

America keeps doing Israel's bidding

Arabs are dismayed by the fact that American positions concerning the Middle East have in effect been subordinated to Israel's will. The injunction comes from Ariel Sharon, prime minister of Israel, and the accommodation from the American president, George W. Bush.

It was Sharon who suggested a conference on the Middle East. Now this has become an American proposition.

It was Sharon who declared that an overhaul of the Palestinian Authority should precede any attempt at resuming peace talks between the Palestinians and Israel. Now this has become an American demand.

Israel mounted numerous brutal assaults against Palestinian territories inside the West Bank, committing atrocities in densely populated areas and refugee camps, without inciting the least protest from the American administration. Israel being America's close ally, it was legitimate for the Arabs to perceive the United States as Israel's tacit accessory in those devastating assaults.

The American envoy to the United Nations performed an active role in drafting a Security Council resolution prescribing a UN fact-finding mission about Israel's assault on the Jenin refugee camp. America was among the Security Council members endorsing the resolution. Israel rejected the resolution, and the American administration acquiesced in the Israeli stand without a word of disapproval.

Sharon is evidently determined to get rid of Yasser Arafat as head of the Palestinian Authority. It is felt in the Arab world that the American position with respect to Arafat is skewing toward Sharon's stand.

There is a strong feeling on the Arab side that the precondition of re-

forming the Palestinian Authority is nothing but a delaying ploy. The U.S administration should be aware that no real reform is feasible except in a free, democratic atmosphere in the Palestinian territories, now under occupation.

It seems that the priorities have been perversely set. The territories ought to be liberated from occupation first, and a Palestinian independent state established.

Then and only then can adequate reforms be undertaken with a modicum of democracy prevailing.

It is widely believed on the Arab side that the American administration is betraying the very values it doggedly preaches as it denies the Palestinians a basic human right, freedom. How credible can the administration's call for human rights on the world scene be when it denies the Palestinian people its natural right to freedom and human dignity?

The U.S administration insists on posing as the peace broker or at least the peacemaker par excellence in the Middle East. This role, crucial as it is, looks very vulnerable on account of the administration's blatant bias in favor of Israel at the expense of basic Arab rights in Palestine.

America's prejudice against the Arabs borders on racial discrimination. In the circumstances, America's posture as a vigorous proponent of human rights in the world becomes at least equivocal.

American's unqualified support of Israel in holding on to the occupied Palestinian territories projects the American administration as an accomplice in the continued violation of international resolutions. America cannot pose as leader of the world while ignoring international resolutions.

The view in the Middle East is that Israel cannot keep the occupied Palestinian territories and still preserve its Jewish and democratic character. Because of disparity in demographic growth rates between the Arab population of the occupied territories and the Jewish population of Israel, it is forecast that in at most 10 years there will be more Arabs than Jews between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

Israel cannot uphold its character as both a Jewish and a democratic

state unless of course it precipitates forced mass migration of Arabs. That is inconceivable in a world that adheres to human rights.

It is therefore evident that it will be in Israel's own interest to withdraw from occupied Arab lands. And the American administration would be doing Israel a disservice by pursuing a policy that bolsters Israeli intransigence.

Arabs expect no more than equity and justice from the world's unrivaled superpower.

Dr. Salim el Hoss

Former prime minister of Lebanon

International Herald Tribune

June 21 2002