

# A CLASSIC “FIELD DIPLOMAT:” THOMAS R. PICKERING

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SEVEN-TIME AMBASSADOR THOMAS R. PICKERING WAS A FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER FOR 42 YEARS. THIS MONTH AFSA IS HONORING HIM FOR A LIFETIME OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN DIPLOMACY.

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BY STEVEN ALAN HONLEY

**O**n June 27, Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering will receive the American Foreign Service Association's award for Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy, in recognition of an extraordinarily distinguished career.

A seven-time ambassador to Jordan, Nigeria, El Salvador, Israel, the United Nations, India and the Russian Federation, he also served in Switzerland and Tanzania. Among his Washington assignments, Pickering was assistant secretary for oceans and international environmental and scientific affairs, and capped his 42-year Foreign Service career by serving as under secretary of State for political affairs, the number three position in the department, from 1997 to 2001. He retired as a career ambassador, the highest possible rank in the Senior Foreign Service.

Pickering was born on Nov. 5, 1931, in Orange, New Jersey. He received a bachelor's degree in 1953 from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, graduating cum laude, with high honors in history, and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. In 1954, he attended the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, where he earned a master's degree. He was then awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to the University of Melbourne and received a second master's degree from that institution in 1956. From 1956 to 1959, he was on active duty in the United States Navy and later served in the Naval Reserve, attaining the grade of lieutenant commander.

He entered the Foreign Service in 1959, working initially in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research and then in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. From 1962 to 1964, he served in Geneva as political adviser to the U.S. delegation to the 18-Nation Disarmament Conference.

Following that assignment, Pickering studied Swahili at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington and was assigned in 1965 to Zanzibar. In 1967, he became Deputy Chief of Mission in Dar Es Salaam, returning to Washington in 1969 to become deputy director of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. From 1973 to 1974, he was executive secretary of the Department of State and special assistant to Secretaries of State William Rogers and Henry Kissinger.

From 1974 to 1978, Pickering was U.S. Ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, after which he returned to Washington to serve as Assistant Secretary for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs from 1978 to 1981. He then served as chief of mission five consecutive times, as ambassador to Nigeria (1981-1983), El Salvador (1983-1985), and Israel (1985-1988), then as Permanent Representative to the United Nations (1989-1992), and finally as ambassador to India (1992-1993) and the Russian Federation (1993-1996). After a stint as president of the Eurasia Foundation, a Washington-based organization that makes small grants and loans in the states of the former Soviet Union, he concluded his Foreign Service career as under secretary for political affairs, a position he occupied from 1997 to 2001.

Upon his retirement from the Foreign Service in January 2001, Amb. Pickering became Senior Vice President for International Relations for the Boeing Company. In this newly created position, he oversees the company's international affairs. A member of the company's Executive Council, he reports to the Office of the Chairman.

In 1983 and again in 1986, Ambassador Pickering won the Distinguished Presidential Award and, in 1996, the department's Distinguished Service Award, as well as many other honors, including the Rockefeller Public Service Award. In 1984, he received an honorary doctorate-in-laws degree from Bowdoin College, and has been similarly hon-

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*Steven Alan Honley is the editor of the Journal.*

ored by 12 other universities. A founding member and the first president of the American Academy of Diplomacy, Pickering is the current chairman of the board of directors of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy (part of Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service) and is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the International Institute of Strategic Studies. He speaks French, Spanish, Swahili, Arabic and Hebrew.

Ambassador Pickering is married to the former Alice Stover, who was also a Foreign Service officer until forced to resign by personnel regulations which at the time required female FSOs to remain single. They have a son, Timothy, and a daughter, Margaret.

*Foreign Service Journal* Editor Steven Alan Honley interviewed Pickering in his office at the Boeing Company in Rosslyn, Va. on April 24.

**FSJ:** *Your award from AFSA for lifetime contributions to American diplomacy places you in the same company as Cyrus Vance, George Bush Sr., and Larry Eagleburger, among others. What would you say have been your strengths as a diplomat?*

**Pickering:** I am honored by the award. I have always considered myself a "field diplomat," someone who really got to know the people of the various countries I've served in. And that knowledge has enabled me not only to promote American interests more effectively overseas but also to explain local concerns to Washington policy-makers.

**FSJ:** *Ron Spiers has described you as "a classic diplomat who takes a policy and implements it with great capability and loyalty," a description that implies that you have not been an innovator. Would you agree with that characterization?*

**Pickering:** No, I would not. I think I have had lots of opportunities over the course of my career to be an innovator and put my own ideas in the hopper. As under secretary [for political affairs], I suggested a series of steps which helped lessen tensions with Pakistan over the status of Kashmir. Also, I helped formulate Plan Colombia and the agreement to try the Libyans indicted for the Lockerbie bombing.

**FSJ:** *Give me an example of a policy you disagreed with that you felt you had to implement, but also worked to change.*

**Pickering:** One that immediately comes to mind is the longtime refusal of the U.S. to talk to the PLO. Well before

the mid-1980s, when I became ambassador to Israel, I came to the conclusion that we — and the Israelis — would have to deal with the Palestinians, and I pushed for that to happen. Eventually, of course, we did. But it took far too long.

**FSJ:** *You observed in an interview with Foreign Policy magazine last year that senior career diplomats sometimes get in hot water with the president or secretary of State for taking too high a profile in presenting U.S. government policy. Yet FSOs are also often criticized for being overly cautious. Do you think either criticism is fair, and if so, what can FSOs do to counter such complaints?*

**Pickering:** I always believed that I owed it to my bosses to be careful and cautious both in carrying out policy and in speaking publicly. But there are times when a more forceful approach is called for and, in fact, when that is the most effective way to advance U.S. interests or resolve problems. When I was U.N. ambassador during the Gulf War, for example, I believe my dealing with the press covering the Security Council proved to be a primary tool in forging and keeping together the coalition.

**FSJ:** *What first drew you to the Foreign Service?*

**Pickering:** When I was an undergraduate at Bowdoin College, I was taking a lot of international relations, history, and government courses as I mulled over several career options, including diplomacy.

One of my government professors encouraged me to take the Foreign Service exam, which at that time lasted three days. I passed the written exam in 1953 but for a variety of reasons, including delays caused by Senator McCarthy's activities, the State Department did not offer the orals until the next year, which I then took and passed. In the meantime, I went on to earn an M.A. from the Fletcher School and then went to Melbourne, Australia, on a Fulbright fellowship. After earning a second M.A. there, I then spent three years in the U.S. Navy.

**FSJ:** *What were you researching in Melbourne?*

**Pickering:** I wrote my master's thesis on the development of Australia's competence to conduct its own diplomatic affairs while it was still closely linked to Great Britain.

**FSJ:** *If you hadn't gone into diplomacy, what might you have done?*

**Pickering:** I gave serious thought to mechanical engineering, believe it or not.

**FSJ:** *Unlike the vast majority of FSOs, you actually began your career serving in Washington, first in INR and then ACDA, and didn't go overseas for three years. Obviously, you went on to a stellar career anyway, but do*



**Thomas R. Pickering,  
Moscow, 1996**

you feel you missed out on anything by not going overseas immediately?

**Pickering:** Well, following my Fulbright year in Australia, I joined the U.S. Navy and spent most of the next three years in Morocco. But the actual reason I ended up staying in Washington was that all but five members of my 1959 entrance class had helped out in the U.S. Passport Office during the spring rush. So the deal was that they all went overseas and the rest of us stayed in Washington.

**FSJ:** You were in the Foreign Service for over 40 years, all told. Do you have a favorite overseas posting or Washington assignment?

**Pickering:** Some of my assignments were tougher than others, but they were all fascinating and rewarding in different ways. But I have particularly fond memories of my tour as consul in Zanzibar and my time as U.N. ambassador.

**FSJ:** You served with and under some impressive people. Who are some that particularly stood out in your estimation?

**Top: Amb. and Mrs. Pickering in Nahariya, Israel in 1988, and, right, at the United Nations in New York, 1992.**

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**Pickering:** You already alluded to Ron Spiers, whom I’ve always found tremendously interesting and who always gave me a lot of personal support. In addition, we lived near each other and used to car pool to work together, so we got a lot done that way. I’d also name George Shultz and Cyrus Vance, each of whom taught me a lot, and Madeleine Albright, who could be quite demanding but was also very impressive.

Last but certainly very far from least, there was Kissinger. Henry could be a real terror, but I learned a great deal just by being around him [as a special assistant] and listening in during the Yom Kippur/Ramadan War in October 1973 on his thought processes.

**FSJ:** Your last Foreign Service assignment was as under secretary for political affairs. That’s a position that has been held both by FSOs and political appointees. Do you have any feelings about whether either background is better preparation for doing that job?

**Pickering:** That particular position is ready-made for a career officer, someone who has extensive overseas experience but is also familiar with the Washington bureaucracy and has expertise in the premier issues of the day. That’s not to say that a political appointee can’t do the job, but I do think FSOs have a natural advantage and should be the primary candidates considered for it. The person in the position has to be someone who can act as the secretary of State’s surrogate and help him or her manage the critical items on the agenda.

**FSJ:** *You have been Boeing's senior vice president for international relations for over a year now. What was the appeal of the job, and was the transition to the private sector a difficult one?*

**Pickering:** Not as difficult as some might think. Much of my background is relevant. I am seeking to find people and put in place strategic planning in some 20 offices overseas for Boeing while working to build more international knowledge and awareness and use of international personnel and technology at Boeing. The challenge is to help a great company find good people, build the right strategies and develop more international awareness to assist it to build value globally.

**FSJ:** *What goals did you set for yourself in your new role, and how would you assess your progress thus far?*

**Pickering:** First of all, since Boeing and I were starting a new activity, I took several months to analyze its current overseas operations and develop a coherent strategy to expand them and make them more effective. Boeing is building 20 new country offices and development offices in six regions. Each of these is headed by a "Boeing ambassador," who oversees a country team. In addition, each country and region is developing a specific corporate strategy it pursues. Another important part of my role is to explain to Boeing's top executives international issues and how they affect the company. Fortunately, as a member of the company's Executive Council, I am in an ideal position to do that.

**FSJ:** *In this era of globalization, some people say that "national corporations" are a thing of the past. To what degree are Boeing's interests synonymous with U.S. interests?*

**Pickering:** To begin with, Boeing is a loyal corporate citizen of the U.S., so I don't see a conflict between its interests and the nation-

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***"Henry Kissinger could be a real terror, but I learned a great deal just by being around him as a special assistant."***

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al interest. After all, one of its largest customers is the U.S. government. Also, it obviously benefits from a strong American presence on the world stage. Our overseas Boeing reps keep in close contact with U.S. embassies and exchange information on commercial issues.

**FSJ:** *How do you respond to charges that U.S. missile defense is simply corporate welfare for defense industry giants like Boeing?*

**Pickering:** I would note that well before taking office, the current administration made quite clear its strong commitment to pursue a national missile defense system. That decision was independent of any influence Boeing or any other company might have exerted. It is true that Boeing won the competition to be the leader of a consortium of companies as the system integrator, but that role is neither permanent nor assured. If we don't excel in fulfilling the terms of the contract, on time and on budget, someone else may well replace us. The transparency of the process and the competition to lead it are strong guarantees that this is not welfare!

**FSJ:** *How do you see the Foreign Service as having changed over the course of your career?*

**Pickering:** Like other institutions, the changes in the Service reflect changes in American society

and social mores. First and foremost, spouses and family members are now seen as important in their own right, not merely as auxiliaries to officers. In addition, I believe the Foreign Service has increasingly emphasized and rewarded individual initiative and merit, and is playing a greater role in foreign policy formulation.

**FSJ:** *If you were talking to some bright young people today, college graduates, would you recommend the Foreign Service to them as a career? Why or why not?*

**Pickering:** Yes, I would recommend it, though with the caveat that FSOs need to be prepared for hardships. They also have to understand that diplomats are supposed to go where they are sent and serve as requested. But in my experience, the rewards — the opportunity to travel extensively, to live in diverse countries and interact with fascinating people, to serve your country, and to be at the center of foreign policy-making — far outweigh the hardships.

While there's no doubt the department has made progress toward offering salaries and benefits that are comparable to those found in the private sector, the fact of the matter is that it will probably never be fully competitive. But when I came into the private sector, I found out that most surveys show that private sector employees actually rate financial rewards well down the list below job satisfaction, something that is also true for FSOs.

**FSJ:** *What changes do you think are needed to the FS personnel system to ensure that the Service has the abilities, outlooks and organizational structure to effectively discharge its role in the active promotion of U.S. interests abroad?*

**Pickering:** Well, I should begin my response by admitting that while I participated in a study to set up the

current assignment system, I never actually had to submit a bid list since I was already an ambassador by the time it took effect. In fact, I am probably one of the last FSOs for whom that was true.

In any case, I believe it is vital for Foreign Service officers to rotate in and out of Washington, and not revert to an overseas-only service as it was back in the 1940s, or one where officers stay in the U.S. as long as possible. There has to be a balance. The Civil Service has a long institutional memory which is absolutely invaluable to the formulation of foreign policy, but State also needs the fresh perspectives and country-specific expertise that FSOs can provide.

**FSJ:** *A year ago, there was a good deal of hope that the recommendations of the Hart-Rudman and Carlucci Commissions, unlike so many earlier studies of Foreign Service reform, might actually be implemented. Did you share that optimism? How satisfied are you with what has transpired, and what prospects do you see for additional steps?*

**Pickering:** I thought the general thrust of the recommendations each commission made was good, but many of the specific proposals were flawed. In particular, the idea of going to an under secretary-heavy, “stove-pipe” structure would be a serious mistake. The State Department is condemned to be a matrix-organization, if you will, and changing it would be very difficult. Look at the difficulty State has had in absorbing USIA, for example.

**FSJ:** *What is your overall assessment of Secretary Powell so far?*

**Pickering:** Very positive. I follow his policy statements closely and believe he consistently hits the nail on the head. He is a strong leader, both as a voice for President Bush and a leader of State, where he has worked hard to obtain resources and improve

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morale. So I definitely am a strong supporter.

**FSJ:** *In the post-Sept. 11 world, what areas of U.S. foreign policy do you believe have changed, and in what areas will continuity predominate?*

**Pickering:** Old issues never really go away; but they often take on new forms. Sept. 11 gives us new opportunities to build coalitions to mobilize support to solve old problems. The new priority on the war on terror is essential to protect our people and, well focused, can help us mobilize support to resolve other issues as well.

**FSJ:** *Do you have any concerns that, given the massive effort we are having to make in terms of leading an increasingly fractious anti-terrorism coalition, other important issues are being neglected? And drawing on your own parallel experience as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations during the Gulf War, what advice would you offer the administration?*

**Pickering:** Above all, I would urge an emphasis on the fundamental concrete objectives of any wartime coalition: obtaining base rights, access and overflight rights, and working with allies willing to stand firmly by us. I would also urge those figures in this administration who are skeptical about the value of gaining multilater-

al, broad-based support to weigh the costs of going it alone, such as no access rights or bases available, against the benefits of cooperation.

**FSJ:** *Since the attacks, there seemed to be a consensus that President Bush had finally overcome the belief that, while he had good advisors, he was ill-suited to foreign policy and not really knowledgeable about foreign affairs. But those earlier doubts seem to be resurging now. Do you think such criticism is fair?*

**Pickering:** I believe that Pres. Bush earned the high marks he received for his foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of Sept. 11, and I think he should be complimented and encouraged in that regard. I don't really join those who are inclined to be highly critical of him.

**FSJ:** *Among your many senior-level assignments, you have been ambassador both to Jordan and Israel. Did you disagree with the Bush administration's reluctance until recently to take an active role in restarting the Middle East peace process, and do you believe Sec. Powell's recent trip accomplished anything?*

**Pickering:** I have always believed that the “bicycle principle” applies to the Middle East: if you stop moving forward, you fall over. And that region is simply too vital to be allowed to drift. So, yes, I think the administration's initial hands-off approach was not the best choice.

That said, I am glad to see that they are newly engaged in the peace process, and I think Secretary Powell accomplished a good deal of important work during his trip. I hope he will go back soon to build on that progress and bring it to completion.

**FSJ:** *What path is open to U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East now?*

**Pickering:** I think the formula we have been promoting is still the only way forward to a final settlement: Israeli withdrawal in return for a solid

and implemented Palestinian commitment to stop the suicide bombings, coupled with both sides returning to the negotiating table. I was recently in the region and I believe that many creative and innovative people on both sides are actually closer than ever before to each other in their views on the actual terms of a peace settlement.

**FSJ:** *You were ambassador to Israel during the first intifada, and you met current Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon several times. Do you think Sharon will ever make peace?*

**Pickering:** Sharon repeatedly told me that his ambition was to become prime minister of Israel and then to bring about a lasting peace settlement. Now that he has accomplished that first objective, I am waiting in hope for him to deliver on the second.

**FSJ:** *How successful do you believe we have been in getting out the message that the war on terrorism is not a war on Arabs or Muslims?*

**Pickering:** I think we have been successful thus far, but we must not relent. In particular, we must continue to make clear our understanding that violence and terror are not the unique province of Islam or Arabs. Christians and Jews certainly have their own unfortunate histories in that regard.

**FSJ:** *Do you think we have been as successful in reaching out to the much-vaunted Arab and Muslim "street" as we have in convincing their regimes to stand by us?*

**Pickering:** No, we haven't. It's a difficult task but we need to work much harder. And I must admit that the Clinton administration did not pay enough attention to that factor or devote enough resources to it, either, which undoubtedly enabled Osama bin Laden to attract more support than he would have otherwise — building on Saddam's own propagandizing in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.

**FSJ:** *Your current job clearly keeps you quite busy. But what else would*

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*you like to do? Any plans to write a memoir or other books?*

**Pickering:** I have thought seriously for some time about writing a memoir, but I want to make sure that it represents a contribution to serious

thought about diplomacy and doesn't just clutter the shelf with personal reminiscences.

**FSJ:** *Your wife Alice is receiving a special commendation from AFSA for her own contributions both to your career and to U.S. diplomacy. Please tell us about both those roles.*

**Pickering:** Since we have always thought of ourselves as a team, we are both deeply gratified by that recognition. As you know, Alice was already an FSO when we met, yet she made the tough choice — as female FSOs regrettably had to in those days — to sacrifice her own accomplished, highly promising career to marry me.

Our partnership has contributed to the Foreign Service in another way, as well: my daughter Margaret serves as a lawyer in the Legal Advisor's office and our son-in-law John is an FSO running State's Office of European Security and Political Affairs (EUR/RPM).

**FSJ:** *Thank you, Ambassador Pickering.* ■

## Join the Journal's Editorial Board!

Active Foreign Service employees from all foreign affairs agencies are invited to nominate themselves or colleagues for a two-year term on the *Foreign Service Journal* Editorial Board beginning in September. Because of normal turnover and moves abroad, there will be at least three vacancies on the board this year.

Board members set the general editorial direction of the *Journal*, in consultation with the editorial staff. Meeting monthly at AFSA HQ (over a free lunch!), they evaluate submitted manuscripts, decide on future focus topics, and weigh in on other matters affecting the *Journal's* style, substance and process.

Board members must be able to attend monthly midday meetings in Washington and should be able to devote at least a few hours a month to reading articles and considering other *Journal*-related matters.

If interested, please get in touch as soon as possible with *FSJ* editor Steve Honley (e-mail: [honley@afsa.org](mailto:honley@afsa.org)), sending some information about yourself (or the colleague you are nominating) and explaining why you are interested in serving on the Board.

**For more information, you may also call (202) 944-5511, fax: (202) 338-8244, or write: Editorial Board Search, Foreign Service Journal, 2101 E Street N.W., Washington, D.C., 20037-2990.**

# ARAB-AMERICANS IN ISRAEL: WHAT “SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP”?

ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES HAVE LONG ENJOYED PARTICULARLY CLOSE RELATIONS. BUT THAT “SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP” HAS NOT EXTENDED TO PALESTINIAN-AMERICANS IN ISRAEL.

BY *JERRI BIRD*

**T**he Department of State’s annual human rights reports have documented for many years a depressing litany of extra-legal human rights abuses perpetrated against the Palestinian people by Israel: countless home demolitions, land confiscations, arbitrary arrests, and widespread torture. Similar practices have also been reported in detail by numerous Israeli, Palestinian and international human rights organizations for years.

But it may come as an unpleasant surprise for the American public to learn that for over 30 years, Israel has also repeatedly detained, tortured and incarcerated Americans of Arab origin, without suffering any sanctions or even a public reprimand from Washington.

Responding to a question in the April 2, 2002, press briefing, a State Department spokesman confirmed that Israel was holding at least 18 American citizens on “security” charges, and had detained at least 22 more since “the current violence began last fall.” He also noted that “we have no way of knowing for certain the numbers of American citizens who may have been detained for short periods and released.” Since it is a legal obligation of every host government to notify the local diplomatic mission within 48 hours of the detention of a foreign national, this is an alarming admission.

In addition, Israeli and international human rights organizations have gathered evidence that such prisoners are routinely denied family visits for long periods and deprived of access to legal counsel. Their interrogations routinely include torture. Such cases are heard by one military officer at a hearing conducted in a settlement on the West Bank, which enables authorities to deny the detainee a civil trial. The detainee is not allowed to challenge the charges or offer a real defense.

I first learned of the detention and torture of American citizens in 1998, when the case of Hashem Mufleh was

brought to my attention. He was an 18-year-old, third-generation American born in Albuquerque, N.M. After attending high school in the West Bank village where his grandmother lives, he went to Ben Gurion Airport together with his mother and brother to return to Albuquerque to attend university. There Israeli authorities seized him. Partners for Peace launched a nationwide effort to bring the facts of his situation to public attention. Sadly, he was severely tortured and was jailed for more than a year before he was expelled from the country. Other cases were soon referred to me and I have since been able to document a total of 13, two of whom remain in prison.

## **Jamil Sarsour**

Jamil Sarsour, now 51, was naturalized as an American citizen in 1983. He lives in Wisconsin where he has extensive business interests. He is married and has eight children. In October 1998, Sarsour was detained upon arrival at the Ben Gurion Airport and taken to Moscoviya Prison (two blocks from the U.S. consulate general in Jerusalem) where he alleges he was subjected to interrogation and torture, including “shabah,” a standard Israeli procedure for dehumanizing prisoners. After being handcuffed and having their feet chained, they are forced to sit in a tilted small chair tied to the ground, leaving them totally unable to move. They are then hooded with a filthy small bag which is very hard to breathe through. Meanwhile, very loud music blasts overhead. Sarsour was also denied the use of a toilet or shower for long periods.

The questioning centered on alleged transfers of funds to “illegal organizations” such as Hamas. Sarsour denies making such transfers but admits that he has helped to support a widow with four children who is a member of his extended family. He also acknowledges that he had \$10,000 in cash on him when he arrived in Israel, but it is not uncommon for Palestinian-Americans to travel with large quantities of cash

when returning to their ancestral homeland where they will share their good fortune with gifts for family and friends.

Sarsour's brother Emad says the family notified the consulate of the detention 10 days after he was first detained, but he did not receive a consular or family visit until after 101 days of incarceration, when an American consul finally came. His wife was allowed to see him two weeks after that, but only on a non-contact basis.

It was 60 days more before Sarsour's attorney visited him, and the two men were never allowed to meet in private. When the attorney visited him again, he was accompanied by a delegation of four American officials: a female U.S. district attorney from Chicago, a male DA from Milwaukee, an FBI or CIA agent, and a counterterrorism official. They interrogated Sarsour and wanted him to sign an agreement to cooperate with them by telling about a terrorist network in the U.S., saying that would help his case. When he refused, the delegation warned him that if he did not confess to providing money to Hamas he would be jailed "forever." He says they also showed him pictures of his home and those of his relatives back in the States, indicating they knew how to implicate them with the same charges.

Although the physical torture stopped once he received a consular visit, Sarsour was then moved from solitary confinement to a cell with Palestinians who he says tried to get him to incriminate himself and beat him when he refused.

After many postponements over a period of almost three years, his trial was finally held on Aug. 8, 2001, and he was convicted of channeling funds to Adel Awadallah, a top Hamas fugitive and mastermind of past suicide bombings in

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*Jerri Bird, the wife of retired FSO Eugene Bird, has lived in Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia and traveled in all of the other Arab countries except Iraq and Sudan. She is president and founder of Partners for Peace, a Washington, D.C.-based NGO whose mission is to educate the public about the issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with particular emphasis on developing productive relationships with the professional media. Partners for Peace sponsors an annual 10-city tour of the United States called "Jerusalem Women Speak: Three Women, Three Faiths, One Shared City," that brings women from Israel and Palestine together to share their views of the conflict with ordinary Americans. (For more information, go to [www.partnersforpeace.org](http://www.partnersforpeace.org).)*

*Ms. Bird is also the author of numerous articles on the role of women in the Muslim world and on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She wrote the chapter "Revolution for Children in Saudi Arabia" in the book Children in the Muslim Middle East, edited by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and published by the University of Texas Press in 1995.*

Israel. (Awadallah was killed in an Israeli raid.) Sarsour was sentenced and imprisoned at Ashkelon Prison, but his family hopes he may be home by Feb. 11, 2003. However, he missed the wedding of his oldest daughter last September, and neither his wife nor any other family member has been allowed to visit him since September 2000. Consulate General Jerusalem routinely sends a local staff person to visit American prisoners approximately once per month.

### **Amjad Ahmad Farah Kur'an**

Amjad Ahmad Farah Kur'an, a 21-year-old who was attending Bir Zeit University and living with his father who had retired to the family home in Al Bireh, adjacent to Ramallah, is also still in prison. Amjad was picked up in June 1998 as he was on his way to Bir Zeit University and alleges he was tortured for a week in the Moscobiya Prison before anyone from the consulate was able to visit him.

Amjad was charged with "stone-throwing, an act against public order, providing chemicals for explosives and seven different materials, conspiring to break prisoners out of prison and membership in an illegal organization," according to the official charge sheet. He signed a confession obtained during torture.

Mr. Farah, his father, claims the charges against his son, based on Amjad's purchase of kerosene for the space heater for the family home, were ridiculous. He points out that there is no way Amjad could reach a prison to assist in any breakout.

When he asked his son why he had confessed to things he claims he did not do, Amjad reluctantly told him it was because he couldn't endure any more torture. In addition to subjecting him to shabah, the interrogators had thrown hot water on him, pulled his hair, deprived him of food and threatened to pull out his fingernails. His family has told me he is in fragile condition; he only weighed 155 pounds at the time of his detention and lost 15 pounds in the first month of detention.

Amjad was transferred to Megiddo Prison, an extremely overcrowded tent prison located between Haifa and the Lebanese border, far from his West Bank home. It is a common practice of the Israeli security establishment to jail Palestinians outside their home area, a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention.

After two years of imprisonment without any trial he was sentenced in July 2000 by an Israeli military officer to 52 months at a hearing held in an Israeli settlement on the West Bank. He was also ordered to pay a \$2,000 fine.

Initially, Amjad's mother and a sister were allowed to visit him by making arrangements with the Red Crescent Society, but now they have not seen him in almost two years. His father has been allowed to visit only once (before the begin-

ning of the September 2000 intifada). On his way to the prison, Mr. Farah says he was stopped at a checkpoint where the guard took his American passport and stomped on it. The guard said, "I could kill your wife and son and the U.S. government couldn't do anything." He was held at this checkpoint for five hours of harassment and taunting. (Keep in mind that this is a man who earned a B.A. degree and an MBA in the United States, then ran his own business in Youngstown, Ohio, before selling it and moving to the West Bank.) And when he and his family reached the prison, the guard required Mr. Farah and other Palestinian visitors to clean the latrines before they were allowed to see the detainees.

When Mr. Farah complained to a consular representative about conditions in the tent prison and the fact that his son was being bitten by rats, he was told there was nothing the American officials could do. He also

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***"I cannot believe that  
my government was  
powerless to take action  
on my behalf.  
Is it because I have  
an Arabic name?"***

— Anwar Mohamed, a Palestinian-American detained in Israel

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visited the consulate in Jerusalem and the embassy in Tel Aviv in the early days of his son's imprisonment seeking help but never managed to talk to an American officer. (In interviewing other detainees and family members, I have found it is a general practice of the American consulate to refer Arab-

Americans to local employees when they make inquiries of any kind.) At the embassy, the FSNs he spoke with blamed him for his son's situation because he had sent him to a Palestinian university.

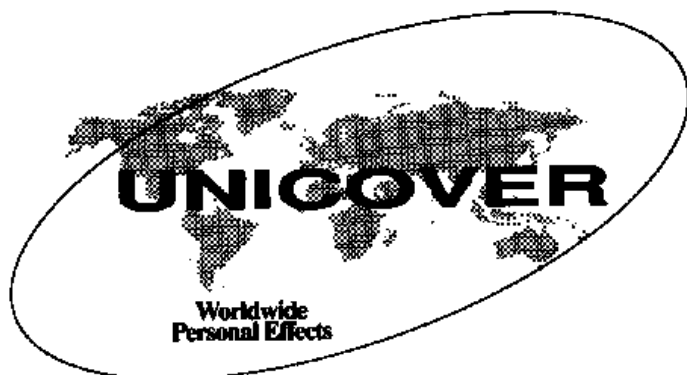
### **40 Days In Hell**

Among the many other Palestinian-Americans who have suffered similar mistreatment but been released are Anwar Mohamed and Yusif Marei. Since both men returned to the United States immediately following their ordeal, I have had the opportunity to interview them extensively.

Anwar Mohamed's brother, Hassan Mohamed, called me to advise me of his brother's detention. Anwar was born in Silwan to an American citizen, Ahmad Mohamed, now deceased. He grew up in America and was the manager of a pizza restaurant when he decided to go to the West Bank to visit his aunts, the only family members

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remaining there. His sister is married and lives in Amman. Anwar decided to visit her before returning home and was detained at the border, handcuffed and chained and taken to "another place" where he says the soldiers taunted him when he presented his American passport by saying, "We are all Americans here, but we hate Americans."

A Department of State official in Washington admitted that a Jerusalem employee of the consulate visited Anwar and observed that he had been beaten. After two weeks of torture Anwar refused to sign a confession and was remanded by a "judge" to 16 more days of "interrogation." The following is an excerpt from his detailed account in his own words, tape recorded as soon as he returned to the United States.

"I spent 40 days in hell. There are no words to describe what I went through. All kinds of torture was practiced on me, from food and sleep deprivation, beatings, inhuman confinement in a concrete box of 6-by-4-feet, isolated for 19 days with no windows and a hole in the floor as a toilet; with disgusting odors, spiders and roaches [crawling] over my face. This box is known as 'The Coffin.' I also faced threats of death, deprivation of clean, warm clothing and my medicine (I have a chronic ear condition), and psychological mistreatment. The chair where I was handcuffed and chained with my head covered with a filthy bag, stretched into a contorted position for days at a time, caused my hands to swell as a balloon and they lost all sense of feeling. I lost 40 pounds. I was in agony. All of this was going on while the American consulate was located just a few blocks away from me, and our American flag was flying high in the sky on top of it!"

Yousif Marei was born in a village near Jenin in 1955, immigrated to the United States in 1978 and became a U.S. citizen in 1996. On April 26,

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1999, after completing the haj (pilgrimage to Mecca), he traveled to Jordan. He and his wife were detained at the Allenby Bridge crossing point to Israel as they were traveling to the home of his parents on the West Bank. They were held in separate areas, and he was extremely agitated about the welfare of his young bride, who had never been to the Middle East. After 14 hours he was handcuffed and taken to Jalameh Prison near Haifa.

Here is a short excerpt from his detailed account of this experience:

“One interrogator used the method of shabah against me for three hours [at a time] to force me to lie against myself. Many times they kept me for long hours in a small cell between the interrogations. That cell was the size of my body. I called it the living grave cell. The Israelis never charged me with anything. The American consul from Tel Aviv visited me on the second day of my arrest. That was a big relief for me. It was the first time after my arrest that I received news about my wife. The consul was sympathetic. I thought he was going to take me with him and free me and let me go to my family. He told me that the Israeli authorities were concerned about my human rights conditions. He told me that the security issue is ‘a matter between you and the Israeli authorities,’ and he couldn’t get involved in that. He offered me two magazines together with some printed pages but the guard didn’t allow me to have the printed pages. Maybe the papers explained my rights as an American citizen. I appreciated the visit but I wish that he had done more for me than give me a magazine.”

Both Yousif Marei and Anwar Mohamed were finally released after 36 to 40 days of detention and torture without any charge ever filed against them, and no explanation or apology. Anwar was required by the Israelis to get a Palestinian passport (which he did not want) and then

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***On his way to a prison  
to visit his son,  
one Palestinian-American  
says he was stopped at a  
checkpoint where the  
guard took his passport  
and stomped on it.***

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apply for an exit visa before he was finally allowed to leave. Again, when Anwar sought help from the American consulate, he was told that he had to “follow Israeli rules.”

#### **Presenting Their Case**

Few Arab-Americans are willing to go public with the details of their torture in Israeli prisons once they gain release and return to America, fearing that they will be targeted by the FBI as so many Arab-Americans have been, or reviled by their fellow citizens as possible security risks. Fear of U.S. reprisal has only increased in the aftermath of Sept. 11. But three men (Anwar Mohamed, Yousif Marei and Bishar Saidi) who endured this experience came to Washington twice to present their cases to the Department of State, Congress and the public. I regard them as brave because Shin Bet officials told them as they left Israel, “Don’t cause us any trouble. We can get you wherever you are.”

The State Department refused to give them an appointment when they came to Washington the first time, suggesting that they mail their affidavits. However, the *Washington Post* ran a story about them and the same day I received a call from the office of Thomas R. Pickering, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs,

offering time for an appointment with staff from Consular Affairs the following day. Those officials expressed concern, but there was never any follow-up to the requests made by the three men, which included obtaining the release of the Americans still held in prison by Israel.

The men also recounted their experiences at a press conference held at the National Press Club and the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others, published articles. CNN produced a 17-minute documentary about Anwar’s experience and aired it worldwide.

Partners for Peace has repeatedly raised this issue with congressional offices, the Department of State and the White House. Congressional offices are largely totally unresponsive. From State, we have received boilerplate replies that express regret but are not responsive to our requests for action. President Clinton responded with the usual acknowledgment of “an obligation to protect all American citizens, regardless of where they may happen to be,” and an assurance that this problem has been raised in the human rights report. He also said that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had raised the issue at the highest levels, including Prime Minister Ehud Barak, whose response was that Israel had “no intention to humiliate or to intimidate any Arab citizens, be they Israelis, Americans or from other countries.” Note that this is not a reply to the charge of torture.

My work during the past four years and the evidence I have compiled suggest that these cases are but the tip of the iceberg. All these young men — and women — are extremely proud to be American and have been deeply offended by the official U.S. attitude in the face of their trauma. As Anwar Mohamed said, “I cannot believe that my government was powerless to take

action on my behalf. Is it because I have an Arabic name?"

### The Special Relationship

The origin of the unwritten policy permitting these abuses — commonly called the “special relationship” — cannot be pinpointed. But after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, following the Six-Day War, there was a subtle but clear shift in U.S. policy, particularly with regard to the reporting from the consulate general in Jerusalem. That post has had a unique independent status since official U.S. policy deems Jerusalem an international city, not the capital of Israel. Initially, this status provided the basis for offering a different voice to Washington, one that reflected American officials’ unique opportunity to observe both sides of the conflict on a day-to-day basis. But by the end of the first decade of occupation, Israeli sensitivities were

already increasingly reflected.

This new pattern was “codified” in the handling of a series of reports of Israeli torture, including the torture of two American teenagers as reported in an airgram (Jerusalem A-19, dated Oct. 9, 1978), filed by junior officer Alexandra Johnson in 1978. The brothers, Gamil Khalid, 15, and Gamal Khalid, 16, were subjected to beatings and thrown to the ground. In a written statement Gamil Khalid reported as follows: “They took me to a room and said to me, ‘Sign this paper, and if not we will do to you like we did to Munzer [another detainee] and hit you in the eye and swell it up like his. We will bring border police and beat you in front of your father with a stick on any part of your body, and put the stick into your rear.’ So I agreed.”

The boys were eventually given several hearings (usually called a military court but devoid of any of the usual rules of evidence), and the “tri-

als” were attended by two American consular officers. As Ms. Johnson’s airgram reports: “One of the two was present at every session of the trial. It is the opinion of both of these consular officers that the Israeli military authorities made no real effort to investigate the charges of mistreatment. Indeed, both the military judge and the prosecutor made it clear throughout the trial that they considered the questions of mistreatment and coercion to be irrelevant and trivial. They also made it clear from the start that the trial’s result was preordained.”

According to the airgram, the consular section of the consulate general had sent over 40 reports on Israeli mistreatment of Palestinian political prisoners in Jerusalem and the West Bank to the State Department. In two later cables (Jerusalem 1500 and 3239, sent on June 3, 1978, and Nov. 30, 1978, respectively), Johnson detailed the treatment of Arab prisoners on the

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West Bank. She received commendatory letters from Arthur Houghton, an aide to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance; Pat Derian, Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, and Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, but was denied tenure in 1979 and left the Foreign Service.

The report dated Nov. 30, 1978, was approved by both the consul general and his deputy, with the following note appended: "The post fully understands Israel's legitimate concern over security on the West Bank and accepts the premise that a military occupation regime may necessarily supercede the basic civil and human rights which are expected in a free, democratic state living in a state of peace."

#### Other Observers

It should perhaps come as no surprise that Israel treats Arab-American prisoners so brutally given the way it

treats Palestinian detainees. A number of NGOs, including some in Israel itself, have documented these abuses. For example, B'Tselem (the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) reports the following:

"Since 1987, the General Security Service (GSS) interrogators have tortured thousands of detainees, intentionally inflicting severe pain and suffering. The torture was neither extraordinary nor limited to 'ticking bombs.' Quite the opposite: torture was a bureaucratic routine; there was standard equipment for inflicting torture, and careful recording of the times the pain and suffering were inflicted. Even the state's response in petitions against torture repeated, paragraph after paragraph, the routine justification for what were supposedly extraordinary acts. Supervision of the GSS did not succeed in preventing torture in Israel from becoming rou-

tine, systematic and institutionalized."

A report by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel defines the issue this way: "Israel's 32-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has given rise to patterns of legal proceedings that undermine the rule of law and the democratic values of the state of Israel. According to the latest official estimate, during the Intifada period alone (1987-1993), 30,000 Palestinians were interrogated by the GSS. Those mass arrests led to illegal interrogation, which usually included submitting the detainees to physical and mental pressure and torture and which, from the start, contradicted the Israeli Penal Code and the Israeli Basic Law of Freedom and Dignity. Moreover, this behavior has continued to take place with total disregard to the fact that in August 1991, Israel ratified the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or

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According to Miftah (an Arab NGO headed by Hanan Ashrawi), since 1967 the Israelis have carried out over 600,000 arrests or detentions. Both Miftah and B’Tselem concur that between 90 and 94 percent of those arrestees have been tortured. Even if we halve that number, that still means that some 270,000 individuals have been tortured. Or to put it another way: if that proportion were applied to the U.S. population, it would mean that more than 25 million cases of torture had occurred in the past 35 years.

### The Israeli Response

Even though it is well documented that the practice of torture began soon after Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the Israelis deny any use of torture at all. With the creation of Israel as an independent state in 1948, the Israeli Knesset adopted the 1945 Defense Emergency Regulations of the British. In the Occupied Territories this law allows detention without trial. The Fourth Geneva Convention permits such detentions on a limited basis, but with clear stipulations limiting the use of the power and calls for the safeguarding of basic human rights. Israel asserts that both detention and “moderate physical pressure” are justified since the country remains on a wartime footing and use of any and all means necessary to extract information and save Israeli lives is required.

After the press conference in September 1999 in Washington, D.C. featuring the three American victims of torture, an Israeli Embassy spokesman was quoted as saying, “We don’t do torture.” But a few days later, the High Court of Israel (comparable to the U.S. Supreme Court) acknowledged that torture was a tool that had been routinely used by the state and ruled that certain forms of “moderate

physical pressure” must be abandoned since these actually constituted “torture.” This was a great victory for Israelis who had been fighting for years in court for such a ruling, and for a few months there were no new reports of torture. However, within six months, credible reports of a continuation of the operations of the General Security Services were surfacing, including interrogation methods explicitly outlawed by the High Court.

### Time to Reassess Our Policy

There is clear evidence that the United States government has known for at least 24 years that Israel uses torture during interrogations of Palestinians and that the practice was widespread. Furthermore, the U.S. had evidence that American children were also subjected to this abuse. Yet, over more than two decades, no effective action has been taken by the United States to halt this practice.

Furthermore, the United States took great care to avoid any public admission that Americans had been tortured.

The special relationship offers the United States the opportunity to have enormous influence on the state of Israel. In addition to giving huge amounts of aid to Israel, the U.S. has provided military resources that have helped make it the fourth most powerful fighting force in the world.

Yet rather than using this special relationship in a constructive way, U.S. policy has become “Israel, right or wrong.” Even when the lives of American citizens are at stake, the U.S. does not intervene effectively to safeguard them. How can this disregard for our citizens be justified? This is not a question of guilt or innocence of the individual detained. The issue is torture.

Israel was founded on the premise that it would be the “light of the

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world," a tiny democracy thriving through hard work in the midst of a desert. Israel has, instead, become a country that tortures and commits many other human rights abuses, acknowledged and detailed in the Department of State's Human Rights Reports for years.

And now we see a ferocious, brutal attack on Palestinian civilians by the massive Israeli military, supposedly to root out terrorists. Let me be clear: Nothing can possibly justify suicide bombings carried out against innocent civilians in pizza parlors, hotels or bus stops. But neither can anything justify the brute force Israel has used to maintain its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Israel has attempted to hijack the U.S.-led war on terrorism by claiming that Palestinians resisting occupation are equivalent to al-Qaida, and asserting that it is merely doing what the U.S. is doing in Afghanistan: protecting its citizens. But the differences are self-evident. The U.S. has not been occupying Afghanistan for 35 years. We have no American settlements in Afghanistan.

And so I ask: Who are the terrorists in the Middle East? Don't decades of torture practiced on a wide scale by an occupying power qualify as being terrorist? Are the Israeli government demolitions of homes not terrorist actions? Do the attacks on civilians in the Jenin operation mean there will be fewer Palestinian terrorists? How long can moderate governments in the region continue as American partners in the "war on terrorism"?

We share Israel's guilt in the commission of human rights abuses over a long period of time because we have allowed our friend to commit them. We are enablers. For the sake of our future and our national honor, and for the sake of peace, our "special relationship" must change. The torture must stop. ■