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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 09, 2005

Lebanon: Why Can't It Just Make Up Its Mind And Do What Bush Tells It To Do?

by Michael in New York on [3/09/2005 08:57:00 PM](#)

"The Daily Show w Jon Stewart" calls the Middle East Mess O'potamia, and with good reason. It truly is a troubled region, even though Bush has been crowing for the last few weeks that baby steps in the Palestinian territory and elsewhere count as vindication for invading Iraq. And when Democrats don't explode with enthusiasm or suggest the region is more complicated than Bush wants to admit, they're lambasted on the Sunday talk shows by right wingers for being spoilsports who "want America to fail."

Reality check. Bush cheered when demonstrators in Lebanon demanded Syria leave. Crowds equaled tens of thousands, an impressive number since Syrian troops still basically control that country. But yesterday, Hezbollah organized a demonstration of HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS saying Syria is welcome and the US should butt out. Today, the [Lebanese assembly re-elected the pro Syrian prime minister](#) who was forced to resign a few days ago.

Everyone says Hezbollah is the best organized group and has the best military outfit. It's gaining strength in office and should pick up more seats in the next election. Will Bush cheer this terrorist organization if it reflects the will of the people? Given what he's done in Latin America (by supporting coups against democratically elected leaders he thought were too leftist), I'm guessing no.

This doesn't mean the majority of the Lebanese want Syria to stay. But it would be silly to claim the majority categorically want them to leave after yesterday's mass protest. Some have suggested Hezbollah has hurt itself long-term by aligning with Syria. Certainly the intellectual elite and the upper and middle class want it gone -- that's why their smaller demonstrations were termed part of the BMW revolution.

Bush faces the same problem in Iraq, where horse-trading among the groups that can't wait to take their pound of flesh out of the Sunni minority that dominated the country for ages still hasn't resolved whether Iraq will be merely influenced or dominated by the Koran. Then there's Afghanistan, which according to many reports has devolved into a narco-state where a good third of the country is controlled by war lords and drug dealers. Opium production is at near-record levels.

The only good news lately is from the Palestinian territories, where the real breakthrough came because Arafat died, not because of Bush's global savvy.

None of this is pessimism. The elections in Iraq were an

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