). One criminological theory explains that criminals are capable of committing crime by neutralizing the guilt about it. This is done through denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners and the appeal to higher loyalties.

The Middle East is ripe with examples of explaining away defeat and turning it to a victory. The most powerful self-delusional public relations campaigns have been carried out in the Middle East where imagination and wishful thinking become substitutes to rational and common sense recognition of realities. There is a huge difference between working hard to achieve a dream as in the saga of the American pioneers or in Herzl's statement "[if you will it, it is not a dream](#)" - out of which modern Israel was born - and sitting idle in a dream world denying reality, denying responsibility, being proud of the injuries inflicted on the enemy, turning "defeat" into "victory" and appealing to higher loyalties such as Pan-Arabism and Allah ("Conspiracy Theories Surrounding Saddam's Capture," Dr. Nimrod Raphaeli, MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis - Iraq, 19 December 2003, No. 155).

Doomsday cults have ways of explaining away why the world was not destroyed at a given moment they predicted. Saddam's sister was the first to explain away why her brother was captured: He "could not have surrendered in this fashion unless he was subjected to anesthetization or nerve gas that paralyzed his movements...If he were in full command of his mental capacity he would have resisted to [the] death. He is not one of the people who would surrender in such a disgraceful manner." The fact that he was seconds away from a grenade being hurled into his rat hole which would have paralyzed his movements forever, obviously has eluded his sister.

The fall of the Saddam regime and now the capture of Saddam himself and the "sadness" that engulfed Palestinians who had to face this development, signify the coalescence of two losing causes: brutal dictatorship and a society bent on killing at any cost ("Sadness at Feeble Display by a Hero to Palestine," Allan Laing, *The Herald*, 15 December 2003).

The portrayal of Saddam's capture and particularly his medical exam as "humiliating" rests on the premise that humiliation is something negative and hence should not be practiced by the victor. Yet there is an important function public shaming serves, and offenders could learn to behave differently if they want to avoid future humiliation ("Killing Him Softly," Charles Krauthammer, *The Washington Post*, 19 December 2003). In the meantime it might be wise policy to clarify to the enemy who is the winner and who is the loser. The enemy and its sympathizers could complain *ad nauseam* that it is "humiliated" but that is all the more reason to use humiliation ("More Humiliation Please," Bret Stephens, *The Jerusalem Post*, 18 December 2003).

After all, this is not torture or public hanging that has been a common practice in Iraq. This is a medical exam and shaving that is at stake. Those who complain about taking away Saddam's

virility never did so when he was clean shaven during decades in power. Indeed it could (and should) be a sign for other dictators that their time has come ("One Down, Dozens More to Go: A plan for ridding the world of dictators," Claudia Rosett, *The Wall Street Journal*, 16 December 2003). Given that the majority of the world's remaining dictators operate from the Arab-Muslim world, it is their responsibility to cope with the problems they make for themselves and the rest of the world. This time the leaders of the free world have proven they are no longer paper tigers ("A Tigris Chronicle: The Arab world grapples with Saddam's captivity," Fouad Ajami, *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 December 2003).

The biggest threat today is perceived to come from Iran, but is by no means limited to it ("Israeli Says Iran Top Terrorism Sponsor," Gavin Rabinowitz, The Associated Press, *The Washington Post*, 16 December 2003). The recent "surprising" announcement by Libya's Moammar Ghaddafi that he will open the country for inspections of weapons of mass destruction and is willing to dismantle them has resulted in cautious yet optimistic and highly positive encouragements from the administration, numerous other governments around the world and the U.N. ("[Libya to Give Up Arms Programs, Bush Announces](#)," David E. Sanger and Judith Miller, *The New York Times*, 20 December 2003).

Yet more than caution is advised. It should be coupled with a very healthy dose of skepticism. Given decades of Iraqi deception, Iranian deception and Libyan intransigence, it is highly recommended to postpone the celebration until after the Libyan WMDs are indeed dismantled - not a minute earlier. One demand that many in the Arab world, including Libya as well as the director of the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#), were quick to put on the table is that Israel dismantle its own nuclear weapons (which Israel has never officially admitted as having). This could really be the end game. It would take years to dismantle countries like Libya from WMDs. **All Arabs as well as the IAEA are cognizant of the fact that Israel poses no threat to the Arabs (unless its existence is considered a threat - and it is). Clever Arab tactic.** Israel will not fall for it but that does not mean that pressure will not be applied.

Some offer a non-military approach to cope with terrorism ("Non-military Approach to Terrorism - The Indian Model," B. Raman, South Asia Analysis Group, Paper no. 859, 12 December 2003). This approach has clear - if limited - advantages. But in the same manner that relying on force only cannot solve complex diplomatic situations without resorting to diplomacy at some point, relying on non-military means only may not be sufficient. This is particularly so in the Middle East where terrorism has become a strategy that could escalate to war between nations. Even India would - if carefully - resort to military means should it deem it necessary - as evidenced by the recent volatile war situation over Kashmir when India and Pakistan threatened each other with the use of nuclear weapons. Terrorism cannot be taken out of context as if it is devoid of military implications.

Some positive developments actually come from Saudi Arabia and may auger well (even if not decisively) for the fight against terrorism. Contrary to the usual rhetoric emanating out of Saudi Arabia and most of the Arab world and particularly the Palestinians, one Saudi columnist actually views President George W. Bush as a "liberator of Baghdad" ("[Saudi Columnist: 'America is a Liberator and not an Occupier... Bush will Go Down in Arab History as the Liberator of Baghdad.'](#)" MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Saudi Arabia/Reform Project, 19 December

2003, No. 631). Another Saudi source actually chides Saudi support of terrorism and raises concern about a conference in Texas with supporters of al-Qaeda and Saudi representatives ("Saudi Diplomats Join bin Laden Supporters in Texas Conference," *Saudi Independent News*, 9 December 2003).

A word on Tom Friedman. If he was not writing on the pages of the *New York Times* he would have been an obscure figure at best. Yet he clearly does not practice what he preaches and a recently reported incident ("The Jewish Ombudsman: Sippin' Geneva Juice," Steven I. Weiss, *Jewsweek*, 13 December 2003) demonstrated that he can turn violent when he does not like a question posed to him. So much for his bi-weekly hollow preaching for peace and understanding.

This week ended with some very positive developments such as the capture of Saddam, the Libyan declaration and the capture of a key Hamas operative (who has been detailed 17 times before!). Yet the elevation of the terror level to "High" this afternoon is but another reminder that the war on terrorism is far from over.

Stay tuned.