

PERSPECTIVES
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MIDEASTERN GYROSCOPES
by
John Duke Anthony

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Its official title is "President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership."

It was supposed to be delivered in the wake of Washington visits by leaders from both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide in early June.

It was delayed at first by lengthy discussions within the Administration and then by a fresh round of violence in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

It was delivered by President George Bush in the White House Rose Garden on the afternoon of Monday, June 24.

Its advanced billing was as the American plan to end the conflict.

Today, "Perspectives" presents "Mideastern Gyroscopes" by GulfWire Publisher, Dr. John Duke Anthony. It provides a snapshot of reaction and analysis of "President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership."

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[Washington - June 28, 2002] Numerous Israelis and American pro-Israel commentators are elated by President Bush's Middle East speech this past Monday. A comparable number of American pro-Palestinian analysts and moderate Palestinian Arab Christian and Muslim leaders are reeling in disillusionment.

Many academics and U.S. government Middle East specialists - military, civilian, intelligence - are equally appalled. To them, the speech should not have been about advancing Israel's interests, or Arab interests, but American interests and national security. Our European allies are also nearly unanimous in their disbelief and bewilderment. Critics are hard-pressed to see how, if at all, the President's speech can have improved the prospects for near-term peace.

Nevertheless, there are positive elements in the President's address. Many of these components closely approximate what Saudi Arabian, Egyptian, and Jordanian leaders recently recommended to the Bush Administration. In the words of Adviser to Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdallah, Adel Al-Jubeir, "The President was clear about Israel's responsibilities: freeze settlements, relax travel restrictions on Palestinians, ease closures of

Palestinian territories, cease the military siege of Palestinian towns and villages, end the occupation and withdraw to pre-1967 borders."

Yet there is equal emphasis that Arab-Israeli responsibility for ending the bloodshed must be a two-way street. Israel and the United States must help the Palestinians to achieve the objectives Bush stated, ones that Palestinian leaders had arrived at independently earlier and were already pursuing. It is unrealistic to expect this to happen so long as Israel continues to target and destroy Palestinian security forces and infrastructure, restrict their freedom of movement, freeze their funds, and surround their major cities with concertina wire, tanks, bulldozers, and soldiers while simultaneously building an equivalent of the Berlin Wall to separate Israel from the Occupied Territories.

Absent a lifting of these constraints, and a cessation of further illegal Israeli seizures of Palestinian land and of house and orchard demolitions, how can the Palestinians realistically be expected to bring about such reforms, including provisions for administering the new country, enhancing its material well being, and managing its security? How can they be expected to prepare the machinery for national and local elections, or indeed run for office and vote, when they are under "curfews" that sometimes last for days?

What are the grounds for believing that Sharon wants peace if it means having to accept a state run by the Palestine Authority as Israel's neighbor? Are not Sharon's destruction of Palestinian governmental institutions and water, sewer, electricity, airport, seaport, and other vital infrastructures, his defiance of President Bush's calls for withdrawal from Palestinian cities, his rejection of Bush's call for a freeze on settlements, and his refusal to accept the standing peace offer of Saudi Arabia and the 22-member League of Arab States a clearer indication of his intentions? After all, the Palestinian Intifada was ignited when, against explicit official American counsel, Sharon, with more than 1,000 soldiers, defiantly entered the Haram as-Sharif/Temple Mount in East Jerusalem, which, as predicted, incited Palestinian demonstrations.

All of which brings into question whether President Bush is aware of the extent to which many thousands more Arabs, Israelis, Americans, and others than before now increasingly regard him, after Sharon and Arafat, in that order, as a major obstacle to peace between Arabs and Israelis. One can only hope Bush is not as oblivious to the absence of Palestinian freedom and human and civil rights in the Occupied Territories as it appears.

Would that one could refute such a harsh characterization. But it is hard to ignore a popular saying among Arabs that many Americans are fond of stating that Israel is their only friend in the Middle East, forgetting that until the establishment of the State of Israel, America had no enemies in the Middle East.

At another time, such a searing insight might be regarded as mere oral sparring. It is telling, however, that there has been no Republican Party or White House rebuke of House Majority Leader Dick Armey's recent public comments in favor of expelling the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation to some other country. So is the fact that neither President Bush nor any other high-ranking U.S. official has taken exception in public

to Sharon's ruling Likud Party having recently resolved to reject even the notion of an independent Palestinian State.

These American actions and inactions are certain to be interpreted by the Israeli leadership as de facto green lights for the extinguishing of legitimate Palestinian hopes and dreams, and the further destruction of their property and livelihoods. Yet reducing the Palestinians to even greater squalor and misery will not bring security to Israel. As has been amply demonstrated over the last two years, and for long before as well, the more brutal Israel's repression, the more Israelis, in turn, have died. Security will only be achieved when both Palestinians and Israelis are the beneficiaries of peace.

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o Dr. John Duke Anthony, Publisher of GulfWire, is also President and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and Secretary, U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee. All three are Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit and non-governmental organizations dedicated to educating Americans and others about the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.