

American and Israeli Occupations

The last week in August I visited Israel for my first time. I was there two nights on business. So, obviously I'm an expert on all of the Middle East – just like a traveling Congressman. Or not. Seriously, my eye's observations enriched my ideas and opinions. My life experiences, learning history and listening to experts got real.

I see the striking similarities and dramatic differences between American Occupation of conquered Iraq and the Israeli Occupation of conquered West Bank and Gaza.

Courage. Courage is in direct proximity to the danger. Our troops in Iraq are not afraid. I saw beautiful, precious Hasidic children playing on the sidewalk in Jerusalem a block from where an Islamist disguised as a Hasidic Jew murdered 22 people the week before. They weren't afraid. Being children, they reflected the absence of fear from their parents. Many folks in America are scared to death.

Quagmire. Both Occupations are resisted by guerilla terrorists. Yet, neither guerilla war is a quagmire. Vietnam with 300 deaths a week, for week after stinking, lousy week was a quagmire. (Oh, how I feel the rage of contempt and disgust swell with the heartache of utter waste when I think of the names on the Vietnam Wall I knew). The losses in both Occupations are sustainable to nations with the will to win. Certainly, every casualty is a tragedy. But, the personal sacrifice paid for victory is different than a life squandered for nothing when we quit. Israel and the U.S. can prevail in our Occupations.

Winning. The Israelis will win when they apply asymmetric pain to the Islamist terrorists – in ways the Islamists can neither copy nor match. One idea would be to bulldoze more than the family home of the suicide/homicide bombers. Bulldoze the block. Ship the extended family of the bomber into exile (dump them on a Lebanese or Syrian beach) and never let them come back. Never.

Likewise, LTG Rick Sanchez (I last saw Rick when our families said goodbye in Germany. Our oldest and youngest daughters were best buds) has the opportunity to make Occupied Iraq the killing fields of our choosing for the Islamists. We can ambush and kill them. The most devastating tactical fight is the defense-offense (like the battles of Cannae, Austerlitz, Cowpens). "Bring 'em on." Winning the tactical and operational successes on the ground, set the strategic, political victory.

Perceptions. Political victory – peace – is based on the perceptions of the combatants. The U.S. has to manage perceptions in Theater, on the Home Front and around the world. It's tough to wage war and make nice with world opinion and domestic politics.

The Israeli's have an easier time, domestically, putting the hard necessary ahead

of the easy accommodation. Their innocents are murdered more often than ours.

While, I concur with “good fences make good neighbors”, Robert Frost is dead. So is wisdom. That’s why Israel should not build an ugly wall to separate Arab from Jew. It’ll look too much like the Berlin Wall. Israel will be on the wrong side – even though they will shoot foreign enemies coming in, whereas, the Communists shot their own citizens going out. The difference between fleeing to freedom vs. breaking and entering to kill women, children and seniors will be lost on the historically illiterate Americans and deliberately ignorant Europeans. The Israelis should build a strip of flowers and grapevines – filled with high tech sensors. It’ll have the same military, economic effect, but be better politically.

Gen. John Abizaid can advise and support Mr. Bremer and the country team to win victory on our terms better than any military officer serving. He is the best. (I last saw John at Grafenwoehr Training Area. I told him how my career was killed and he shared how much he loved being back in the Airborne.) I hope they aren’t building a strong national government. A divided and separated balance of power among Sunni, Shiite, Kurd, Turkman and Christian with a limited central authority would serve their peace and our National Interests for years to come. I doubt that democracy will flourish in Islamic sands. More freedom and autonomy than the people have ever known – and just enough to end their hostility – is possible. If we don’t quit.

Will. Both Occupations can be won. Victory preserves and protects Israel and United States. The enemies of the Occupations must be defeated. It will take a long, long time and lot of will. The Israelis understand generational conflict. They live the will to survive and thrive. America’s will depends on how the odd couple of Liberal Democrats and Isolationist Conservatives and Libertarians fare against reality.

The hate-America-first and wish-we-back-in-Kansas-Dorothies can chip away at American will with their gasping, righteous laments. But, when other 9-11s come, America is more likely to fight back than surrender. The people who can not get their minds around a Munificent Destiny – our Republic with imperial power and responsibilities but without imperial ambitions or over reach – should be the minority until the Islamists are defeated late this century or the next. It depends on who wins the U.S. Culture War.

Common enemies will fight Israel and the U.S. for decades. Israel will win its occupation. The United States might.

James Atticus Bowden

James Atticus Bowden has specialized in inter-disciplinary long range 'futures' studies for over a decade. He is employed by a Defense Department contractor for the Future Combat Systems. He is a retired United States Army Infantry Officer. He is a 1972 graduate of the United States Military Academy and earned graduate degrees from Harvard University and Columbia University. He holds two elected Republican Party offices in Virginia.