

Nov 04, 2016 by *Gordon Robison*

Watching the Returns ^[1]

Outside of Israel and (perversely) Iran there may have been some positive reaction to President Bush's reelection, but I have not run across it yet. One of my daughter's friends has changed his instant messenger screen name to "Crap! I can't believe they reelected him!" Another Jordanian friend sent me a text message declaring this a "dark day for humanity", adding that she is considering moving to Mars.

On the more public level, however, the dichotomy I observed last week in London is holding true for reactions to the vote. Just as Brits – friends and strangers alike – were quite upfront in wanting to know if I had voted 'correctly' there has, since Wednesday morning, been little reticence in the UK about the result: "How can 59,054,087 people be so DUMB?" screamed the front page of this morning's *Daily Mirror*, immediately above the sub-head, "US Election Disaster".

Ahead of the vote Arabs seemed to feel that good manners required a bit more circumspection. Similarly, the post-election headlines were slightly less hysterical. "Middle East Treads Lightly on Bush Victory" read the banner in Beirut's *Daily Star*. The accompanying analysis piece was titled "An ominous watershed? 4 More years of trauma?"

For many papers the election was a delicate issue. However much people may dislike Mr. Bush and his administration the United States remains an ally of many of the region's governments, and there is an understanding in many Arab countries that media criticism of friendly governments can only go so far. Dubai's *Gulf News* finessed this delicate issue, as it often does, by using a news agency story. "Arabs express disappointment at poll outcome" the headline read, the Reuters attribution providing a degree of protection were someone in authority to complain

Here in Amman the *Jordan Times* ran the same Reuters piece on page one, but also offered some more pointed comments on its editorial page. "For many around the world, the results of the US elections – the presidential, Senate and House races – dashed hopes of a leadership change in Washington that might have ushered in a new era of international relations," the paper wrote.

"Bush and the team he chooses... have much damage to undo, starting with the disregard with which so many in the international community have come to look at the US."

On Tuesday night I continued a 36 year family tradition by holding an election night party. It ended at 5:20am when the Jordanian man from the World Bank looked at his watch, declared "this clearly is not going to be over in the next hour or two," and stood up to leave, taking the last few guests with him. The Americans, perhaps 60% of the 40-ish people present, seemed to take the result in stride, though few were enthused. The Jordanians seemed unsurprised and unhappy with the unfolding result in roughly equal parts.

In the wake of the election there is a sense of tension and expectancy throughout the region. What one does not sense is much in the way of either hope or optimism.

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