

PolicyWatch 643

## Changing Rogue Regimes

[\*Raymond Tanter\*](#)

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King Abdullah of Jordan's visit to Washington tomorrow offers the Bush administration an opportunity to clarify the relationship between regime change in Baghdad and progress in the Israel-Palestinian arena. Last Monday, the king told British prime minister Tony Blair that in light of the failure to move the peace process forward, military action against Iraq would open a Pandora's box.

### Regime Change in Iraq Would Help the Peace Process

President George W. Bush might inform the king that rogue regimes are inimical to Israeli-Palestinian peace. Such regimes fan the flames of conflict by supporting organizations that promote suicide bomb attacks against Israel and supplying arms to the Palestinian Authority (PA), contrary to the principles of the Oslo Accords.

For example, consider Iran's recent activities. In January 2002, Tehran secretly sent arms to the Lebanese Hizballah via Syria, and then attempted a covert arms shipment to the PA for use against Israel. In June, Tehran hosted a terrorism summit attended by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and 160 officials from Iran and twenty-three other countries. Such actions by rogue states feed the violence on the ground, enflaming Palestinian hostility and endangering Israeli security.

Even if Palestine were to become the next democratic state in the region, it would probably not be a peaceful state given the presence of neighbors like Saddam Husayn. Israel is more likely to fulfill its security goals alongside a democratic Palestine that is not pressured into violence by rogue regimes. In other words, regime change in Iraq would do much to advance the twin goals of a democratic Palestine and a secure Israel; in fact, toppling rogue regimes like Saddam's may be a necessary condition for achieving those goals.

### Democratic Palestine, after Regime Change in Iraq

A "peace through democracy" strategy characterizes the Bush approach to the Israel-Palestinian peace process. This strategy is supported by the widely acknowledged fact that democracies are less likely to fight other democracies. In other words, if there were more democratic states in the Middle East, there would be more peace in the region. Again, though, simply creating a democratic Palestine would not be sufficient to maintain peace, given the troublemaking potential of rogue states. Rather, the regime in Baghdad should be toppled first, followed by the creation of a democratic, market-based Palestine, which would then be free to make peace with a democratic Israel.

Bush envisioned a democratic zone of peace in his June 24, 2002, Rose Garden speech. The president believes that the reelection of an authoritarian leader, Yasir Arafat, would be insufficient to make for democratic government. Instead, Bush foresees a Palestinian legislature with real authority to protect human rights; the decentralization of power, stripping control from an unaccountable elite; the creation of a constitution that separates the powers of government; and the implementation of fair, multiparty local elections prior to new presidential elections.

In other words, elections are only part of the process of creating a democracy. That said, it is disheartening to note how few elections have actually been held in the PA. In January 1996, Palestinians elected Arafat to a term of office that was supposed to expire in May 1999. Similarly, the terms of Palestinian Legislative Council members expired long ago. The Bush administration can emphasize these facts in answer to critics who claim that the current PA leadership was freely elected: elections alone are insufficient to create a democracy, particularly when they are held only once.

Although democracy would do much to advance the peace process, it would not eliminate all of the obstacles to peace. To be sure, the absence of a political process makes it more likely that those unhappy with the present conditions will turn to violence. But it is discouraging to note just how many Palestinians support violence. According to a May 2002 survey by Khalil Shikaki of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 52 percent of Palestinians polled support bombings inside Israel, 92 percent support armed attacks against Israeli soldiers, and 89 percent support attacks against settlers.

Moreover, future PA elections may simply give Arafat new legitimacy as a "democratically chosen leader." Yet,

analysts like Shikaki are correct to extol the positive effects of democracy on peacemaking. As he suggested, bargaining between a democratic Israel and a nondemocratic PA is difficult because Israel is unable to gain sufficient access to the "pulse of the Palestinians."

#### Simultaneous Progress, or Phased Progress?

A strategy of simultaneous progress on all fronts is tempting: that is, countering threats from rogue regimes, ensuring security for Israel, and creating a democratic Palestine. Indeed, some in Europe and the Arab world are proposing such a strategy, though their plans leave out the vital step of ending the destabilizing threats from rogue states.

Germany's Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer suggested a timetable to establish an "Emergency Palestinian Authority" immediately, hold elections in 2003, declare a provisional state at the end of that year, and begin final-status negotiations on borders and other issues in 2004. Similarly, in response to Bush's June 24 speech, foreign ministers from Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia presented the president with a plan in mid-July to establish a Palestinian government that would include a new post of prime minister and limit Arafat's power. Both of these plans are nonstarters, however, because they do not take into account the tough neighborhood in which a Palestinian state would be birthed and fail to address the violence on the ground. These two problems must be resolved before progress on the diplomatic front can be renewed.

Bush's proposal for progress relies on sequencing, not simultaneity. The Bush approach draws on the April 2001 Mitchell report, which proposed a sequential roadmap without a timetable: first, an immediate end to violence; second, confidence-building measures, such as a halt to Israeli settlement-building and a PA crackdown on violence; and third, resumption of political negotiations that might lead to a Palestinian state.

The Mitchell plan left out the problem of rogue states that exacerbate violence, and it is this shortcoming that the Bush administration is now addressing with its focus on removing rogue regimes. Similarly, the Mitchell plan understated the problem of an ineffective, authoritarian PA, and Bush is addressing this problem with his new emphasis on democratic reform.

In contrast, the plans suggested by Fischer and the Arab foreign ministers represent a step back from the Mitchell approach. At best, they recommend concurrent movement toward security and reform, an approach that jettisons the essence of Mitchell: phased sequencing. From a more cynical viewpoint, these plans seem to propose a reverse sequencing: Israeli withdrawal from the territories, political discussions to declare a Palestinian state before a ceasefire, and, lastly, some progress on security for Israel. It is unclear what incentive the PA would have under these circumstances to confront radicals who would want to continue battling Israel even after a full withdrawal to the 1967 borders.

#### Rogue Regime Change First

As a result of its victory in the 1991 Gulf War, the United States was able to convene the landmark Madrid peace conference, which brought Israel and even its most truculent neighbors to the peace table. Moreover, the results of the conference was that it indirectly led to the election of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin several months later, who in turn participated in the Oslo peace talks. Regime change in the Gulf a decade later should have a similar jumpstarting effect on the Arab-Israel peace process.

Raymond Tanter is a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute.