

Another Middle East Fantasy

There is an element of cognitive dissonance in the way that many members of the reality-based community in Washington tend to approach U.S. policy in the Middle East. Many of my colleagues in Washington have urged policymakers to adopt a sense of realism about the American ability to achieve reconciliation between the ethnic and religious groups in Mesopotamia: Hey, be serious! These guys have been feuding since the British created Iraq after the Great War, and we Americans need to project some sense of humility when dealing with this complex reality. Let's stop deluding ourselves that brilliant American diplomacy is going to bring Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds around the campfire on the banks of the Euphrates to start singing "Kumbayallah."

But these same Realpolitik-oriented experts transform into born-again idealists when they insist that Washington could and should help resolve the conflict between Arabs and Jews. If the U.S. President will only get all of them to Camp David and build a cozy fire, they will come and make peace. Never mind that, just as in Iraq, these two peoples in Israel/Palestine have been fighting uninterrupted since the British invaded the area in World War I. The same analysts who express skepticism, if not cynicism, about the plan of the current occupant of the White House to turn Iraq into a model of political and economic freedom in the Middle East are also pressing Bush to exhibit some faith in the leadership of the United States to get the peace process moving ahead in the Holy Land.

This faith is grounded in unique historical circumstances: The successful efforts, launched by President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, to end the state of war between Egypt and Israel led directly to the diplomatic achievement of President Jimmy Carter in brokering

a peace accord between Cairo and Jerusalem at Camp David in 1979. Since Dr. K's Shuttle Diplomacy in the Middle East and President Carter's Camp David Accord, generations of officials, experts, and journalists in Washington have been promoting the legend of America's role as a "peacemaker" in the Middle East.

But notwithstanding Kissinger's success as a world-class diplomat in mediating a stable cease-fire between Israel and Egypt, and President Carter's success in bringing about an Egyptian-Israeli peace (reflecting his strong religious beliefs as well as his skills as a negotiator), these two Americans didn't "make peace" between the Israelis and the Egyptians. The 1973 war demonstrated to Egypt that she didn't have the military power to defeat the Jewish state, while the Israelis recognized that the cost of maintaining the *status quo* in Sinai was becoming unbearable. In a way, the war and its aftermath helped to establish a certain regional balance of power that led the Israeli and Egyptian leaders to conclude that ending 30 years of war between them was in their respective national interests—starting with the disengagement agreement and ending with the accord at Camp David.

What Kissinger and Carter actually did was to facilitate the diplomatic process that brought about these arrangements. Thus, they made an important contribution to the successful conclusion of the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations, while strengthening the U.S. position in the region (by coopting Egypt into the pro-American camp during the last years of the Cold War).

The Egyptian and the Israeli leaders decided to meet at Camp David in 1979 only after Israeli foreign minister Moshe Dayan and Egyptian aide Hassan Tohami had agreed in advance on the basis for their negotiations: Israelis would return all of occupied Sinai to Egypt in return for Egyptian willing-

ness to recognize Israel. What both the Israelis and the Egyptians wanted to win at Camp David (and succeeded in doing so) were long-term U.S. security commitments and economic assistance in exchange for signing the peace accord whose contours had been accepted before the talks had even started.

That Bill Clinton's Camp David II ended up as a major fiasco had nothing to do with his diplomatic skills. President Clinton couldn't "make peace" because both the Israelis and the Palestinians had concluded that making the painful concessions on core national interests—dividing Jerusalem's holy sites; the "right of return" of the Arab refugees; the fate of the Jewish settlements—wouldn't be cost-effective from their respective standpoints. At the same time, each side calculated that using violence would force its adversary to surrender to its demands.

President George W. Bush and his aides seemed to have learned the lessons of both episodes when they decided that they needed to lower expectations this time in Annapolis, Maryland. They emphasized America's role as facilitator of a potential peace accord that could only be achieved if and when the Israelis and the Palestinians reached the conclusion that the costs of continuing to fight have become so high that they require agonizing compromises over Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees, and the Israeli settlements.

And there are really no signs that the Israelis and the Palestinians have reached such a stage—and no amount of public-opinion polls indicating that the two peoples want "peace" will change that reality. Hence, the most accommodating Israeli peace proposal on the various existing issues would probably be rejected by moderate Palestinians—and *vice versa*. In fact, both sides are now ruled by weak governments that have negligible political legitimacy and certainly won't be able to mobilize support for his-

toric concessions on the core issues. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is as popular among Israelis as Bush is among Americans. And the government of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is basically ruling over an Israeli-American protectorate in the West Bank (while the elected radical Islamic Hamas controls Gaza).

American diplomacy is not going to make a lot of difference now. It's not surprising, therefore, that the "peace conference" in Annapolis proved nothing more than a useless exercise—not in statesmanship but in stage-crafting a media event. President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were hoping to highlight the emergence of an Israeli-Arab "consensus" that would help persuade both sides to move toward a resolution of the conflict. According to the Washington spin, since the "moderate" Arabs and Israelis were faced with such a menacing regional threat—Iran, with nuclear weapons and alleged designs to dominate the Middle East—they would be able to overcome their historic differences.


That inspiring narrative helped the Bushies to write the script for the media spectacle in Annapolis. The problem was that the "peace conference" had very little to do with the realities of the Middle East. None of the major attendees was buying into the notion that the "tribal" issues separating the Israelis and the Palestinians could be resolved by accentuating the outside "threat" of Iran.

Olmert and Abbas couldn't even take the first steps toward overcoming their differences during the talks that led up to the meeting. And what was once envisioned as a three-day conference to kick off the negotiation of final-status issues was transformed into a pathetic 24-hour press conference during which President Bush played Master of Ceremonies.

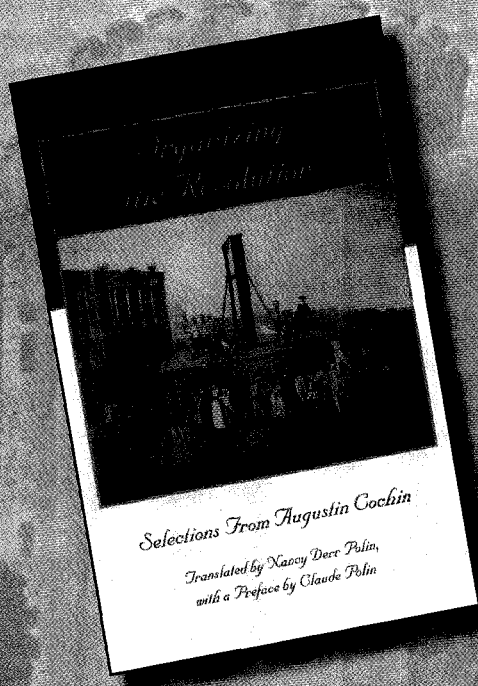
The Saudis, who attended the meeting but refused to shake the hands of the Israeli officials, see the rise of Iran not as a challenge to the West but through the prism of the Sunni-Shiite divide. If anything, they would like to see reconciliation between Hamas and

Abbas's Fatah, a move that the Americans and the Israelis oppose.

Facing strong U.S. opposition, the Syrians had to worm their way into the conference. The neoconservative strategists who continue to influence White House policy have insisted that the secular Ba'ath regime in Damascus is an ally of the ayatollahs in Iran, and they have pressed the Israelis not to open diplomatic negotiations with the Syrians, who are actually interested in distancing themselves from Iran and joining the moderate Arab fold.

The realists in Washington should recognize that peace will come to the Holy Land if and when the core issues separating Israelis and Palestinians are resolved. As for an agreement between Israel and Syria, the "territory for peace" formula that was applied at the original Camp David could serve as a basis for an accord between Jerusalem and Damascus—if both sides conclude that it is in their interest to do so. America could *help* to make that happen—but she cannot *make* it happen. 

NEW FROM CHRONICLES PRESS



Organizing the Revolution

Selections From Augustin Cochin

translated by Nancy Derr Polin

Preface by Claude Polin

Augustin Cochin (1876-1916) undertook a minute analysis of the role that provincial clubs and societies played in the genesis of the French Revolution. His work shows clearly how the revolution was organized long before the events of 1789. This translation is an attempt to present his unfinished writings in a clear and coherent form.

HONOR KILLING IN CANADA

As Canadians were preparing for the Christmas season, they were shocked to learn that Aqsa Parvez, a 16-year-old Muslim girl from the Toronto area, was strangled to death by her devout father, a cab driver of Pakistani origin. It appears her crime was a refusal to wear the traditional *hijab* when she was not at home and behaving like a typical Canadian teenage schoolgirl by posting photos of herself on Facebook wearing colorful clothing and accessories.

Friends describe Aqsa as a vibrant, fun-loving girl who liked to dance and take pictures. When she arrived at school, she would change into Western dress. A week before her death, she had left the family home to stay with friends because of arguments with her father and elder brothers. When she returned home to gather some clothing, she was killed. The father, Muhammad, has been charged with murder, and one of her older brothers has been charged with "obstructing police."

Honor killing is a common occurrence in many Muslim countries of the Middle East and South Asia. The term refers to the barbaric practice of killing female family members who violate the "honor" of the family, usually by compromising their sexual purity in some manner—but often, as well, by simply disobeying a dress code, refusing an arranged marriage, or being seen in the company of a man who is not a relative. As recently as December 19, a top Muslim cleric in Iran said that women who do not wear the *hijab* must die. The United Nations estimates that as many as 5,000 such honor killings take place annually.

Aqsa's murder has sparked a national debate in Canada about the cause of her death. Was it the result of a family argument that went wrong? Was it because of the generational gap that often exists between parents and their teenage daughters? Or was it yet

another sad example of child abuse that has become all too frequent in our society? Few commentators have dared to place the blame on the loathsome tradition of "honor killing" or to suggest that her murder had anything to do with religion.

Canada's conservative-leaning newspaper, the *National Post*, in an editorial about Aqsa's death, warns its readers that nothing has yet been proved and reminds them that Canada's Muslim community is moderate by world standards. The *Post* writes that "Canada is no Europe where immigrant communities are left to fester within impoverished ghettos in perpetuity—with their imported violent and backward practices passed on from one generation to the next." The suggestion here seems to be that Canada's Muslims are different from Europe's.

Spokesmen for Canada's Muslim community have been united in denouncing the slaying of the Toronto-area teenager but attribute it to a case of domestic abuse. An executive of the Canadian Islamic Council claimed the murder had nothing to do with Islam and said it was a teenage issue. Muslim leaders, however, also stressed the importance of women wearing the *hijab*, which is a vital part of Islamic culture. One of the leaders who is a member of the Canadian Council of Imams said that, if a daughter decides not to wear the *hijab*, her parents have failed.

A Muslim woman columnist for the national *Globe and Mail* complained that, because of this incident, "the Muslim community will once again be put under the microscope." She may have been referring to the concern caused by the arrest last year of 18 young Canadian-born Muslims who were planning to blow up the Canadian Parliament buildings and behead the prime minister; a follow-up poll revealed that 12 percent (roughly 84,000 of the 700,000 Muslims in Canada) believed that the terrorist plot was

justified.

Canada has prided herself on being a welcoming country for immigrants and a champion of multiculturalism and diversity, but many Canadians are beginning to question the wisdom of continuing to accept immigrants whose religious beliefs appear to override many of the fundamental values of a liberal Western democracy. The tragic death of Aqsa Parvez should stimulate more open debate in Canada about this issue.

—James Bissett

WHO VOTES CATHOLIC?

Quite a few years ago (1977, to be exact), a colleague tried to convince me that the best way to make our college conservative was to set up a curriculum and a program in Christian studies that would appeal to conservative Catholics. There are lots of Catholics who are fed up with the "R.C. lite" of most so-called Catholic schools, he reasoned, and since there are more conservative Catholics than conservative anybody-elses, such a strategy would be money in the bank.

Actually, he was not that cynical. He was convinced that believing Catholics were running out of educational options for their sons and daughters—and he had a point. Since then, conservative Catholics have begun to put their educational money where their faith is. There hasn't been a stampede yet, but foot traffic has not been toward the educational left.

What about Catholic voters in the so-called public square? Barrels of ink have been spilled showing that Catholics, ever since the glory year of 1960, have been "swing voters." Catholics are always on the winning side in presidential elections. The old "lunchbucket" Catholic voters who lined up for FDR sort of sidled over to Reagan but haven't been all that reliable as Republicans and probably won't be. Analysts from *Commonweal* and the