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American realism in the alleys of Gaza

By [Shmuel Rosner](#)

WASHINGTON - Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made an interesting choice when she named the U.S. presidents whose foreign policy serves as her model. Rice spoke last week at the Centennial Dinner for the Economic Club of New York about "American realism," a concept that she apparently will use as a key for explaining her behavior in the 18 months remaining in her job. This is "realism, to be sure," but realism behind which there is "something greater, something nobler." Rice - who was educated on the colder and far less noble "realism" of the first Bush administration, and became a central component of the "idealistic" policy of the second Bush administration - is now trying to pave a path of her own.

Some will see this as an attempt by Rice to help the president, to explain him better. Others are likely to identify an independent decision: Rice is distancing herself from the "Bush legacy" in an attempt to create a legacy of her own. In a meeting with journalists from NBC the following day, Rice was asked whether this is "the beginning of a Rice doctrine" similar to that articulated by secretary of state James Monroe in the early 19th century.

"Oh, please," she replied modestly. But it is hard to believe that she would object to having this patent registered in her name.

In her speech, Rice focused mainly on the foreign policy of one of the greatest American presidents, Teddy Roosevelt. He is the correct model, in her opinion, for an approach that is based not on a global political reality alone, but on the nature of the American character as well. Thus, Rice is rejecting the realism whose sole purpose is to maintain stability. America, by its almost revolutionary nature, is striving for a transformation of the global reality, though of course within the limitations of its interests and its ability to implement.

During the meeting at NBC, Rice was asked about criticism leveled against the administration by former president Jimmy Carter. Carter, certainly not by chance, is not one of those model presidents mentioned in Rice's programmatic speech. Aside from Roosevelt, there were another three (and several of their advisers) from the Cold War period: Democrats Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy, and Republican Ronald Reagan. She skipped over Republicans Dwight D. Eisenhower, Richard Nixon and George H.W. Bush, and Democrats Lyndon Johnson and Carter. To the question regarding Carter's criticism, she replied with a modicum of ridicule: "Yeah, and all of those others had such great success in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, didn't they?"

So here, on the eve of another visit by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to Washington, Rice is crediting one dizzying success to President George W. Bush. According to her interpretation, Bush is the person thanks to whom a "great bulk" of the Israeli and Palestinian public today wants to see the fulfillment of the two-state vision. "People act as if it just kind of happened magically. Well, of course not. It happened because it's a policy that Bush articulated early and has pursued ever since," she declared.

In any case, this statement by Rice can be considered a direct continuation of the declaration by Bush himself in October 2005 in the Rose Garden, with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas standing beside him. Some people,

declared the president, say that "I would like to see two states before I get out of office. Not true." Bush already lowered expectations then, before Hamas came to power, before Ariel Sharon collapsed, before the battles erupted in Gaza. Now Rice, who is also in favor, is preparing the ground for a predictable disappointment. It's true, she will be able to claim when the time comes, that no state was established; but Bush succeeded in bringing about a critical change in public opinion.

And meanwhile, beyond the speeches, the secretary of state and her assistants will now make do with outlining a path of "American realism," which is now being translated into spoken Arabic among the smoking alleys of the Gaza Strip. That is the political philosophy with which she will explain the efforts to strengthen the status of Fatah, which lost the elections, at the expense of Hamas, which won them legitimately. That is also the theory that will justify the renewed reliance on oppressive regimes such as Egypt, deceitful ones such as Saudi Arabia and autocratic ones such as Jordan. Pursuing what is desirable, and making do with what exists.

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