

The CIA and Fatah; Spies, Quislings and the Palestinian Authority

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When Hamas gunmen stormed the Fatah security compounds in Gaza last week they found huge supplies of American-made weaponry including 7,400 M-16 assault rifles, dozens of mounted machine guns, rocket launchers, 7 armored military jeeps, 800,000 rounds of bullets and 18 US-made armored personnel carriers. They also discovered something far more valuable— CIA files which purportedly contain “information about the collaboration between Fatah and the Israeli and American security organizations; CIA methods on how to prevent attacks, chase and follow after cells of Hamas and the Committees; plans about Fatah assassinations of members of Hamas and other organizations; and American studies on the security situation in Gaza.” (Aaron Klein, WorldNetDaily.com)

If the documents prove to be authentic, they will confirm what many critics of Fatah believed from the beginning; that US-Israeli intelligence agencies have been collaborating with high-ranking members of the PA to help crush the Palestinian national liberation movement. The information could be disastrous for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his newly-appointed “emergency government”. It could destroy their credibility before they even take office.

The extent of Fatah’s cooperation with the CIA is still unknown, but an article in The New York Sun, (“ Hamas Takes over Gaza Security Services” 6-15-07) suggests that the two groups may have been working together closely. Former Middle East CIA operations officer Robert Baer, who was interviewed in the article, said that the discovery of the documents was “a major blow to Fatah” and will show “a record of training, spying on Hamas”.

Baer added ironically, “Fatah equals CIA is not a good selling point.”

Baer is right. The uncovering of the documents is “big trouble” for Abbas who is already facing a loss of public confidence from his closeness to Israel and for his appointment of Salam Fayyad, the ex-World bank official who the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz calls “everyone’s favorite Palestinian.”

Perhaps more significant is the fact that members of Hamas who spoke with WorldNetDaily claimed that “the files contain, among other information, details of CIA networks in the Middle East” and that Hamas plans to “use these documents and make portions public to prove the collaboration between America and traitor Arab countries.” Imagine what a headache it will be for the Bush administration if Hamas exposes the broader network of US spies and Arab quislings operating throughout region.

Bush Support for “Regime Change” in the PA

It's no secret that the Bush administration has been funneling money to Palestinian militias that are preparing to overthrow Hamas. On Monday, Condoleezza Rice announced that the US would resume "full assistance to the Palestinian government" and end the year long boycott to the people in the West Bank. The new aid—which could amount to as much as \$86 million—will be used to shore up the PA security apparatus and pay the salaries of officials in the "emergency government." The uncovering of the CIA documents in Gaza will cast a cloud over the administration's largesse and make Abbas look like a Palestinian Karzai who gets financial treats from Washington to follow their diktats.

Yesterday, Condoleezza Rice was given the task of outlining the administration's new policy vis-à-vis the Abbas' "emergency government". The Bush team had already decided the night before that they would throw their full support behind Abbas and his "unelected" clatter of pro-western stooges. Rice could hardly contain her glee the next day when she ascended the podium and began wagging her finger reproachfully at Hamas:

"Hamas has made its choice," Condi growled. "It has sought to attempt to extinguish democratic debate with violence and to impose its extremist's agenda on the Palestinian people in Gaza, now responsible Palestinians are making their choice and it is the duty of the international community to support those Palestinians who wish to build a better life and a future of peace."

This typically Orwellian statement was intended to justify the deposing of the legally-elected government of Palestine. No matter; Rice's pronouncements are always reiterated verbatim in the media without challenge regardless of how incongruous they may be.

The Bush administration had plenty of time to observe developments on the ground and make an informed decision about what to do next. There was no need to hurry. Instead, they decided to blunder ahead and launch their "West Bank First" policy which commits US support to Abbas without any consideration of the public mood. The frantic pace of the decision-making, makes it look like Bush and Olmert are elevating Abbas to promote their own political agendas. Naturally, the Palestinians can be expected to resent this conspicuous outside meddling.

Former President Jimmy Carter was the first to blast Bush's new plan. He said that "the United States, Israel and the European Union must end their policy of favoring Fatah over Hamas, or they will doom the Palestinian people to deepening conflict between the rival movements.... Carter said that Hamas, besides winning a fair and democratic mandate that should have entitled it to lead the Palestinian government and that the Bush administration's refusal to accept the 2006 election victory of Hamas was 'criminal.'"

Carter's comments appeared in just one newspaper—the Jerusalem Post. The ex-president has been increasingly marginalized since he dared to imply that Israel is an apartheid state. But Carter's analysis is dead-on—Bush is just aggravating an already tense situation. He'd be better off trying to bring the two sides together and reconciling their differences rather than igniting a potentially explosive confrontation. Besides, Abbas' close ties to Washington and Tel Aviv doesn't bode well for his government's long-term prospects. The US and Israel are widely reviled in the occupied territories and, as author Khalid Amayreh says, "Palestinians won't accept a Vichy Government."

Three days ago Abbas disbanded the Hamas-dominated parliament and sacked Prime

Minister Ismail Haniyeh. Abbas had no legal justification for this action. In fact, the “Basic Law” which applies to this case stipulates that “The President cannot suspend the legislative Council during a state of emergency” and there is “no provision whatsoever for an emergency government”. The president does not even have the authority to “call for new elections”—let alone, replace the elected representatives of the people. Abbas only support comes from political leaders in Tel Aviv and Washington and their reluctant accomplices in the EU.

The key issue here is whether democratic elections have any real meaning or if they can simply be rescinded by executive decree?

This question should be as relevant to Americans as it is to Palestinians. After all, both people now face a similar predicament; the flagrant abuse of executive authority to enhance the powers of the president. In both cases, the president must be forced to conform to the law. Democracy cannot be decided by fiat.

Free elections are not a crime—that is, unless one lives in the Occupied Territories. Then voting for the candidate of one’s choice provides the justification for cutting off food, water, medicine, and financial resources—as well as stepping up a campaign of illegal detentions, destruction of personal property and targeted assassinations.

This is what the “Bush Doctrine” looks like in the Gaza Strip today. The occupants of the “most densely populated place on earth” participated in the balloting at insistence of the Bush administration and they’ve been rewarded for their cooperation with a savage boycott and daily brutality.

If Bush didn’t want democracy, then why did he force it on the Palestinians?

Political powerbrokers in the US and Israel immediately rejected the election results and initiated a plan to scuttle Hamas through economic strangulation, persistent harassment and covert warfare. For the last year, the newly “elected” government has shown remarkable restraint under constant assault. Hamas has kept its word and refrained from suicide bombings in Israel even though hundreds of Palestinian civilians have been killed or injured during that same time. In fact, there has NOT BEEN ONE HAMAS-BACKED SUICIDE BOMBING SINCE THE PARTY TOOK OFFICE. (This fact is invariably ignored by the media which is far-more sympathetic to the Israeli position) We should remember that suicide bombing has been used for years as the excuse for putting off “final settlement” negotiations. Now that the bombing has stopped, Israel has invented an entirely new excuse to avoid dialogue, that is, that Hamas “refuses to recognize the state of Israel”.

Actually, it is Israel that refuses to accept Palestinian statehood—a fact that is further underlined by its relentless efforts to topple the Hamas government.

Hamas has done nothing illegal since they were elected. The Qassam rockets which are fired into Israel are the unavoidable corollary of the 40-year long occupation. How is Hamas supposed to stop these sporadic attacks? If Israel seriously believed that Hamas was responsible for the rockets, they wouldn’t hesitate to arrest or kill every leader in the current parliament. The fact is, Israel knows that Hamas is not instigating these attacks. It’s just another red herring.

Regardless of what one may think about Hamas, Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh has shown

that he is a man who can be trusted to keep his word. In an interview in the Washington Post with Lally Weymouth, Haniyeh was asked if Hamas sought the “obliteration of the Jewish people”? (another myth propagated in the western press)

Haniyeh answered, “We do not have any feelings of animosity toward Jews. We do not wish to throw them into the sea. All we seek is to be given our land back, not to harm anybody.”

This, of course, is not the response that neocon extremists in the US-Israeli political establishment want to hear. It undermines the rationale for the ongoing military occupation and expansion of illegal settlements. They would rather promote the image of Palestinians as vicious radicals bent on the Israel’s complete annihilation. But how accurate is that image?

In a particularly affecting editorial in the Washington Post, Prime Minister Haniyeh stated his case in simple terms. He said:

“As I inspect the ruins of our infrastructure—all turned to rubble once more by F-16s and American-made missiles — my thoughts again turn to the minds of Americans. What do they think of this?

They think of the pluck and “toughness” of Israel, “standing up” to “terrorists.” Yet a nuclear Israel possesses the 13th-largest military force on the planet, one that is used to rule an area about the size of New Jersey and whose adversaries there have no conventional armed forces. Who is the underdog, supposedly America’s traditional favorite, in this case?

I hope that Americans will give careful thought to root causes and historical realities, (of) why a supposedly “legitimate” state such as Israel has had to conduct decades of war against a subject refugee population without ever achieving its goals.

Israel’s nearly complete control over the lives of Palestinians is never in doubt, as confirmed by the humanitarian and economic suffering of the Palestinians since the January elections. Israel’s ongoing policies of expansion, military control and assassination mock any notion of sovereignty or bilateralism. Its “separation barrier,” running across our land, is hardly a good-faith gesture toward future coexistence.

But there is a remedy, and while it is not easy it is consistent with our long-held beliefs. Palestinian priorities include recognition of the core dispute over the land of historical Palestine and the rights of all its people; resolution of the refugee issue from 1948; reclaiming all lands occupied in 1967; and stopping Israeli attacks, assassinations and military expansion. Contrary to popular depictions of the crisis in the American media, the dispute is not only about Gaza and the West Bank; it is a wider national conflict that can be resolved only by addressing the full dimensions of Palestinian national rights in an integrated manner.

This means statehood for the West Bank and Gaza, a capital in Arab East Jerusalem, and resolving the 1948 Palestinian refugee issue fairly, on the basis of international legitimacy and established law. Meaningful negotiations with a non-expansionist, law-abiding Israel can proceed only after this tremendous labor has begun”.

Haniyeh’s appeal to the American people helps us understand that what Hamas really wants is for Israel to conform to “unanimously approved” UN resolutions “predicated on historical truth, equity and justice.”

Does that sound unreasonable? Wasn't the same demanded of Saddam?

Haniyeh is not a madman nor is he an "Islamofascist." In fact, it may be that Haniyeh's dreams are not that different from the average Israeli citizen.

Consider the polls that were conducted just days after the election of Mahmoud Abbas. One survey showed that nearly 80% of Israelis supported immediate peace talks with the new Palestinian president. The Israeli leadership, of course, stubbornly refused even though Yasir Arafat had died a month earlier. The Israeli political establishment is resolutely against peace talks or negotiations. Unlike the vast majority of Israeli citizens-Israel's ruling elite reject the principle of "land for peace!"

Perhaps, Arafat wasn't the "obstacle to peace" after all. Perhaps it was just a PR swindle to avoid real dialogue?

Israeli leaders have no intention of negotiating with the Palestinians, regardless of what the Israeli public wants or who's sitting in Ramallah. The Zionist "grand plan" will not be compromised by conferences or bartering. The military occupation and settlement activity will continue until US support dries up and Israel is forced to the bargaining table. Until then the onslaught will continue.

Another Siege of Gaza?

Ha'aretz reports that Israel is planning to launch a military operation in Gaza aimed at crushing Hamas. ("Barak planning military operation in Gaza within weeks" 6-17-07) The invasion will involve 20,000 troops, armored vehicles, tanks, and air support.

But what is the justification? Is it because the US-Israeli plan to overthrow Hamas with Palestinian militias failed? Or is it because the duly-elected government has reclaimed the power it was given at the ballot box?

According to an Israeli official, the invasion will be in response to the firing of Qassam rockets into Israel or another suicide bombing.

In other words, Israel is devising a pretext for "regime change" EVEN BEFORE THEY ARE ATTACKED. Until then, the border crossings will remain closed, the blockade will be tightened, and the economic asphyxiation will continue.

In the face of US-Israeli plotting, consider the comments of Prime Minister Haniyeh, who articulates as well as anyone, the aspirations of the Palestinians people:

"We do not want to live on international welfare and American handouts. We want what Americans enjoy — democratic rights, economic sovereignty and justice. We thought our pride in conducting the fairest elections in the Arab world might resonate with the United States and its citizens. Instead, our new government was met from the very beginning by acts of explicit, declared sabotage by the White House. Now this aggression continues against 3.9 million civilians living in the world's largest prison camps.

We present this clear message: If Israel is prepared to negotiate seriously and fairly, and resolve the core 1948 issues, rather than the secondary ones from 1967, a fair and permanent peace is possible. Based on a hudna (comprehensive cessation of hostilities for an agreed time), the Holy Land still has an opportunity to be a peaceful and stable economic

powerhouse for all the Semitic people of the region. If Americans only knew the truth, possibility might become reality”.

Hamas history of violence is problematic, but it should not be an insurmountable obstacle to peace. The IRA had a similar history and, yet, those issues were ultimately resolved through the Good Friday peace accords. Now, the warring factions have joined together in a power-sharing agreement and there’s reason to believe that the armed struggle phase of the conflict is over. A similar remedy is possible between Israel and Palestine.

Hamas entry into the political system should be seen for what it is— a step in the right direction. It is an indication that they are tired of the armed struggle and want to pursue a political solution. Israel and the US should be receptive to this. They should reward Hamas’ efforts to stop the suicide bombing and agree to backchannel negotiations. That will determine whether common ground can be reached on any of the main issues. If the violence resumes, Israel can always return to its present strategy but, it’s certainly worth a try.

At the very least, Bush and Olmert should respect the will of the Palestinian people and allow Hamas to perform its duties without further hectoring, sanctions, violence or sabotage. The US and Israel have no right to intervene in the affairs of a sovereign government. If Hamas perpetrates violence against Israel, then Israel has every right to respond. But until then, they should show restraint and try to play a constructive role in strengthening the emergent Palestinian democracy.

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