

Drawing lines: John Kerry and Israel

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [July 27, 2004](#) issue

On July 28, delegates to the Democratic National Convention in Boston will nominate John Kerry as their candidate for president. They will also approve the party's national platform. Gay marriage will be finessed to satisfy Kerry's cautious approach. Iraq? Bush's efforts will be condemned; patriotism will be celebrated. God will reemerge as a Democrat. Health care? Democrats can do it better. Support stem cell research? Count on it, and watch for Ron Reagan as a surprise guest.

Palestinians and Israelis and a new beginning that's fair to both sides? Forget it. When Howard Dean suggested that the U.S. should take an "evenhanded" approach to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, he was hit with a harsh letter from 34 congressional Democrats questioning whether, as their front-running candidate, he shared their "unequivocal support for Israel's right to exist." The next day Dean came out for Israel's right to defend itself. He got the message.

John Kerry already knew the message, but he had to be reminded, as Esther Kaplan writes in *Nation*. In February, Kerry met with Jewish leaders at a gathering organized by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. According to Kaplan, Hannah Rosenthal, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said that her desire to discuss economic issues with candidate Kerry was brushed aside. "The central issue, no matter how they came at it, was, 'Are you going to be there for Israel in these difficult times?'"

According to Kaplan, "Kerry took his cue. During the meeting, he backed off from earlier statements that he'd send Jimmy Carter (seen by the right as pro-Palestinian) to the region to jump-start negotiations, and . . . when George W. Bush, in an agreement with Ariel Sharon, accepted Jewish settlements as permanent and renounced Palestinian refugees' right of return, Kerry immediately endorsed it."

A thoughtful man like Kerry surely must be aware of the impossibility of a military solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He must also know that many Israelis recognize that this occupation, with its crippling security fence and the Palestinian people cooped up in prisonlike conditions, will only prolong agony on both sides. Will

Kerry use his platform to announce a new vision of hope for peace and justice in the region?

Don't count on it. Congressman Robert Wexler (D., Fla.), a senior member of the House International Relations Committee, says he has been asked by Kerry to coauthor the Democratic Party platform plank on Israel. In an Israeli Independence Day speech April 26, Wexler said, " I strongly support Israel's right to self-defense and believe the United States must firmly support Israel's construction of a security barrier between Jewish population centers and the West Bank."

For a trip to Israel from June 29 to July 4, Wexler planned meetings with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, Labor Leader Shimon Peres and Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. No meetings were scheduled with Palestinians.

If Kerry is elected in November, a peace-and-justice vision could still emerge. Or maybe not. Listen to Middle East journalist and analyst Youssef M. Ibrahim as he considers a potential Kerry foreign policy team. Ibrahim, a former *New York Times* Middle East correspondent and now a fellow at the Center for Foreign Relations, wrote in a recent essay that a Kerry White House could have its own Democratic neocons, bringing with them a vision "even more frightening" than that of the current White House.

Ibrahim warns: "Those millions who aspire to better days under a Democratic administration led by Senator John Kerry [should] think again. The Democratic Party's neocon vampires are a lot worse than the current ones—the second movie could be more frightening than the first."

Ibrahim points to two veteran Democratic foreign policy experts who are waiting in the wings for a Kerry victory: Leslie Gelb, president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, and former ambassador Peter W. Galbraith, both of whom advocate a three-state solution for Iraq's future. They propose separate enclaves for Shi'ites, Sunnis and Kurds (see Gelb's article in the *New York Times*, November 25, 2003; Galbraith's in the *New York Review of Books*, May 13, 2004).

If their three-state solution prevailed, Iraq would be reduced to three weak and unstable states. Under this scenario, Ibrahim says, a Kerry White House could "appoint Israel . . . [as] the American proconsul for the Arab world by supplying it with more military and financial aid while diminishing such aid to Egypt and other

Arab countries . . . [completing] its ongoing takeover of the West Bank of Jordan and squeezing most Palestinians into a tiny pseudo state in Gaza . . . under Israeli control." A scary scenario, but empires thrive on fear as an instrument of control.

In his new book *The Sorrows of Empire*, Chalmers Johnson notes that with its unchecked military power, the American empire has the ability to dominate any state for economic purposes—e.g., oil. It can maintain local control through surrogates. An empire can also violate human rights at will, so long as it can justify its conduct with reasons it can sell on the domestic market, like security at home or for client states like Israel. Local surrogate rulers adjust to this domination, but their populations deeply resent it, which is why, angry and frustrated, they too often turn to terrorism. Does John Kerry understand this?