

# Sharon's cunning plan

James M. Wall

The most distressing reality facing us in the Middle East is not the deadly struggle between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat. What is most distressing about our current situation is the chilling fact that no candidate for the U.S. presidency dares display any awareness of the Palestinian perspective in this conflict.

President Bush and before him, President Clinton, were equally unwilling to acknowledge, or were unaware that there was such a perspective. But once in office both were forced to acknowledge that the rest of the world understands: Israel's military control over Palestinian life is at the heart of the problem.

Unfortunately, driven by domestic political concerns, these leaders continue their unwavering and total support for Israel, as Bush demonstrated in his embrace of Sharon during the Israeli leader's most recent visit to Washington.

Bush's ear for political nuance, never as finely tuned as it might be, was especially wooden when he declared that a future Palestinian state must have leaders who are neither corrupt nor terrorist. Conservative columnist George Will could not have said it better. Karen Hughes, who is in charge of shaping the Bush image, should have reminded her old friend that such a statement is not a sign of leadership, but a demonstration of partisanship.

Of course, governments of any country should avoid corruption and eschew acts of terror, which are despicable tactics of desperate people with no power of their own. Bush should be reminded that the modern state of Israel was born, in part, out of acts of terrorism, and that Israel elected two prime ministers from terrorist leadership -- Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir.

Bush stretched the limits of rhetoric when he praised Sharon as a 'man of peace' -- hardly an apt description for a leader whose career, according to Israeli historian Avi Shlaim, has been marked by 'savage brutality' toward Arab civilians. Shlaim also notes that Sharon's real agenda is 'to subvert what remains of the Oslo accords, to smash the Palestinians into the ground, and to extinguish hope for independence and statehood.'

This is not a man of peace, this is a man with a plan.

A recent appearance on Meet the Press by North Carolina Senator John Edwards was not encouraging to any future peaceful solution of the conflict. Edwards might be only one of 100 senators (98 of whom voted for a recent pro-Israeli resolution) but he is also a leading candidate for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination. He is a handsome, rich, articulate and southern trial lawyer--perhaps all that is required to give him a strong lead among the anyone-but-Gore crowd that is competing for the nomination.

In questioning Edwards, host Tim Russert went through the entire pro-Israel litany: Should Bush have told Sharon to get his troops out of the West Bank? (No, a sovereign state doesn't like to be told what to do); Should Sharon see Arafat as a peace partner? (That is for Sharon to decide); Should the UN have investigated Jenin (No). All of these answers ignore Israel's massive military superiority which continues to cause great suffering in the West Bank and Gaza. Yes, suicide bombers are bad, but Edwards seems unaware that Sharon's invasions guarantee more suicide bombers.

Another Democrat often mentioned as a 2004 nominee for president, Senate majority leader Tom Daschle, of South Dakota, has been in politics much longer than Edwards. But like Edwards, his views on the Middle East suggest he is not open to any perspective but the Israeli one. In an American Prospect essay on Jewish lobby power in Washington, Michael Massing traces Daschle's rise to power: 'When, as a four term congressman, Daschle first ran for the Senate... his record was not particularly distinguished on matters Israeli, but AIPAC [the American Israel Public Affairs Committee] and other Jewish groups, intent on nurturing him, helped organize a round of fund raisers in different locales. In the end, say former AIPAC officials, these events netted Daschle roughly one-quarter of the \$2 million he spent on the campaign. Daschle has received similar amounts in subsequent races. And as he's ascended the Democratic ladder in the Senate, his votes on the Middle East have reliably reflected AIPAC's perspective.'

In his book, *Mount Rushmore: An Icon Reconsidered*, Jesse Lerner examines the irony of the South Dakota memorial to four American presidents who were instrumental in dehumanising and humiliating native Americans. The four faces adorn a mountain on land that the United States agreed by treaty to allow the Lakota tribe to retain. The American government stole that land, of course, and commissioned Gutzon Borglum, a sculptor with strong ties to the Ku Klux Klan, to create the memorial.

In his visit to Washington, which cut short by another suicide bombing, Ariel Sharon no doubt repeated his contention that he is only doing to the Palestinians what the U.S. did in Afghanistan--attacking an entire nation to eradicate a terrorist infrastructure. Sharon might also have said, but probably did not, that his 'peace' plan is the same military strategy the United States used against its Native Americans. He too is protecting settlements by stealing land, violating treaties, and forcing an entire native population to live on reservations.

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