

Column One: History's tragic farce

Contributed by Caroline Glick , THE JERUSALEM POST
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It is a fundamental truth that while history always repeats itself, it almost never repeats itself precisely. There is always a measure of newness to events that allows otherwise intelligent people to repeat the mistakes of their forebears without looking completely ridiculous.

Given this, it is hard to believe that with the advent of the Obama administration, we are seeing history repeat itself with nearly unheard of exactness. US President Barack Obama's reported intention of appointing former Sen. George Mitchell as his envoy for the so-called Palestinian-Israeli peace process will provide us with a spectacle of an unvarnished repeat of history.

In December 2000, outgoing president Bill Clinton appointed Mitchell to advise him on how to reignite the "peace process" after the Palestinians rejected statehood and launched their terror war against Israel in September 2000. Mitchell presented his findings to Clinton's successor, George W. Bush, in April 2001.

Mitchell asserted that Israel and the Palestinians were equally to blame for the Palestinian terror war against Israelis. He recommended that Israel end all Jewish construction outside the 1949 armistice lines, and stop fighting Palestinian terrorists.

As for the Palestinians, Mitchell said they had to make a "100 percent effort" to prevent the terror that they themselves were carrying out. This basic demand was nothing new. It formed the basis of the Clinton administration's nod-nod-wink-wink treatment of Palestinian terrorism since the Palestinian Authority was established in 1994.

By insisting that the PLO make a "100 percent effort," to quell the terror it was enabling, the Clinton administration gave the Palestinians built-in immunity from responsibility. Every time that his terrorists struck, Yasser Arafat claimed that their attacks had nothing to do with him. He was making a "100 percent effort" to stop the attacks, after all.

After getting Arafat off the hook, the Clinton administration proceeded to blame Israel. If Israel had just given up more land, or forced Jews from their homes, or given the PLO more money, Arafat could have saved the lives of his victims.

Mitchell's plan, although supported by then-secretary of state Colin Powell, was never adopted by Bush because at the time, terrorists were massacring Israelis every day. It would have been politically unwise for Bush to accept a plan that asserted moral equivalence between Israel and the PLO when rescue workers were scraping the body parts of Israeli children off the walls of bombed out pizzerias and bar mitzva parties.

But while his eponymous plan was rejected, its substance, which was based on the Clinton Plan, formed the basis of the Tenet Plan, the road map plan and the Annapolis Plan. And now, Mitchell is about to return to Israel, at the start of yet another presidential administration to offer us his plan again.

MITCHELL, OF COURSE, is not the only one repeating the past. His boss, Barack Obama, is about to repeat the failures his immediate predecessors. Like Clinton and Bush, Obama is making the establishment of a Palestinian state the centerpiece of his foreign policy agenda.

Obama made this clear his first hour on the job. On Wednesday at 8 a.m., Obama made his first phone call to a foreign leader. He called PLO chief Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. During their conversation, Obama pledged his commitment to Palestinian statehood.

Fatah wasted no time responding to Obama's extraordinary gesture. On Wednesday afternoon Abbas convened the PLO's Executive Committee in Ramallah and the body announced that future negotiations with Israel will have to be based on new preconditions. As far as the PLO is concerned, with Obama firmly in its corner, it can force Israel to its knees.

And so, the PLO is now uninterested in the agreements it reached with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. For Israel to enjoy the privilege of negotiating with the PLO, it must first announce its willingness to expel all the 500,000 or so Israeli Jews who live in Judea, Samaria and the neighborhoods in east, south and north Jerusalem built since 1967, as well as in the Old City, and then hand the areas over, lock, stock and barrel, to the PLO.

This new PLO "plan" itself is nothing new. It is simply a restatement of the Arab "peace plan," which is just a renamed Saudi "peace plan," which was just a renamed Tom Friedman column in The New York Times. And the Friedman plan is

one that no Israeli leader in his right mind can accept. So by making this their precondition for negotiations, the PLO is doing what it did in 2000. It is rejecting statehood in favor of continued war with Israel.

What is most remarkable about the new administration's embrace of its predecessors' failed policy is how uncontroversial this policy is in Washington. It is hard to come up with another example of a policy that has failed so often and so violently that has enjoyed the support of both American political parties. Indeed, it is hard to think of a successful policy that ever enjoyed such broad support.

Apparently, no one in positions of power in Washington has stopped to consider why it is that in spite of the fervent backing of presidents Clinton and Bush, there is still no Palestinian state.

SINCE ISRAEL recognized the PLO as the "sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" in 1993, the US and Israel have based their plans for peace on their assumption that the PLO is interested in making peace. And they have based their plans for making peace by establishing a Palestinian state on the assumption that the Palestinians are interested in statehood. Yet over the past 15 years it has become abundantly clear that neither of these assumptions is correct.

In spite of massive political, economic and military support by the US, Israel and Europe, the PLO has never made any significant moves to foster peaceful relations between Israel and the Palestinians. Not only did the PLO-led PA spend the six years between 1994 and 2000, in which it was supposedly making peace with Israel, indoctrinating Palestinian society to hate Jews and seek their destruction through jihadist-inspired terrorism. It also cultivated close relations with Iran and other rogue regimes and terror groups.

Many are quick to claim that these misbehaviors were simply a consequence of Arafat's personal radicalism. Under Abbas, it is argued, the PLO is much more moderate. But this assertion strains credulity. As The Jerusalem Post's Khaled Abu Toameh reported on Monday, Fatah forces today boast that their terror cells in Gaza took active part in Hamas's missile offensive against Israel. Fatah's Aksa Martyrs terror cells claim that during Operation Cast Lead, its terrorists shot 137 rockets and mortar shells at Israel.

Abbas's supporters in the US and Israel claim that these Fatah members acted as they did because they are living under Hamas rule. They would be far more moderate if they were under Fatah rule. But this, too, doesn't ring true.

From 2000 through June 2007, when Hamas ousted Fatah forces from Gaza, most of the weapons smuggling operations in Gaza were carried out by Fatah. Then, too, most of the rockets and mortar shells fired at Israel were fired by Fatah forces. Likewise, most of the suicide bombers deployed from Judea and Samaria were members of Fatah.

The likes of Madeleine Albright, Powell and Condoleezza Rice claimed that Fatah's collusion with Hamas and Islamic Jihad and its leading role in terror was a consequence of insufficient Israeli support for Arafat and later for Abbas. If Israel had kicked out the Jews of Gaza earlier, or if it had removed its roadblocks and expelled Jews from their homes in Judea and Samaria, or if had prevented all Jewish construction beyond the 1949 armistice lines, then Arafat and later Abbas would have been more popular and able to rein in their own terror forces. (Incidentally, those same forces receive their salaries from the PA, which itself is funded by the US and Israel.)

THE PROBLEM with this line of thinking is that it ignores two essential facts. First, since 2000 Israel has curtailed Jewish building in Judea and Samaria. Second, Israel kicked every last Jew out of Gaza and handed the ruins of their villages and farms over to Fatah in September 2005.

It is worth noting that the conditions under which the PA received Gaza in 2005 were far better than the conditions under which Israel gained its sovereignty in 1948. The Palestinians were showered with billions of dollars in international aid. No one wanted to do anything but help them make a go of it.

In 1948-49, Israel had to secure its sovereignty by fending off five invading armies while under an international arms embargo. It then had to absorb a million refugees from Arab countries and Holocaust survivors from Europe, with no financial assistance from anyone other than US Jews. Israel developed into an open democracy. Gaza became one of the largest terror bases in the world.

Four months after Israel handed over Gaza - and northern Samaria - the Palestinians turned their backs on statehood altogether when they elected Hamas - an explicitly anti-nationalist, pan-Islamic movement that rejects Palestinians statehood - to lead them.

Hamas's electoral victory, its subsequent ouster of Fatah forces from Gaza and its recent war with Israel tells us another fundamental truth about the sources of the repeated failure of the US's bid for Palestinian statehood. Quite simply, there is no real Palestinian constituency for it.

Even if we were to ignore all of the PLO's involvement in terrorism and assume like Obama, Bush and Clinton that the

PLO is willing to live at peace with Israel in exchange for Gaza, Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem, what Hamas's control of Gaza and its popularity throughout the Palestinian areas show is that there is no reason to expect that the PLO will remain in control of territory that Israel transfers to its control. So if Israel were to abide by the PLO's latest demand and accept the Friedman/Saudi/Arab/PLO "peace plan," there is no reason to believe that a Jew-free Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem wouldn't then be taken over by Hamas.

Given that there is no chance that Israeli territorial giveaways will lead to a peaceful Palestinian state, the question arises, is there any way to compel American politicians to give up their fantasies of fancy signing ceremonies in the White House Rose Garden that far from bringing peace, engender radicalism, instability and death?

As far as Mitchell is concerned the answer is no. In an address at Tel Aviv University last month, Mitchell said that the US and Israel must cling to the delusion that Palestinian statehood will bring about a new utopia, "for the alternative is unacceptable and should be unthinkable."

So much for "change" in US foreign policy.

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