

Sacramento Bee
May 8, 2008

Carter's kow-towing to terrorists blocks path to peace
By Lawrence J. Haas

Appearing recently on al-Jazeera TV, Hamas leader Khaled Mashal made clear why he is pursuing a truce with Israel, and why anyone interested in a permanent Arab-Israeli peace should not be encouraged.

“People should not assume that in the management of this conflict, we are moving from a phase of resistance and battles to a phase of calm,” Mashal declared. “No ... the (calm) is a tactical means. It is a step within the resistance and is not detached from it.”

In other words, Hamas wants to take a break, end Israel’s pin-point assassinations of its leaders, and use the time to rearm before resuming the pursuit of its overriding goal – to destroy Israel.

This, of course, is not peace but, rather, war by other means. Mashal’s interview came just a week after Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, attacked Israel’s border with a barrage of gunfire and mortar shells and two car bombs, injuring more than a dozen Israeli soldiers.

Hamas’ commitment to Israel’s demise, its tactics, and the support it receives from Iran make clear why Jimmy Carter’s recent trip to the Middle East set back peace efforts: With his prestige as a former president, Carter sent dangerously mixed signals to our friends and foes about where we stand and what we will accept as part of any deal that we broker.

The formula for real peace is no secret. It begins with Arab recognition of Israel and the creation of a new state of Palestine that would live alongside the Jewish state, each respecting the territorial integrity of the other.

That is U.S. policy, as enunciated by President Bush, who serves as the nation’s top diplomat. It reflects our principles – for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law and our behavior – to promote freedom and democracy and to isolate terrorists while destroying their networks.

Any U.S.-brokered peace will reflect those principles, not just because we believe in them but because they are a prerequisite for a peace that lasts.

Getting there begins with clarity. All parties to a Middle East peace agreement – Israel, the Palestinians and their neighbors – must understand that, while compromise on matters such as the borders between Israel and Palestine is inevitable, the United States will not sacrifice its principles.

Based on those principles, the United States and its European allies have sought to bolster Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president who has committed to a two-state solution, and to isolate Hamas, which calls for Israel's destruction through its leadership and its charter.

Carter complicated those efforts, giving false hope to those who have a far different view of the future.

Rather than isolate Hamas, Carter embraced it – literally, by embracing senior Hamas official Nasser Shaer at a meeting in Ramallah.

Rather than uphold the rule of law, Carter sidestepped the issue of Hamas' coup against Abbas' Fatah Party in Gaza. In a later *New York Times* op-ed, he wrote disingenuously, "Eventually, Hamas gained control of Gaza."

Rather than reject terrorism as a legitimate tactic to achieve political goals, Carter laid a wreath at the grave of Yasser Arafat, who helped invent modern-day terrorism and served as an obstacle to peace.

Were he an ordinary citizen, Carter's antics would be merely misguided. But as a former president, he has complicated the U.S. imperative to project a single, coherent message to our friends and enemies alike.

That will encourage the enemies of freedom and democracy that their activities are working, that they can wear us down, and that we will compromise our principles as a result of violence and mayhem.

The United States will not do that. By suggesting that we might, Carter has put another roadblock in the path to peace.

About the writer:

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