

**ANOTHER VIEWPOINT
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CLOSURE OF THE PLO OFFICES AND PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Conflict and war in the Middle East may be regarded as normal features of the region. It is also normal to find efforts continuously being expended to resolve these conflicts and end those wars. The most recent such efforts are those of the President and Secretary of State of the United States. Their efforts are especially important because of both their timeliness and potential impact on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Success, however, would no doubt depend on the cooperation of the conflicting parties and their willingness to compromise in order to find reasonable and acceptable solutions. It is important, therefore, for the parties that are keen on promoting peace to help create conditions that would enhance cooperation and promote willingness to compromise and accommodate each other by the conflicting parties. The two most relevant parties in this conflict are the Palestinians and the Israelis and the cooperation of both is equally essential for the success of the new peace efforts. Yet, it seems at this time that cooperation of the Palestinians can hardly be counted on, for various reasons.

First, the United States has expended little effort to help improve the vastly deteriorating situation against the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The repressive policies of terrorizing, beating, and shooting civilians have continued with hardly any pressure put on Israel to modify its policies and improve its treatment of the occupied people. The United States has

continued to use the Veto on behalf of Israel, even when violations of human rights are evident, and attested to even by Israeli high officials. Yet the United States has not hesitated to condemn any actions by the Palestinians that may have anything to do with violence as acts of terrorism. The Palestinians cannot understand why they are subjected to this double standard. Second, the present initiative for peace between the Palestinians and Israel seems to focus on United States contacts with all parties other than the Palestinians and their representatives. Palestinians everywhere feel as if they are being intentionally slighted by the United States in a matter which concerns them most, regardless of their behavior in the conflict.

Third, the present initiative certainly needs cooperation of the Palestinians for it to succeed; yet, it is hard to imagine such cooperation to be forthcoming when the PLO, their legal representative, is being expelled from the United States by unilateral action. Closure of the Information Office of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Washington, and the pending closure of their office at the United Nations can hardly be considered inducements for cooperation. This policy of closure deserves serious reconsideration, if cooperation of the Palestinians were to be mobilized in the cause of peace, for their sake and the sake of Israel.

Closure of the offices of the PLO may be challenged on legal grounds. It may also be challenged on philosophical and diplomatic grounds. Such challenges will certainly be exercised by other parties and in other contexts. However, our concern in this context is the pragmatic situation in which cooperation of the Palestinians seems crucial for the success of the newly initiated peace efforts. Closure of the PLO offices, especially of their office at the United Nations has few potential benefits to the United States and many effects harmful to the US as

well as to Israel and other less involved parties. Most of all, the net result can be extremely harmful to the US diplomatic efforts that are being expended on behalf of peace.

Who are the potential beneficiaries of the policy of closure of the PLO offices? The United States government can hardly gain, except to prove one more time that it does what Israel and its lobby want. However, such a result can hardly be significant since the the U.S. government already has a strong allie in Israel and further appeasement or inducement can barely add to the strength of that alliance. The United States people cannot expect to benefit from the policy of closure since the offices and officers of the PLO in the United States are not doing any harm to the people of this country. On the contrary, they may be doing some good by disseminating information which may help democracy to function on the basis of knowledge and awareness of the various sides of the issues .

The lobbyists for Israel may think that they have benefited by seeing their short-run objectives realized; peace in this case must certainly not be one of their objectives. Another group that might benefit are members of congress and who are running for election and need the votes and financial support of the pro-Israel lobby and its sympathizers. These candidates may win elections by this means, but the larger objective of peace through the U.S. initiative will suffer. Another group that might benefit and, which will overlap with those already mentioned, are the people who wish to annihilate the identity of the Palestinians as a nation, of whom there are quite a few in the Middle East and outside it. The history of the last one hundred years, however, shows that the Palestinian identity cannot be annihilated and the short-run joy over the closure will not be transformed into a long-run joy over the desired but unattainable peace. Finally, and ironically, the Palestinians themselves may be beneficiaries of the closure in as much

as it victimizes them and may help to mobilize sympathy and diplomatic support for them around the world. The Palestinians, however, would most probably prefer to keep their offices open rather than fill their coffers with rhetoric and verbal sympathy. In conclusion, then, the policy of closure of the PLO offices can benefit neither the United States policies or your most recent peace initiative.

The beneficiaries may be few, but the losers are many. On the philosophical and diplomatic levels, it is sufficient to suggest that the tradition of diplomatic courtesy and the idea of an international forum will suffer a setback by this unilateral action. If the PLO does not deserve to have an observer's status in the United Nations, let the United Nations decide. The most immediate harm will certainly fall on the current peace efforts: how will the United States convince the Palestinians and their supporters of its genuine endeavor to bring about peace between them and Israel as they close down the offices of their representatives in the country and at the United Nations? How will the United States convince all those mediators who have been trying to bring Palestinians and Israelis closer together that the closure is a positive step in the direction of peace? The potential losers are many, but foremost among them are the Palestinians who truly seek an international forum as a means to find a solution to the conflict. If they cannot address the United Nations and be heard, how can the Palestinians seek a political solution? And if a political solution is not reachable, is it not possible that they will have to resort to other means including violence? Another important potential loser are the Israeli and American groups who actively believe in peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. How can these peace-seeking groups carry on a dialogue for peace when the Palestinians and

their representatives are denied access to an international forum, even on the neutral grounds of the United Nations?

The Palestinian people are desperate for understanding. They have been regularly ignored and most frequently misunderstood. To close their offices and to expel them from the U.S. can only add to their frustration, compound their suffering, and reinforce the misunderstanding. The United States has the power to change that situation by hearing the Palestinians and by challenging them to explain themselves to the American people under the severe scrutiny of the American system of democracy and free dialogue. The United States can change that situation by challenging the Palestinians to face the scrutiny of the international community represented in the United Nations and live up to the expectations of that international community. The United States can change that situation by challenging the Palestinians to face Israel at the international forum and negotiate a peaceful settlement responsibly as a member of the family of nations. The United States can indeed change that situation by setting the example for Israel to face the Palestinians and challenge them to step forward at the international forum of the United Nations and negotiate a settlement that will guarantee security and sovereignty for both of them. The United States may still reconsider the closure policy and dwell on these challenges which would enhance its peace initiative.

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