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A Lasting Settlement?

While George Bush talks up the prospects for peace, in reality he backs Israel's assault on Palestinians' legitimate national aspirations

By Karma Nabulsi

11/01/08 "[The Guardian](#)" -- -- West Point was the first United States military post built after the Declaration of Independence. It had been designed and constructed by [Tadeusz Kosciuszko](#), republican visionary, hero of the American Revolution and the 1794 Polish Uprising, and one of the greatest liberation figures in modern history. Kosciuszko believed and fought for a vision of an America emancipated from foreign rule, an America of both individual and collective liberty, a country that only waged wars of self-defence, and never wars of aggression and occupation. He was one of the founders of a great American tradition, the practice of hope and audacity in the struggle for freedom.

That practice was contesting a tradition of colonisation, slavery and empire - indeed, in appreciation of his contribution at West Point, Kosciuszko's commanding officer gave him the gift of a slave. Kosciuszko immediately freed him, stating that all forms of slavery must be resisted, and that, in the contest for the soul of the republic, the side of liberation must always be chosen. To this very day, the American republic is constantly shaped by this ongoing battle between the tradition of cynicism and that of hope, one of conservative reaction versus progressive values and freedom.

George Bush, as we know, does not come from that rich and valiant tradition, of which Kosciusko was part, and which is so vibrant in the American body politic of today. When it came to Palestine, George Bush chose his side from the moment he took office, and has confirmed his position at every opportunity over the last seven years - and there have been many. Under his presidency, the possibilities for peace have nosedived spectacularly into a downward and violent spiral of increasing conflict and conquest. Israeli expansion and aggression was actively encouraged and supported by the neo-conservatives in his administration, and every opportunity for progress towards peace derailed.

In Israeli hallways yesterday, Bush was celebrated as the unwavering supporter of Israel's expansionist policies that he truly is, as he pressed ahead with a public relations campaign that began at Annapolis - talking future statehood for the Palestinians in theory, but backing occupation policies in practice - standing by as Olmert spoke of increasing settlements in illegally annexed Arab East Jerusalem. For the massive construction of Israeli settlements on expropriated Palestinian land over the last few years - illegal under international law and condemned by almost every country in the world - is only made possible by uncritical American financial, military and diplomatic support for Israel.

The accelerated illegal settlements activity that kills all hope for progress is not taking place in spite of President Bush's role in the Middle East, but is, obviously, directly connected to it: he will do nothing to stop it. At the press conference in Ramallah, Bush categorically dismissed United Nations resolutions on settlements: "The UN deal didn't work in the past ... this is an opportunity to move forward and negotiate a new deal ... We can stay stuck in the past, which will yield nothing good for the Palestinian people or we can chart a hopeful path for the future."

Palestine's future is intimately tied up with America's, and Palestinian freedom is connected to a particular tradition of American freedom that

is based on justice and equality, and on the universality of human rights. So when Palestinians today express despair about the present administration's commitment to their freedom, it does not mean they are despairing about the desire for a better future, or that they are not committed to peace, or that they do not possess the capacity of hope. It simply means they have a more realistic and pragmatic appreciation of their current predicament than those who insist that Palestinians should draw their hope from Bush's deadly rhetoric.

When Kosciusko launched the uprising in Poland in 1794, he did so in the name of those who were fighting for their freedom, as well as of those who were withholding it from them: "For both our freedom and for yours." It is that political tradition of hope and of courage that will bring us all the peace we have been seeking.