

Small carrot, no stick: A road map to nowhere

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A senior Israeli official, listening to President Bush's June 24 speech outlining U.S. policy on the Middle East, kept waiting to hear what pressure the U.S. was going to apply to Israel. He never heard it mentioned. "I thought all the way through the speech: this is the carrot, now comes the stick," said the official. But "there was no stick."

Bush's demands were directed only at the Palestinians, whom Bush said must install new leaders, create more democratic institutions, and devise new security structures to crack down on terrorism. Only then, the president said, will the U.S. support the Palestinian drive for statehood. Bush later specified that if Yasir Arafat is again elected head of the Palestinian National Authority, the U.S. will stop sending the Palestinians \$100 million in annual economic aid.

This one-sided speech offered nothing to alter the violent and hopeless status quo in Israel/Palestine. Bush managed mainly to put himself in a diplomatic corner. His attempt to isolate Arafat has elicited an outpouring of support for the PNA president—probably helping to ensure his reelection, which was likely in any case. And his refusal to apply any pressure on Israel to curb its settlements (which continue to expand) in the occupied territories has strengthened the stance of more militant Palestinian and Israeli groups, which are all too willing to maintain the cycles of violence.

Bush's goals, by themselves, are reasonable, and in line with the goals of many Palestinians. As J. Martin Bailey reports in this issue (see p. 10), a number of Palestinian groups are seeking to reform political and economic institutions. Many of them would agree that Arafat's leadership is incompatible with open, democratic governance, and they hope that he will find some way to step down. But these reformers are also the first to say that their democratizing movement is undermined by the Israeli occupation, which constantly disrupts Palestinian life and breeds

hopelessness.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said recently that it is unreasonable to expect the U.S. to offer a “road map” for getting to a peace agreement and land settlement. But until the U.S. presents a plan with more details, a timetable and some ultimatums for Israel, hope for the region will seem even more unreasonable.