

Palestine: Mapping Out Catastrophe

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Does anyone remember that quirky little document called “the roadmap,” the proposed path to peace initiated by the Quartet—the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia—involving the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians? If you remember it and its contents, you can recall that Israelis and Palestinians should be in phase two (of three) of the plan by now: the creation of a quasi Palestinian state with “provisional borders” and the markings of sovereignty. Sadly, the prospects for peace look as grim as the day the roadmap was first outlined in June 2002. I still remember US President George W. Bush’s words, “Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories must stop.” Furthermore, Bush proclaimed, “The Israeli occupation that began in 1967 will be ended through a settlement negotiated between the parties, based on U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338.” In the nearly three and a half years since those promising words were spoken in the Rose Garden, Israeli settlement activity has expanded at an inordinate rate, and the peace process has been curtailed to say the least—nearly 2100 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces.

According to statements made last year by Dov Weisglass, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s senior advisor, “The disengagement [of the Gaza Strip] is actually formaldehyde. It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that’s necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians.” Weisglass’ bold and arrogant analysis was unnecessary. Bush’s track record in the last five years is indication enough. Although focusing on the Iraq quagmire, President Bush nodded along with nearly all of Sharon’s wishes regarding the Apartheid Wall’s discriminatory route, military incursions into the Occupied Territories, extrajudicial assassinations, and unilateral procedure. The status quo remained in place even after the death of the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat who was considered “an obstacle to peace” by the US and Sharon’s government. As Arafat faded away slowly, imprisoned in his compound in Ramallah, Bush publicly reassured Sharon that given “new realities” on the ground, “it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949.” The “return to the armistice lines” is known to Palestinians as the remaining 22 percent of historic Palestine and is the basis for a viable and contiguous future state. Moreover, the White House made little mention of Israel’s responsibilities pertaining to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, while Bush made constant calls for the disarmament of Palestinian militant groups and the “rights” of Israel in maintaining its security. An apparent double standard continues, Israeli security is considered to be a prerequisite and Palestinian security is an optional arrangement.

On October 20, 2005 another “historic” meeting took place between President Bush and Palestinian President Mahmood Abbas. Joining for a discussion on the “way forward” for Israelis and Palestinians, both men seemed fairly satisfied, granted there were no

handholding attempts by President Bush. I guess the only ones left unsatisfied were those who are stimulated by actions rather than words. President Bush stated, "Israel should not undertake any activity that contravenes its roadmap obligations." Bush's post-game talk, unlike his speech in 2002 (albeit propaganda), was severely lacking in content and more importantly in reassurances for action if Israel doesn't fulfill its "obligations." If only President Bush spoke as firmly to Israel, as it did to Iraq prior to the invasion (concerning the implementation of "UN resolution after UN resolution") or to Syria and its possible involvement in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri. If political assassinations are illegal, should they not be illegal for *all* countries in the Middle East, *including* Israel? President Bush was merely paying "lip service" three and a half years ago. I still enjoyed, however, the calls for basing peace on UN resolutions that America voted for and a diffusion of the occupation which, I might add, has done wonders for the Palestinian economy and employment prospects.

Major polls show that the Palestinian population is against attacks on Israel. Likewise, Hamas stopped claiming responsibility for attacks and is gearing up for the parliamentary elections set for January 2006. Yet Israel has chosen to keep the peace process frozen, to mull over the next unilateral step, which according to Sharon and his aides won't be coming for a longtime anyway. This contradicts the mighty claim that Israel has no partner for peace. Abbas and the Palestinian Authority are waiting for engagement, bi-lateral talks and negotiations, but reciprocation does not fit into Sharon's unilateral vision. Yes, fighting exists, be it internal strife or struggle with Israel, but conflict existed after the signing of Oslo. One can easily say, however, that Abbas is more moderate, in tone and in speech to the Israeli, American and Palestinian media. As well, the agenda set forth by Abbas is more appeasing, peaceful, orderly and presidential.

All this lapdog action is not enough for Sharon and an acquiesced White House. Unfortunately, it is not enough for the Palestinian people either, who want change, sustainability, and a leader who will not give into the demands of Israel and America, but rather one who will stand up for their human and indigenous rights. Palestinian society will not let Abbas' hand remain outstretched forever. Angered by continued land appropriation, home demolitions, extrajudicial killings, mass jailing, torturing, restrictions in movement, and strangulation in resources, the Palestinian people will rise up again. If Israel, America, and their own leadership would like the Palestinian people to remain seated, who in Sharon's administration, the Whitehouse, or the Palestinian Authority is willing to stand up and prevent the Third Intifada?

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