

Bush's Mideast 'peace' theater

by Joseph Brewda

The first act of the U.S.-sponsored Mideast peace talks concluded on Nov. 4 in Madrid, amid confusion as to when or where the assembled actors will again reconvene. The three sets of bilateral talks, between Israel and Syria, Lebanon, and a joint Jordanian/Palestinian delegation, followed two days of ceremonial presentations by President George Bush, Soviet has-been Mikhail Gorbachov, and the delegations themselves. Bluster, rhetoric, impassioned pleas, tantrums, and occasional eloquence dominated the stage. As of Nov. 7, Israel is still demanding that the next round of talks be held in several Mideast states, including Israel itself. The Arabs do not wish to make yet another concession, in respect to recognizing Israel, by holding talks there.

Despite such uncertainty, Bush has declared that "the talks are progressing well," while Secretary of State James Baker said, "We really are beginning a new phase in the Middle East." Similar sentiments have been expressed by both Israeli and Arab spokesmen, notably many Palestinians who believe that they have at last found a forum for presenting their case before the world public. Unfortunately, if it were merely a question of eloquence and justice, the Palestinian problem would have been solved to their benefit long ago. But with the Arab world divided as never before, the Gulf states occupied by U.S. troops, OPEC effectively destroyed, the military power of Iraq annihilated, and the Palestinian movement itself being progressively split, there is little cause for optimism.

Splintering the Palestinians

Within weeks after completing his genocidal war against Iraq last spring, Bush proclaimed a new Mideast peace effort in which he even alluded to the formulation of "land for peace," a longstanding Arab demand. It was hoped by some that the United States would finally get tough on the little Anglo-American puppet state of Israel. Despite professed concern with justice, there were only two important reasons for the proclamation. One was to shore up badly discredited U.S. assets in the region such as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Something had to be done to provide such assets with a plausible justification for their treachery in supporting the war against Iraq, and the idea of a solution to the Palestinian issue, supposedly coming out of the war, was just that.

The far more important reason was to redraw the map of the region—one of the main purposes of the bloody war in the first place—although precisely how the United States intends to redraw that map is not yet certain. A Mideast jointly controlled by a combination of Saudi Arabia (and a Saudi-run Syria and Egypt) with Israel appears, at this point, to be Washington's objective. To do so means "solving" the Palestinian problem, to Bush's liking, once and for all. Pacification—not peace—is the objective.

It is noteworthy, in this regard, to consider the academic career of Dan Kurzer, the deputy assistant secretary of state for the Near East, who has played an instrumental role in orchestrating the talks. Kurzer's masters and doctoral theses at Columbia University in New York were studies of the French repression of the Algerian revolution, and the Israeli repression of the Palestinians. Successful counterinsurgency, Kurzer found in both studies, cannot be based on repression per se, but also requires splitting the insurgent movement through diplomatic and political maneuvers.

As it is, the Palestinian movement has already been split into three wings: the mainline Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization led by Yasser Arafat, and two rejectionist wings, the Islamicist Hamas movement, and the secular political radicals primarily associated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. There are indications that the U.S. wants to split the PLO in the Occupied Territories, which is directly involved in the peace talks, from the PLO's international headquarters in Tunis. Moreover, it has been longstanding U.S. policy to form a synthetic PLO sponsored by the aligned states of Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

A separate peace, or separate war

Meanwhile, and despite the show of hostility, there are also signs that the U.S. wants to orchestrate a separate deal between Israel and Syria. Israel and Syria have long had a secret understanding, which Washington would like to make more comprehensive and more public. The return of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights to Syria is necessary for this to occur, just as the return of the Sinai peninsula to Egypt was necessary to the Camp David Israeli/Egyptian deal more than a decade ago. The creation of some Druze minority buffer state might be one solution; the carving up of Lebanon between the two regional powers is, in any case, rapidly proceeding.

Alternatively, if there is not a separate Israeli-Syrian peace, there could always be a separate Israeli-Syrian war, a war some analysts think is likely within six months. With Iraq out of the way, no Arab state even comes close to being a match for Israel except the expendable regime of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad. Whether it proceeds with its war or peace option, continuing U.S. genocide against Iraq will keep the region more or less under Anglo-American control—Bush's theatrical displays about a concern for justice to the side.