

Peace

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Page : 27

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Peace came to earth some 2,000 years ago with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It was not peace to humankind, it was peace to the soul of those who would believe in him and would follow in his footsteps. Peace was a matter of choice. Herod chose not to believe and a few days after the birth of Jesus, the blood of all infants under two years of age was spilled all over Bethlehem.

Two thousand years later, blood continues to flow in Israel—the blood of the followers of Moses, the blood of the followers of Mohammed. As we once again rejoice in the peace the spirit of Christmas brings to us, we must also reflect on why this blood continues to be spilled in the land where Jesus was born.

President Jimmy Carter has very clear views on this subject. Carter, who as president was able to negotiate peace between Israel and Egypt and received the Nobel Prize for it, has remained deeply involved in Middle East affairs since leaving the White House. There will be no substantive and permanent peace for any peoples in the Middle East, says Carter, as long as Israel is violating key U.N. resolutions, official American policy and the international “road map” for peace by occupying Arab lands and oppressing the Palestinians. I fully agree with Carter. Furthermore, and this is also his position, Israel’s official pre-1967 borders must be honored.

During the past few years, I have felt that by condoning illegal Israeli actions the U.S. has contributed to the upsurge of violence in the Middle East. As Carter says, Israel’s continued control and colonization of Palestinian land have been the primary obstacles to a comprehensive peace agreement in the Holy Land. In order to perpetuate the occupation, Israeli forces have deprived their unwilling subjects of basic human rights.

It is offensive to hear, over and over again, that the U.S. blocks U.N. Security Council resolutions critical of Israeli actions. This reflects a lack of political will on the part of the U.S. to assume the proper role—one that does not take sides—in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Peace will not come to Israel until the U.S. government leads in a sustained effort to bring about a just agreement that Palestinians and Israelites can honor. This agreement, of course, must guarantee the security of Israel and all Arab neighbors must honor Israel’s right to live in peace.

Peace in Israel would be the most important contribution that the U.S. can make to peace in the Middle East. Conflict between nations and within nations in the Middle East is the greatest threat to world peace today. The war in Iraq backfired as an effort to bring a stable democracy into being in order to contribute to peace in the Middle East. The situation in Afghanistan, although not as bad as in Iraq, is deteriorating

rapidly. The U.S. lacks the capability, or the political will, to provide the long-term security necessary to stabilize these countries.

More than three years ago, on May 15, 2003, I wrote a column in CARIBBEAN BUSINESS, which I titled “Wolfowitz and Jefferson on Democracy.” Wolfowitz, then at the Department of Defense, was the principal theoretician behind the Bush administration’s policy of stabilizing the Middle East by wars to make democracies. I then wrote these words, which have turned out to be prophetic: “Although postwar democratization of countries with previous authoritarian regimes has succeeded in the past—Japan and Germany being prime examples—it has usually followed as a logical step after winning a war into which the U.S. was drawn to defend itself, not to democratize others.

“Making wars to establish democracies is another matter. The difficulties attendant on establishing order in Iraq, not to say those involved in bringing all the ethnic factions together, promoting bargaining, compromise, consensus and institution building among them, and at the same time steering the process in a direction pleasing to Washington, are a totally different matter. The events unfolding in Iraq toward the reconstruction of its government point toward a directed democracy.

“Thomas Jefferson would oppose these policies as contrary to the principle of consent of the governed. That the Iraqis by and large wanted liberation from the tyrant is not to be debated. But once the tyrant has fallen, it does not follow that all the important policies of a democratic government in Iraq will be agreeable to Washington. Yet their being agreeable to Washington is the objective toward which they are directed. That’s where the U.S. runs into trouble with the “e” word, i.e., empire.”

“Yes, Arabs and other Muslims wanted some of that bright, shiny democracy, which we liked to brandish in front of them. But they wanted something else,” says the award-winning journalist Robert Fisk in his illuminating book *“The Great War for Civilization,”* recently published. And he goes on to say: “They wanted justice, a setting to rights, a peaceful but an honorable, fair end to the decades of occupation and deceit and corruption and dictator creation. The Iraqis wanted an end to our presence as well as to Saddam’s regime. They wanted to control their land and own their own oil. The Syrians wanted Golan back. The Palestinians wanted a state, even if it was built on less than 22% of mandated Palestine, not a 20-foot wall and occupation. The Iranians had freed themselves from the Shah, America’s brutal policeman in the Gulf, only to find themselves living in a graveyard of theocracy, their democratic elections betrayed by men who feed off the hatred for America that now lies like a blanket over the Middle East. The Afghans resisted the Soviet Union and wanted help to restore their country. They were betrayed—and finished in the hands of the Taliban. And then another great army came into their land. However much the newly installed rulers and the old surviving dictators whom we had helped to power over past decades might praise the West or thank us for our financial loans or for our political support or for invading their countries, there were millions of Muslims who wanted something more: they wanted freedom from us.”

As I reflect on these matters during the holidays, my thoughts turn to the principle of freedom of the will. If there is one principle that the government of God respects, it is the principle of human liberty. He never saw fit to love us so much as to force us to obey his commandments. He wanted the love of free men and women. Democracy will blossom in the Middle East if liberty blossoms, and liberty must be complete so the strongest bonds—the bonds of peace—can be tied among all the parties concerned through diplomacy, cooperation and consultation.

