

“Israel and the Clash of Civilisations”

A Review of Jonathan Cook's book

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Jonathan Cook is a British-born independent journalist based (since September 2001) in the predominantly Arab city of Nazareth, Israel and is the “first foreign correspondent (living) in the Israeli Arab city....” He’s a former reporter and editor of regional newspapers, a freelance sub-editor with national newspapers, and a staff journalist for the London-based Guardian and Observer newspapers. He’s also written for The Times, Le Monde diplomatique, the International Herald Tribune, Al-Ahram Weekly and Aljazeera.net. In February 2004, he founded the Nazareth Press Agency.

Cook states why he’s in Nazareth as follows: to give himself “greater freedom to reflect on the true nature of the (Israeli-Palestinian) conflict and (gain) fresh insight into its root causes.” He “choose(s) the issues (he) wish(es) to cover (and so is) not constrained by the ‘treadmill’ of the mainstream media....which gives disproportionate coverage to the concerns of the powerful (so it) makes much of their Israel/Palestine reporting implausible.”

Living among Arabs, “things look very different” to Cook. “There are striking, and disturbing, similarities between” the Palestinian experience inside Israel and within the Occupied Territories. “All have faced Zionism’s appetite for territory and domination, as well as repeated (and unabated) attempts at ethnic cleaning.”

Cook authored two important books and contributed to others. His first one in 2006 was titled “Blood and Religion: The Unmasking of the Jewish and Democratic State.” It’s the rarely told story of the plight of the 1.4 million Palestinian Israeli citizens living inside the Jewish State, the discrimination against them, the reasons why, and the likely future consequences from it. Israel’s “demographic problem” is the issue as Cook explains. It’s the time when a faster-growing Palestinian population (aside from the diaspora) becomes a majority, and the very character of a “Jewish State” is threatened. Israel’s response – state-sponsored repression and violent ethnic cleansing to prevent it – in the Territories as well as and in Israel.

Cook’s newest book, just published, is called “Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East.” It’s the subject of this review in the wake of advance praise. Noted author John Pilger calls it “One of the most cogent understandings of the modern Middle East I have read. It is superb, because the author himself is a unique witness” to events and powerfully documents them. This review covers them in-depth along with some of this writer’s reflections on the region from America.

Introducing his topic, Cook begins with Iraq and states upfront that “civil war and partition were the intended outcomes of invasion.” Separation and conflict were planned, they serve America’s interests, they’re not haphazard post-invasion events, and they originated far

from Washington.

From the early 1980s, it was Israeli policy to subdue the Palestinians, fragment Arab rivals, and foster ethnic and religious discord to maintain unchallengeable regional dominance. Bush administration neocons chose the same strategy. Like Israel, they want to neutralize the region through division and separation and make it work even though prior to invading Iraq, Sunni and Shia neighborhoods were indistinguishable, and the country had the highest intermarriage rate in the region.

The scheme is “Ottomanisation,” and it worked for Ottoman Turkey against a more dominant Islam. Israel sees four advantages to it:

- divided minorities are easier to exploit, and Sunni - Shia conflict can achieve a greater aim - subverting Israel’s main threat - secular Arab nationalism united against the Jewish State;
- greater military dominance lets Israel maintain its favored status as a valued Washington ally;
- regional instability may lead to the breakup of Saudi-dominated OPEC, weaken the kingdom’s influence in Washington, and diminish its ability to finance Islamic extremists and Palestinian resistance; and
- Israel becomes freer to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Washington supported the scheme post-9/11, the “war on terror” was born, a clash of civilizations ensued, and the idea was that “Control of oil could be secured on the same terms as Israeli regional hegemony: by spreading instability across the Middle East” and Central Asia through a new-type divide and conquer strategy. For Israel, it weakens regional rivals and dampens Palestinian nationalism and their hopes for “meaningful statehood.”

Regime Overthrow in Iraq

Removing Saddam Hussein was justified to disarm a dangerous dictator threatening the region. It was untrue and based on “False Pretenses” according to a study by two nonprofit journalism organizations. On January 22, it was posted on the Center for Public Integrity web site. It’s “an exhaustive examination of the record” that shows the President and his seven top officials “waged a carefully orchestrated campaign of misinformation about the threat” Iraq posed to galvanize public opinion and go to war “under decidedly false pretenses.”

At least 532 separate speeches, briefings, interviews, testimonies and more provide the evidence. They show a concerted web of lies became the administration’s case for war even though it’s clear Iraq had no WMDs or any ties to Al-Queda. Numerous bipartisan investigations drew the same conclusion, including those by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in 2004 and 2006, the multinational Iraq Survey Group’s “Duelfer Report,” and even the dubious 9/11 Commission.

The study cites 232 false Bush statements alone about WMDs and 28 others about links to Al-Queda. Colin Powell, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and others put out the same lies that increased after August 2002 and spiked much higher in the weeks preceding invasion. In all, the study documented 935 false statements, the dominant media

spread them, their deception is now revealed, and yet the administration avoided any responsibility for its actions and the media is unapologetic. In addition, there are no congressional investigations, and the war is still misportrayed as a liberating one when its clear intent was to erase a nation, divide and rule it, turn it into a free market paradise, use it as a launching platform to dominate the region, and control its oil.

Saddam was never a credible threat. In addition, he'd been effectively disarmed in the early 1990s, but US officials suppressed what UN weapons inspectors' learned – the Gulf War neutralized Iraq and “there were no unresolved disarmament issues.” Further, Saddam's son-in-law, Hussein Kamel, ran the country's WMD program in the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1995, he defected to the West, was thoroughly debriefed, and confirmed that there was no nuclear program, and “Iraq destroyed all its chemical and biological weapons stocks and the missiles to deliver them.”

The story was widely reported at the time, including a front page New York Times August 12 article headlined “Cracks in Baghdad” plus several subsequent follow-ups as events developed. It was then buried, however, and never resurfaced in the run-up to March, 2003. For Iraqis, the consequences were horrific, and they began after Saddam was tricked into invading Kuwait.

Four days later, Operation Desert Shield was launched, economic sanctions followed, a large US troop buildup began, and a sweeping Kuwait-funded PR campaign prepared the public for Operation Desert Shield. It began on January 17, 1991, ended on February 28, caused mass killing, and all essential to life facilities were destroyed, effectively returning the country to its pre-industrial condition.

Twelve years of the most comprehensive, genocidal sanctions followed. They included a crippling trade embargo and an air blockade to enforce it. Adequate humanitarian essentials were restricted, and the 1995 UN Oil-for-Food Program was a well-planned scam. Until it ended after March 2003, it provided the equivalent of 21 cents a day for food and 4 cents for medicines. In addition, vital drugs and other essentials were banned because of their claimed potential “dual use.”

The toll was horrific and got two UN heads of Iraqi humanitarian relief to resign with Dennis Halliday saying in 1998 that he did so because he “had been instructed to implement a policy that satisfies the definition of genocide: a deliberate policy that has effectively killed over one million individuals, children and adults,” including 5000 Iraqi children a month in his judgment.

Conditions got worse post-March 2003 with street violence commonplace; mounting deaths and injuries; and a total breakdown of essential services, including electricity, clean drinking water, sanitation, medical care, and education made worse by mass unemployment and poverty – an occupation-created humanitarian disaster of epic proportions that continues to worsen.

Four million refugees left the country or are internally displaced, one-third of the population needs emergency aid, millions can't get enough food, malnourishment is rampant, medical care barely exists, and the British medical journal The Lancet published the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health study on the death toll in October 2006. It estimated 655,000 violent deaths since March 2003 that could be as high as 900,000 at the time (and now much higher) because interviewers couldn't survey the country's most violent areas

and omitted from the study thousands of families in which all members were killed.

Cook quoted a Palestinian academic, Karma Nabulsi, citing similarities between Iraq and occupied Palestine – two populations “living in a Hobbesian vision of an anarchic society: truncated, violent, powerless, destroyed, cowed, ruled by disparate militias, gangs, religious ideologues and extremists, broken up into ethnic and religious tribalism and co-opted collaborationists.” Palestinians and Iraqis resist, demand their freedom, and polls shows overwhelming numbers want the occupations to end. In Iraq, almost no one thinks America came to liberate them or establish democracy.

Nearly everyone knows Washington’s real intent – permanent occupation to control the country’s oil so Big Oil giants can exploit it for profit, deny Iraqis their own natural wealth, and give America “veto power” over rivals and potential ones to assure their compliance.

A September 1978 Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandum is particularly notable. It listed three US Middle East objectives:

- “assure continuous access to petroleum resources,
- prevent an inimical power or combination of powers from establishing hegemony, and
- assure the survival of Israel as an independent state in a stable relationship with contiguous Arab states.”

Of great concern to US planners, then and now, is “curbing and crushing (Arab and Iranian) nationalism that might inspire Middle Eastern states” to claim the right to their own resources and deny the West their benefits. Twentieth century history documents how Britain and America controlled the region, installed puppet rulers, backed repressive dictators, removed uncompliant ones, and looted oil-rich states for their gain. Iraq is now exploited, local industry was crushed, US corporations plunder the country, and the so-called hydrocarbon law gives Big Oil the same right to the nation’s oil – if it’s enacted but so far it’s stalled.

The Iraqi cabinet approved it last February, but that’s where things now stand because of mass public opposition to a blueprint for plunder. If the puppet parliament passes it, foreign investors will reap a bonanza of resources leaving Iraq with just slivers. Its complex provisions, still being manipulated, give the Iraqi National Oil Company exclusive control to less than one-fifth of the country’s operating fields with all yet-to-be-discovered deposits (most of Iraq’s reserves) set aside for Big Oil. Even worse, contracts (under “production sharing agreements”) up to 35 years will be granted, all earnings may be expropriated, and foreign interests have no obligation to invest in Iraq’s economy, partner with Iraqi companies, hire local workers, respect union rights, or share new technologies.

Earlier in the 20th century, America coveted Middle East oil once its potential was realized. Post-WW I, however, Britain occupied Iraq and Kuwait, benefitted most until WW II, miscalculated on Saudi’s importance, and let the Roosevelt administration secure an oil concession in the 1930s that began close ties between the two nations. The President and King ibn Saud struck a deal. America guaranteed the kingdom’s security in return for a steady supply of oil at stable prices, and later on, the recycling of huge petrodollar profits into US investments and military hardware.

Thereafter, the region was key, and the Carter Doctrine highlighted it after engineering the Shah's removal in 1979. Carter stated – "Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America (and) will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."

Post-9/11, the Bush Doctrine applied Carter policy globally in the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS), later revised and made harsher in 2006. It's an imperial grand plan for world dominance, preventive wars are the strategy, the Middle East and Central Asia are its main targets, and the powerful Israeli Lobby assures Washington and Tel Aviv interests are in lockstep. More on that below.

The Long Campaign against Iran

The January 2007 Herzliya, Israel conference was notable for what's become the country's premiere political event. This one differed from others in two respects. Forty-two past and present US policy makers were invited, and attention focused on a Shia "arc of extremism" with debates and discussion highlighting Iran and Hezbollah.

Participants claimed Iran spread regional instability, was close to developing nuclear weapons, and would use them against Israel. There were similar echoes from the January 2008 conference with comments from speakers like Ehud Barak saying "The Iranian nuclear threat remains critical (and) We will not accept an Iran which possesses a nuclear capable military." General Ephraim Sneh added "Our problem is not the nuclear problem, but rather the Iranian regime. (It) incorporates imperial ambition, hatred of Israel, increasing military strength, and an unlimited budget." Ignored was common knowledge or any glimmer of truth – that the late Ayatollah Khomeini banned nuclear weapons development, today's Iranian officials repeatedly stress the country's only nuclear aim is commercial, and Tehran represents no threat to Israel or any other country in or outside the region.

Since the early 1990s, Israel claimed otherwise – that Iran sought nuclear weapons, represented an existential threat, and had to be confronted. By 1994, Haaretz reported that the country's top priority was neutralizing Iran to thwart its regional aspirations because Tehran threatened to acquire nuclear weapons, long-range missiles, and had the ability to export terrorism and revolution to subvert secular Arab regimes. Iraq was already under sanctions, but Israel saw both countries as a combined threat. Weakening one would only strengthen the other, so both had to be smashed.

With Iraq under occupation, Iran's now called the center of world terrorism and packaged with Syria and Hezbollah as Israel's axis of evil with Hamas added later after its early 2006 electoral victory. Israel has big aims – to become a regional hegemon, prevent a rival power from influencing the "peace process," and deny the Palestinians any hope of ending the occupation. It thus manufactured an Iranian threat and along with Washington blocks dialogue and negotiation.

Claiming Iran is a nuclear menace runs counter to the facts. Tehran is years away from producing nuclear power, and IAEA head Mouhammad el-Baradei reports no evidence that Iran is building or seeks to build nuclear weapons. He also told the press last August that "Iran is ready to discuss all outstanding issues which triggered the crisis in confidence. It's a significant step. There are clear guidelines (and Iran is not) dallying with the agency (or)

prolong(ing) negotiations to avoid sanctions....Iran (deserves) a chance to prove its stated goodwill."

IAEA also reported Iran's uranium enrichment program slowed, operates well below capacity, and isn't producing nuclear fuel in significant amounts. It had only 1968 centrifuges functioning, several hundred others in various stages of assembly or testing, and its enrichment level is well below what's needed to build a nuclear bomb. In addition, in December 2007, the US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) reported that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 (without evidence one ever existed) and has none of these weapons in its arsenal.

The Bush administration and Israel sidestepped NIE and denounced the IAEA, called it an Iranian ploy to buy time, and "There was no (Israeli) debate about which country should be targeted after Iraq." The goal was to isolate Iran, end its threat to Israel, but avoid the mistake of invading and occupying another country with Iraq already out of control. Other choices were preferable – stoking internal conflict, inciting instability, attacking by air, and deciding which reports to believe.

An August 2007 one called "Considering a war with Iran: A discussion paper on WMDs in the Middle East" was particularly alarming. British experts Dan Plesch and Martin Butcher prepared it, other evidence of impending conflict supported it, no date was given, but they stated things are too far along in planning to stop. They wrote the Pentagon has plans for a "massive, multi-front, full-spectrum" shock and awe-type attack with no ground invasion. Its aim is to target 10,000 sites with bombers and long-range missiles, destroy the country's military capacity, nuclear energy sites, economic infrastructure and other targets to destabilize and oust its regime or reduce the country to a "weak or failed state."

Washington also pressured the UN to impose sanctions on Iran. In July 2006, the Security Council passed Resolution 1696 demanding Tehran halt enriching uranium by August 31 or be sanctioned. UN Resolution 1737 followed in December, cited the country's nuclear program and imposed limited sanctions with further ones applied after UN Resolution 1747 passed in March. On January 22, 2008, the five permanent Security Council members and Germany agreed to a third round of sanctions that was less than what the Bush administration wanted.

The cat and mouse game continues, the threat of wider war remains, and nothing may be resolved with the current administration in power. Nor is there much chance for change under a new one in 2009 as hawkish candidates from both parties dominate the race and support Israel's design on Iran.

The Islamic Republic remains Target One, but on July 12, 2006 the Olmert government surprised. It attacked Lebanon in a blatant act of aggression. It later came out the war was long-planned, Washington was on board, and a minor incident became the pretext to launch it. The target was Hezbollah, and the scheme was to remove what former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage once called "the A-team of international terrorism." That was his way of noting a long-time Israeli irritant that was able to liberate Lebanon's south by ending the IDF's 22 year occupation in May 2000.

By summer 2006, strong rhetoric suggested a wider war with Iran and Syria. Both countries were accused of supplying Hezbollah with thousands of rockets to "wipe Israel off the map," and they were being indiscriminately used to do it.

In fact, Hezbollah was founded as a national liberation movement after Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. It's not an Islamist or terrorist organization as its founding mission statement reveals. It was an "open letter to all the oppressed in Lebanon and the world" stating its aims – to drive the US, French and Israeli occupiers out of Lebanon, defeat the right wing Christian Maronite Phalange party allied with Israel, and give our people "liberty (in) the form of government they desire." It added "we don't want to impose Islam upon anybody. We don't want Islam to reign in Lebanon by force as is the case with the Maronites today."

Today, Hezbollah is a legitimate political and social organization that maintains a military wing for self-defense. It represents Lebanon's Shia population (40% of the total) and is respected for running a comprehensive network of schools, health facilities and other social services available to anyone in need, not just Shias. Nonetheless, it's been unfairly branded anti-Jewish, accused of wanting to destroy Israel, and Washington put it on its Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list in 1997.

In summer 2006, Hezbollah responded to Israeli aggression as its legitimate right. It targeted military, not civilian, sites with spotty accuracy, hit some, and proved to Israel's embarrassment that its forces, Iran and Syria knew site locations that could be struck more accurately with more powerful weapons in retaliation if attacked.

The threat is real, but Hezbollah was the first order of business. Its rockets had to be eliminated as Seymour Hersh reported. Otherwise, "You hit Iran (or Syria first), Hezbollah then bombs Tel Aviv and Haifa," but more was at stake as well. Backing Lebanon's Siniora government against a weakened Hezbollah and asserting the army's control in the south was key. In addition, with Iran and Syria potential targets, the Pentagon wanted Israel to field test its bunker-buster bombs to learn their effectiveness in advance.

Hezbollah was more formidable than expected, it prevailed against Israel's might, its leader, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, is stronger than ever, his support extends beyond his Shia base in the south, the IDF suffered a humiliating defeat, and that's where things now stand. Had the Olmert government prevailed, Cook reports that an air attack on Syria was planned, President Bashar Assad apparently knew it, a credible Washington source revealed it, and the Israeli media suggested the Bush administration wanted Israel to proceed.

Further hawkishness came from Hebrew University professor Martin van Creveld, a respected military historian "with intimate knowledge of the army's inner workings and its collective ethos." His March 2007 Jewish Daily Forward commentary argued that Syria planned to attack Israel no later than October 2008, possibly with chemical weapons, but no evidence was cited. He merely said the Assad government "had been on an armaments shopping spree in Russia" and let readers draw their own conclusions. Israel, he claimed, was thus justified to attack preemptively even though there was credible evidence that Syria sought resolution on the Golan issue, made overtures to negotiate, and the Olmert government believed Assad was serious.

Nonetheless, he was rebuffed and hard line Washington and Tel Aviv officials prevailed. Appeasing Iran and Syria was off the table, removing their "dire threat" had to be confronted, and it hardly mattered that none existed. Then came November 2006. Olmert's approval rating was dismal, and a newspaper poll showed Netanyahu would best him in fresh elections. US Republicans were just as weak. The November 2006 congressional elections sent a strong message – end the war and bring home the troops. For the first time

since 9/11, neocon dominance was uncertain, tensions surfaced in the administration, and a change of direction looked possible.

James Baker's Iraq Study Group recommended one in December. It argued that US forces should be gradually withdrawn from Iraq, Iran and Syria should be engaged to help stabilize "what was clearly a failed state," and the home front battle lines were drawn. Key Bush advisors continued to claim Iran was the problem by trying to undermine Washington in Iraq. It was stirring up Shia resistance, arming the Sunnis, and countering Tehran required greater US involvement, not an exit.

For a while, it wasn't clear how things would turn out, but in the end the administration remained hard line, and in early 2007 announced a 30,000 troop surge, stepped up pressure against Iran, and positioned a major naval strike force in the Gulf. At the same time, President Ahmadinejad became another "Hitler" and was misquoted as saying he was trying to "wipe Israel off the map." He actually said "this regime that is occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time" in a reference to its military conquest, illegally occupying Jerusalem, colonizing the Occupied Territories, and repressing the Palestinian people. Ultimately, these policies will fail, and respected analysts say the same thing.

Ahmadinejad made no reference to Jews, only a racist Israeli government that relegates non-Jews to second class status or worse. Regardless of his words and meaning, every move and comment he now makes is scrutinized for any way to attack him.

End of the Strongmen

Cook asks why were Israel and the US extending the "war on terror" to the strongest Middle East state, Iran, since it's the one most able to alleviate crisis in Iraq? Why turn a "clash of civilisations" into an added Sunni-Shia struggle and risk making an unstable situation worse? Many Middle Eastern states are "uncomfortable amalgams of Sunni and Shia populations" because they were combined into unnatural states post-WW I. By late 2006, internal conflicts destabilized Iraq and Lebanon, threatened to spread, and Washington and Tel Aviv were encouraging it.

By confronting Iran and Syria, things may only worsen, but White House reasoning is that this is preferable to a united resistance targeting its occupation. Israel has the same view, and it lay behind the summer 2006 Lebanon war. At its start, it was hoped conflict would unite Christians and Sunnis against Hezbollah and repeat the sectarian civil war that ravaged the country from 1975 to 1990. Instead, the nation united against Israel, and Hezbollah's power and overall status was enhanced, the opposite of what Tel Aviv planned.

The same strategy is playing out in the Occupied Territories, but its outcome is unresolved. After Hamas' electoral victory, Israel refused recognition, and the US and West went along. All outside aid was cut off, an economic embargo and sanctions were imposed, and the legitimate government was isolated. Stepped up repression followed along with repeated IDF incursions and attacks, and the idea was to foment internal conflict on Gaza streets. It went on for months, then subsided (with occasional flare-ups) when Hamas prevailed against Fatah. It defeated Mahmoud Abbas' heavily US-Israeli-armed paramilitaries that were led by Mohammed Dahlan. In spite of defeat, Israel achieved a long-standing aim. It split the Palestinians into two rival camps in Gaza and the West Bank and recognized the unelected Abbas government as legitimate.

Israel plans the same fate for Syria, but Cook says its “closed society (is) more difficult to read.” Nonetheless, Congress passed the Syria Accountability Act in late 2003 to justify a US and/or Israeli future attack on any pretext that’s never hard to find. A clause in the law states Syria is “accountable for any harm to Coalition armed forces or to any United States citizen in Iraq if the government of Syria is found to be responsible” even without proof. Whatever Syria does, it’s thwarted despite clear evidence it seeks peace with the West and Israel and will make concessions in return for resolution to long-outstanding issues like the Golan.

Cook thus wonders “who controls American foreign policy? Does the dog wag the tail or the opposite given the power of Israel to influence policy? One camp argues the former with distinguished figures like Noam Chomsky believing Washington has a “consistent, predictable and monolithic view of American interests abroad” and how best to secure them.

How to explain Iraq then since the administration rejected the advice of many of its key policy advisors, including what Big Oil wanted. Instead, it opted for a messy “regime overthrow,” not a simpler “regime change” that worked well in the past without war and occupation. In addition, attacking Iran guarantees regional turmoil, greater instability, regimes likely toppling, intensified Iraq conflict targeting Americans, higher oil prices, possible world recession, and no assurance of a favorable outcome.

Why risk it when Iran sought dialogue for years, but Washington consistently refuses. Cook cites two US academics, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt and might have included James Petras’ work and his powerfully important book titled “The Power of Israel in the United States.” This writer reviewed it in-depth and was greatly struck by its persuasive content. It documents the Lobby’s depth and breath at the highest levels of government, throughout Congress, business boardrooms, academia, the clergy (especially dominant Christian fundamentalists) and the mass media. Together they assure full and unconditional support for most Israeli interests most of the time going back decades. Wars included – in the Occupied Territories, against Lebanon, the Gulf War, the current Iraq war as well as all Israeli wars since 1967 and the prospect of engaging Iran and Syria despite strong opposition at home.

Cook presents his own view saying “the dog and tail wag each other,” and that’s Israel’s strategy by making both countries dependent on the other for dominance in and outside the region. He believes Israel persuaded administration neocons that both countries shared mutual goals. It worked because it placed US interests of global domination and controlling oil at the heart of strategy.

Consider also a long-standing “special relationship” between the two countries going back decades. Senate Foreign Relations Committee private meeting transcripts before and after the 1967 war reveal it. They explain, early on, that Washington valued Israel as a strategic ally in a vitally important part of the world. Aside from oil, the Johnson administration called Israel a useful Cold War asset at a time Russia courted leading Arab states and made progress. Its regional wars were also helpful to confront the kind of nationalist threat Egypt’s Nasser represented. They split regional states into irreconcilable camps – weak Gulf ones like the Saudis needing US protection; stronger regimes in Egypt, Jordan and Iran under the Shah; and outliers like Syria, Libya, Iraq and Iran after 1979.

Cook recounts Ariel Sharon’s vision of empire as a regional superpower in an early 1980s

speech he never made. He radically departed from Israel's traditional strategy of either seeking peace or directly confronting hostile neighbors. His new thinking was to extend Tel Aviv's influence to the whole region by achieving qualitative and technological weapons superiority.

Sharon was a seasoned general, his views were respected, and he greatly influenced younger officers who rose in prominence and, in the case of Ehud Barak, became Prime Minister like himself. He believed Israel should impose its dictates and force other regional states to comply or be punished.

The "Sharon Doctrine," as it's called, also reflected the views National Security Adviser, General Uzi Dayan, and Mossad head, Ephraim Halevy stated in December 2001. They called 9/11 a "Hannukkah miracle" because it gave Israel a chance to marginalize and confront its enemies. Henceforth, all "Islamic terror" elements could be grouped together as threats to the region's rulers. Confronting it was crucial, so after Afghanistan Iraq, Iran and Syria were next "as soon as possible." It was Dick Cheney's vision of permanent "war that won't end in our lifetimes."

In 1982, Israeli journalist and former Foreign Affairs Ministry senior advisor, Oded Yinon, proposed an even more radical idea. Like Sharon, he advocated transforming Israel into a regional power with an added goal: breaking up Arab states into ethnic and confessional groupings that Israel could more easily control. Similar to Huntington's "clash of civilizations," Yinon suggested we were witnessing cataclysmic times, the "collapse of the world order," and he identified the threat: "The strength, dimension, accuracy and quality of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons will overturn most of the world in a few years." He believed an age of terror emerged that would challenge Israel with growing Arab militancy.

His remedy - install minority population leaders who are dependent on colonial powers even after nominal independence. It worked in Lebanon under the Maronites, in Syria under the Alawis, and in Jordan under Hashemite monarchs. Yinon believed these states were weak, as were oil-rich ones, could be easily dissolved, and doing it was key to forcibly displacing Palestinians from the Territories and inside Israel. Furthermore, achieving dominance depended on dissolving Arab states so Israel would be unchallengeable and able to complete its ethnic cleansing process.

Remaking the Middle East

After the Soviet Russia dissolved, Israel's military had to convince Washington it could be useful in a post-Cold War world. Would it be a bullying enforcer or a regional guarantor of US and Israeli dominance by sowing disorder and instability? In the 1990s, "two new kinds of Middle Eastern political and paramilitary actors" emerged - Sunni jihadis called Al-Queda and elements like the Taliban in Afghanistan and Hezbollah in south Lebanon. They represent formidable challenges that aren't easily intimidated or bullied.

In this type world, threats are at a sub-state level, so Yinon's scheme was appealing - encourage discord and feuding within nations, destabilize them, and arrange their dismemberment into mini-states. Tribes and sectarian elements could be turned on each other, and alliances with non-Arab, non-Muslim groups like Christians, Kurds and Druze could be cultivated to advantage.

One problem remains, however - the possibility that another Middle East state may develop

nuclear weapons, challenge Israel's dominance and get away with it. Nonetheless, Israel planned "organized chaos" across the region and convinced administration neocons the scheme was sensible. They had every reason to approve, and powerful opposition at home aside, they're destabilizing the region along with Israel. There's no guaranteed outcome, the subsequent fallout is unpredictable, but consider the possibilities. The administration is quite able to vaporize Iran and Syria and end the homeland republic if that's the plan. It's also what other states have to fear.

Cook considers why Israel and Washington chose this agenda despite the risks:

- by controlling Iran and Iraq, oil production can be increased and prices brought down to a desired level;
- Israel's rivals will be economically and politically crippled as will Palestinians in the Territories and inside Israel;
- Gulf states will also be weakened, including Saudi Arabia; and one major out-of-region goal may be achieved –
- containing China by controlling its main oil source; it may also be easier to dismember the country the way the Soviet Union was dissolved.

The goal is grandiose, risky and its chance of succeeding highly improbable. Consider Russia under Vladimir Putin. Contained under Boris Yeltsin, it's no longer a pushover. In a largely ignored June 2007 speech, Putin highlighted deteriorating US-Russian relations post-9/11 with alarm. Bush administration policies were threatening and endangered his country's security:

- US military bases encircle it;
- former Soviet states were recruited into NATO;
- offensive missiles were installed on its borders on the pretext of missile defense;
- allied Central Asian regimes were toppled to Washington's advantage; and
- US-backed Serbian, Ukrainian and Georgian "pro-democracy" groups incited political instability in Moscow.

These actions convinced Russian hard-liners that America plans regime change and further fragmentation of the Federation. China sees this, too, and knows it may be next. It's gotten both powers to ally in two organizations for their own self-defense and to compete with the US for control of Central Asia's vast reserves – the Asian Energy Security Grid and the more significant Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that was formed in 2001 for political, diplomatic, economic and security reasons as a counterweight to an encroaching US-dominated NATO. Other regional powers may also join one or both alliances, including India, Iran and even South Korea and Japan as a new millennium Great Game unfolds.

On the other side are the US and Israel with the Occupied Territories a test laboratory for what they have in mind for the region. Israel has been at it since the 1967 war when the idea was to expel Palestinians to Jordan because "Jordan is Palestine." The only debate was

how to do it.

At the same time, Israel long considered dismembering Arab countries into feuding mini-states, and in the early 1980s, Haaretz's military correspondent, Ze'ev Schiff, wrote that Israel's "best" interests would be served by "the dissolution of Iraq into a Shi'ite state, a Sunni state and the separation of the Kurdish part." Ever since, Israel implemented this practice in the Territories along with testing urban warfare tactics, new weapons and crowd control techniques. Workable or not, it's been a boon to business and it's built Israel's economy around responding to violence at home and everywhere.

Israeli technology firms pioneered the homeland security industry, still dominate it, and it's made the country the most tech-dependent one in the world and its fourth largest arms exporter after the US (far and away the biggest), Russia and France. The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is one of its biggest customers for high-tech fences, unmanned drones, biometric IDs, video and audio surveillance gear, air passenger profiling, prisoner interrogation systems, thermal imaging systems, fiber optics security systems, tear gas products and ejector systems and much more.

With products like these and lessons learned from the Territories, Israel believes it can abandon the old puppet strongman model of controlling populations. It wants no part of a "Palestinian dictator" who might encourage Palestinian nationalism, challenge Israeli rule, and disrupt settlement development plans in the Territories. Building them depends on keeping Palestinians divided, weak, unable to resist, and easier to remove from land Israel wants to incorporate into a greater Israel that includes south Lebanon.

After the 1967 war, Israel prevented new Palestinian leaders from emerging and first tried to manage the population along family or communal lines by co-opting its leaders or eliminating ones who became obstacles. By 1981, Sharon (as defense minister) refined the scheme into what was named "Village Leagues" that were local anti-PLO militias. The system was abandoned, however, when Palestinians rebelled against their collaborating leaders so Israel tried new approaches.

Most important was the Muslim Brotherhood (that had roots in Egypt) that later became Hamas in the late 1980s. Israel, at the time, believed traditional Islamic elements were more easily managed than PLO nationalists, would later learn otherwise, and it led to a radically new experiment – the Oslo process. It began secretly with a post-Gulf War weakened PLO, specified no outcome, and let Israel delay, refuse to make concessions, and continue colonizing the Territories. For their part Palestinians renounced armed struggle, recognized Israel's right to exist, agreed to leave major unresolved issues for indefinite later final status talks, and got nothing in return.

Yasser Arafat and his cohorts got what they wanted – a get-out-of-Tunis free pass where they were in exile following the 1982 Lebanon war. They got to come home, take charge of their people and become Israel's enforcer. Interestingly, Cook points out a little known fact. Many high-level Israeli security figures opposed Oslo. They saw it giving Arafat an "internationalist platform" to encourage Palestinian nationalism that might undermine Israel. After Rabin's assassination, it wasn't surprising that the spirit of Oslo died, Arafat became isolated, spent much of the second intifada a prisoner in his Ramallah compound, and died in a Paris hospital in November 2004, the victim of Israeli poisoning with convincing evidence to prove it.

In the meanwhile, Israel scrapped Oslo and tried a new approach – cantonizing Gaza and the West Bank to crush organized resistance and dissolve Palestinian nationalism. It began with checkpoints and curfews. Then it was hardened into forced separation, displacement, willful harassment, land seizures, home demolitions, bypass roads, and state-sponsored violence matching lightly-armed people against the world’s fourth most powerful military with every imaginable weapon at its disposal and no hesitancy using them against civilians.

At the same time, Israel chose a co-optable Mahmoud Abbas over the legitimate Hamas government. Its leaders will only recognize Israel if Palestinians are recognized in return and given an independent homeland inside pre-1967 borders or there’s one state for all Israeli citizens. Israel, of course, refuses, and continues expanding settlements on expropriated land. In addition, with Abbas’ Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza, Israel assures the two sides remain divided and continue fighting each other for control. That’s the strategy to keep Palestinians marginalized and Israel confident that what’s now working in the Territories can be applied advantageously across the region.

That became Bush administration strategy early on with extremist neocons in charge led by Dick Cheney. They knew all along that invading and occupying Iraq would unleash sectarian violence “on an unprecedented scale.” Cook notes that the scheme came out of a 1996 policy paper called “A Clean Break” that was written by key neocons behind the war – David Wurmser, Richard Pearle and Douglas Feith. They predicted that after Saddam fell Iraq would “be ripped apart by the politics of warlords, tribes, clans, sects and key families” because Sunni leadership maintained unity through state repression.

Pre-war, Britain knew it as well, and, in May 2007, a US Senate Intelligence Committee reported that US intelligence documents warned of post-invasion chaos because Iraq is one of the least cohesive Middle East states with rival Sunni, Shia and Kurdish populations. This, however, fits perfectly with the type occupation Washington wants. It also justifies the “war on terror,” and prepares things for the final solution Israel advocates – splitting the country into three mini-states: a Kurdish one in the North, Shias in the South, and Sunnis between them.

Making it work won’t be easy, however, because Iraq’s largest cities have mixed populations. It’s the reason the Pentagon plans to cantonize them Israeli-style by enclosing neighborhoods with barricades and walls and require special IDs for entry. Israel plans the same thing for Lebanon where a large Shia population has been marginalized under the country’s “confessional” system. It allocates public office along religious lines, gives disproportionate power to Christian and Sunni minorities, but Hezbollah is challenging the pro-western government with things so far unresolved.

After the 2006 war, Hezbollah got stronger, Washington supports the Siniora government, and is promoting a “Cedar Revolution” like the “Orange” and “Rose” ones it successfully engineered in Ukraine and Georgia. Assassinations and car bombings are part of the scheme, they’re blamed on Syria without evidence, but a more likely culprit is Mossad that has a long history in the region engineering this type violence. Cook quotes former US counter-terrorism expert, Fred Burton, saying the technology used in Lebanon’s recent assassinations is available only to a few countries – the US, Israel, Britain, France and Russia.

The Pentagon and CIA are also active in “black operations” in Iran, have been for many months, and it’s no secret why. As in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, it’s to create ethnic

tensions throughout the country, promote conflict, and hope it will destabilize the government and force it into a mistake Washington can jump on in response. A Pentagon source told Seymour Hersh that their operatives are working with Azeris in the north, Baluchis in the southeast, Kurds in the northeast, and their own special forces in-country as well. The pot is bubbling, and Iran knows it.

It's a new version of the older colonial "divide and rule" scheme that so far proved ineffective, and Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, thinks he knows what's going on. He says Israel and Washington want to partition Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Syria. If he's right, as seems likely, it means the idea is to change the way colonial powers ruled post-WW I, and Cook challenges it. He believes making it work is "improbable (and) little more than a deluded fantasy." It worked in Yugoslavia, but the Arab world is different.

He concludes his book saying a generation of Washington policy makers have been "captivated" by thinking the Middle East can be remade by "spreading instability and inter-communal strife." Instead, Cook sees a different outcome – new political, religious and social alliances forming across the region. If Washington pursues its "war on terror," he sees continued "war without end" with no victory. After the chaotic Bush years, it's hard disagreeing with him.

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