

JAMES JONES VERSUS HILLARY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

I pointed out the other day that those worried about Obama's foreign policy plans ought to be more focused on his National Security Advisor, reported to be retired Marine General James Jones, than Hillary at State.

And there are reasons to be concerned about Jones. For example, Jones currently leads a US Chamber of Commerce initiative to forge an energy consensus that espouses some questionable views (though I am thrilled about an NSA who has been focusing on energy in recent years).

Eli Lake offers a different view, focusing on Jones' possible tension with Hillary as it relates to Middle East peace. Lake argues that Jones will be much more accommodating of (moderate) Palestinian views in any negotiations than Hillary.

Last November, Condoleezza Rice appointed [Jones] as her special envoy for Middle East security, with a particular emphasis on working with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Palestinian security services. Last August, he drafted a report on security in the Palestinian territories that is said to have been highly critical of Israel's policies in the territories and its attitude toward the Palestinian Authority's security services. The White House and State Department opted not to publish the report.

In August, Israel's leading newspaper, *Ha'aretz*, reported that the draft report challenged Israel's conception of its security interests in the West Bank as being overly broad, and that the IDF in particular was too dismissive of the Palestinian security services.

[snip]

In his interview with *Inside the Pentagon*, Jones said that the Palestinians should be granted increasing degrees of local sovereignty over the West Bank until an independent state is born—with an emphasis on giving the Palestinians experience with governance. On Sunday, *Ha'aretz* reported that Jones favors dispatching a NATO force to keep the peace in the interim. That's a plan that the Israeli government would likely fiercely resist on the grounds that the Jewish state's defense doctrine has always spurned the presence of foreign troops on its territory and that it could be a reprise of the disasters of the U.N. mission to Lebanon.

Now, consider his potential nemesis, Hillary Clinton. It is true that there is some doubt about where she ultimately lands on the Israel-Palestine question—confusion that followed her famous hug with Suha Arafat. But since becoming senator, she's been a persistent critic of Palestinian media and schooling, an issue that has traditionally been swept under the rug by the State Department and a central argument the Israeli right has used to warn against the delusions of the Oslo process. Clinton has described the teaching of anti-Israel views in Palestinian textbooks as "child abuse," and held hearings on the topic in an effort to get the Bush administration to do more on the issue.

By focusing on the underlying tenets of Palestinian culture, Senator Clinton has in a way made common cause with the Bush administration hawks. While General Jones wants to take steps now to empower Abbas and his Fatah party to take over a

Palestinian state, Clinton is asking if even the Palestinian moderates are ready to govern.

Now, it appears Hillary has negotiated direct access to Obama. And it doesn't sound like Jones intends to act as a gatekeeper to mediate Hillary's views.

Mrs. Clinton ... has told friends that she does not expect the national security adviser to stand between her and the president.

[snip]

Because of his physical proximity – the national security adviser works in the West Wing of the White House and consults with the president several times a day – General Jones will automatically serve as a counter to the State Department. But a State Department that is at war with the White House is the last thing that General Jones wants, his friends and associates say.

“He's not the sort of person who is going to be chasing down whether Hillary went through him or not,” said one of General Jones's friends, who spoke on condition of anonymity. “He doesn't have that kind of an ego.”

General Jones, friends say, gets along well with Mrs. Clinton and has even hired some of her former staff members to work for him on the energy task force.

Now, frankly, I'm more optimistic than Lake about Hillary's aspirations in Israel (and to be fair, he suggests she might just be doing what Senators from NY do—go hawkish on Israeli issues), though he certainly follows these issues more closely than I.

That said, his notion that the push for soft

power might derive from the NSA, rather than State, suggests a fascinating dynamic.