

## ***Congress Ignores Human Rights Groups In Pro-Israel Resolution***

By Stephen Zunes

Despite new public opinion polls showing rising public concern about unconditional U.S. support of Israel, recently the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly passed resolutions defending the policies of right-wing Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon in the occupied territories. Human rights activists are alarmed, both at the strong congressional support for a repressive military occupation as well as the fact that the resolutions are being widely interpreted as an attack on the credibility of Amnesty International and other human rights groups.

Last month, Amnesty International published a detailed and well-documented report on the situation in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, noting how “the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] acted as though the main aim was to punish all Palestinians. Actions were taken by the IDF which had no clear or obvious military necessity.” The report goes on to document unlawful killings, destruction of civilian property, arbitrary detention, torture, assaults on medical personnel and journalists, as well as random shooting at people in the streets and houses.

By contrast, the House resolution, passed by a 352-21 margin, claims “Israel’s military operations are an effort to defend itself ... and are aimed only at dismantling the terrorist infrastructure in the Palestinian areas.”

This not only puts the House of Representatives in direct contradiction to reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, but also of Israeli peace and human rights groups like B’Tselem, Gush Shalom, and Yesh G’vul. These Israeli organizations, which have many IDF reservists in their ranks, have reported that the apparent goal of the Israeli offensive was to dismantle much of

the civilian infrastructure of Palestinian society. The Israeli and international news media have graphically shown the wanton destruction of homes, offices, schools, and utilities with no connection whatsoever with any “terrorist infrastructure.”

It is perhaps not surprising that the more harshly worded House resolution, sponsored by Assistant Majority Leader Tom DeLay, was backed by virtually the entire Republican Right. Yet the chief co-sponsor of the resolution was none other than Tom Lantos, the liberal California Democrat who chairs the Human Rights Caucus. Other prominent liberals supporting the resolution included Nancy Pelosi, Robert Matsui, Maxine Waters, Henry Waxman, Mark Udall, John Lewis, Lane Evans, Barney Frank, Edward Markey, Major Owens, David Price, and Patrick Kennedy, among others.

That so many supposedly progressive voices in the House of Representatives would take the word of Tom DeLay over that of Amnesty International is indicative of how little regard there is in Congress for the Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization.

The House resolution also called for an increase of the already more than two billion dollars of annual military aid sent to Israel—and praised President George W. Bush for his policies.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Senate, in a 94-2 vote, passed a similar resolution, again referring to the assault on Palestinian towns and refugee camps as taking “necessary steps to provide security to its people by dismantling the terrorist infrastructure in the Palestinian areas,” with every liberal Democrat voting in the affirmative.

Public opinion polls indicate that most Americans blame both sides for the violence,



though the resolutions passed Thursday put the blame exclusively on the Palestinians. More strikingly, a *Time/CNN* poll revealed the 60% of Americans believed Washington should suspend some or all aid to Israel to force them to pull back from their offensive in the West Bank, while only 1% believed U.S. aid should go up. Yet over 90% of the House of Representatives supports just such an increase in military aid.

The huge majorities in support of these resolutions cannot be attributed to a need to secure the "Jewish vote" in this election year. American Jews are increasingly divided over the policies of Israel's rightist prime minister and the vast majority of the congress-

sional backers of these resolutions are from states or districts with only tiny Jewish populations.

Similarly, most of these resolutions' supporters are from safe enough seats so as not to need campaign contributions from the conservative political action committees supportive of Ariel Sharon.

For most members of Congress, then, it is simply a reflection of their sincere ideological support for Israel's occupation policies and a demonstration of their low regard for internationally recognized human rights standards.

The biggest loser in Thursday's votes is the struggling Israeli peace and human rights movement and their

moderate Palestinian counterparts, whose defiance of their violent leaders and efforts toward reconciliation have once again been sabotaged by the U.S. Congress.

*(Stephen Zunes  
<stephen@coho.org> is Middle East editor for the Foreign Policy in Focus (online at www.fpif.org). He is an associate professor of Politics and chair of the Peace & Justice Studies Program at the University of San Francisco, where he serves as adviser for the student chapter of Amnesty International.)*

**Subscribe:**

Subscribe for \$15 (10 issues) or \$30 (20 issues). Individual copies of *In Focus* are \$2.50, postpaid; bulk orders of *In Focus* are \$12.00 for 10 copies of the same issue, postpaid; orders for delivery outside the U.S. are double the listed prices. (Subscriptions do not include back issues. Contact the IRC for a list of available back issues.) Make checks payable to the Interhemispheric Resource Center. We also accept VISA and MasterCard.

To subscribe to *Foreign Policy In Focus*, or to order back issues, contact the IRC:  
PO Box 4506 ♦ Albuquerque, NM 87196-4506 ♦ Phone / Fax: (505) 842-8288

Name

Email Address

Street Address City, State, Zip Code

VISA/MasterCard Number Expiration Date

Signature