

Bush's visit to the Middle East: triumph of form over substance?

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The President's visit to the Middle East this week will show once and for all that status quo lives on under the attempt to validate the old saying that an ounce of image is worth a pound of performance. In this case the image came seven years too late.

In public appearances the Bush administration claims it supports "the road map for peace". In 2218 words that "map" lacks any mention of human rights and International law. But even with this shortcoming, it calls for total freeze on settlement activities including so called "natural growth". Israel simply refuses to abide by this. Bush sent a letter to assure Israel that some settlements will be exempt since they would stay with Israel under any final deal. In so doing, Bush himself undermined his own "road map". It is not surprising that US policy evolved from describing settlements as illegal to "obstacles" to "unhelpful" and finally to Jewish neighborhood that will remain part of the Jewish state.

The US government claimed interest in advancing democracy is recognized around the world as the biggest breeding ground for promoting dictators, violence and terrorism (whether that practiced by individuals or the more deadly state terrorism). For example, Hamas was elected in the occupied Palestinian areas in a vote that this administration pushed for. Rather than pressuring Israel to comply with International law (an action which would have truly built up moderate forces in Palestine), Bush chose to pressure Abbas to take Hamas on militarily and thus increase the already high antagonism to the US and its client state of Israel.

Continuing in this policy, when Bush visits Ramallah to meet with Abbas, the city will be under curfew and a virtual marshal law according to instructions given to Palestinian police. Bush's security detail demanded no visible nonviolent demonstrations. Israeli Foreign Minister, daughter of the terrorist who oversaw the bombing of the King David Hotel will jovially agree with Bush on fighting "Islamic terrorism." Bush will look out from that same hotel to see a wall that the International court of Justice ruled illegal. Many of the US officials accompanying Bush were handpicked from lobbyists and pundits who support Israel (Clinton was not any better) so he will not hear the history of that hotel.

Considering the above, the photo opportunities in occupied Jerusalem will not accomplish any more than they did in Annapolis not even the hope of a changed policy after Bush leaves office. Thus, the decline in the U.S.'s ability to influence events around the world is becoming more visible (even in the declining value of the US dollar). There is an obvious and more honest route to peace, security, and economic prosperity for all (Palestinians, Israelis, Americans, Iraqis etc): International law and human rights.

Israel is the only country in the world that gives members of a particular religion, including converts, automatic rights (citizenship, land, homes, subsidies), while denying citizenship to native Christians and Muslims who were ethnically cleansed. World leaders who are freed from the pressures of the Israel lobby have recognized this system for what it is: Apartheid. Israelis actually use hafrada (=segregation) to describe their program. President Carter wrote a book titled "Palestine: Peace not apartheid." Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote: "In our struggle for justice and peace in South Africa we had to learn to speak and listen to hard truths. Our experience should encourage all who strive for justice and peace in the Holy Land. My visits to the Holy Land remind me so much of South Africa: apartheid is back, complete with the "Separation Wall" and Bantustans. History, it seems, repeats itself."

A growing International movement of boycotts, divestment and sanctions, (BDS) coupled with truth telling is building that will succeed like we did with cutting U.S. support for Apartheid South Africa. Israel will then evolve into a democracy with equality for all (Jews, Christians, Muslims etc.) and implement international law including, allowing the refugees to return to their homes and lands. This is the only way to allow a functioning Hebrew and Israeli culture to remain while remedying the injustice committed against the native people.

Many media outlets, influenced by special interests, gave support to pro-Israel candidates while ridiculing those calling for a real change in the self-destructive US foreign policy (e.g. Ron Paul, Dennis Kucinich). The jury is thus still out on whether the new President will continue the same path. More and more US citizens are seeing the devastation caused by the alternative strategy (from 9/11 to chaos in Pakistan). Citizen pressure on all political parties is what achieved ending the war on Vietnam, ending US support for apartheid South Africa, and advancing civil rights. It is time to reclaim our country.

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