The Arab-Israeli conflict - the neo-mandate solution

BY BARRY RUBIN

War without end. That is what the Obama administration wants to do, as the Arab-Israeli conflict is now being dealt with by the US, Israel and the Palestinians. If the current Obama-Kerry plan for an Israel-Palestinian deal is implemented, scores of Americans will likely die. This was revealed recently by US Secretary of State John Kerry, particularly in a speech at the Saban Forum. (By the way, the Saban Forum speech was made appropriately on December 7, the anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The former head of the Saban Center has also been chosen as negotiator.)

The Obama administration plan is very simple, assuming that everything goes smoothly - which of course it will not.

According to the plan, the United States would gradually create and maintain the agreement by policing an independent Palestinian state. Israel would be protected by the US force and the US would protect it from Iran. And that's part of the problem, because the Palestinians would stage a huge number of protests against and complaints regarding Israel's actions, likely demanding more concessions.

In addition, the Palestinians, particularly Hamas, would see the new Palestinian state as perpetually victimized. They would mobilize any Arab forces they could to back their complaints. It would be a nightmare. But what the wrong-headed people in the Obama administration do not understand is that they would be under constant challenge. They do not understand that no matter what they say, Hamas, Fatah, Iran, Syria, al-Qaida, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists - and most likely Saudi Arabia - will never accept an Israeli state. In other words, they will be on the ground, they will be targeted. Now the question is, what will they do? Will they "protect" Israel? And what is the definition of protecting Israel? And what about gaps in this protection or disagreement among the observers?

In his Saban speech, Kerry said, "Our commitment to Israel's security spurred the US-Israeli development of ballistic missile defense technologies to keep Israelis safe from rockets and missiles. Those systems and newer technologies continue to protect Israelis from the range of threats that they still face today.

What about a large number of cross-border attacks? Will Americans attack Palestinians if they are committing the agreement? May I point out that at various times, Hamas and Hezbollah have launched rockets in Israel with no such action. Again, the most important point is not so much the aggression of the Israeli military, but routine policing of a Palestinian state, not to mention Israel's Lebanese-Syrian border.

Are we to believe that American helicopters, airplanes and ground soldiers would attack when the total effort of this exercise had been to avoid military commitment? How many years would this neo-mandate continue? Will the United States intimidate certain countries if necessary? Remember that the US didn't even support the military government in Egypt. The US may suffer a great number of casualties over time. Note that the 3,400 deaths of Western coalition soldiers in Afghanistan so far. Are Western forces willing to sacrifice more than 300 soldiers a year? In 2010, IED attacks in Afghanistan wounded 3,366 US soldiers. And that was in just one year of the war.

And of course Americans are going to accidentally kill Palestinians, both fighters and unarmed civilians. As of February 2013, between 17,000 and 19,000 civilians died in Afghanistan. This then would create a blood feud. And by the way, many of these people will blame Israel.

Think along the lines of Afghanistan. The US has informed President Hamid Karzai that it is withdrawing its forces. Karzai is not happy with that, and he wants to support that. Can any American rely on American defense even if it accepts it?

Recently, the US has betrayed the following countries: Egypt (wanting to support a Muslim Brotherhood government); Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey (supporting their side in the Syrian civil war). And it has left a mess in Iraq. Do you think that at this moment Israel is going to trust the US? Consider this, too: what will happen when the US soldiers come back in body bags? How long will the US commitment last before dumping an independent Palestinian state on Israel?

Remember there will be Turks, Iranians, Arabs, Islamists and Palestinians who will not accept the solution or who will continue fighting. And sooner or later, the US will leave the new state and leave Israel with a mess.

Given all the above, such a solution cannot possibly work. I cannot conceive that people do not look forward in this way and rather seem to be guided by wishful thinking that the conflict will end suddenly.

It is no accident that Israel has never been willing to trust its security to a third party. This is a roadmap for increased conflict. For example, is the US air force going to bomb a building in Gaza that is an open headquarters for Gaza rocket and terrorist attacks? Will it aggressively go after foreign fighters, even if those foreign fighters have attacked Americans? Will it send them to Guantanamo Bay? Will it respond to criticism in the UN? May I point out that US counter-terrorism policy has not been very aggressive of late? Think Benghazi.

The US will then have two choices:

1. The US helps Israel, albeit with constant opposition, and alienates the Arab and Iranian and Turkish world.

2. The US will gradually get tired of the burden and walk away from it.

In other words, Israel would not benefit from what can only be called "Obama Strategic Care."

If you like it, no matter what you've heard, you can keep your strategic patron or plan, you can keep your ally (Obama), and you'll save money. No one will be able to take that away from you.

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