

Bush Eludes Vitriol That Dogged Bill

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In years past, Jewish Republicans slammed then-president Bill Clinton for failing to move the American embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, criticized Hillary Clinton for meddling in Middle East affairs when she voiced support for the eventual creation of a Palestinian state and lambasted her for accepting a campaign contribution from the American Muslim Council, which she later returned.

But, critics of the current administration point out, nary a word has been heard from many Jewish Republican activists during the past week as President Bush opted not to move the embassy for at least another six months, his FBI director agreed to speak June 28 at the Muslim council's annual convention and First Lady Laura Bush appeared to criticize Israeli moves to build a security fence.

"Bush's policies are arguably worse than Clinton's when it comes to Israel," said the president of the Zionist Organization of America, Morton Klein, an opponent of the Oslo accords and a frequent critic of the Bush and Clinton administrations. "There are too many Jewish Republicans who would have criticized Clinton for the same policies that Bush is enacting. But when it comes to Bush, they are essentially ignoring them."

On Monday Bush opted to postpone the relocation of the embassy for national security reasons. The embassy move was called for in a 1995 congressional bill, although the measure allows for a presidential waiver every six months.

During a radio interview Monday, Laura Bush spoke about Israel's initial steps to build a fence along part of the so-called Green Line, the pre-1967 border. "I don't think a fence will be some long-lasting sign of peace," she said.

The first lady added: "Right now, there is a huge barrier of hate and distrust between all the parties in the Middle East. I hope they can tear that barrier down."

Meanwhile, FBI director Robert Mueller announced that he will be speaking at the upcoming gathering of the American Muslim Council, an organization that has been accused by some of voicing support for groups that conduct terrorist attacks against Israel.

Officials at the National Jewish Democratic Council said that the silence in many Jewish Republican circles concerning these developments represented a clear double standard.

"These guys have been hypocrites since day one, and it will be really interesting to see how they react now," declared the Democratic Council's executive director, Ira Forman.

In a reference to former president George H. W. Bush, who was disliked by many Jewish activists for pressuring Jerusalem and his warm ties to the Arab oil industry,

Forman added, "GOP supporters in the Jewish community have never spoken up when this administration has been influenced by the Saudi/poppy wing of the party."

But the Florida chairman of the Republican Jewish Coalition, real estate developer Ned Siegel, defended Bush's record on the Middle East.

"This president sees the war on terrorism as closely aligned with what's happening in Israel," Siegel said. "It is this true moral clarity that separates him from any other administration.... The president is very clear that American security is very much tied into Israel's security."