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# No Arab, Palestinian Cheers for U.S. Democrats

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Arabs, at least at the non-official level, were quick to hail President George W. Bush's mid-term electoral defeat and the humiliating downfall of his war architect Donald Rumsfeld, but cheering the Democrats' victory has yet to wait and may not be voiced at all.

Why hailing Bush's defeat? Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist, Jim Hogland, of The Washington Post had part of the answer: "Bush lost more than a midterm election and a cantankerous defense secretary on Tuesday. He also abandoned any lingering chance of remaking U.S. foreign policy into a radical force for democratic change in the Middle East and elsewhere," thus dumping his "new" and "greater" Middle East plans as well as regime change schemes for the region to the dust pins of history at a high cost for Arab and American lives and billions of wasted dollars of U.S. tax payers.

Another part of the answer has a lot to do with the Arab hopes that a change in the U.S. administration may lead to ending the U.S.-British occupation of Iraq and to a more balanced policy vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict; but Washington gave Arabs no time even to hope.

The U.S. veto at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) against a draft resolution condemning the Israeli attacks against the Palestinian civilians on Saturday was exactly the timely reminder needed to alert Arabs to the fact that historically both Republicans and Democrats have been essentially united on a bipartisan agenda in the Arab world, particularly on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Sceptics should consult bipartisan voting record of Congress in recent years on Middle East issues.

Reviewing U.S. voting records at the UNSC reveals Saturday's veto as the 30th anti-Palestinian vote and the 42nd anti-Arab out of more than 80 U.S. vetoes.

In an extraordinary joint statement, more than 200 Socialist members of the European Parliament hailed the American election results as "the beginning of the end of a six-year nightmare for the world," but their optimism seems premature.

True Democrats are back in power in the House and Senate after 12 years, but dramatic changes in basic U.S. foreign policy are unlikely, particularly in the "war on terror" and combating "Islamic radicalism," on which there is a bipartisan consensus.

De-ideologization of U.S. foreign policy into a "realistic" one has yet a long way to go. The "war team" — Bush, Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice – is still in the driving seat and has the veto power on war and peace issues; Democrats have yet to lay their hands on the steering wheel of their country's international policies.

Both Democrats and Republicans are expected to play politics more than they will plan

policies until they settle the leadership dilemma in 2008 election; the future of military occupations and peace making in the Middle East will have to wait until then.

Rep. Tom Lantos, the Democratic lawmaker set to take over leadership of the International Relations Committee of the House, told AP Wednesday: “You won’t see a sudden change. We basically share the same goals and objectives,” he said, referring to Democrats and Republicans.

Meanwhile Bush is turning to his father’s men to help him clean his mess in foreign policy: Robert Gates, former president George Bush’s CIA director and James Baker, his father’s friend and secretary of state, the architects of Iraq containment policy and Madrid-Oslo Israeli-aborted peace processes of 1991 and 1993.

Dennis Ross — who was a Middle East envoy for the elder Bush and successfully dragged Palestinian-Israeli years-long negotiation into its current deadlocked situation – said: “It is pretty clear the neoconservative agenda on regime change and democracy promotion will take a back seat to stability and less pressure on regimes to open up their political systems,” he said, to the relief of Arab governments.

However a full-fledged Democratic victory in 2008 will not hold a lot of promise or hope for Arabs; since the creation of Israel 59 years ago created with it the Arab-Israeli conflict the U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis this conflict as far as peacemaking is concerned has been one of either inaction or action to put in motion this or that form of a “peace process” with the aim of managing the conflict and not resolving it, mostly to trick Arabs into appeasement following this or that of their defeats, catastrophes or setbacks at the hands of the unshakable U.S.-Israeli strategic alliance.

This strategic alliance has pre-empted and will continue to pre-empt all American well-meaning proposals for a two-state solution, which nonetheless made their way into United Nations legitimacy by the Security Council resolution 1515. It was responsible for the demise of the peace process sponsored by Bill Clinton’ and his Democratic administration and now it has proved mainly responsible for the demise of Bush and his Republican two-state “vision.”

Both Israeli and Arab observers were in a rare agreement that no change in U.S. policy is expected. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told NBC on Friday the results of the Mid-term US congressional elections would neither change the Israeli nor the U.S. Administrations’ Middle East policy.

On Iraq , Democratic senator Edward Kennedy summarized his party’s stance: “I was personally opposed to the war but that was yesterday; I think that what we are trying to do now is (decide) how we proceed now. That’s really the challenge,” The Washington Post quoted him as saying on Nov. 9. The election to a large extent became a national referendum on the war on Iraq , but it is becoming clear the Democratic leaders are drifting away from the anti-war demands of their constituencies.

A slight difference in approach is however discerned: Democrats may push towards engaging Syria and Iran instead of antagonizing them in Iraq , but within the framework of “Iraqization” of the war there and without any departure from Bush’s end goal of installing a pro-American U.S.-styled regime in Baghdad .

On other Arab issues like Syria , Sudan ’s Darfur and Lebanon the bipartisan agreement is

evident.

The Israeli Factor

“It’s clear the 110th Congress will continue America ‘s long tradition of staunch support for a strong, safe and secure Israel and an abiding relationship between the United States and our most reliable ally in the Middle East ,” Josh Block, a spokesman for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency on Nov. 9.

With Nancy Pelosi as the would-be Speaker of the Congress, “Jewish activists and officials are confident that the U.S. Congress will remain strongly pro-Israel …I’ve heard her say numerous times that the single greatest achievement of the 20th century was the founding of the modern state of Israel,” Amy Friedkin, a former president of AIPAC, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). Pelosi has reiterated on record that the key issue in the Middle East is Israel ’s survival, not its occupation.

In the entire mid-term campaign, the Democrats have not offered one specific plan to address foreign policy grievances, neither in Iraq nor in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The political horizon of Bush’s two-state vision has eroded now into an eclipsing hope that is rapidly slipping into oblivion with no “Democratic alternative,” thus relieving the Palestinians of more peace illusions but leaving Israel with the upper hand in the occupied territories, or more accurately the only hand there given the absence of outside influence to offset Israel’s crushing military superiority because of the stalled peace process and the Palestinian “no negotiations-no resistance” moment of inaction.

The Israeli-Jewish factor figured very high in the Democrats’ campaign: Rahm Emannuel and Chuck Schumer are the new brains of American politics who were credited for their victory; they are both Jewish and ardent supporters of Israel with strong Zionist convictions on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

At least six Jews were among the 25 new Democrats sweeping into the House; that brings to 30 the total number of Jewish representatives. In the Senate, Jewish senators increased their numbers from 11 to 13 — a record high; “all but one of the Jews elected or re-elected to the House and to the Senate on Tuesday were Democrats or pledged to vote with the Democrats,” Cleveland Jewish News online reported on Nov 11. However the infiltration of the top echelons of the Bush administration by pro-Israel strategists is also a public knowledge.

The “independent” Jewish agenda is very well represented by the [former] Democrat Senator Joseph Lieberman, who waged a campaign against the will of the Democratic Party as an independent and prevailed as a de facto Republican candidate. He is Jewish, extremely pro-Israel and pro-war in Iraq and expected to be the most powerful power broker in the Senate for the next two years.

This state of U.S. foreign policy affairs in the Middle East is dooming historical friendships between Washington and several Arab regimes, discrediting thousands of Arab liberals who were inspired by the American way of life and creating the ideal political environment for extreme anti-Americanism. Arab disillusionment with U.S. hollow promises will reinforce the trend further.

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