

Israelis' Call for Peace Unhinges Cheney

by Michele Steinberg

When the Senate Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, headed by Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R-R.I.), met on Oct. 15 to discuss overcoming the "Obstacles to Peace" in the Middle East—just days after a massive Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip, and on the day three U.S. security personnel were killed in a terrorist attack, the Bush Administration was nowhere to be seen. The Administration "hid under the bed," rather than come face-to-face with two Israelis: Dror Etkes, coordinator of the Settlements Watch team of Peace Now; and Rabbi Michael Melchior, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Israel. The message of these two Israelis was that the Bush Administration has not only failed the Palestinians, but threatens the survival of Israel itself.

Ranking Democrat Sen. Barbara Boxer of California opened her statement by revealing that the Bush Administration had refused to attend, though they had testified behind closed doors. And the connection of the Administration's cowardice to the Iraq debacle was evident. "We were told by Mr. [Paul] Wolfowitz . . . that the Iraqi war was going to help solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," said Boxer. "I was skeptical of that. We certainly don't see that happening."

Just the opposite of what Wolfowitz had predicted is happening: More Israelis have been killed since September 2000, when Ariel Sharon marched onto the al-Haram al-Sharif holy site in Jerusalem, than in the 1948 "war for independence." Israel under the Sharonists is becoming a fascist state, and more and more Israelis fear it.

If peace is not reached, creating an independent Palestinian state, warned Etkes, Israel would, in the near future, have to "choose to forego all acceptable norms of democracy in order to maintain Jewish minority supremacy over an Arab majority," an option which "should frighten all friends of Israel." He added that the Israeli "settlements today pose an existentialist threat to the future of Israel. The West Bank and Gaza are not empty. Beside the settlers, there are now about 3.5 million Palestinians. And given demographic trends, the Palestinians, combined with Israeli Arabs who live inside the Green Line, will guarantee the Jews will soon be . . . a minority and Arabs will be the majority in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea."

While insisting that there is "no moral equivalence" between the settlements and suicide terrorism, Etkes exposed

that since 1998, in order to destroy the Oslo Accords, Sharon, then foreign minister, has been rallying Israeli radicals to "grab the hilltops," creating new settlements to prevent the Palestinians' land from being turned over to them, in preparation for an independent state.

Rabbi Melchior emphasized, "We need *today* a Palestinian state. It can't wait until the end of some road or in five years or in ten years. I want to say very clearly, if there are not two states there will be only one state, and that state will not be a Jewish and a democratic state. . . . If it cannot be done under an agreement, which is of course to be preferred in every way and sense, we have to do it unilaterally, and we have to do it fast. And then of course we will have to move to our side of the fence." He added that you can't build a "security" fence, and "then continue to pour more and more people into the other side of the fence."

Rabbi Melchior poignantly referenced the violence of the Jewish radical right, saying, "We in Israel, as Jews, we have to fight the extreme elements also amongst ourselves which led to the Baruch Goldstein tragedy, to the assassination of our Prime Minister, to what many of our extremists are doing today, when they know very well which buttons to press on the other side in order for there not to be progress."

Patriots vs. Synarchist Democrats

Such frank statements from Israelis have been all but outlawed since Vice President Dick Cheney and his neo-conservative allies declared political and ideological "martial law" in the United States after 9/11. In fact, the Administration put intense pressure on Senator Chafee to stack the witness list with hardliners, in order to "counter" any pro-peace outlook.

Chafee's courage against such neo-con perversion of the Constitutional balance of power is notable. And, citing her collaboration with Chafee, Boxer said, "We need a real heroic effort . . . across party lines" for peace.

But for that to succeed, traditional Republicans and FDR Democrats are going to have to purge the neo-con warmongers from both parties. That problem was evident in the testimony given to the hearing by Dennis Ross, the former Clinton Administration Middle East envoy, who now squats as director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP). Ross gloated that after Sharon's attacks on Syria, and the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip, "Arafat is likely to be afraid. He's likely to be concerned that maybe the U.S. right now will give a yellow light to the Israelis about expulsion."

Ross is no force for peace, and his Likudnik think-tank could be seen as an outpost of Cheney's office. WINEP includes on its board anti-Muslim fanatic Daniel Pipes, and it was formerly home to Cheney aide David Wurmser, a co-author of the 1996 "Clean Break" policy, written for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to abrogate Oslo, and launch war with Iraq, Syria, and Iran.