

# The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events  
impacting the world's financial markets*

Mark L. Melcher  
Publisher  
[melcher@thepoliticalforum.com](mailto:melcher@thepoliticalforum.com)

Stephen R. Soukup  
Senior Editor  
[soukup@thepoliticalforum.com](mailto:soukup@thepoliticalforum.com)

Friday, June 17, 2005

## **A REPRINT FROM A PIECE PUBLISHED OCTOBER 18, 2000**

### **'NO WAR, NO PEACE' MAY BE THE BEST OF ALL WORLDS**

**Mark L. Melcher  
Stephen R. Soukup**

The big news is, of course, trouble in the Middle East, so I thought I would offer a few observations on the subject this week. For starters, I have concluded, after watching gaggles of experts and reading swarms of editorials and news stories on the subject over the past several days, that I am quite optimistic in comparison to what appears to be the conventional wisdom.

It should go without saying that I am as disturbed as anyone else over the recent bloodshed in the Middle East. But let me say it anyway. I am as disturbed as anyone else over the recent bloodshed in the Middle East. But unlike so many prominent experts and pundits, I don't think a failure of the talks between Barak, Arafat, and Clinton would necessarily mean that the Middle East is going to descend immediately into "Chaos and old Night," to borrow a phrase from Milton.

In fact, I believe that one of the best things that could happen is if the major players in the region, most especially the United States, would finally drop the belief that a formal peace accord between Israel and its neighbors is possible, likely, and desirable, and concentrate instead on formulating a practical plan under which each side could live without open warfare.

Years and years and years of insistence by American presidents from both parties that Israel give up land that is crucial to its security needs in exchange for chimerical promises of peace from its neighbors have, in my opinion, had the predictable effect of weakening Israel and thus feeding the dangerous dreams of its enemies that they can destroy the Jewish state.

I believe that another war between Israel and its enemies is inevitable if this nonsense doesn't stop, and no matter how nice a Nobel peace prize would look in a presidential library that will have few honors of any sort, such a prize, in my opinion, isn't worth the price of a war in the Middle East.

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Subscriptions to The Political Forum are available by contacting:  
The Political Forum

8563 Senedo Rd., Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842  
Tel 540-477-9762, Fax 540-477-3359, Email [melcher@thepoliticalforum.com](mailto:melcher@thepoliticalforum.com),  
or visit us at [www.thepoliticalforum.com](http://www.thepoliticalforum.com)

To put this another way, I think there is a good chance that the recent dashing of hopes for a formal peace accord could lead to a much more realistic approach to stability in the region, based on the doctrine that I have always described as "No war, No Peace."

This doctrine, which I remember as being conventional wisdom prior to the Camp David accords, is based on the belief that the key to avoiding open warfare between Israel and its neighbors is to keep Israel strong enough militarily to discourage any efforts by its enemies to destroy it.

A corollary to this theory is that attempts to force the parties into formal peace agreements actually aggravate the situation, by riling the Arab masses, weakening the positions of the Arab leaders who are being asked to sign such agreements, and eventually weakening Israel's strategic position.

I am not questioning here the intentions of most of the American presidents, beginning with Eisenhower, who have ventured into this arena since the formation of Israel in the aftermath of World War II. But I would refer to what Archbishop, poet, and philologist Richard Chenevix Trench once called the "queen of all proverbs," namely that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions."

And I would refer those who are interested in pursuing how this phrase operates in the modern world of foreign policy to the great contemporary American philosopher Eric Voegelin's wonderful study of modern liberal thought, *The New Science of Politics*. To understand the following quote from that great 1952 classic, it is necessary to understand that Voegelin uses the adjective "Gnostic" to describe the philosophy of modern day liberalism.

In the Gnostic dream world . . . nonrecognition of reality is the first principle. As a consequence, types of action which in the real world would be considered as morally insane because of the real effects which they have will be considered moral in the dream world because they intended an entirely different effect. The gap between intended and real effect will be imputed not to the Gnostic immorality of ignoring the structure of reality but to the immorality of some other person or society that does not behave as it should behave according to the dream conception of cause and effect. The interpretation of moral insanity as morality, and of the virtues of sophia [wisdom] and prudentia [practical wisdom, or prudence] as immortality, is a confusion difficult to unravel. And the task is not facilitated by the readiness of the dreamers to stigmatize the attempt at critical clarification as an immoral enterprise . . .

Gnostic politics is self-defeating in the sense that measures which are intended to establish peace increase the disturbances that will lead to war . . . If an incipient disturbance of the balance is not met by appropriate political action in the world of reality, if instead it is met with magic incantations, it may grow to such proportions that war becomes inevitable. The model case is the rise of the National Socialist movement to power, first in Germany, then on the continental scale, with the Gnostic chorus wailing its moral indignation at such barbarian and reactionary doings in the progressive world--without however raising a finger to repress the rising force by a minor political effort in proper time . . . These policies were pursued as a matter of principle, on the

basis of Gnostic dream assumptions about the nature of man, about a mysterious evolution of mankind toward peace and world order, about the possibility of establishing an international order in the abstract without relation to the structure of the field of existential forces, about armies being the cause of war and not the forces and constellations which build them and set them into motion, etc.

In short, I think there is a good chance that the "real world" will finally impose itself on the "dream world" of the "peace negotiators." And I think, in the final analysis, this will be a good thing, since the dream world was becoming increasingly dangerous, in perfect accord with Voegelin's observations about such worlds.

Needless to say, the real world is not pretty either. But I can't help but think that everyone will be better off if all parties (once again, particularly the United States) wake up and smell the following roses.

● That Israel is smaller than either New Hampshire or Vermont. On most world maps, it is too small to have its six-letter name written within it. Its population is approximately six million. It is surrounded by nations with combined land masses of millions of square miles and with greater combined populations than the United States. And most of these countries, at one time or another, in one way or another, with guns, tanks, terrorists, or oil money have tried to destroy it.

● That the majority of the citizens in each of these nations still hate Israel, long for its destruction, and would look with extreme disfavor upon any leader who endorsed the Jewish state's right to exist, unless that endorsement were seen as a strategic move in a long-term plan to destroy it.

● That each of these nations contain large and well financed groups of terrorists who are devoted to the destruction of Israel and the killing of Jews, who are answerable to no government, and don't give a whit what any government thinks of them or their goals.

● That Syria, which is run by the son of as big a butcher as Saddam Hussein, a son whose intentions and character are still largely unknown, is nine times as big as Israel with three times as many people.

● That Iraq, where Saddam still rules, is 20 times as big as Israel with even more people than Syria.

● That Iran, which is ruled by religious fanatics desperately opposed to Israel's existence, is 80 times larger than Israel with almost 12 times as many people.

● That the moderate government of Egypt, Israel's largest and most powerful neighbor, is in deep political trouble, under fire from powerful radical elements within that are implacably dedicated to the destruction of Israel.

● That because of all this Israel has no room, zero room, for error.

o And finally, that should Israel actually fall to its enemies, as many in the Arabs and Iranians believe is likely, and which no reasonable person can discount entirely, the region, along with its considerable oil supplies, would most likely look like a wasteland the following morning, given that Israel has nuclear weapons and would most likely use them in a last ditch effort to save its statehood.

It is this latter truth that gives me some confidence that things will calm down in the region in the near term, regardless of how the on-going talks turn out. When the so-called "peace process" brought Israel and Arafat's Palestinians to a state of near war last week, this process began to look increasingly less interesting to virtually everyone. This includes, I would bet, the region's major oil producers, as well as Arafat himself, whose chance for a Palestinian state couldn't survive a military dust up with Israel that lasted very long.

Bill Clinton, who is desperate to leave a foreign policy legacy of some sort, and Russia's Vladimir Putin, who would love to fish in troubled waters anywhere, would appear to be the only two persons left in the world who are enthusiastic about "talks." Fox News reported last week that Bill was so intent on winning the Nobel Peace Prize that he had members of his administration contact at least two Norwegian public-relations executives and one member of the Norwegian parliament in an attempt to win him the prize, a move that is considered in Norway to be an unprecedented breach of both ethics and good taste.

In the long run, I believe that Israel's existence, and by extension, reasonable stability between it and its neighbors, will depend, just as it has in the past, on that nation's overwhelming military strength and the believability of America's commitment to defend it should the need arise. Should either of these ever wane, that would be the time, I believe, to sell the SUV.

I have no way of knowing whether Israel's military will continue to dominate the region. But I must say that I think American supporters of the Jewish state should be concerned about whether the special relationship that it has enjoyed with United States since its inception will continue through the next decade.

This is, I know, a controversial view. But one need not be a political guru to recognize the growing clout of the Arab-American lobby, and the skill with which its leaders have wielded that strength in the halls of Congress and in the Clinton White House.

Among others, Jim Zogby, the founder and President of the Arab-American Institute, is not only one of the most vociferous and effective critics of Israel in the entire nation, but he is also a consultant to the Gore campaign and a frequent visitor to the Clinton White House.

Anyone who believes that an oversight was responsible for Mrs. Clinton's call for a Palestinian state, her embrace of Suha Arafat, her silence when Mrs. Arafat insulted Israel, and her husband's administration's recent refusal to veto a U. N. resolution condemning Israel, is not paying attention to the growing importance of the Arab-American community in the electoral process, or to the equally impressive growth in the effectiveness of the political leadership of that community.

This can be contrasted, I believe, with substantial disagreement among American Jews not only as to course that Israel should be following but whether the course it has followed in recent years is even defensible. There is even widespread confusion in the American Jewish community, as far as I can tell, about whether American politicians who openly court people who are openly antagonistic to the interests of Israel can be considered to be antagonistic to Israel themselves.

Time will tell how all of this turns out. As the process continues, I would advise keeping in mind the following additional thoughts on the subject from Eric Voegelin.

Gnostic societies and their leaders will recognize dangers to their existence when they develop, but such dangers will not be met by appropriate actions in the world of reality. They will rather be met by magic operations in the dream world, such as disapproval, moral condemnation, declarations of intention, resolutions, appeals to the opinion of mankind, branding of enemies as aggressors, outlawing of war, propaganda for world peace and world government, etc. The intellectual and moral corruption which expresses itself in the aggregate of such magic operations may pervade a society with the weird, ghostly atmosphere of a lunatic asylum.

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