

U.S. Middle East Policy Following the Midterm Elections

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Robert Satloff is executive director of The Washington Institute, a post he assumed in January 1993.

On January 22, 2007, Washington Institute executive director Robert Satloff addressed the [Seventh Annual Herzliya Conference \(http://www.herzliyaconference.org/Eng/Articles/Article.asp?CategoryID=33&ArticleID=1596\)](http://www.herzliyaconference.org/Eng/Articles/Article.asp?CategoryID=33&ArticleID=1596) on the balance of Israel's national security. These are his remarks.

There are three items on President Bush's agenda, which are Iraq, Iraq, and Iraq -- in that order. Democrats have retaken both houses of Congress. Polls show public support for Bush is low. Yet Bush rejects the central thesis of the Baker report. He has also increased the wager in Iraq and thrown down the gauntlet to Iran. His central message is more and not less. While many attributed a hawkish U.S. foreign policy to the influence of neo-conservatives, now that Douglas Feith, Paul Wolfowitz, and Donald Rumsfeld have left the Pentagon, President Bush has nonetheless upped the ante.

Iran is the second highest issue for the administration and is intimately connected to Iraq. The fact that President Bush explicitly comments on Iran's material support to Iraq' should not be taken lightly. The president's declared mission of the Secretary of State is (1) shoring up Arab support in Iraq and (2) Broader Middle East peace. He does not speak of Arab-Israeli speak. While this has been independently taken up by Condoleezza Rice's office, this has not been advanced at a presidential level.

The freedom agenda was high in the first administration. The fact that Egypt and Saudi Arabia have increased their support in Iraq and have expressed concern against Iran means that they appreciate that the freedom agenda has been lowered a couple of decibels by the administration. Democrats will not deny troops to Iraq, but will put down markers nearer the 2008 campaign. This is the first election since 1952 that there is no incumbent president or vice president on the ticket. The U.S. divisions on Iraq have not translated into divisions over Iran and Israel. Israel needs to prepare for this potential eventuality.

While the Baker Report is dead, it is not dead and buried and relegated to the trash bin of U.S. diplomacy. As a result it can be revived. It is possible that there will be U.S. engagement with Iran and Syria over Iraq in the future. There is not an end to an American era in the Middle East. Just yesterday it was conventional wisdom that the United States was too muscular in the region. Now the conventional wisdom is that the United States is too supine in the region. Arabs are begging for the United States not to leave Iraq and not Iran. The United States is the most active power in the region. The question is how the United States will use that power.

Israel does not realize the enviable position it finds itself in. All Arabs want to talk to Israel. Israel can choose who it speaks to and when it speaks to them.

There is too much fixation on Israel-Saudi diplomatic talks. Moderate Arabs want a change of tune as there is a great convergence of interests. There should not be behind the scenes diplomatic talks between these states. Public diplomacy should take place.

Regarding Iran, the majority of U.S. diplomatic analysis advances deterrence and not prevention. If Israel was not focusing on prevention, the U.S. policy elite would slide into deterrence and the focus would be on Israel and not Iran.

Israel is deeply supported at the popular level in the United States. This is weakening. President Jimmy Carter's recent book, Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid was taken to task by Jews such as Alan Dershowitz, Dennis Ross, and William Cohen. Ten years ago the list would include names such as Jeanne Kirkpatrick, George Schultz, Daniel Patrick Moynahan, Humphreys, and Jackson. The non-evangelical elite's support for Israel is decreasing. ❖

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