

[MIDEAST]

MAN OF PEACE?

Speaking in Brussels, President Bush declared Mideast peace “an immediate goal.” He added that Israel must “freeze settlement activity” and that a Palestinian state made up “of scattered territories”—the kind of Bantustan plan preferred by some on the Israeli Right—“will not work.” This is exactly what a president must say if he is serious about peace. We hope he follows through.

Ariel Sharon—once described as a “man of war” in these pages—has been acting as if he might now understand that Israel’s interests would be served by a just peace with the Palestinians. Consequently, there are glimmers of progress on many fronts—a ceasefire with the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian elections, the decision to withdraw Israeli settlements from Gaza, the return of Egyptian and Jordanian ambassadors to Israel. Thus far a murderous terror assault in Tel Aviv has not derailed the process.

The fact that Sharon might be serious about moving toward a settlement is underscored by the ugly reaction from the Israeli settler movement. Some Israeli ministers have received death threats from extremist settler groups, and Sharon had to post guards by his wife’s gravesite after settler activists threatened to desecrate it. The invective now leveled against Sharon and his ministers reminds some of the venom the settler movement spewed at Yitzhak Rabin before he was assassinated.

The settlers—many of them born and raised in the United States—are now as much a part of the volatile Mideast extremist mix as the loopy Saudi fundamentalist cleric or Palestinian intifadist. But they can be politically isolated. Both Sharon and Abu Mazen have solid majorities of their peoples on their side. It is not yet clear whether Sharon contemplates going beyond a relatively



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easy Gaza withdrawal and will work towards a realistic final settlement or whether Abu Mazen can control the Palestinian groups who reject any peace with Israel. But with a strong push from the United States, peace in Israel and Palestine, so necessary for the peoples there and so vital for America’s own security, once again has real prospects.

[ECONOMICS]

READ HIS LIPS

President Bush’s fiscal legacy has been typified by staggering spending and rising red ink, but up until now economic conservatives have had one consolation—at least he’s held the line on taxes. This too may pass.

When Bush first outlined his plan to revamp the Social Security system, he promised he would not finance it by raising taxes. Read his lips. The president has since told reporters that while he is still ruling out a hike in the payroll-tax rate, he is willing to consider increasing the income levels at which this tax applies.

The 12.4 percent payroll tax currently applies only to the first \$90,000 of wages. Raising this ceiling by definition increases taxes. If the cap were eliminated entirely, 9.2 million Americans would see their tax bills rise and marginal tax rates for top-bracket wage-

earners would hover near 50 percent. The revenue gains would be minor—the Social Security Administration estimates the change would only extend the system’s surpluses by seven years. Wasn’t the point of Social Security reform to shrink government and promote private wealth creation?

[JUSTICE]

AFFIRMATIVE ACCESS

By a 5-3 vote, the Supreme Court ruled against California’s policy of separating inmates by race during their first 60 days in prison. A state corrections official told the *Los Angeles Times* that the move will be “catastrophic and extremely dangerous.” “The only way the system has maintained any sense of control has been through segregation policies.” But apparently multiculturalism trumps all practical considerations.

During oral arguments, Justice John Paul Stevens asked what he called a “stupid question”: if the state’s goal is to discourage racial violence, would it not be better to house prisoners with members of a different race? He was right—about the stupid part. Human Rights Watch reports, “white inmates are disproportionately targeted for abuse.” A warden testified, “You cannot house a Japanese inmate with a Chinese inmate.

They will kill each other.” In fact, the practice of separating inmates by race arose in 1994 when the Mexican Mafia ordered imprisoned Latino gang members to target Asians. One inmate of Chinese and Cambodian descent told the *Times* that integration is “like feeding us to the sharks.”

Liberals who write legal opinions can afford to view the world through an ideological lens. But those charged with maintaining order among a community of felons know that this is not a population amenable to lessons in diversity.

Several months ago, *TAC* received notice from the Texas Department of Corrections that an issue of our magazine ordered by an inmate had been confiscated because a certain phrase might incite racial rioting. Our offense? Referring to a wayward relative as the family’s “black ewe.” Of course the prison officials overreacted, but their skittishness shows just how close to the surface these tensions run—and suggests that political correctness may have taken the court somewhere cruel and unusual.

[NEOCONS]

CHALABI OF THE MONTH

Not so long ago Walid Jumblatt, leader of Lebanon’s Progressive Socialist Party, was saying things like “we are all happy when an American soldier is killed” and “The true axis of evil that rules the world today is an axis of oil and Jews.” A conspiracy nut as well as an anti-Semite, Jumblatt hinted darkly to Al-Arabiyya TV last year that the U.S. government was complicit in the 9/11 attacks.

But today Jumblatt is a trusted source for those neocons and others who want to believe Syria assassinated former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Evidently he’s had a road-to-Damascus experience. Singing a new tune—“I was cynical about Iraq. But when I saw the Iraqi people voting three weeks ago, 8 million of them, it was the start of a new

Arab world.... The Berlin Wall has fallen”—Jumblatt has been cited approvingly, and credulously, by the *Washington Post’s* David Ignatius, *National Review’s* Jim Geraghty, and warbloggers Glenn Reynolds, Vodkapundit, and Arthur Chrenkoff, among others. According to Geraghty, “the White House is now circulating ... Jumblatt’s comment,” too.

If the day comes when Iraq-style democracy arrives in Lebanon, perhaps Jumblatt—who applauded the destruction of the *Columbia*, saying “My joy was great because one of those killed was an Israeli astronaut”—will stand ready to become the next Ahmad Chalabi.

[EDUCATION]

LIMITED GOVERNMENT LEFT BEHIND

On Jan. 17, announcing that he’s extending his education initiative to high school, President Bush told a group of students, “We’re making great progress because of the No Child Left Behind Act. I will vigorously defend the No Child Left Behind Act.” He should have waited a month.

The results of a yearlong study of the effectiveness of the Bush education reforms are in—and the news isn’t good. A bipartisan panel of state lawmakers concluded, “Under NCLB, the federal government’s role has become excessively intrusive...” Moreover, the policy “include[s] several methodological flaws” and is “overly prescriptive and rigid.”

The Department of Education shot back that the “report could be interpreted as wanting to reverse the progress we’ve made”—then reverted to the sort of boilerplate bureaucrats use when programs can’t be defended on their merits: “NCLB is bringing new hope and new opportunity.” But at what cost? National spending on education has ballooned 40 percent to \$24.35 billion since Bush took office, but that’s the least of it. The damage to federalist constraints is incalculable. ■

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A Republic, Not a Democracy

As Herr Schroeder was babbling on in Mainz, during his joint press conference with President Bush, about a need for carrots to coax Tehran off its nuclear program,

Bush interrupted the chancellor to issue yet another demand—that “the Iranian government listen to the hopes and aspirations of the Iranian people.”

“We believe,” said Bush, “that the voice of the people ought to be determining policy, because we believe in democracy...”

Who, one wonders, is feeding the president his talking points? Is he unaware that the Iranian people, even opponents of the regime, believe Iran has a right to nuclear power and should retain the capacity to build nuclear weapons?

While 70 percent of Iranians may have voted to dump the mullahs, just as Pakistanis were delirious with joy when they exploded their first nuclear device, we should expect Iranians to react the same way. What people have not celebrated their nation joining the exclusive nuclear club?

“We believe ... that the voice of the people ought to be determining policy,” said Bush, “because we believe in democracy.” Does Bush really believe this? How does he think the Arab peoples would vote on the following questions: (1) Should the United States get out of Iraq? (2) Is it fair to compare Israel’s treatment of Palestinians to Nazi treatment of the Jews? (3) Do Arab nations have the same right to an atom bomb as Ariel Sharon? (4) Is Osama bin Laden a terrorist or hero?

If Bush believes he and we are popular in the Islamic world, why has he not scheduled a grand tour of Rabat, Cairo, Beirut, Amman, Riyadh, and Islamabad to rally the masses to America’s side, rather than preaching democracy at

them from the White House? If one-man, one-vote democracy came suddenly to the Arab world, every pro-American ruler in the region would be at risk of being swept away.

Yet there is a larger issue here than misreading the Arab mind. Whence comes this democracy-worship, this belief by President Bush that “the voice of the people ought to be determining policy”?

Would Bush himself let a poll of Americans decide how long we keep troops in Iraq? Would he submit his immigration policy to popular vote?

“We often hear the claim that our nation is a democracy,” writes columnist Dr. Walter Williams. But, “That wasn’t the vision of the founders. They saw democracy as another form of tyranny. ... The founders intended, and laid out the ground rules for, our nation to be a republic. ... The word democracy appears nowhere in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution.”

Indeed, the Constitution guarantees “to every State in this Union a republican form of government.” Asks Williams: “Does our pledge of allegiance to the flag say to ‘the democracy for which it stands,’ or does it say to ‘the republic for which it stands’? Or do we sing ‘The Battle Hymn of the Democracy’ or ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’?”

There is a critical difference between a republic and a democracy, Williams notes, citing our second president: “John Adams captured the essence of that difference when he said: ‘You have rights antecedent to all earthly governments; rights that cannot be repealed or restrained by human laws; rights derived

from the Great Legislator of the Universe.’ Nothing in our Constitution suggests that government is a grantor of rights. Instead, government is a protector of rights.”

The Founders deeply distrusted democracy. Williams cites Adams again: “Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There was never a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.” Chief Justice John Marshall seconded Adams’s motion: “Between a balanced republic and a democracy, the difference is like that between order and chaos.”

“When the Constitution was framed,” wrote historian Charles Beard, “no respectable person called himself or herself a democrat.”

Democracy-worship suggests a child-like belief in the wisdom and goodness of “the people.” But the people supported the guillotine in the French Revolution and Napoleon. The people were wild with joy as the British, French, and German boys marched off in August 1914 to the Great War. The people supported Hitler and the Nuremberg Laws.

Our Founding Fathers no more trusted in the people always to do the right thing than they trusted in kings. In the republic they created, the House of Representatives, the people’s house, was severely restricted in its powers by a Bill of Rights and checked by a Senate whose members were to be chosen by the states, by a president with veto power, and by a Supreme Court.

“What kind of government do we have?” the lady asked Benjamin Franklin, as he emerged from the Constitutional Convention. Said Franklin, “A republic—if you can keep it.”

Let us restore that republic. As Jefferson said, “Hear no more of trust in men, but rather bind them down from mischief with the chains of the Constitution.” ■