

US Congress backs Israeli assault on Palestinians

Resolutions highlight alliance of Zionism and Christian right

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On the eve of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to Washington, and on the very day that the US-based rights group Human Rights Watch accused Israel of war crimes in Jenin, both houses of the US Congress overwhelmingly approved resolutions unreservedly backing Sharon's invasion of the West Bank.

Democrats competed with Republicans to issue the most fulsome praise for Israel and the Sharon government, and the most menacing attacks on Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation. The two non-binding resolutions, passed May 2, used almost identical language to declare "solidarity with Israel as it takes necessary steps to provide security to its people by dismantling the terrorist infrastructure in the Palestinian areas."

Representative Peter DeFazio (Democrat of Oregon), one of a handful in the House of Representatives to vote against the House version of the resolution, said he found it "stunning" that the House would go on record with a resolution that positioned it "to the right of Ariel Sharon and the Likhud Party." A more accurate and honest appraisal would describe the measure as an unabashed endorsement of the militarist and expansionist policies of the Israeli regime.

The Bush White House made a show of opposing the resolutions as inopportune legislative incursions into the foreign policy preserve of the executive branch. Administration officials had pressured Republican House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, the primary mover of the resolutions, to put off a vote until after President Bush met with Saudi Prince Abdullah and secured a deal for the lifting of the Israeli siege on the Ramallah headquarters of Palestinian Authority President Arafat.

But any White House discomfort with the resolutions was purely a matter of tactics. Their substance was entirely in

line with the policy of Bush, who last month praised Sharon as a "man of peace" and is presently holding meetings with the architect of the West Bank invasion, even as rescue workers continue to search for bodies in the bulldozed rubble of the Jenin refugee camp. Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice continue to issue statements placing the onus for the bloodshed in Israel and the occupied territories on Arafat and the Palestinians, even though Palestinian fatalities far outnumber those of Israelis.

The House resolution, sponsored by DeLay and California Democrat Tom Lantos, passed by a vote of 352 to 21, with 29 congressmen abstaining. The prime mover of the Senate resolution was Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, the Democratic vice presidential candidate in 2000. His co-sponsor was Oregon Republican Gordon H. Smith. The upper chamber's measure passed by a vote of 94 to 2.

Neither resolution made any reference to the 35-year-long Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in violation of United Nations resolutions, or Sharon's record of provocations and atrocities against the Palestinians, including his policy of political assassinations. Nor was there any mention of Israel's defiance of last month's UN decision to send an investigating team into the ravaged Jenin refugee camp.

Instead, the resolutions hailed Israel as Washington's ally in the international "war on terrorism," implicitly equating Palestinian resistance with last September's attack on the World Trade Center. Lieberman, speaking on the floor of the Senate, made the amalgam explicit by focusing entirely on Palestinian suicide bombers. He said, "Those suicide bombers striking innocent Israelis in supermarkets, buses and public squares are cut from the same cloth of evil as the terrorists who turned airplanes into weapons and struck the

United States on September 11.”

Only a fool or cynic would accept the pretense that US backing for Israeli aggression is directed solely against suicide attacks on Israeli civilians. But in any event, one does not have to support such terrorist tactics to react with disgust at the preachments of a supporter of US imperialism who equates the desperate actions of brutalized youth, facing an oppressor bristling with US-supplied tanks, gunships and smart bombs, with the mass killings on September 11.

The House resolution went even further than that of the Senate, directly attacking Arafat and declaring his actions to be “not those of a viable partner for peace.”

On the same day that Congress passed the resolutions, Human Rights Watch issued a report on the results of its on-the-site inspection of the Jenin refugee camp. The US media gave wide coverage to the group’s earlier statements denying that a massacre had occurred at the camp, but had little to say about its summary report, which contained damning conclusions on the role of the Israeli military.

The document concluded there was “strong prima facie evidence” that Israeli soldiers “committed grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, or war crimes.” Peter Bouckaert, the Human Rights Watch senior researcher, said, “We have no doubt that extremely serious violations of the laws of war were committed. The evidence is certainly strong enough to warrant a war crimes investigation.”

The US Congress is obviously not bothered by war crimes, as long as they are committed by American forces or those of Washington’s allies. In any event, they are a necessary component of a strategy whose ultimate goal is to “cleanse” the occupied territories of Arabs and make them part of a Greater Israel. This is the logic of Sharon’s policies, and the explicit program of much of the Christian right, which exercises enormous influence over the Republican Party and the Bush administration.

Only days before the passage of the congressional resolutions, DeLay, an evangelist partisan of the Christian right, declared that the West Bank, which he called Judean Samaria, belonged by Biblical dispensation to Israel and should be incorporated into the Israeli state. On May 1, his fellow Texan, House Republican Leader Dick Armey, acknowledged on the CNBC television program, *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, that he favored Israeli annexation of the West Bank and the expulsion of its Palestinian inhabitants.

“I’m content to have Israel grab the entire West Bank,” Armey said, adding that he believed “the Palestinians should leave.”

The congressional resolutions underscored a political phenomenon of major significance—the increasingly open alliance of Israel and its American Zionist supporters with the Christian fundamentalist right. This alliance is pregnant with a morbid irony—the well-known anti-Semitic propensities of the fascistic milieu that spans Christian fundamentalist groups, white supremacist organizations and militia outfits, all of which have close ties to the right wing of the Republican Party.

Only last month, DeLay, speaking to a group of evangelical Christians in Pearland, Texas, declared, “Christianity is the only way.” The point man for the extreme right in Congress went on to say he was God’s instrument for promoting a “biblical world view” in American politics.

The Zionist-Christian right nexus embodies the deeply reactionary role played by the Israeli state, not only in the Middle East, but internationally. Another recent demonstration of its emergence is a half-page ad placed in the May 2 *New York Times* by the Anti-Defamation League. The ad consists of an article, published without comment, by Ralph Reed, a leading figure in the Christian right and current chairman of the Georgia Republican Party. The article is entitled “We People of Faith Stand Firmly With Israel.”



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