

US Middle East Policy: Heedless But Unequivocal

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There are no conspiracies to dissect, no hidden agendas to sort through and no oblique language to skillfully decode: the Bush administration's position on illegal Jewish colonies in the occupied Palestinian territories is crystal clear.

President George W. Bush did all of us a great favour when he once more articulated his stance on the colonies during a joint press conference with Israel's Ariel Sharon on April 11.

Bush's new realities were none other than the already existing colonies in the West Bank that were established following the 1967 war and the subsequent Israeli occupation.

The colonies violate international law as dictated in numerous UN resolutions and their dismantlement is demanded.

It is no secret that the billions of dollars spent to build and sustain them have been provided willingly by successive US governments Republicans and Democrats.

The huge sum of money given by the United States to aid this loud violation of international and human rights law continues unabated.

However, those who struggled to fathom the American role in Israel's grand project of populating the biblical land of Yehuda and Samaria, should no longer claim confusion regarding this topic.

The US president finds it "unrealistic, to dismantle the Jewish-only large population centers" in the West Bank and Occupied East Jerusalem.

This acknowledgment renders much of the anticipated peace talks irrelevant for it sidelines international law, invalidates the US-own-claim of being an honest broker in the so-called peace process and unequivocally declares support for the Israeli position on the matter.

The Israeli position is also clear and compels no ingenious interpretations.

"It is the Israeli position that the major Israeli population centers [illegal Jewish colonies] will remain in Israel's hands under any future status agreement, with all related consequences," Sharon helped clarify further.

Both Bush and Sharon simply restated their positions, which are one and the same, save a few minor details. One of which is the issue of expansion of existing colonies.

Israel has been actively connecting the numerous Jewish colonies by Jewish-only bypass roads, which has compelled the creation of new security zones in the West Bank that were

quickly incorporated into the ever-growing original colonial infrastructure.

The location of the colonies have been selected on strategic grounds. They were mostly built, within reasonable proximity to the 1967 border, to ensure territorial contiguity with Israel while contributing to further territorial disintegration in the Palestinian territories.

They seized the most fertile Palestinian land and water reserves. And with the introduction of the encroaching "Israeli Apartheid Wall", the plan is near completion.

The wall is a de facto annexation of Palestinian land. It cuts off entire communities from their farms and livelihood outside their ever-shrinking population centers.

It locks in whole towns and villages like Qalqilia and it presents tens of thousands of Palestinians with two most difficult options, either indefinite imprisonment or voluntary transfer.

Another challenge that Palestinian farmers must face is obtaining a permit from the Israelis to farm their lands.

If no permit is granted, no access is granted, and if the land is not tilled for a period of three years, it becomes the property of the state of Israel.

But the project is never complete without the absorption of the city of Jerusalem, including Occupied East Jerusalem.

Hence, the expansion of the largest illegal Jewish colony of Maale Adumim.

Once the 3,500 units are completed, Occupied East Jerusalem will be disengaged from the rest of the West Bank, rendering the Palestinian demands for a capital in Occupied East Jerusalem equally "unrealistic", according to Bush's logic.

Those who touted the rift between the Israeli and American position on the colonies need not look beyond the outcome of the vote at the Geneva-based UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).

On April 14, the world's foremost human rights body passed a resolution, condemning Israel's illegal expansion of its colonies in the Occupied Territories.

The resolution was widely approved, with the exception of two countries, one of which was the United States.

US Ambassador Rudy Bochwitz argued that the resolution was both "imbalanced and unjust".

While again there was nothing shocking about the US position in the UNCHR or any other international body critical of Israel, it confirms that no meaningful change has occurred or should be expected to occur in the Bush administration regarding the issue of colonies.

Conversely, the US administration's clarity on other primary issues can hardly be doubted. Bush has reiterated time and again that demanding a right of return for the Palestinian refugees is equally "unrealistic".

While this clarity should by no means exonerate the US administration's reprehensible, imbalanced and self-defeating stance regarding the perpetual Middle East conflict, it demands a complete reversal in the Palestinian Authority's unconditional surrender to and trust in Washington's pro-Israeli policies.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his circle of supposedly pragmatic and moderate officials seem to completely ignore BusUS Middle East policies.ems h's holier-than-thou anti-Palestinian rights position, reducing the Palestinian struggle to a mere quest for foreign aid.

It is only a matter of time before the fatigued Palestinians rebel once more against Israeli oppression, American complacency and the Palestinian National Authority's submissive and subservient response to both.

As long as the above equation carries on with its values unaltered, the region will remain hostage to instability, violence and extremism.

My hope is that the American clarity in its support of Israel will be paralleled with a similar clarity on the heavy political cost that such unwarranted and provocative support entails.

If the United States should carry on with its costly gamble for whatever strategic reasons it wishes to serve, the American people ought to think twice.

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