

Israeli-Palestinian conflict to broader issues in the region rears its head over and over again. Zbigniew Brzezinski did it in the 1970s, trying to blame Soviet influence in the region on the absence of a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Prior to the first Gulf War, there were those who opposed the war on the grounds that we needed first to address the Palestinian issue before we could credibly confront Saddam Hussein. And early on in the Obama administration, reports were circulating suggesting that American interests throughout the Middle East were dependent on progress on the Palestinian-Israeli front.

Henry Kissinger, in his magisterial two-volume memoir, dealt with this matter head on. He demonstrated during the Cold War that America's ability to further its broader regional interests was connected not to a need to resolve the Palestinian issue, but to showing America's moderate allies in the region—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Gulf States—that it paid to be allied with America. The best way to prove that? When Israel was under attack by regional extremists supported by the Soviets, it was vital for the US to make sure that Israel triumphed. By doing so, the moderates would absorb the truth that the future lay with the US and its allies. Standing up against radicals and with one's allies, rather than blaming one's friends for problems in the region, continues to be the best formula for serving US interests in the Middle East.

Now we are hearing the linkage theme once again. After the brouhaha between the administration and the Israeli government surfaced, a story emerged indicating that a military team under General David Petraeus's CENTCOM command reported to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael Mullen in January that Israel was jeopardizing US standing in the region. And then Petraeus himself, speaking before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 16, reinforced this message. He stated that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict "fosters anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of US favoritism for Israel." He went on to say that "Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of US partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR (Area of Responsibility) and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world."

Once again, an illusion is at work here, one that will, if pursued, invariably result in no real progress being made in the region. We all want peace between Israel and the Arabs. And putting more effort toward such a goal is a good thing. What is not real, and is dangerous, is putting most of America's eggs in the region in this basket.

The Arab-Israeli conflict has never responded to such a heavy emphasis. Progress is made when Arab leaders decide it's time for peace. Maybe Assad of Syria is considering this, and it should be explored. But that's very different from placing this conflict at the center of everything. Disappointment, as always, will follow since the gap between what the Arabs want and Israel wants is substantial. Moreover, Arab willingness to accept Israel's legitimacy as a "Jewish State" is belied by everything that comes from Arab leaders and Arab media.

What inevitably happens if such unrealistic weight in the region is given to the Israeli-Arab conflict is that Israel comes to be seen as the problem. If only Israel would stop settlements, if only Israel would talk with Hamas, if only Israel would make concessions on refugees, if only it would share Jerusalem, everything in the region would be fine. Iraq would be fine. Afghanistan would be fine. Pakistan would be fine. Iran would be fine. Lebanon would be fine.

Of course, this is nonsense. These problems would remain even if Israel did not exist. The result of such an approach would be no progress on America's interests and great stress in US-Israel relations.

The Kissinger approach of strengthening moderates may be tainted in some minds because it may be associated with Bush's policy—but it doesn't have to be. One doesn't have to be a Bush supporter to understand that the greatest need in the region today is for victories by the moderates over the radicals. In Israel's case, radical challenges exist from Hamas in the south, Hizbullah and Syria in the north, and Iran. All are complicated challenges. US support for a strong and wise Israeli policy in response to these challenges will provide the best opportunity to strengthen American interests. Holding off Hamas, weakening Hizbullah, or preventing Iran from gaining nuclear weapons will provide the biggest boost to moderates throughout the Middle East. If the Obama administration can help bring about one or more of these accomplishments, it will go a long way to restoring American influence in the region and, by the way, make Israeli-Arab peace far more likely.

This linkage trend, if continued, is dangerous and counterproductive. It could undermine the historic bipartisan support for Israel in America, a support based on moral and strategic grounds, that has been—and still is—good for both countries. It will reduce whatever incentive the Palestinians have to reach a compromise peace with Israel; if America is backing away from Israel, the Palestinians would reason, then hopes of Israel's disappearance will be strengthened. It will raise questions about American loyalty and credibility among the Arabs who, despite their rhetoric criticizing US support for Israel, would be far more distressed about the US abandoning an ally.

It diverts attention away from the larger challenges in the region—Iran's nuclear program, and the challenge of Islamic extremism and terrorism. Finally, it has the smell about it of blaming the Jews for everything. The notion that al-Qaida's hatred of America or Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons or the ongoing threat of extremist terrorist groups in the region is based on Israel's announcement of building apartments is absurd on its face and smacks of scapegoating.

It's time for the administration to step back not only from the harsh rhetoric but also from the illusionary thinking about Israel hurting American interests. America and Israel can have their differences, but the US has no better ally than Israel. The administration needs to recognize this and find ways to reassure those who are raising concerns.

## OUR UNCONSCIONABLE NATIONAL DEBT

### HON. MIKE COFFMAN

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 25, 2010

Mr. COFFMAN of Colorado. Madam Speaker, today our National debt is \$12,662,466,657,519.82.

On January 6, 2009, the start of the 111th Congress, the national debt was \$10,638,425,746,293.80.

This means the national debt has increased by \$2,024,040,911,226.02 so far this Congress.

This debt and its interest payments we are passing to our children and all future Americans.

HONORING MARIA COSTA SMITH

### HON. MARIO DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 25, 2010

Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Maria Costa Smith, successful horticulturalist, businesswoman and agricultural engineer in South Dade, Florida.

Maria currently serves as the color division president of Costa Farms. She is part of the third generation of the Costa family to run the farm. Started in 1961 by her grandfather, Jose Costa, and father, Tony Costa, Costa farms is one of South Dade's largest small businesses, now employing 2,200 and owning over 2,600 acres of land. In addition to its thriving foliage and plant divisions, Costa Farms operates merchandising and transportation companies in south Florida, North Carolina, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. Maria runs the farm with her husband, Chief Executive Officer Jose Smith, and her brother, Jose, who is vice president of the foliage division.

Recently, the Dade County Farm Bureau Women's Committee recognized Maria Costa Smith as the 2010 Woman of Distinction in Agriculture. She was recognized for her valuable contributions to the South Dade agriculture and agribusiness. Today I honor her for those reasons and many more, including her commitment to seeing through the dream of her grandfather, helping others in the community and ensuring that South Florida's local economy continues to flourish.

As we celebrate Women's History Month, I ask you to join me in congratulating and thanking Maria Costa Smith for her outstanding dedication, work ethic and desire to see her community prosper.

PRESIDENT MORE POPULAR IN THE NEWS THAN AMERICANS

### HON. LAMAR SMITH

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 25, 2010

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Madam Speaker, President Obama is far more popular in the news than he is among American people.

Sixty percent of national media mentions of the President were positive over the past week while 40 percent were negative, according to Rasmussen Reports' new "Media Meter."

In contrast, just 48 percent of Americans approve of the job the President is doing.

By a 10-point margin, more Americans "strongly disapprove" of the President's job than "strongly approve." And just one-quarter say the country is "on the right track."

Wouldn't it be nice if the national media reflected the views of the American people?

The national media should give Americans the facts, not tell them what to think.