

**ANOTHER VIEWPOINT
ADP_NS109, February 2005**

**THE LONG WAIT FOR PEACE AND STABILITY:
PALESTINE AND IRAQ!**

Elias H. Tuma

There is a mood of optimism, hope, and exuberance in the United States (US) and in parts of the Middle East suggesting, that peace and stability in Palestine and Iraq may eventually prevail. Unfortunately that eventuality is not close at hand, nor is it apparent on the horizon, in spite of the elections hailed as a success in both countries. There is enough reason for skepticism because the political, military, and diplomatic actions underway in both situations have focused on processes (elections), and on controlling effects (violence against foreign occupation), rather than on causes of the conflict and ways to resolve it. Furthermore, it is far from clear that the intentions of the US in Iraq and Israel in Palestine are truly in favor of a quick and reasonable solution to the respective conflicts. It is more apparent that the occupying powers in Palestine and Iraq are intent on first breaking the back of the Palestinian and Iraqi resistance to occupation before they will discuss causes of the conflict or negotiate contents of any reasonable solutions. The result has been an unavoidable delay in the peace and stabilization process in both cases. The similarity in approach between the two situations is worth noting.

Both Israel and the US have used excessive force against poorly trained and equipped enemies, thus causing disproportionately heavy casualties among the Palestinian and Iraqi people, especially among

civilians. Both Israel and the US have been acting like imperial powers, heavy on occupying, destroying, dislocating, and killing their resisters, with little sensitivity to the suffering of the non-combatant people. The massive destruction in Gaza, Hebron, and Ramallah in Palestine, and in Baghdad, Fallujah, and Mosul in Iraq is hard to imagine as the work of regimes truly in search of peace and stability in the region. Such actions, on the contrary, have generated hatred and perpetual distrust on part of the occupied and suffering people. At the same time, those actions have provoked and emboldened the individuals and groups that are fighting against occupation; Israel calls them terrorists and the US calls them insurgents.

Israel and the US have both insisted that little can be done until all violent resistance has been ended. To achieve that result they have co-opted the new Palestinian Authority and the “appointed” government in Iraq to fight terrorism and insurgency and silence them on the occupiers’ behalf. Both have also insisted that a new leadership is needed as well as a new democratic system of government, regardless whether the Palestinians and Iraqis wanted such a system or not, or whether they are ready for the proposed western-type democracy. To make this happen, they prescribed popular elections, which virtually guaranteed that leaders willing to be co-opted by the occupation forces would be elected. This has already been accomplished in Palestine, and there is little doubt that it will happen in Iraq.

Democracy and general elections are great institutions, but only in a favorable environment. They can be viable and effective when the people are knowledgeable about democracy, its benefits, and its responsibilities. A viable democracy means that the people are free to

discuss, argue, and choose between known (or knowable) candidates and platforms. But democracy and elections can hardly be viable ways to peace and stability when occupation forces restrict the candidates and the electors, or when they have little knowledge of democratic institutions, or when large segments of the potential electors are excluded from voting for one reason or another. Most of the Palestinians and large segments of the Iraqis have been excluded.

It would be great if forced elections and imposed democracies lead to peace and stability under all circumstances. Unfortunately history tells a different story. The imposed democracy in Haiti has been an abject failure. The showcase democracy of Afghanistan is a forgery: it tells little about political life outside the capital city, Kabul, and even less about the quality of life in the country in the aftermath of the elections. The elections in Pakistan and Iran, and their elected governments are good illustrations of what a false democracy entails: oppression, corruption, gender discrimination, and little improvement in the quality of life for the people.

The problems facing Palestine and Iraq are similar in some ways and different in others. One similarity is that the occupation forces in both tend to seek peace and stability in a reverse order of logic. They ignore the causes and seek to contain the effects. "Terrorism" and "Insurgency" are effects, not causes. Remove the causes and the effects will vanish. The cause for both is foreign occupation. If Israel ends the occupation, or at least sets a reasonable timetable for ending the occupation, removing the settlements, and acknowledging the pre-June 1967 boundaries as legitimate boundaries between it and Palestine, there would be no reason or excuse for the Palestinians to fight the Israelis. If the US withdraws its

forces or sets a reasonable timetable for total withdrawal, it would remove the causes for insurgency.

However, there are significant differences between the two situations. The Israelis are greedy for Palestinian land and will use any excuse to grab all they can before ending the occupation, and time has been on their side. Therefore, they have made security of the occupier a prerequisite for even discussing peace and resolution of the conflict. That, of course, has slowed down the pace toward a negotiated settlement, in contradiction to the declarations in favor of peace stability. The US and its allies may also be greedy for the cheap oil of Iraq, even though they know that regardless of the regime in power, Iraq has to sell its oil on the international market. Apparently the US wants to make sure that Iraq remains weak and disunited and thus unable to be a strong and independent country in the Middle East region. The US policy has led to religious and ethnic divisiveness within the country. The Shii-Sunni division is largely an invention of the foreign powers, Britain and the US. Iraq had a secular government for a long time, and it was on the road to economic and social development, even under Saddam Hussein. The situation changed when Saddam Hussein, with implicit and explicit help from the US waged his war against the Shii regime of Khomeini in 1980. And that is when Iraq's downhill course started. The present US administration has aggravated the schism between ethnic and sect oral groups by applying a sort of quota to appointments in government based on ethnic and religious affiliation, instead of promoting merit and secularism as bases of governance and political and social cooperation. Since then the media have made it almost a rule to report on every event

as if it related to religious division and ethnic separatism. The delaying tactic has been working!

The road to peace and stability is easy to recognize. Remove the cause of the conflict (occupation) and the conflict and its effects (violence) will evaporate. Well-specified and reasonable steps can do this so that the perpetrators of violent resistance to occupation will have enough hope that the end of violence will lead to freedom, independence, and sovereignty. Failing to take such steps, the occupiers of Palestine and Iraq will be only delaying their inevitable withdrawal. They will be continuing to inflict suffering on the occupied people, and to pay a heavy price with the blood of their own citizens. Let us hope that Israel and the US will face the facts and take the right steps to end the occupation and its related suffering.

AUP is a non-profit, non-partisan monthly published by Elias H. Tuma, professor emeritus of economics, University of California, Davis, CA. The views expressed above are those of the author and do not implicate the university in any way. Website: <http://www.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/tuma/avpindex.html>