

Remarks by Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr.  
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Thank you for this opportunity to share in a dialogue on the key Middle East policy issues. I am honored to participate on the same podium with these three distinguished experts, and to see this level of interest in the audience today. The Middle East Institute of Japan has done me a great service by advertising this event within the Gaimusho. I have found it particularly easy this week to be in touch with my colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and for that I am appreciative.

The global partnership embodied in the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship is well served by close consultation and constructive debate between friends. It is in that spirit that I am pleased to offer some thoughts today on U.S. policy in three key areas in particular, namely the Arab-Israeli peace process; Iraq and the question of Gulf security; and prospects for forward movement between the U.S. and Iran after two decades of mutual estrangement.

It is at times like this, namely the crisis involving Iraq, when the U.S. and Japan need to reaffirm in practice the global nature of their relationship. It is understandable, perhaps, that the Clinton Administration would accord a top priority to its diplomacy with the Security Council permanent member states, the former Gulf War coalition allies and the Arab countries neighboring Iraq. But Japan has a vital interest in the stability of the Gulf and a valued perspective on the challenges of maintaining that stability.

Japan's importance to U.S. global interests, as well as its prospective future role as a permanent member in an expanded U.N. Security Council, means, to this observer at least, that it must be very much "in the loop" of American crisis diplomacy. While I am not privy to all the contacts between Washington and Tokyo, I hope that is the case.

Today, I will summarize my perspectives and invite you to raise specific points for further discussion at the end.

The Arab-Israeli Peace Process

To start with the Arab-Israeli peace process, the recent Wye Plantation accord between Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel and President Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority produced, at the same time, grounds for optimism and grounds for pessimism, depending on one's perspective.

I have spent the past week traveling through the Arabian Gulf and speaking to diplomats, officials, businessmen, journalists and friends. For the most part, they are unhappy with the Wye Accord and pessimistic about the future of the peace process. Among the reasons the pessimists cite are that:

- The Agreement rewards Israel very generously for taking steps that it was (in their view) already obligated to take, and should have taken already, under the Oslo Agreement commitments;
- Mr. Arafat was (they believe) unduly pressured by the U.S. and Israel into the Wye agreement, and had no bargaining power and no choice but to sign.
- Mr. Netanyahu's commitment to the letter and spirit of the accord was immediately brought into question by the Israeli government's delay in ratification and by its failure to prevent new settlement activity around Jerusalem and in the West Bank which, many observers firmly believe, violates not only U.N. Resolutions and the Oslo Agreement, but the Wye Agreement itself. Since many Jewish settlements are without tenants, there is a perception that these new settlements are politically and ideologically motivated, and not a practical response to a housing shortage as some in Israel have claimed.
- There is also a sense among Gulf pessimists that President Clinton, having devoted an unprecedented nine days to the Wye Plantation negotiations at a time when he was trying to deflect bad publicity from his scandal, did not, in the end, move the process very far forward. Their concern is that Mr. Clinton may not be prepared to commit still more time and political capital in 1999, when the five-year Oslo transition period draws to a close and the Palestinian side measures the progress, or lack of progress, on the final status issues such as Jerusalem.
- To this list of pessimistic views one can add unhappiness that economic conditions for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza have worsened during the tenure of Prime Minister Netanyahu, and many Palestinians find their freedom of movement, access to water, and employment opportunities in Israel reduced.
- Finally, there are the evident health concerns surrounding both Mr. Arafat and King Hussein, causing many to wonder how the peace process can survive the passing of one or more key participants, particularly in the present climate of extremism, fear and recrimination.

So there is a considerable amount of negative feeling in the Arabian Gulf in the aftermath of the Wye Agreement. There is, of course, an alternative perspective, an optimistic view, which I attempted to illuminate in my interviews with Arab journalists in recent days. The more positive outlook includes the following considerations:

- First, after nearly two years of stalemate and tension in the peace process following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the conservative government of Prime Minister Netanyahu has taken an historic step away from right wing Zionist ideology and conceded the principle that it is legitimate for Israel to exchange land for peace — even the biblical land the conservatives call *Eretz Israel*.
- Second, the reaction of the Israeli public to the Wye Agreement has shown that Mr. Netanyahu's peace diplomacy enjoys wide support in the center and left of the political spectrum; by one poll, 72 percent of the Israeli people favor this agreement, and large pro-peace demonstrations last week in Israel underscored this reality.
- Third, while Arab public opinion has been critical of the Israeli demand for a change in the Palestinians' Charter, to eliminate language that calls for the destruction of Israel, there is a "silver lining" for the optimists here: the right-wing of the Israeli political spectrum is implicitly recognizing the legitimacy of the Palestine National Council as an authoritative representative political entity. Otherwise, they would not bother to seek PNC action to amend the Charter.
- Finally, on the positive side, President Clinton has shown, for the first time since the Netanyahu Government came into office, a serious willingness to commit his personal prestige to obtain results. For many observers, this is a welcome change from Mr. Clinton's previous reticence to press Mr. Netanyahu very hard for fear of a domestic political backlash in the U.S. It is an irony that the recent presidential scandal seems to have liberated Mr. Clinton to show more dedication and political courage in his conduct of foreign policy, at least in this area.

So those are the pessimistic and optimistic perspectives on the Wye Agreement; you may have others. Prime Minister Netanyahu has made Mr. Yasser Arafat's performance the pivotal issue in the ratification and implementation phase now underway in Israel. My own judgment is that Mr. Netanyahu himself, not Arafat, is the key player right now, and he faces a fundamental choice.

Netanyahu rose to power by virtue of being deeply connected, and

committed, to ultra-conservative policies and politicians — people who have vowed never to give the biblical lands of Israel away and who have stridently rejected the Oslo Agreement from the very beginning. Yet now the Prime Minister, under pressure from the United States, has broken with his ideological roots by embracing PLO leader Yasser Arafat as his partner and conceding to Palestinian control additional land in the West Bank.

Mr. Netanyahu now knows, if he did not before, that he can capture the support of a solid majority in Israel if he moves politically toward the center. For him to do so, however, would be to repudiate his political heritage and turn the ultra-conservative elements in Israel against him with a vengeance — not an appealing prospect at a time when Israel is still remembering the loss of Yitzhak Rabin to an extremist's bullet.

Watching Mr. Netanyahu in recent days trying to placate the conservatives in his government without repudiating Israel's Wye Agreement commitments, one can sympathize with his plight as he tries to have it both ways. The suicide bomb attack last week and other disturbances have only made this balancing act more tenuous for the Prime Minister.

However, this is not a choice that can be avoided for much longer. Mr. Netanyahu's now-familiar pattern of migrating between his commitments to the White House and his commitments to opponents of the Madrid process within his governing coalition is not a recipe for security in Israel, which is the 'bottom line' of the whole endeavor.

Assuming that Israel's Knesset ratifies its commitments under the Wye Agreement next Monday and carries them out, major issues will still remain to be addressed, and soon. Mr. Arafat will need to demonstrate by May 1999 that he has delivered the benefits promised to the Palestinians in the Oslo Agreement. His expanding law enforcement obligations within the Palestinian community will be successful only to the extent that Palestinians believe the overall bargain with Israel serves their interests. Otherwise, we could see a new and dangerous round of instability, a second *intifada*, if you will.

As for the United States, one has to wonder whether this White House — now very much thinking ahead to Vice President Gore's aspirations in the year 2000 Presidential election — will show continued fortitude in pressing Israel to live up to its share of the Oslo bargain, should the Netanyahu government continue to exhibit such ambivalence.

In sum, despite the breakthrough achievement of the Wye Agreement, the pessimists' viewpoint must be taken seriously. The road ahead is treacherous, and

this is the time when the international community should be extending support to those on both sides with the courage to make peace.

### Iraq

Now let me turn to Iraq. Traveling through the Gulf in recent days I had a sense of *deja vu*, since the Iraqis also created a crisis in November of last year, refusing to allow the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) access to Presidential "palace" sites where proscribed weapons materials were believed to be located. The imminent use of force against Iraq, mainly by the United States, was averted in February 1998 through the mediation of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Today we have a similar crisis, precipitated when Iraq refused on August 5 to permit any more challenge inspections by UNSCOM, and compounded by Iraq's announcement on October 31 that it has terminated all cooperation with UNSCOM, although weapons monitoring cameras were permitted to continue operating.

While Arab opinion in the Gulf has not changed much over the past year, from one crisis to the next, I am persuaded that U.S. policy today has undergone a substantial revision since the denouement of the last crisis in February. It is no secret that until very recently, the United States was becoming painfully isolated within the U.N. Security Council on the issue of whether to maintain sanctions on Iraq.

The propensity of the U.S. to mobilize warplanes, ships and troops from around the world whenever the Iraqi regime created a crisis during the 1990s was steadily eroding Arab and international support for the U.S. role in containing Iraqi aggression. Americans were perceived in the Arab world as waging war on the Iraqi people, whose suffering became a major international concern. Moreover, each U.S. show of force seemed to make Saddam Hussein appear stronger, standing up to the world's superpower.

The visibility of American forces on the Arabian peninsula was becoming a domestic political liability for both the Americans and the Saudis in the face of dissident movements who conducted truck bomb attacks on U.S. facilities in Riyadh and Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996, respectively.

It became very costly for the U.S. to maintain so many forces at a high operational tempo in the Gulf region — costly both in budgetary terms and in terms of lower re-enlistment rates among our fighting forces and pilots who have been serving in these temporary deployments to the Gulf.

So when the UNSCOM inspector Mr. Scott Ritter, a former U.S. Marine, resigned in protest in early August, and accused the Clinton Administration of canceling important challenge inspections by UNSCOM, the Administration acknowledged that a policy shift had indeed occurred in recent months.

The new U.S. approach has been termed by critics, perhaps unfairly, as “substituting deterrence for containment” — in other words, pulling back from unannounced, intrusive U.N. inspections, thereby avoiding sudden confrontations, and instead making clear that responsibility for lifting U.N. sanctions rests with Iraq, and that the U.S. is prepared to wait for as long as it takes until Iraq complies with U.N. Resolutions.

Since August, it is apparent that the Clinton Administration’s goal of achieving a broad consensus policy within the Security Council has been successful; recent resolutions on Iraq have been unanimous. Until this week, the U.S. had also stabilized its military presence in the Gulf, maintaining sufficient force along with allies to contain Iraq, but keeping a lower profile.

Adding to this, the oil-for-food program administered by the U.N. is thought by many observers to have raised the level of nutrition and medicine available to the Iraqi people. While evidence still exists of suffering, many believe that the Iraqi government is responsible for allowing this to occur. The Baghdad government apparently finds it convenient to project the image of a society victimized by foreign powers led by the U.S.

So there has been in 1998 a revision in the U.S. approach to Iraq, one which moved away from the hair-trigger brink of military confrontation, addressed the humanitarian issue, and achieved renewed consensus among the nations whose Security Council votes control the future of the sanctions. To these pressures on Baghdad one could add the congressionally-mandated Radio Iraq broadcasts and budgetary appropriations for the Iraqi resistance, both of which commenced in recent days.

Unwilling to address UNSCOM’s remaining concerns over its suspected supply of prohibited weapons, lacking any effective military options, faced with a more united and less sympathetic Security Council, frustrated by Washington’s new policy approach that is less vulnerable to Iraqi manipulation, and seeing no near-term prospect of having the sanctions lifted, Iraq did what it has done several times before in such situations — it engineered yet another crisis.

By showing no interest in negotiating the resumption of UNSCOM’s mission, Iraq has directly challenged the new U.S. policy by forcing Washington to carry out its traditional role of backing up the United Nations’ diplomatic efforts

with a credible threat of force.

As a justification for its suspension of cooperation with UNSCOM, Iraq has alleged that the U.S. is unfairly expanding the requirements it must meet before the sanctions can be lifted — in the phrase heard most often, it is not giving the Baghdad regime any prospect of “light at the end of the tunnel.” This issue arose in the “comprehensive review” that UNSCOM Commissioner Richard Butler had been negotiating with Iraq in recent weeks, as a roadmap to completing the arms control process.

It is true that the Clinton Administration has pushed for fulfillment of all Gulf War related U.N. Resolutions by Iraq as a condition for lifting sanctions, whereas many other countries cite paragraph 22 of Security Council Resolution 687 which ties the sanctions explicitly to curbing of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction. The Clinton Administration has exhibited an understandable reluctance to give Iraq’s oil income directly to Saddam Hussein.

In so doing, the U.S. has suffered criticism in the Arab world that U.N. Resolutions governing Israel’s past actions have gone unfulfilled for years with no American sanctions or threat of force. Resolution 425 of 1978, requiring Israel to remove its forces from Lebanon, is often cited by Arab observers as proof of a “double standard” in U.S. policy.

So we can see that the Baghdad regime has been trying to turn a losing situation into something more favorable by attempting to shine the spotlight on the Americans and trying to turn international pressure in the other direction. But Iraq’s histrionics must not obscure our vision from the core issue that the U.N. has placed before it: namely, its own failure, to date, to resolve the very serious remaining issues in its accounting of weapons of mass destruction.

UNSCOM’s periodic reports of major discrepancies and deceptions in Iraq’s representations, as well as Mr. Ritter’s own allegations of a top-level weapons concealment program by Saddam Hussein’s regime since 1991, obligate the international community to consider the security implications and respond appropriately. Nowhere does this burden fall more heavily in the post-Cold War era than the United States.

In my opinion, President Clinton has been far more reluctant to use force in the current crisis than he was last February, reflecting the lessons learned from previous Iraqi crises. Yet he has recognized that without a truly credible threat of force, Baghdad will not budge, and UNSCOM’s utility will be all but ended. While the political cost of attacking Iraq may be high, this President has shown, in Bosnia and Haiti as well as Iraq, that he is unwilling to be put in the position of

having made an empty threat.

Indeed, I will venture today to say that Iraq's effort to destabilize this successful new American approach of recent months may have been too clever. I would expect that the President and his national security team are resentful that the U.S. must endure yet again the negative public perceptions in the Arab world, and expend the military and budgetary resources of this latest buildup in the Gulf. This was not supposed to happen under the new policy.

Since the Iraqi regime has forced the issue to a choice between letting Saddam Hussein keep a small arsenal of weapons of mass destruction or launching a military operation against the regime, I believe the U.S. will go forward with the military campaign. This time, however, the Americans are likely to forego symbolism and hit Saddam Hussein's power base hard enough to shake up the equation inside Iraq. President Clinton does not want to be remembered for letting the Iraqi dictator escape his U.N. obligations and resurrect his power to threaten the region. Rather, he and Vice President Gore want their Administration's legacy to be one of strength and resolve in the face of this dangerous challenge. If Iraq's leaders can say that they have had enough of the *status quo*, so have the Americans.

But should force be used, it is necessary to be clear on what Iraq is being compelled to do. Should we go back to the Scott Ritter-type challenge inspections, in order to locate the regime's concealed cache of weapons of mass destruction? Or, consistent with the modified U.S. approach of recent months, do we simply want routine UNSCOM operations to be resumed, despite the evident shortcomings of that accounting process? Alternatively, if there are to be no further intrusive U.N. arms control measures in Iraq, what dangers are posed by Iraq's potential ability to assemble a small number of missiles and warheads without detection — and what should be done about it? Finally, if UNSCOM's role is discontinued, on what basis should the sanctions be maintained or lifted?

In the end, it is necessary to think about a strategy for the longer-term containment of Iraq, under Saddam Hussein or a successor regime, in which there can be no guarantee that every missile or every warhead has been removed, accounted for or even detected. The price of perpetuating an unstable situation with Iraq in which the perceived legitimacy of the United Nations legal machinery and the acceptability of U.S. military power are both at risk suggests the need for new thinking about a more permanent policy approach that will keep the region secure and the international community united.

## Iran

Finally, I would like to make a few observations about U.S. policy on Iran. It is quite apparent that President Khatemi, with his gracious words about American society and history, has helped to overcome nearly two decades of animosity and hard feelings among Americans. Mr. Khatemi's historic CNN interview last January implied a desire to see both Iran and the United States look to a future in which tensions between the two were resolved.

In the intervening months, the U.S. has taken several steps to reciprocate this overture from Iran. Policy experts have exchanged visits, as have sports teams. President Clinton agreed at the G-7 summit in London to waive sanctions on European Union companies investing in Iran's petroleum sector. Secretary of State Albright, in May of this year, suggested that the two countries structure a "roadmap" toward better relations. Throughout, the U.S. has offered to enter an official dialogue with Iran.

Having made all of these reciprocal gestures, U.S. policy officials harbored more than a little anticipation when President Khatemi and Foreign Minister Kharrazi traveled to New York in September for the U.N. General Assembly. Mr. Khatemi's speech, however, went no further than his previous statements. He did not take up the idea of a roadmap, or point to any specific avenue for further progress in bilateral relations. The centerpiece of his address was a call for the United Nations to initiate a "dialogue of civilizations" at the turn of the century.

Foreign Minister Kharrazi followed up with a speech to the Asia Society in which he left it to the United States to unfreeze Iranian assets held since the revolution in 1979 as a precondition for any forward movement by Iran. He declined to attend an 8-way meeting on Afghanistan in which Mrs. Albright was participating, sending his deputy instead.

The absence of forward movement resulting from President Khatemi's New York visit left U.S. officials somewhat immobilized. Mr. Khatemi's criticisms of U.S. policy were diplomatically phrased rather than vitriolic, so there was no inclination to react negatively. Yet his positive words gave no further momentum to the thaw in relations between the two countries. Lacking any basis for additional U.S. steps vis-a-vis Iran, you saw very little reaction from Washington.

More than a month later, we can see that an internal political process is taking place in Iran, in which opponents of President Khatemi's more moderate approaches are making a show of strength. Specifically, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is clearly raising his profile on foreign policy issues at the expense of Mr. Khatemi's position.

This is evident in Afghanistan. In response to the mistreatment of Iranian journalists in Afghanistan, President Khatemi undertook a diplomatic effort to resolve tensions. Yet Ayatollah Ali Khamenei overrode that initiative by deploying 200,000 Iranian troops to the Afghan border, signaling his strength not only to the Taliban, but to the political class in Teheran.

Khamenei has also denounced Yasser Arafat for his peace diplomacy with Israel, and last week was accused by the Palestinian Authority Police Chief of providing direct support to Hamas extremists planning violent disruptions in and around Israel. Viewed in conjunction with the Lebanese Hezbollah chief's recent call for Mr. Arafat to go the same way as did Egypt's peace-maker Anwar Sadat, it is painfully apparent that Iran's Supreme Leader is even less enthusiastic about Palestinian democracy than he is about Iran's own electoral results.

As if any further embellishment were needed, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei recently commemorated the one-thousandth Friday prayer since the seizing of the U.S. Embassy in 1979 by delivering a strident and outright hostile diatribe against America. He made no secret of his belief that a policy hatred of the United States has served Iran well. All told, this hardly sets the stage for Iran to lead a dialogue between civilizations.

Of course, we all recognize that there is an internal struggle underway in Iran to determine the future course of this important country. I would expect Washington to keep its voice low and hope that the public sentiments that brought Mr. Khatemi into office will continue to assert themselves in the months and years to come. A lot is at stake in the Middle East, depending on Iran's future character.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, compared to one year ago, U.S. policy in the Middle East has undergone a considerable shift. No longer do we see the Clinton Administration clinging rather forlornly to the Oslo Accords, staring at the empty chairs at the Doha Economic Conference while the Netanyahu government plays to its right wing, resisting diplomacy and taking inflammatory unilateral measures on the ground.

No more is the Administration isolated in the international community on the issue of Iraq, driven by domestic political impulses at the expense of sound strategic considerations.

Gone is the political bidding war between President Clinton in the White House and Republican legislators in Congress to erect the most punitive sanctions

on Iran. Indeed, in the wake of defeat in the November 3 U.S. election, gone is the chief sponsor of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), Senator Alfonse D'Amato of New York. The words "dual containment" are no longer heard in Washington policy circles.

My conclusion is that the United States is making real strides in bringing its Middle East policy approaches up to date, and shows the potential for regaining the influence that has been slipping away in the Gulf since Mr. Clinton first took office. This is indeed a time for strategic partners such as the U.S. and Japan to put their heads together and chart a course that will serve our shared interests in peace, stability, prosperity and justice for all in that sensitive and volatile region.

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