

Values and Pragmatism, Ideology and Principles

Overcoming the Divide that Separates the East and West in the Middle East

This is a compilation of letters submitted to President-elect Obama via the Obama Transition Team's Citizen's Briefing Book in anticipation of his address at the 2009 Presidential Inauguration Ceremony.¹ It is an effort to muster support for an immediate end to Israeli brutality in the Middle East and to promote a more proactive, less militaristic, pragmatic role on the part of the United States in bringing peace to the Middle East. For, it is only in this way that we can diminish the religious, cultural, and racial schism that exists between the Islamic East and the West. Each letter is dated and titled, begins with a statement and finishes with a brief question, observation, or comment to President-elect Obama.

¹ The Citizens Briefing Book is a seminal and still fledgling effort on the part of the Obama Transition Team to bring the voice of citizens directly to the President-elect's desk. <<http://citizensbriefingbook.change.gov/>>

THE OUTGOING AND INCOMING ADMINISTRATIONS - 16 JANUARY 2009

On Friday, January 16, 2009, the Holy Day of the Islamic week, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her Israeli counterpart, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* between the United States and Israeli governments confirming their determination to prolong the ideological conflict between the Western and Islamic worlds and extend the most recent wave of state-sanctioned terror in the Middle East region.¹

In a January 12, 2009 statement to the American public via Fareed Zakaria's CNN/GPS online report Hanan Ashrawi who is a member of the democratically elected Palestinian Legislative Council, a moderate political activist, and a feminine writer stated the following in response to a question posed to her by Mr. Zakaria:

This is the problem with Israel and with US policy. They have such a simplistic view, and a surface view, of Palestinian realities and culture, that they always do exactly the opposite of what they proclaim, or publicly claim that they want to do.²

Dear Mr. President-elect,

Among your first actions as President of the United States would it not be wise to nullify this memorandum as unacceptable and apologize to the Islamic nations for America's blatant disregard for the Islamic Holy Day.

Roddy A. Stegemann

WHAT IS GOOD FOR AMERICA MAY OR MAY NOT BE GOOD FOR THE WORLD - 15 JANUARY 2009

During her recent confirmation hearing Senator Hillary Clinton alluded to remarks made by the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Senior Member, Senator Richard Lugar. In so doing, she reaffirmed the important role that the United States plays

¹ This memorandum was obtained from the US Department of State website on 16 January 2009 at Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice/What the Secretary Has Been Saying/2009 Secretary Rice's Remarks/January 2009: Secretary Rice's Remarks <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009/01/115142.htm>>

² This is a transcript of the discussion taken from <<http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/bestoftv/2009/01/12/gps.gaza.israel.experts.cnn?ref=videosearch>> on 12 January 2009.

in world affairs by virtue of its size, historical commitments, and current global involvement. What I learned from Senator Clinton's 30-minute introductory statement is that she is essentially a child of the Cold War and brings with her many of the same attitudes of that era -- this, despite her numerous calls for optimism with regard to the use of smart power, the discovery of global solutions, and the importance of increased international cooperation.

Surely, a national leader that does not extol the values of her own nation would be poorly suited for the post of Secretary of State. Certainly, a national leader that does not place her own country's values first when dealing with the leaders of other nations would also perform a disservice to her country. Equally noteworthy, a national leader who insists that her own country's values are first for anyone but herself and her own country's citizens is destined to fail as a global leader.

Replacing ideology with principles and pragmatism that are based on the same old set of values is not a recipe for world leadership. It is, however, a recipe for continued US hegemony in a world that has grown weary of US triumphalism.

Dear Mr. President-elect,

Please listen to your new Secretary of State with caution.

Roddy A. Stegemann

CRIMES COMMITTED IN THE NAME OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES - 14 JANUARY 2009

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict grew out of World War II, when it was agreed by the victors to set aside land for the creation of a new state in an area of the world where Jews could claim historical roots. What this act of Jewish repatriation achieved was to provide relief to Europeans at the expense of Arabs and to provide the United States with a familiar face in the Middle East.

Today, the United States uses the state of Israel as a regional thug to spy on Islamic nations, leverage regional political objectives, and sanction unscrupulous military acts of aggression. Over the years this unhealthy relationship has poisoned the world community and caused the ruin of many lives both within the state of Israel and the region as a whole.

The United States is no longer seen as a fair arbiter in the region, and the American people must stop pretending that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is simply a conflict between two peoples that cannot get along with one another. Indeed, in order to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the United States must compel the Israelis to stand down. This can only be achieved by withdrawing its military and economic support, and if necessary prohibiting US trade with Israel.

Supporting Israel, because it is the only established democracy in the region, while maintaining close military and economic ties with largely autocratic Arab governments, while the peoples of the entire Islamic world cry out in abomination can only continue to undermine our own democratic principles.

I once believed in Israel, because I was appalled by the Jewish holocaust and blinded by my own religious, cultural, and racial prejudice. Mr. President, the dictators of 20th century Europe are now behind us and the communist threat has largely disappeared; unfortunately, the subjugation of peoples different from ourselves in the name of free trade and political democracy is still alive and well.

That we do our best to bring an end to the current misery of the Palestinian people.

Dear Mr. President-elect,

If our goal is to spread our democratic values throughout the world, would it not be wise to listen to the voices of the Arab public with attention and enthusiasm similar to that with which you have listened to the American public.

Roddy A. Stegemann

FALSE FRIENDS AND POORLY CONCEIVED ENEMIES - 15 JANUARY 2009

That we not be taken in by people who would trivialize the plight of the Palestinian people by comparing the Israeli and Hamas governments with children. In the end, both governments have a strong incentive to promote war, for if they did not, either side would lay down its arms, and the current conflict would be over.

It is for this precise reason that a third party is required -- one that can offset the egregious asymmetry that exists between the Israelis and the Hamas and make it difficult for both sides to continue in the absence of peace. Only the United States can achieve this, but peace cannot be achieved with blind allegiance to a failed past and a false friend.

Indeed, the fuel that stokes the fire of animosity toward the United States in the Middle East has many sources, but the oldest and most persistent source is the now perverted friendship between the United States government and the state of Israel.

Peace cannot be achieved without the cooperation of the world community and our Arab brethren: with the world community, because what the Israelis cannot obtain from the United States as a geopolitical friend, they can likely purchase on the open market as a business partner; with our Arab allies, because in the absence of Arab cooperation the Hamas will never relinquish.

Dear Mr. President-elect,

Few Americans desire that you push Israel into the sea, as the Hamas government threatens -- only back to its 1967 borders where the League of Arab Nations has agreed to full Israeli diplomatic acceptance. In order to achieve this, however, you must stop treating the Hamas as al-Qaeda terrorists and show them the respect that they deserve as an important source of armed resistance against Israeli occupation, genocide, and hypocrisy. The Hamas must be included in the discussion.

Roddy A. Stegemann

PEACE WITH DIGNITY - 15 JANUARY 2009

The holocaust is over, but many Israeli Jews and many non-Israeli Jews would have us believe that it is still with us. Unfortunately, they are right. It is, however, not the holocaust of a past that disappeared with the occupation of NAZI Germany; rather, it is the holocaust of the present brought about by our parents' and grandparents' past.

In the end, Mr. President-elect, we did what we had to do in World War II, but we could have done better in its wake, and now we are being made to pay for our mistakes.

Twenty-percent of the world's population is Muslim, less than two-percent of US citizens are Jewish.

We can never win the friendship of the Islamic world, by supporting Jews in the United States who fail to distinguish between Tel-Aviv and Wall Street, Jerusalem and Washington, D.C.

Neither can we earn the respect of those who take no side in the Muslim-Jewish war of hatred, by defending Israel's relentless aggression against the Palestinians.

Palestinian rocks, tin-can rockets, and suicide bombers are only an expression of deeply seated frustration; missiles, tanks, bulldozers, and blockades are the grim reality of a superior force motivated by self-righteous greed. We are the only power in the world that can sway the Israeli hand peaceably, and this can only be achieved by ending our unconditional support for the state of Israel.

For the moment, the Palestinians can see no future, and many supporters of Israel prefer that we see only our ugly past.

Dear Mr. President-elect,

I respect your silence and calm in a time of such crisis, and I await not just your words on Inauguration Day, but also your commitment to act with vision that can free us from the ugly shackles of our past and bring freedom to those who are oppressed by the ugly reality of our present.

Terror is surely the United States' greatest enemy, but we can only cease being its target when we are no longer its cause.

Roddy A. Stegemann

NO LONGER A FAIR ARBITER - 14 JANUARY 2009

There are many Jews, both inside and outside of Israel, who disagree with the Israeli government's behavior. So too, there are many Muslims that disagree with the behavior of the Hamas. In contrast, both the Israeli and the Hamas governments enjoy the majority support of their peoples. What some people label self-defense on the part of the Israeli government, others label state-sanctioned terror. What some label Hamas terrorist aggression toward Israel, others label self-defense. In the end both sides must learn to live together, and they cannot do it without third party intervention. As the United States is the chief supplier of arms to the Israelis and a major contributor to the Israeli economy, it is the only nation in the world sufficiently well-positioned to intervene and sway the Israeli hand. In so doing, it could win the favor of the Arab community, who could in turn place significant pressure on the Hamas to enter into peace negotiations with the Israelis. For the moment, the United States and Israeli governments are the primary source of continued friction in the Middle East -- not the Arabs, not the Iranians, neither the Hamas, nor the Hezbollah.

Dear Mr. President-elect,

The current crisis in Palestine is an opportunity to heal the wound between the US and the Arab community created by the Iraq War.

Roddy A. Stegemann

FINDING THE PROPER WORDS - 15 JANUARY 2009

In a recent CNN news clip BAN Ki Moon, the UN Secretary General, stated before the world press:

Let me reiterate at the outset my condemnation of the rocket fire aimed at Israeli citizens. I have always made my unequivocal condemnation of these rockets as acts of terrorism. They have no justification whatsoever and they must cease.

Whereupon Shimon Perez, President of the State of Israel is then shown to say:

As a friend I tell you, but I try to think why did they start shooting at Israel? What is the rea-

son? I'm at a loss, completely out of it! I try to think logically what did they want to achieve? I couldn't begin to find an answer to it. What they did is against all human norms.³

Dear Mr. President-elect,

It is my sincere hope that you and your speech writers can do a better job on Inauguration Day and the many days that follow -- both in word and deed.

Roddy A. Stegemann

WISDOM AND COURAGE -- 14 JANUARY 2009

Dear Mr. President-elect,

War ends when either side lays down its arms. This can about in many different ways. Simply someone with the wisdom, courage, and resources is required to make it happen.

Roddy A. Stegemann

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND UNDERSTANDING - 17 JANUARY 2009

On Friday, January 16, 2009, Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State, and Tzipi Livni, Israel's Foreign Minister, signed a joint *Memorandum of Understanding* that effectively blamed the Palestinians for Israel's most recent incursion into Gaza.⁴ This document came only days after the United States abstained from a UN resolution for an immediate cease fire on all sides.⁵ The United States was the only member of the UNSC that did not vote in favor of the resolution. Friday is the Muslim Holy Day.

It should be clear from this action that our current Secretary of State is either insensitive to the needs of Muslims the world over or purposely sought to offend them. As Tzipi Livni is surely familiar with the Arab calendar, we must further assume that the Foreign Minister purposely withheld this information from the Secretary, or that the two agreed that it was both right and proper to offend the entire Islamic world. That it would slip the minds of both, although possible, would be even more incriminating.

In order to avoid such action from occurring in the future I would like to suggest that federal government officials responsible for foreign affairs be made more familiar with the Islamic calendar. This familiarity could be achieved by making the final day of each al-Eid celebration a congressional or national holiday. This would

1. stimulate American interest in, and appreciation for the religion, culture and language of 20 percent of the world's population.
2. demonstrate America's commitment to the Arab peoples and lessen the current animosity between the United States and the Islamic world.
3. eliminate still another lever of Israeli propaganda used against the Palestinians -- namely, American ignorance of Islamic culture and history.
4. help the United States government and US citizens to distinguish between Muslims of faith and those who would use their faith to achieve asocial ends, and
5. permit over 1 million US citizens to practice their faith with the same comfort and dignity accorded Christians and Jews resident in the United States.

³ Until someone demands that CNN takes it down you can view this video clip at <<http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/world/2009/01/15/bts.israel.ban.peres.pool?iref=videosearch>>

⁴ Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, op. cit., p. 1.

⁵ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/1860 (2009) adopted by the Council at its 6063rd meeting on January, 8 2009. [online document] <<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/204/32/PDF/N0920432.pdf?OpenElement>>

Please understand that I am not promoting religion of any kind, because it is my carefully researched belief that theistic notions of all kinds are a human creation. Nevertheless, religion plays a crucial role in the lives of many US citizens, and the beliefs of these practitioners must be respected. According to the 2001 US Census Bureau more US citizens declared the Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist faith as their religion of preference than did those who claimed adherence to the Jewish faith. Moreover, the number of Muslim citizens in the United States appears to be rising, while that of the Jewish faith is falling.⁶

Indeed, if Congress can pause for a Jewish holiday in the middle of America's biggest financial melt-down since the Great Depression, then it can certainly pause to honor the Muslim faith.⁷

Dear President-elect,

Encourage Congress to declare the two al-Eid holidays national holidays, so that our Islamic brethren can enjoy the same Constitutional right that you enjoy each and every Christmas.

Roddy A. Stegemann

Note: Copies of all documents for which links are provided have been secured on disk and are available for the asking.

⁶ See attached document.

⁷ Roddy A. Stegemann. 7 October 2008. "Say No Evil, Hear No Evil, Know No Blame". An essay about what was not adequately discussed during the 2008 presidential debates and about special interests that command foreign policy to the detriment of the greater American domestic good. [Online document] <<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/viewpoint/knowNoBlame.pdf>>