

The Nakba and the Israeli State: What's to Celebrate?

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GEORGE W. BUSH came to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel with a speech to the Knesset. Perhaps Bush felt comfortable speaking in one of the very few countries whose head of government, Ehud Olmert, has even lower approval ratings than himself. Perhaps he felt right at home in delivering his banal and historically illiterate speech on "appeasement," likening Iran with Nazi Germany, to a foreign parliament where half the audience eats it up and the other half is too polite or cowardly to call him an idiot.

In any case, Bush used the forum of Israel's 60th anniversary to attack Barack Obama for the Democratic presidential candidate's stated willingness to talk to the leaders of countries like Iran, Syria and Cuba. Given the occasion and the foreign venue, this was one of the most grossly indecent statements of Bush's entire misbegotten presidency, which is really saying a lot.

Nonetheless, the content of Bush's message fits the present situation perfectly. Whatever the crisis in the Middle East, whatever the challenge, whoever may rise up in revolt, the United States and its Israeli partner will crush resistance with overwhelming military firepower. The message is received with applause in Congress and Knesset alike, despite the strategy's multiple and catastrophic failures – for the United States in the occupation of Iraq, for Israel in its effort to force Palestinian surrender, for both of them in the bombing and invasion of Lebanon in 2006, and worst of all for the peoples of Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon.

Bush was telling his Israeli and American audience that this disastrous package of policies will continue not only through the rest of his own administration, but in the next one too – Republican or Democratic. And in this, he's all too accurate. John McCain has pledged more war, a promise he'd certainly keep. Senator Obama dropped the sympathies he showed for the Palestinian struggle when he was a community organizer in Chicago, long before he threw Rev. Jeremiah Wright under the bus. Hillary Clinton promises that as president she'd "annihilate" Iran if it attacked Israel with nuclear weapons – a double absurdity, fortunately, given that Iran doesn't have those weapons and Hillary Clinton won't be president.

Not a one of these candidates would be able to answer – assuming that any reporter would ask – how they would respond if Israel, which does have nuclear weapons, attacked Iran. When it comes to the Middle East, particularly Israel and Palestine, U.S. policy is truly bipartisan, in the worst and most destructive ways. (Anyone looking for presidential candidates who don't subscribe to this consensus needs to check out the campaigns of Cynthia McKinney and Ralph Nader.)

The point here is not just that Israel's 60th anniversary is celebrated by the U.S. political establishment from right to left, but how and why. Since 1967, the Israeli state has been seen as a strategic bulwark against any potential nationalist or revolutionary threat to imperial control of oil supplies and a guarantor of regional "stability." This above all is why more than \$3 billion in direct U.S. military aid goes to Israel every year, and more in open and hidden subsidies for the horrors in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, from the expanding Jews-only settlements to the Annexation-Apartheid Wall to the entire system that Israeli anti-occupation activist Jeff Halper calls the Matrix

of Control.

In U.S. political life, this “special relationship” is rigorously enforced by a toxic alliance of the weapons industry, the fundamentalist Christian right and the major Jewish organizations now entirely controlled by the Zionist movement. AIPAC, the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee, exercises terrorist control over Congressional dissent. The major corporate media ensure that any criticism of the whole concept of a “Jewish state” (or “state of the Jewish people”) is pushed to the margins. And of course, the USA PATRIOT Act and “Global War on Terror” mean that Palestinian or Arab voices of dissent can face consequences much harsher than just verbal or political retaliation.

The Realities

The American celebration of “Israel At 60” has little to do with the real lives of Israeli citizens, let alone the catastrophic economic and social collapse in Gaza and the West Bank. It’s not surprising that the celebrations in Israel itself were rather unenthusiastic and uneasy. Even for Jewish citizens of the Jewish-supremacist Israeli state, poverty and inequality have grown along with the American-style dismantling of state welfare protections. Sixty years after the ethnic cleansing of 1947-’48, Arabs inside Israel face not only systematic discrimination but increasing assaults on their rights to remain citizens.

For the Palestinian people – whether in exile, in the Occupied Territories or still in Israel – this is the sixtieth anniversary of al-Nakba, the catastrophe of their dispossession and expulsion. For all those of us who stand on the side of the oppressed, the victims of colonialism and rampaging global capitalism, our place is with the Palestinians who mourn this anniversary rather than with the kitsch and glorified false history promoted by the celebrations.

It’s one thing to recognize that the creation of Israel in 1948 was motivated, in part, by the desire to create a home for hundreds of thousands of Jewish survivors of Nazi genocide in Europe (in which the Arabs of Palestine, of course, had no role at all). That’s a part of the story, though far from all of it. Further, it’s a futile temptation to re-fight the wars of the past, as if they might come out somehow differently and better the second time.

But the point is not old battles, but today’s and the ones to come. For us in the heartland of imperialism, fighting and winning those battles means recognizing that the culture of military supremacy and overwhelming firepower links the U.S.-Israel “special relationship” and the destruction of Palestine with the horrors of Iraq and the continuing threats of war with Iran. It means recognizing that this culture of permanent militarism and war has never been more bankrupt, and a greater threat to human survival, than today.

Most of all, it means learning how to bring that message to the American people, and facing the reality that the policies and actions of the United States are the greatest barrier to winning the basic right of self-determination for the Palestinian people.

P.S.

* From Against the Current website:

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/nakba>