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LETTER TO A LIBERAL AMERICAN FRIEND

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[Editor's Note: Former M.K. Yoash Tsiddon-Chatto, one of the founders of the Tsomet party, is one of the principal spokesmen for those Israelis who see territorial concessions for peace as dangerous. Here he presents a strong statement of that position in the form of a letter to a fictional American friend holding the opposite position.]

Dear Friend,

I accept your challenge and shall attempt to answer your incisive queries with friendship and appreciation for your interest. But, please bear with me.

From my experience with acquaintances who are not thoroughly familiar with the Middle East as well as my experience as a member of the Israel delegation to the Madrid talks, I learned that in order to get a good grasp of the subject, one has to steer away from Western, Cartesian logic. In the maze of the Middle East, where the Western fashion of thought is practically unknown, one has to eye the problems from a different perspective.

Who Won the Gulf War?

At the conclusion of the Gulf War, when President Bush held an exuberant victory parade in New York, Saddam Hussein held an exuberant victory parade in Baghdad at the same time. He even made sure that CNN was there to spread his words and the image he portrayed across the Islamic world. The U.S. and some of its allies certainly did win the battle, but did they win the war?

Bush's true war aim was to dispose of Saddam Hussein and his regime, preferably by proxy. He did not achieve this aim. Saddam Hussein's war aim was to survive the onslaught of the mightiest power on earth and live to tell the tale to the Islamic world. He did. He not only survived, but has been able to restore his "warrior's honor" in the eyes of the Moslem world, through a twist of Middle Eastern psychology, by killing more thousands (Shi'ites and Kurds) than were killed in Hiroshima or Nagasaki, while the mighty U.S. looked on. Saddam continues to assert himself by delaying and frustrating the U.N. effort to disarm

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Iraq of its unconventional weapons potential. He has thus turned the world's judgment into a mockery and keeps on challenging the world, even continuing to claim Kuwait. So who won the war?

America Misreads the Map

Bush is not the only American to misread the map of the Middle East and take the wrong path. Since the U.S. took over from the British in the Middle East at the beginning of the 1950s, there have been numerous controversial episodes where U.S. actions appeared counterproductive to U.S. interests in the area.

The Baghdad Pact of the early 1950s was supposed to result in a U.S.-Moslem NATO-like defense of the Southern Tier, whose mission was to contain the Soviet Union. The U.S., Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan were to be the major members, supported by other Arab nations, but after lengthy U.S. efforts the outcome was nil.

While the U.S. was out forging the Baghdad Pact, Ben-Gurion lived with the nightmare of a close U.S.-Islamic rapprochement cutting Israel off from its natural Western "hinterland." He tried to balance the situation by proposing a parallel U.S.-Israel alliance. Israel was to permit the establishment of a large U.S. Air Force base to harbor the then-new, six-engine B-47 bombers. At that time, flight refueling was more of a stunt than an operational routine, and the U.S. needed a base close enough to reach the Soviet Union. The work on constructing the extra-long runway (which Israeli Air Force pilots were not to use even for emergency landings) was started, but the U.S. declined to become involved with Israel and chose to stay with the more remote but "safe" Wheelus Air Force Base in Libya. How many years ago were the Americans forced out of Wheelus and how are U.S.-Libyan relations today?

Then came the major U.S.-Iranian connection. Where is Iran today? Then came Iraq's turn, which was to be lured into the Western camp with loan guarantees, technology transfers, and even U.S. tolerance of its toying with nuclear fire.

What is the systematic error that the U.S. commits which results in such consistent failures in the Middle East? As in Central and South America some time ago, in the Middle East the U.S. has pursued a policy of association with the darkest regimes of medieval dictators and anachronistic rulers.

U.S. reasoning has been similar to that of a short-sighted corporation which, hard pressed to present a positive yearly balance sheet, drops all expenditure on future marketing, strategy and planning. Apart from

the Lawrence of Arabia-like fascination with the "Arab desert warriors" which it inherited from its British predecessors in the area, the U.S. would rather strike short-term deals than promote democracy. Their reasoning is based on a certain realism: the Arabs and Iran sit atop about 66 percent of the world's known oil reserves. Black gold flows west, yellow gold flows east, from where it returns west in exchange for goods and services — mainly advanced weaponry. Whatever color the gold, profits are made at each stage and profits forge pro-profit opinions.

Arming Islamic Dictators Threatens Israel

The peaceful, harmonious co-existence of the democratic West with the totalitarian Islamic Middle East, whose arms the West provides in exchange for oil, could be materially, if not morally, justified on grounds of economic interests, were it not for the nagging Israeli security problems it creates. To counter Israel's security claims, Israel is represented as the mean spoiler of the game in the area, a position which ignores the West's own security interests, interests that become more and more apparent with the Gulf War and the discoveries, or rather uncoveries, that followed it, as well as with the emergence of virulently anti-Western Islamic fundamentalism. Evidence of these threats to Western security is amply documented, for instance, in the U.S. House of Representatives Republican Task Force Report on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare of February-March 1992. This report, unfortunately, is not classified. Therefore, its findings could not be leaked to stir interest. The conclusion: the U.S. had been surprised by Iraq. Needless to say, had the U.S. heeded Israeli intelligence, there would not have been so many surprises, but the U.S. was, again, sure it knew better.

There seems to be a basic lack of communication and understanding between the West and the Islamic Middle East. Otherwise, how could one explain U.S. Ambassador April Giles' words in July 1990? Or how could one explain the fact that on August 1, 1990, Saddam Hussein was, in the eyes of the U.S. administration, a friend to be trusted; Assad of Syria was a Soviet puppet and the terrorist of Beirut and Lockerbie fame; King Hussein was a pro-Western, moderate ruler; and Arafat was a repentant sinner. Yet only 24 hours later Saddam became the bitter enemy, Assad a friend to be hugged by Baker, Hussein a vile cheat and traitor to the West, and Arafat, the old Arafat again.

How come the democratic West is so openly happy that the Algerian armed forces, by means of a bloody, anti-democratic putsch, prevented the democratically-

elected Islamic fundamentalists from taking charge of that country's government?

The Conservative Islamic Political Culture

The retelling of these many episodes only serves to reinforce the conclusion that in the Middle East, where fiction and facts mingle freely, with fiction taking precedence, norms and ethics are totally different from those of the West. Western notions cannot be applied where the conservative Islamic political culture prevails, whether wearing the Ba'athist uniform or the fundamentalist *jallabiah*.

This is a reality with deep roots in the past. Unlike the teachings of tolerance of the Judeo-Christian civilization, Islam is inherently militant and aggressively expansionist by definition. It divides the world in two: *Ard-el-Salaam* (the Country of Peace) consisting of the Moslem countries and *Ard-el-Harb* (the Country of War) consisting of the non-Moslem countries destined to be conquered by *jihad* — holy war. Islam defines the status of Christians and Jews as *dhimmis* — "protected inferiors," whose degree of protection, for them a matter of life and death, is left to the local ruler to negotiate in exchange for extra taxation, better known as extortion. (Pagans and animists fare even worse under classic Islam.)

The mix of regressive, militant Islamic teachings with dictatorships and medieval monarchies, with oil wealth, with (mainly Western) mindless, nay, criminal access to nuclear technology, and with the fiercely revanchist post-colonialist culture, norms and ethics, is producing the most dangerously explosive political combination of the post-Cold War era. The Evil Empire's place may be taken by a pan-Islamic antagonist which has, in fact, more leverage on the West than the Soviets ever had, including terror, economic blackmail (remember the 1973 oil crisis?), buy-outs (pure and simple), and a nuclear threat.

Primordial Necessities for Israel

Well-meaning Americans warn Israelis of the harm that Israel's policies are causing with respect to American public opinion as well as the (already hostile) American Administration, the harm those policies do to its own youth, and the potential harm they do to the peace process itself. These "harm factors" are very important, yet certain primordial necessities must be dealt with first, as top priority, with their possible harmful side effects addressed to the best of our capability without their impairing the satisfaction of those primordial necessities.

First of all, whether the survival of the Jews as a nation is viewed as important or not, whether Zionism is right or wrong, the fact is that 4.2 million Jews presently live in Israel. They deserve, like everybody else, security, prosperity, and quality of life. Their security is constantly challenged by overwhelming pan-Arab or even pan-Islamic aggressive forces. To compromise on the security of Israel's Jews, in the Middle Eastern environment described above, is to court a second Holocaust.

Given the enormous political, religious, economic, cultural and civilizational gaps between Jews and Arabs, given the *jihad*-inspired, fiercely aggressive, religious-political mentality and practice of the Arabs, given the Arabs' enormous economic and numerical superiority as well as their international politico-economic appeal, a stable peace (or a non-shooting situation — "a poor man's peace") may be achieved only by a primarily military balance of power where the respective aggressive motivations are also weighed, as was the case in U.S./ex-U.S.S.R. relations.

The logic that applied to the U.S. expenditure of \$11 trillion (approximately \$45 trillion in current dollars) between 1948 and 1992 in order to maintain a balance of power with the Communist bloc that ensured peace, applies to the Israeli-Arab conflict as well, downscaled for size and upscaled again for intensity, territorial and numerical disproportion, and the geographical proximity of the parties. There are no oceans between Israel and those threatening it, and no territories that may be traded for time, a tactic adopted by the Russians since Napoleon Bonaparte. Nor is there any time available either: Israel's potential enemies are a few miles away from its population centers and Israel needs some 48 hours to mobilize its armed forces, the vast majority of which are reservists.

It is no coincidence that one speaks of building a country the way one speaks of constructing a building. A building's safety must, *by law*, be over-designed. Its foundations and walls are oversized to anticipate imponderables such as miscalculation, faulty materials, gales, floods and earthquakes. The same logic applies to building a country. Being "overly" cautious may increase the cost and time of building, but compromising safety for the sake of cost, time or public relations may prove to be catastrophic, especially in the Middle East where history's shifting sands, gales, floods and earthquakes are the rule rather than the exception.

Diplomatic ambiguities, whose purpose is to expedite (paper over) agreements, carry within themselves the seeds of war. The Balfour Declaration of 1917,

endorsed by the League of Nations, spoke of a Jewish homeland (what is it?) in Palestine (the whole? a part? which part?) and was followed by 75 years of war over its interpretation. At the same time, the arbitrary lines drawn in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement define, unchallenged to this day, the boundaries of Syria, Iraq and Jordan (Eastern Palestine).

Israeli Generals and Politics

Well-meaning friends who warn us of the harm Israel's policies are causing like to quote Israeli generals, whose opinions weigh heavily, and rightly so. The generals whose opinions they invoke are all great fighters with superb war records, but are mercenary in making the political assumptions which set the parameters and foundations of their military analysis. One does not have to lie in order to reach their conclusions. One has "only" to base one's analysis on a U.S.-Canada type of peace, where there are no relevant differences and no aggressive motivations. Assuming that the Arabs are Americans or Canadians provides a wide scope for peace, but is it realistic?

Why do I say mercenary? One of these generals had considered joining an ultra-hawkish party until Labor offered him the chairmanship of Tahal, a government-owned engineering firm. Another joined that same party and spread its message until he was offered the position of heading the Histadrut's nationwide Amal trade school system. Yet another has been offered the headship of the Jewish National Fund.

So for many of these generals it is "Territories for Tahal," "Territories for Amal," or "Territories for the JNF." They believe they will do no harm because anyway the Arabs are not about to agree to Labor's Allon Plan any more than to the Likud's; hence the stalemate is bound to continue, especially when Arab expectations have been raised by the present U.S. administration. But harm they did, misleading less knowledgeable people.

In opposition to these retired generals one finds the present Chief of Staff, a kibbutznik supposedly related to Labor, whose appointment drew fire from the right, who says that "under the circumstances" there exists no logic in ceding territories. What circumstances are going to change in the foreseeable future? Or take, for instance, the opinion of U.S. General Kelly, whom I heard saying in mid-March 1992 in Washington that "you must be crazy to leave the territories," or the similar opinion of the 151 U.S. generals and admirals who wrote to President Carter on this topic, or that of

over 100 who wrote Reagan, or the formal U.S. Army War College opinion of 1974, etc.

High-ranking Israeli officers, like all other professionals, are first and foremost citizens in a highly politicized environment. The majority began their careers in the early, formative years of the state when Ben-Gurion and his followers made sure that party affiliation played a major role in promotions. For example, Yitzhak Rabin, who during the 1948 War was a most promising deputy chief of central and then southern commands at the time when the main military operations took place, was nominated to be Chief of Staff some ten years after Moshe Dayan, who was but a battalion commander in 1948, though one who belonged to Ben-Gurion's party, unlike Rabin whose name was linked with Ben-Gurion's left opposition. Rabin's case is one of many.

The only conclusion to be reached is that generals, as such, should be kept from defining political parameters, just as politicians should be kept out of the military planning derived from the political parameters they establish.

The David of 1967 Became the Goliath of 1992

How did the David of 1967 become the Goliath of 1992, in spite of the Arabs making an international nuisance of themselves by breaking international laws, customs and norms; legitimizing terror; hijacking; wielding hostages as weapons of confrontation and war; and promoting aggressive fundamentalism? (Remember the days when one could walk in and out of air terminals without security checks?) Israel may be to blame for this reversal of image, but are we now to try to reinterpret reality to compensate for our failure to make our position understood?

The harm done to Israel with respect to American public opinion is real. Correcting it will be much more difficult than preventing it would have been, but we will have to do it. Judging from my own experience, a true, factual message, conveyed loud and clear, with no whitewashing "embellishments," zigzagging or mysticism, is received and understood even when the bare truth is unpleasant and hardly palatable. Assuming the Arabs are like the Canadians or Americans is not going to do anybody any good. This kind of political-intellectual acrobatics is bound to foster a mortal danger for us. We Jews went through this experience when, between the two world wars, we turned our backs on threats because they demanded positive action, and we paid for it.

The Adverse Effects of Economic Dependence

While Israel's lack of economic independence is a major concern, it is in large part the result of U.S. arms sales to the Islamic Middle East and the need to offset those sales, as well as of U.S. submission to the Arab boycott. Therefore, Israel's economic dependence is not entirely of its own making.

I have participated personally in the mutually beneficial U.S.-Israeli defense partnership, where U.S. money was put to better use than elsewhere, and I am deeply grateful for any moral, political or material support that Israel receives at the hands of the U.S. Nevertheless, it is important to illuminate the unnatural, unhealthy and illegitimate involvement of the U.S. in the Middle East in selling U.S. arms to dictatorships (or authoritarian kingdoms, which are no different) as well as *de facto* U.S. submission to the Arab boycott.

Were the U.S. to cease arming Middle Eastern dictatorships and apply its determination to stop others from doing so, a feat rendered possible by the termination of the Cold War, and were the U.S. to adhere to the letter of its own anti-Arab boycott laws, Israel would have long since enjoyed economic independence and even a trade surplus, despite its poorly managed, centralized economy, its immigrant absorption efforts, and its defense burden.

During the decade preceding the Gulf War, pan-Arab conventional arms purchases amounted to about \$168 billion, with the vast majority being supplied by the U.S. *Aviation Week* has assessed the amount to be \$208 billion.

U.S. military assistance to Israel has been \$1.8 billion yearly, of which \$1.4 billion are U.S.-manufactured arms and equipment, totalling some \$18 billion over the same ten-year period. This figure is only 10 percent of total arms sales to the Arabs and roughly 15 percent of U.S. arms sales to them. It is not illogical for Israel to receive, as a "friend and ally," this amount of compensation for arms sold to states which are legally at war with it and whose official policy and declared objectives are Israel's destruction.

The \$1.2 billion conferred annually upon Israel as civilian aid and consisting mainly of U.S. agricultural surpluses (shipped in U.S. vessels) should be measured against the costs to Israel of the quasi-officially U.S.-tolerated Arab boycott. For example, although a fair amount of Israel's oil is supplied at international prices by Egypt from its Israel-developed oil fields, large amounts are purchased at disadvantageous prices and shipped from as far away as Venezuela and Mexico. Were the Houston-based major U.S. oil companies

to insist, oil could flow to Israel from wells next door at normal prices. But, faithful to the boycott clauses in their agreements with the Arabs, they do not trade with Israel. Countless U.S. firms deny trade with Israel, in contravention to U.S. laws, yet are openly forgiven. Many other U.S. firms profit from the occasion and charge exaggerated prices, selling through camouflaged intermediaries.

Egypt provides yet another example. Heavily dependent upon the U.S., which has only recently written off \$7.2 billion of its debt, Egypt is continuously breaking its peace agreement with Israel by not only adhering to the boycott, but also by promoting it. This is a double affront, given the fact that the peace agreement returned Sinai to Egypt with an oil industry fully developed by Israel. The U.S. could surely do something about Egypt's honoring international agreements, were it willing to. But, as a matter of fact, the U.S. tends to move the other way: it suggests trading off the boycott against the cessation of Jewish settlement in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. By this deed, it confers legitimacy on a practice illegal by U.S. law and, in fact, asks Israel to pay again to have Egypt honor a contract for which it has already received payment in full.

Peace Must Be Built on a Balance of Power

Having taken a modest but active part in the emergence and survival of my country for nearly fifty years, it is with great satisfaction that I see the Israeli development graph point generally upwards. Hence we are here to stay. Were our neighbors to accept this fact, which they have never accepted to this day (with the hesitant exception of Egypt), peace would be at hand. But any peace in the Middle East, if it is not to be temporary, has to be built upon the firm foundation of a balance of power. Any other synthetic substitutes for that balance of power, like demilitarization or international guarantees, have never worked anywhere throughout history. There is no reason why they should in the Middle East. Nor has technology (missiles, satellites, etc.) proven to be a valid substitute. The Gulf War has been, rather, a proof of the opposite. When the movement across terrain stopped, the technology-dominated air victory in battle withered away.

The balance of power is the capacity to forestall war by being able to wage and win it. The capability of waging war is a coordinated combination of firepower, mobility and terrain, i.e., geography and topography. Hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned as we are, and with our peace partners/antagonists able to buy enor-

mous firepower and mobility, our need to put some distance and topographical obstacles between our vital centers and our neighbors' military might is as important to our survival as the air we breathe.

If the balance of power is to be accepted as the foundation of the edifice of peace, then all other elements of that edifice have to be tailor-made to fit that foundation. This is difficult, but possible and vital if the peace is to be longlasting.

Surviving in the Middle East is a full-time job which cannot be taken lightly while looking for a reckless, irresponsible quick fix. A typical example of this type of approach is a *New York Times* (June 19, 1992) story correctly quoting Israeli military intelligence as saying that Israel's positive balance of power is assured for *the next three to five years*. The author then proceeded to develop his thesis (based upon aberrated facts like Iraq lying crushed, or the dust having settled upon the collapse of the Soviet Empire, etc.) as if this positive balance was guaranteed to last for perpetuity, a "small" extrapolation which could cost Israel its collective life, come year four or six. His conclusion is that Israel should hasten to make peace before Iran and Syria introduce nuclear weapons in ten years.

Assuming that one accepts the preposterous idea that the three to five year superiority of Israel is guaranteed to last forever, and assuming that Israel concludes a hasty peace in exchange for territories, which will mean that Israel loses its hard-earned superiority in the domains of terror, guerrilla and conventional warfare,

will this act affect the pan-Islamic nuclear effort? Why should an aggressor, who never misses an opportunity to wish my death, drop his gun when I drop my shield?

Peace is not a spring-like burst of color, smell and hope. It is, rather, a carefully planned edifice built to last. As in any other planning, one should be fully aware of the consequences of being mistaken.

If I am wrong to be overcautious and skeptical, then peace may be slower in coming and we will lose a popularity contest. But if we adopt the suggestions of American liberal friends and they are proven wrong once again, we risk being exterminated.

Do you understand my concern, dear liberal friend?

* * *

Col. (Res.) Yoash Tsiddon-Chatto began his Israeli military service with the pre-state Palmach, brought "illegal" Jewish immigrants through the British blockade, led convoys during the battle for Jerusalem, and later became a fighter pilot, test pilot, and Chief of Planning and Chief of Development for the Israel Air Force. He then pursued a successful business career until his election to the Twelfth Knesset (Tsomet) where he was one of the leaders of the fight for constitutional and electoral reform. He has now returned to the business world. Mr. Tsiddon-Chatto is a member of the Board of Overseers of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.