

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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UNDERSTANDING THE CONFLICT

U.S. should do more to address roots of terrorism

Following Sept. 11, America has focused on stopping terrorism. Many steps have been taken to prevent terrorism, including the overthrow of the Taliban and the formation of the Department of Homeland Security. Much of the efforts so far have aimed at stopping those who have already decided to commit terrorist acts as opposed to addressing issues that leave people feeling terrorism is their only option.

In the Islamic world, much of the frustration that leads to terrorism comes from the situation involving the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis.

In the middle of a modern, westernized country in the world's spotlight, war has simmered for more than 35 years. Since 1967, when Israel defeated a coalition of Arab states, the fate of territory occupied during the war has been up in the air. It is mostly inhabited by Palestinians, but Israeli settlements formed in the past 35 years also exist. As long as the fate of the occupied land is in question, there will be war for it.

According to the BBC, in the two years since Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon touched off the latest series of back-and-forth retaliations, there have been 600 Israeli and 1,500 Palestinian deaths. Most of those killed were civilians. This can only be described as an incredible tragedy played out on the world stage. Horror stories from this area of the world almost seem ordinary now, as they are in the newspaper every day.

The United States must push harder for a final world consensus on a settlement, not only because it is the humanitarian thing to do, but because it is in our own self interest. Peace is a realistic possibility.

The Pew Research Center, a non-profit agency, recently conducted a survey on international opinions. More than 38,000 people in 44 countries were surveyed, and the survey showed that America was viewed much more negatively in Arab and Muslim countries than in other countries at similar economic levels.

The broad-based but relatively mild dislike of the United States in these countries is the foundation for the extreme dislike of the radical few that make up terrorist organizations.

What is the root cause of this dislike for America? One might speculate that it is based primarily on perceived U.S. involvement in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and misinformation in the relation of world events that the people of the Middle East get from their news sources. Others might speculate that our culture is fundamentally at odds with Islam itself.

TIM SCHNIEDWIND

If all three of the above reasons are true to some degree, then the perception that the United States unfairly supports Israel is perhaps the most damaging, because rumors and false information are easier to spread when washed down with snippets of news. In the book "What Arabs Think," a survey provides evidence that the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is the root of our image problems. A group of people from eight Arab countries were asked what the United States can do to improve its image. In every country, at least a third of those who responded mentioned some change in the United States' policy towards Israel. This was the most frequently-mentioned topic.

Assuming that the United States was viewed as taking a more evenhanded approach to the peace process, our image problem in the Arab world would decrease, along with the terrorist threat to our nation. The diffusing of a tragic conflict, while at the same time bettering our world image, seems a much more attractive solution than more security in the form of a larger military and further restriction on immigrants.

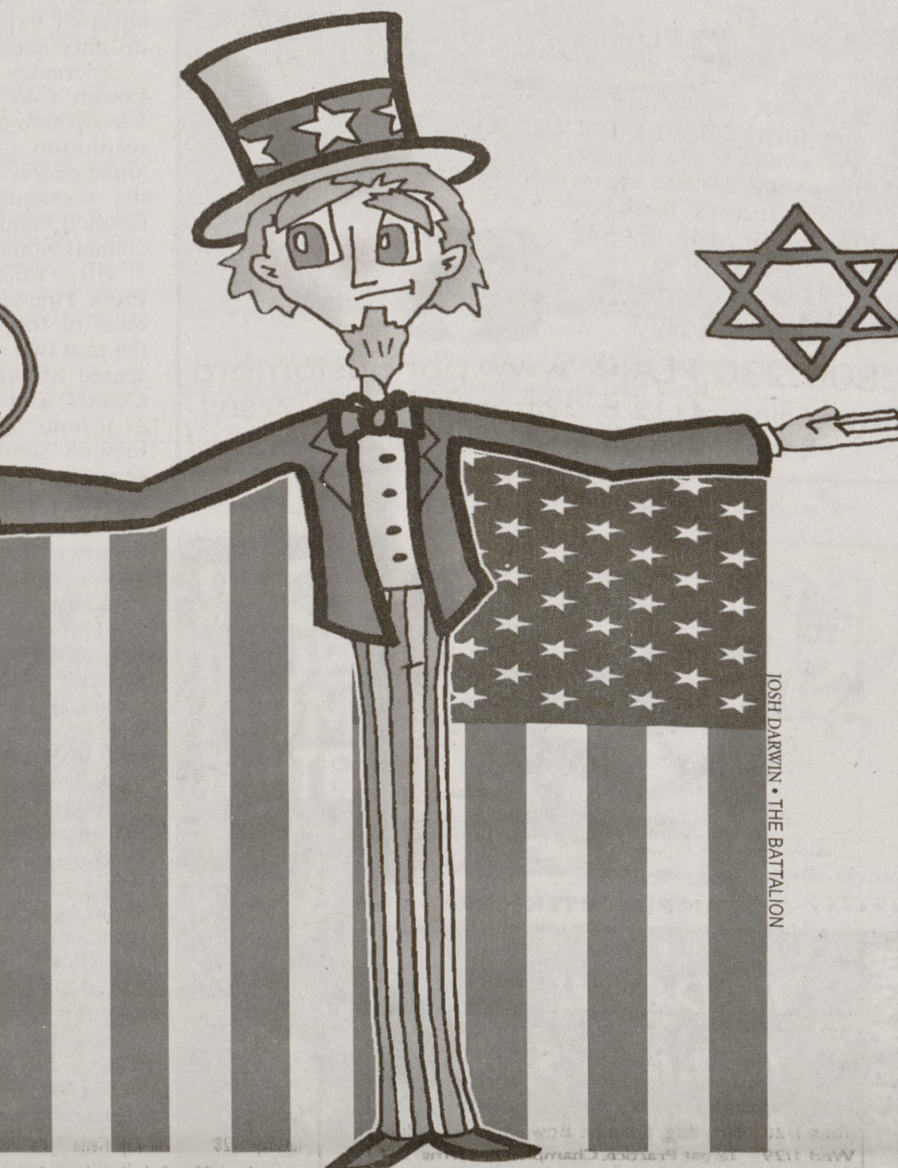
There is no guarantee that peace will work in Israel and Palestine now when it has failed in the past. With each passing year more people are realizing that this conflict is not just a tragedy, but a threat to stability in the Middle East and the world. The major world powers are currently trying to work out a peace plan for the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia.

Known as the "quartet," they are less polarized on the issue than ever before. The possibility of these countries working out a fair diplomatic solution seems hopeful.

According to the Christian Science Monitor, the United States gives Israel \$3 billion of direct aid each year. More than \$2 billion goes to support Israel's military. This gives the United States considerable bargaining leverage to bring the Israelis to the negotiating table. Recently Ariel Sharon made comments that the European Union was not ready to be included in the peace process because it is biased. This is equivalent to the pot calling the kettle black, and the United States should demand that Israel's leadership take a different attitude that is more peace-friendly if they want our continued support.

While details of a possible settlement are beyond the scope of this column, there are principles that a settlement should include. It must involve more countries than just the United States, and should include the countries in the "quartet" and several Arab states. Israelis and Palestinians must be well represented. The majority of occupied territories would have to be returned to Palestinian rule. If territory remained part of Israel it must have a large Israeli population or be viewed as necessary to ensure Israel's security, and would have to form a contiguous and logical geographic area with Israel's current borders. In return, the international coalition would make a firm commitment to defend Israel from any further attacks, and make it clear that this a permanent solution. Arab states would have to recognize Israel as a state.

If a settlement is worked out, maybe the money the United States is currently funneling into the area's militaries and governments could then be redirected into helping the people of the region escape the harsh economic realities brought on by war. This would certainly help to alleviate the desperation that is the root of most terrorism.



Terrorism is a selfish cry for help. The steps the United States have taken so far have sent the world the message that we will not tolerate it. Now it is time to answer the cry for help. We should not further punish those who are suffering by ignoring their plight

because of the selfish and desperate acts of terrorists. To truly win the war against terrorism, the United States must end the war for the occupied territories.

Tim Schmiedwind is a graduate student environmental engineering major.

MAIL CALL

Diversity and political correctness reexamined

What right do A&M officials have to pass judgment on a party that does not even occur on campus? The administration is exacerbating the tension caused by their own hypersensitivity to race. It doesn't help that our officials seem willing to sacrifice tradition and the things we love about A&M for vague buzzword goals like "diversity" and a top-20 ranking.

The administration seems to have forgotten that this university is a business. We, the students, pay for a service to be provided. We are the customers. And the First Rule of Business is that the customer is always right. So whether we want the Bonfire back on campus or a simple theme party, aren't our officials obligated to facilitate that — or at least not actively hinder it? After all, businesses that don't follow the Rule fall by the wayside.

Money from our pockets allows these people to live and buy food; with all due respect, they should start acting like it.

It has been my experience that many issues of so-called racism have been blown out of proportion in the past and probably will continue to be in the future. Society has taught us to be sensitive to the feelings of others based on the color of their skin. "Don't say this you might offend someone." "Don't do that you might hurt someone's feelings." In my opinion, in our effort to be "politically correct" we have actually encouraged racism. Have we not alienated the races from each other in doing this? Can a person not make a comment any more without it being considered offensive?

In a failing attempt to bring unity to Americans, society has made us afraid to branch out and meet people of a different nationality because this person might be "offended" by what we do or say. When students decide to throw a party on Martin Luther King day and want to call it a ghetto party, who's right is it to say that they can't? Is this not an infringement on those students free speech rights? Whether or not it was racist is not the issue. Obviously these students did not intend for the theme to be racist. It was simply a themed party thrown on a national holiday.

Nick Nethery
Class of 2003

Jamie Scott
Class of 2005



New name, new identity?

More than name change needed to improve TS

PTTS is no more. The organization that is responsible for ticketing and towing on the A&M campus, among other things, is now simply Transportation Services (TS).

With this name change, TS Director Rodney Weis and the rest of (PT)TS believe they can convince the student body that their organization is now different and better. Those believing this ruse are sorely mistaken, and only need to look at the actions of TS involved with its name change to see why.

To inform students of the name change, the former PTTS launched a public relations blitz, which, fortunately, is now over. The organization placed ads in The Battalion and on radio stations, among other things. As such, the money generated from TS giving out several parking tickets was enough to pay for one of these ads, whether or not ticket money funded the media blitz. TS said the advertisements were designed primarily to improve its public image and publicize its name change.

When one looks at the public relations campaign, the events scheduled were even more appalling — radio spots, several ads in The Battalion, and little festivities at which food and products were given away to entice students into liking TS. Interestingly, the need to change TS stationary, logos, etc. all over campus adds up to \$14,000, according to TS Assistant Director Debbie Hoffman. Associate Director Kenneth Kimball said the funds for the name change came from the same account into which ticket revenues go. Thus, the students, faculty and staff of Texas A&M, directly or indirectly, helped to finance the TS name change with a couple hundred parking tickets.



NICHOLAS NEUMANN

TS claims, in its Battalion ad, that, "We've changed our name. But we're not stopping there." It promises a new and improved organization. The question remaining to be answered is: why did TS need a new name to become a better organization and serve the A&M community in a more beneficial manner? The simple answer: it doesn't.

The only thing the TS name change really attempts to accomplish is to improve the public image of the organization. The last thing a ticketed driver wants his ticket money going to is the improvement of the public image of the very organization that gave him his ticket, yet this is exactly what is happening.

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Rather than using money from tickets and other sources to actually improve the services of the organization, TS is wasting it on making itself look better. If TS can think of no better way to use its money than on public relations, it should give its excess cash to a department or organization at A&M that could actually use it in a positive manner. The last thing TS should be concerned about is its pub-

lic image, while its primary concern should be serving its customers. Sadly, its priorities are exactly reversed.

Student stories of horrendous experiences with the former PTTS abound, and now traumatic experiences with Transportation Services are being created every day. Yet TS is doing everything it can to make certain people like the employees of the department. The aforementioned ads in The Battalion show 14 TS employees smiling. Until the ads ran, most could count on their own fingers the number of times they had seen a TS employee with a smile on his face or a friendly, caring attitude. The media blitz of TS is really nothing more than a campaign of propaganda that attempts to mask the deviousness and discourteousness of the organization behind a wall of artificial smiles.

The TS ad promises the organization is "moving in a whole new direction," or "forward." Its new Web site claims that TS's "focus will remain customer driven." While TS is correct in implying that up to this point it has not been moving "forward," its ability to focus on customers is laughable. The people TS tickets can hardly be called "customers."

TS needs to realize that the manner in which it does its job, not a bunch of glitzy advertisements, freebies, and a new name, is the only way it can improve its image with the student body. Weis became the new director of PTTS this past year and was supposed to usher in a new and better PTTS, but his first major step is disappointingly one in the wrong direction. A rose by any other name is still a rose; likewise, PTTS by the name of Transportation Services is still PTTS.

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