

# Palestine: The Logic behind Rice's Grin

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In its struggle for the regional order it wants, the US is reaching new lows in its deceitful and disingenuous stance towards the Palestinians.

Commencing 3 October, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice journeyed between various Arab capitals, conferred with Arab leaders, then shuttled between Israeli and Palestinian officials, before eventually joining a few of her counterparts in London, 6 October, in a six-nation conference aimed at fanning the flames of hostility against Iran.

Rice, the most faithful foreign policy ambassador of the Bush administration, even before her taking over the State Department, seems hell-bent on reining in Iran, ensuring the failure of the Hamas government, and restructuring the political landscape of Lebanon in a way that would deny Hizbullah the opportunity to capitalise on its astounding military achievements.

One can easily dismiss Rice's attempts as futile, indeed self-defeating. The logic is simple: Rice represents all that is insidious about the Bush regime, one of the most loathed US administrations in the modern history of the Middle East, if not the world. Her visits to the region, despite the official fanfare that often awaits her at Arab capitals, coupled with her disagreeable and untimely grins, are often associated with her government's disastrous foreign policy, political plots and anti-democratic efforts.

Nonetheless, Rice is intelligent enough to deduce such a conclusion. All she has to do is look at caricatures of her in daily newspapers; the gap between her front teeth matures into a dark abyss, her insolent attitude and inconsiderate expectations all turn the former academician into the region's fiend, one that is strongly associated with political instability and disorder.

The fact is, Rice couldn't care less about Arab public opinion, nor any other public opinion for that matter. Her definition of democratic transformation hardly resembles the people's collective desire. She simply stands at odds with the people's aspirations for greater freedom and change, and undoubtedly she knows it.

Her declaration, following Israel's devastating war on Lebanon in July 2006, that time had arrived for a "New Middle East", and her full backing of the Israeli military adventure, earned her "enemy of the people" status that towers far beyond that of former secretary of state Madeline Albright.

Rice's incessant attempts to chastise and sanction Iran — while leaving all other options open — for allegedly striving to obtain nuclear capabilities for the purpose of manufacturing weapons of mass destruction while turning a blind eye to Israel's full-functioning mass killing

capabilities, made her but another double-faced foreign policy hypocrite.

Even her promise, made during her 4 October joint press conference with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, that the US will “redouble” its efforts to help starving Palestinians, was quickly snubbed by Palestinian media and by a mass rally held in Gaza two days after her visit to the West Bank. Palestinians understand well that the purpose of her visit was to support President Abbas’s disgruntled faction, Fatah, against Hamas, now the ruling party. In the span of three days prior to her visit, 10 Palestinians were killed in clashes between the two groups. Fatah continues to infuse chaos, rendering the government inoperative and paving the way for a presidential decree to abolish it, while Hamas is fighting to retain control of what it perceives rightfully as its political achievement resulting from the democratic choice of the Palestinian people during the January elections.

The greatest irony in Rice’s visit is that it cemented anti- democratic forces in the region. The democratization of the Middle East seemed, at least for a few months, the Bush administration’s winning ticket out of Iraq. It was the only possible pretence that would relieve the administration of its failure to uncover Iraq’s non-existing weapons of mass destruction. That delusion quickly vanished when Hamas came to power, riding the same democracy wave stirred by the Americans, and opening up the horizon for aspiring Arab opposition groups, Islamic or any other, to push against once seemingly immovable Arab regimes and their entrenched elites and patrons.

Now Rice is back, pushing to abort the same democratic process that her boss alleged to champion. Recall that in his Middle East “vision” speech of 24 June 2002, President Bush considered free and fair elections in the Palestinian territories as key to the success of what was later termed the roadmap peace initiative.

Rice’s problems are much greater than that of her personal image and chances of likeability. The Israeli military failure in Lebanon had ruled out, at least for a while longer, the desire of her government’s warmongers, the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington and the Israeli government to challenge Iran militarily. That setback has empowered both Syria and Iran to challenge the Bush administration more candidly than ever, with Iran calling the American bluff regarding war.

For now, the core of the American Middle East battle is focused on Palestine. If Palestinian democracy prevails, withstanding intense Israel-American-Palestinian pressure, then US foreign policy will suffer its greatest loss yet, whose outcome will reverberate across the region. The Palestinian democratic experience thus must fail, even if the price is politically backing embattled President Abbas and his fractious followers, equally desperate not to lose this decisive battle against Hamas.

Rice’s visit to the region was neither intended to “reinvigorate” the peace process nor to support the voice of “moderation” in the region. It was meant to ensure the fortitude of her allies and secure and extend the collective punishment of the Palestinian people until they repent and throw out their democratically elected government, a scenario that was tried with success in Nicaragua in the 1970s, though at a very high price.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian president and his henchmen, joined by various Arab governments and European states, are in unison with Rice’s iniquitous objectives, thus giving her good reason to mendaciously grin.

*Ramzy Baroud's latest book: The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle (Pluto Press, London) is now available on Amazon.com.*

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