

Bush's phony tiff with Zionist lobby

by Joseph Brewda

President George Bush held a White House press conference on Sept. 12 to announce his "principled" effort to enforce a 120-day delay on a congressional vote that would grant Israel \$10 billion in housing loan guarantees. Bush says the delay is necessary to help secure a Mideast peace conference, even if it means a confrontation with Israel. The White House had previously promised several Arab states that it would pressure Israel following the Gulf war, but has instead supported the Anglo-American puppet state on all issues.

But behind Bush's theatrical performance, there lie strategic and political calculations that have nothing to do with "standing up to the Zionist lobby."

"I'm going to fight for what I believe," Bush stated, slamming both hands on the lectern for emphasis, "and it may not be popular politically [to delay the vote], but that's not the question here, whether it's good 1992 politics."

Bush referred to supposedly strong Zionist lobby pressure against the delay: "We're up against very strong and effective groups that go up on the Hill. I heard today that there were something like a thousand lobbyists on the Hill working the other side of the question. We've got one lonely little guy down here doing it," the U.S. President said in reference, naturally, to himself. Bush is even reportedly considering a nationwide television address to give him a forum to say that the U.S. will not be pushed around.

Baker works things out with Shamir

Shortly following the supposed U.S./Zionist confrontation, Secretary of State James Baker flew to Jerusalem to meet with the Israeli leadership. At a Sept. 16 press conference following his meeting with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Baker said that there had been a satisfactory conclusion of the dispute.

He reported that resolution had the following components. First of all, "we would agree that we would not ask for further delay beyond January." Second, the White House would lobby for the acceptance of the \$10 billion guarantee by Congress in January. Third, the U.S. would "restate" its commitment to the principle of providing Israel with aid to help settle Soviet immigrants. Fourth, the administration would "solicit housing aid" from "other countries"—mean-

ing Europe. Finally, Baker reported that the United States would reimburse Israel from out-of-pocket costs resulting from the 120-day delay. Hardly an ungenerous package.

But the next day, the U.S. press claimed that Baker had also secretly threatened the Israelis that if they did not stop constructing Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories, they would get nothing. The media talked of a showdown.

Oddly, the Israelis are not so worked up over the issue. "There is a firm recognition in U.S. society and in all sectors of the administration that the United States owes this aid to the great enterprise of absorbing immigrants," Shamir told Israeli state radio on Sept. 6. "We only disagree on the timing," he said.

On Sept. 8, Israeli state television authoritatively reported that "the political echelon in Israel does not reject the compromise the U.S. administration is now proposing. . . . The assessment is that the Americans are putting off the discussion of aid to Israel to make it easier to obtain Arab agreements" at the upcoming peace conference.

Politics as theater

There are two major considerations weighing on the White House, which motivate the current tiff or apparent tiff, Washington commentators and observers report.

First of all, there is the concern to sustain the new Mideast empire that the Americans and British created through their Gulf war. The United States just bombed Iraq to smithereens, with the support of many Arab states. It has just signed a deal with Kuwait acquiring basing rights there, thereby ensuring that the U.S. will militarily dominate the region's oil fields indefinitely. To get Arab support, Bush had promised some Arab leaders that he would finally get tough with Israel after the Gulf war. These Arab leaders—Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak—for example, fear that without such high-profile U.S. pressure on Israel, they will appear to be nothing but U.S. puppets. To sustain Anglo-American imperial ambitions, consequently, some Israeli demands might indeed have to be sacrificed.

On the domestic front, some Democratic party circles are harping on the theme that while Bush is obsessed with foreign policy, he has no concern with domestic issues. Recently, Sen. Thomas Harkin (Iowa), a contender for the Democratic presidential nomination, complained that the "real threats" to America, are not "halfway around the world," but "halfway down our streets." Fighting foreign giveaways makes Bush look good in this regard, syndicated columnists Evans and Novak report, saying that for Bush the spat with Israel is a "win/win" situation.

Then there is the related concern to rally support from those Americans who think that all of our domestic problems must have a foreign origin. Cheap shots against the "Zionist lobby" are useful to this end, especially when they hide the fact that the "Zionist lobby" is based in the United States and Britain, not in Israel.