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Israel: The World is Holding its Breath



One of the most delicate subjects in foreign policy is the United States' support for Israel. From outside the U.S., it seems that this support is unconditional. Whether Israel is invading Gaza or Lebanon, expelling people or killing opponents, building a wall of shame or violating human rights, it is perceived by the rest of the world that the U.S. will approve or remain silent, never expressing condemnation.

What happened last week is symptomatic: a few hours after ceremonial meetings and political discussions with Vice President Biden, the government of Benjamin Netanyahu announced measures that openly contradict the most consistent request of the U.S. Government -- don't build additional settlements. This time, the United States reacted appropriately. Israel had committed an act of aggression and deserved to be rebuffed.

Europeans, more than most, understand the delicate issues surrounding Israel: after the terrible Shoah and the struggle to build the State of Israel, a reservoir of sympathy exists towards the Jewish people. This, however is not the issue nor should this sympathy be exploited to give Israel a pass on its actions. There is a difference between Jewish people and Israel: the fact that the United States has a substantial Jewish population does not mean that that the United States must unconditionally approve whatever the State of Israel does.

The world has watched the developments with a sense of relief: maybe the United States will finally adopt a more balanced policy for the region and make peace in this strategic part of the world a political objective.

The "quartet" (United Nations, USA, European Union, Russia) drew a "road map," which Israel accepted in 2001, that required an end to further settlements. Where is the respect for this international agreement? Since then, the population of East Jerusalem, supposedly frozen to its level of 2003, has increased from 180,000 to 200,000.

There is no justification, whether moral, economic or social, to allow Israel to behave like this.

The rest of the world watches intensely and hopes that this is the first sign that the U.S. will expect Israel to live by the rules or that it will no longer support Israel without question. This would help to resolve one of the thorniest problems of foreign policy: Middle East Peace. This diplomatic crisis is an opportunity to submit Israel to the rule of law. The "growing anger" of the U.S. population might be good news for the rest of the world.

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