

Ashcroft, DeLay Thumb Noses at 'Road Map'

by William Jones

Attorney General John Ashcroft has introduced major changes in the U.S. Justice system since he took office in early 2001. Sept. 11, 2001, in particular, gave Ashcroft an ideal pretext for putting to one side some of the protective mechanisms assured the individual under the U.S. Constitution. While these measures have been focused against Arab-Americans, or American Muslims, this would seem to be motivated by the fact that the Sept. 11 attacks ostensibly involved Muslims. A critical examination of Ashcroft's peculiar brand of "Christianity," however, clearly indicates that his push for extraordinary measures against American Muslims may involve much more than the simple "law and order" bias of a very conservative Republican.

This "religious" character of Ashcroft's peculiar brand of legal philosophy was never more apparent than in his appearance as the main speaker at a meeting of the "Stand for Israel" campaign on April 2. This Fellowship is the pet project of Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, and for almost two decades has functioned to mobilize the Christian Right in support of radical Zionism. Eckstein is seconded by Pat Robertson protégé and former executive director of the Christian Coalition, Ralph Reed, who has been instrumental in swinging the Christian Right in support of a Greater Israel. These disparate, albeit not contradictory, brands of fundamentalism, the Bible-Belt Protestantism and the Torah-clad Zionism, have been successfully welded together as a battering ram to prevent efforts to achieve a Middle East peace. Assistant Secretary of Defense, Doug Feith, one of the main chicken-hawk proponents of the Iraq war at the Pentagon, has been a favorite speaker at Fellowship gatherings.

The belief of the radical Zionists, that the land of Israel, including the West Bank and Gaza, belong to the State of Israel because the "Bible said so," is of course not incompatible with the Christian fundamentalist's interpretation of the

Bible. Richard Lamm, of the Southern Baptist Convention, explained how, when he was a boy, during the Suez crisis in 1956, his "mamma" told him that what he was seeing on TV—Israel occupying the Sinai Peninsula—had already been prophesied in the Old Testament. Of course, the Christian fundies have had to suppress their traditional anti-Semitic outlook in order to accomplish this amalgamation; but as Rabbi Eckstein himself pointed out, the two are both waiting for the coming of the Messiah. They just have some quarrels about whether "the Messiah" sees this as his First or Second Coming!

While the two-day "Stand for Israel" rally in Washington was in part a rally in support of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the real aim was to prevent President Bush from implementing the Administration's "Road Map" for peace in the Middle East, drawn up in U.S. negotiations with Europe and Russia. While Bush, seeking to allay Arab concerns about the real meaning of his invasion of Iraq, was forced to reiterate his commitment to the "Road Map" for gradually creating a Palestinian state, the Christian fundies and the Zionists are convinced that they wield enough power in this Administration to change that.

Prior to Ashcroft's arrival at the meeting, the crowd was "worked" to fever-pitch by radio talkshow host Janet Marshall, who ridiculed the very notion of anything called Palestine, taking a joke from comedian Dennis Miller about how it was only when Israelis had occupied the Holy Land, and started producing "oranges as big as grapefruits," that Arab inhabitants of the area "suddenly discovered something called Palestine." The proponents of the Mideast peace plan, Marshall explained, "do not want to permit Israel to become all God has called her to be"; Eretz Israel, containing all the West Bank. "They will never remove Israel from the West Bank," Marshall announced to the wild jubilation of the crowd.



As Attorney General Ashcroft has stepped outside the Constitution in regard to law-enforcement powers, he stepped far outside his duties at an April 2 "Stand for Israel" rally, rejecting the "Mideast peace road map" which is the public policy of President Bush and Secretary of State Powell.

Waiting for Further Wars

Senator Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), a Christian fundamentalist who recently converted to Catholicism under the influence of Carlist Catholic elements associated with Supreme Court Justice Anton Scalia and the Washington Opus Dei crowd at the K Street Catholic Information Center, also tickled the right chords of this crowd. The U.S. war on Iraq, Brownback told his audience, was not about "regime change," but about "region change." "Iran has supported terrorism much more than Iraq," Brownback said, indicating his agreement with the Pentagon chicken-hawks that after Iraq, Iran and Syria will be next. "We want democracy in the region," Brownback said. "We will spread our values and the beauty of democracy in the region and throughout the world," asserted this modern-day Crusader. Brownback also took a swipe at the "Road Map." "The Road Map is a journey," Brownback said, "not a time frame." Obviously, Brownback and his cohorts feel that President Bush "misspoke" when he promised that there would be a Palestinian state in three years.

Brownback's unconverted colleague, House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), was even blunter. "Certain parties to the peace process, more interested in appeasing aggression than combating terrorism, have forfeited their right to leadership on this issue," DeLay ranted. "The United States is the world's defender of freedom, and Israel is one of our greatest allies. We won't allow anyone to reward terrorists and terrorist acts, least of all nations and organizations who

appeased Saddam Hussein and who continue to appease Yasser Arafat. This struggle is one of good versus evil; nations and organizations who fail to distinguish between the two, disqualify themselves from input on this matter. Israel should not be expected to offer substantive concessions, while the Palestinian leaders offer only empty promises. . . . Israel should have the freedom to defend its national security and to negotiate at a time and on terms set by its democratic government, not those imposed by anyone else," DeLay said, in a direct attack on the idea of the "Road Map," which had been worked out through the combined efforts of the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the UN.

Rapture or Rupture?

The arrival of Ashcroft sent the crowd into near rapture. The mere presence of the Attorney General—whose introduction of prayer meetings at DOJ gatherings has made him a darling of the Christian fundamentalists—at this particular event, was probably the clearest sign that the Bush Administration was not as firm as it lets on, with regard to its promises to the Arab world about the "Road Map." Ashcroft was introduced by Jay Sekulow. Sekulow, long the top attorney for televangelist "Diamond Pat" Robertson, has also been the legal counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice, a Robertson-linked operation working to expand the legal prerogatives of religious groups in the United States. Sekulow was appointed an adviser on Legal Education at the Justice Department by Ashcroft.

"After 9/11, Israel was the country that understood our situation the best," Ashcroft said. "Israel has been under siege, but it has stood true to its values." These values, Ashcroft said, were also shared by the United States. "These values stem from the Old Testament through the Magna Carta to the Constitution," Ashcroft claimed, giving his own peculiar "lineage" to the document which he is playing fast and loose with—the U.S. Constitution—in his own particular crusade to "weed out" terrorism. The two countries "are bound together by cords of virtue that span the seas," Ashcroft said. "We are peoples of faith."

Conscious of the heavy criticism the Ashcroft Justice Department has been under in its abrogation of the basic civil rights of Muslim citizens as well as non-citizens, Ashcroft felt the need to rationalize the extraordinary measures. "When we came to the Department, we didn't like what we got, so we changed it," he said, quickly adding the proviso that "of course, there are things which we should never change, like the Constitution." Many noted legal scholars have, however, taken issue with the Attorney General on that very point, arguing that the basic Constitutional rights of citizens have already been violated by the Ashcroft crusade. "We are sending a clear message to the terrorists: 'The rules have changed,'" Ashcroft said. "We have created a hostile environment for your activity." And an extremely hostile environment in these United States for the Constitutionally-guaranteed rights of citizens of Arab origin or of Muslim faith.