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Dick's Dirty Money

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

After serving for five years as Interior Secretary in the Bush Cabinet, Gale Norton, protégé of James Watt, quietly stepped down from her post whence she had been supervising the ongoing ruination of the American West. Norton's sudden exit was almost certainly hastened by the widening fallout from the corruption probes into Jack Abramoff and the retinue of clients and the politicians and bureaucrats he held on retainer. Abramoff, it will be recalled, performed some of his most extravagant shake-downs of clients, many of them destitute Indian tribes, seeking indulgences from the Interior Department.

To date, Norton has escaped being directly implicated in Abramoff's crimes of influence peddling and bribery. But her former chief deputy, super-lobbyist J. Steven Griles, who oversaw the oil and gas leasing on federal lands at the same time he remained on the payroll of his lobbying firm, may be entering in the crosshairs of the Abramoff investigation.

In a series of emails remarkable for their braggadocio and name-dropping, Abramoff advised his clients to donate money to an industry front group founded by Norton that promotes the privatization and industrialization of federal lands. In return, Abramoff bragged that he could offer them unfettered access to the top officials at the Interior Department, where their fondest desires would win a favorable hearing from people like Griles. In one instance, Abramoff claimed that Griles promised to block an Indian casino proposal opposed by one of Abramoff's clients. If Griles goes down, Norton may soon follow him into the dock.

To replace Norton, Bush called upon (Kempthorne continued on page 5)

Making Non-Sense of the Funding Cut-Off Hamas and Israel's Right to Exist

BY VIRGINIA TILLEY

To the great consternation of most of the world, the European Union, followed now by Norway and Canada, has halted aid to the Hamas-led government of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The stated reason is that Hamas as not recognized Israel's "right to exist" or "renounced violence," but the action so violates all common sense that its logic requires our closer scrutiny.

Let us first be clear: no conceivable good can come from this policy. It will slash the PA's capacity to govern a shattered and desperate population. It will wreck the capacity of Hamas to mediate and contain tense factional divides. It could even demoralize and destroy the Palestinians' long-standing commitment to democracy, ruining Palestinian political stability and, therefore, any possibility of peace negotiations. So why impose sanctions that can only result in dangerous disintegration of the political situation?

A certain withered diplomatic logic does underlie this measure. The PA itself was invented in 1995 to administer Oslo's implicit two-state solution. Hamas's refusal to recognize Israel's "right to exist" would seem to negate the diplomatic agreement that established the terms of its own authority. Until it agrees to those terms, the international community might deem that Hamas has rendered the PA's legitimacy uncertain.

Unfortunately for its proponents, this rationale has crashed on one glaring pitfall: the premise that Israel itself supports the terms of Oslo or the Road Map. Prime Minister Olmert has openly declared the "Road Map" a dead letter. His stated policy of "ingathering" settlers into the major West Bank settlement blocs is accepted by everyone as signaling Israel's intent

permanently to annex major portions of the West Bank. The advancing Wall and settlement construction are ample material evidence that this plan is Israel's real program and is already half-achieved. No one disagrees that these developments signify permanent territorial dismemberment of any Palestinian "state." No one disagrees that the terms of Oslo have vanished like the morning mist.

It must, therefore, be evident even to the EU, Norway, and Canada that Israel has negated the diplomatic agreement that established the terms of its recognition by the Palestinians. So why pretend that Israel has not openly cast onto the trash heap of history the very peace deal that these countries now insist Hamas endorse?

The first answer is too obvious to belabor: craven capitulation U.S. pressure. The entire international community has been cajoled or threatened into continuing lip service to the Road Map while standing by passively as the U.S.A. and Israel render the Road Map obsolete. Diplomatic nonsense always requires some political or moralistic palliative, however. The cover story is that Hamas's recognizing Israel's "right to exist" and abandoning armed struggle will somehow restore the diplomatic conditions of the Road Map, trigger comprehensive Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank, and allow peace finally to break out. Let us take this argument step by step.

First, it is simply unbelievable. All agree that Israel's withdrawal of major settlement blocs in the West Bank (especially, the major cities of Ma'ale Adumim, Ariel, and Gush Etzion) is not foreseeable. The Israeli government itself has declared them permanent. No international actor or combination of actors has the political

will and/or clout to change Israeli policy. Israel will not withdraw the major settlement blocs under any circumstances short of a national emergency. Hamas's suddenly waxing nice will not constitute that emergency.

Second, the argument adopts specious Israeli claims about Arab logic that only dwindling ranks of Israel's die-hard supporters still believe. Israeli propaganda holds that Arab "hatred" for Israel is irrational, born solely of Judeophobia, religious zealotry, and cultural backwardness, and that tough measures can, therefore, leverage Arab capitulation to reality even while the occupation continues. In this view, Israel's hold on the West Bank is not really an "occupation," serving a program of land annexation, but only a benign "administration," forced on Israel by collective Arab and Palestinian unwillingness to recognize Israel's "right to exist."

The funding cut-off endorses this fantasy in holding that Hamas has rejected Israel's authentic "promise of peace" due to its rejectionist Islamic dogma and not because Hamas has graphic evidence that Israel has no intention of permitting Palestinians a viable state. In this twisted view, cutting vital funds should make Hamas rethink this "irrationality," abandon its "extremism," recognize Israel's "right to exist," and end all hostile actions toward it. Hamas and the PA will then be rewarded

(it is hinted vacantly) with a return to the Road Map.

Aside from its transparent tomfoolery (full awareness that the U.S.A. and Israel are eliminating the conditions for the Road Map as quickly as possible), deeper problems plague this papery notion. For if we look more closely at what Hamas is being asked to do, none of it makes sense either.

What does a "right to exist" mean exactly? There is no "right to exist" for states under international law. The formula has arisen in international diplomacy uniquely regarding Israel. It does not mean simply diplomatic recognition, which is the "fact" of existence. It does not mean recognizing Israel's "right to self-determination," either, or we would be using that famous term.

Let us pretend for a moment that Hamas is being asked to recognize Israel in

ies and enclaves in Canadian, Norwegian, English or French national territories, while promising to carve those nations into "cantons"? Absent clear borders, recognizing Israel's "right to exist" must mean something else. And of course it does. Clearly implicit in the term is Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. In other words, the "right" Hamas is being required to endorse is that Israel can legitimately compose itself as a state in Palestine that is populated and run primarily by Jews, primarily for Jews. Such a state would thus be authorized by Hamas to sustain whatever laws and policies necessary to preserving its Jewish majority, even rejecting the return of Palestinian refugees mandated by international law. Or building a massive Wall on Palestinian land designed to protect the Jewish state from the "demographic threat" of mass non-Jewish citizenship, i.e., the Palestinians. Israel would also be legitimized for

Is it Israel's right to pursue a policy of ethnic cleansing that is expressed in the phrase, "right to exist"?

the normal diplomatic sense. In this case, however, the EU position is unsupportable, because diplomatic recognition of a state routinely requires one bit of vital information: "right to exist" where? Israel's borders are not set. Even its plans for those borders are not known; with impressive brashness, Mr. Olmert has announced that we will not know (until 2010).

It is entirely legitimate for Hamas to require firm confirmation of Israel's borders before recognizing it. It should also be incumbent on the international community to confirm where those borders will be before insisting that Hamas recognize Israel's "right" to them. Otherwise, recognizing Israel's "right to exist" could be construed to mean that Israel has a "right to exist" within whatever borders it chooses in coming years.

As the Palestinians stand to lose most of what is left of their homeland to this fuzziness, Hamas is refusing to endorse it. Is this extremist Islamic intransigence, warranting a funding freeze? Let us run a little thought experiment. (Would Canadian, or Norwegian, or English, or French governments be called on the international carpet for not recognizing the "right to exist" of a neighboring state that is, with military force, settling its own ethnically defined population within contiguous walled cit-

past actions on the same agenda, such as expelling the Palestinians from their homes in 1948, and for its future plans, such as confining Palestine's indigenous people to cantons.

Israel's leadership has declared all these measures necessary to preserve Israel as "a Jewish and democratic state," as phrased in Israel's Basic Law (and reiterated by Mr. Sharon, Mr. Olmert, and almost every Israeli party across the political spectrum). Yet it is not the fact of this open policy of ethnic cleansing, but Israel's right to pursue it, that is expressed in the phrase, "right to exist."

Hence bitter reluctance by the PLO, the Arab states, and much of the Muslim world to do so for many decades. They abandoned that position in 1989-90, as a pragmatic gesture toward a two-state solution. Cannot the EU then insist that Hamas recognize Israel's "right to exist" if the PLO, the PA, and all other governments in the world have recognized it?

The problem is that the quid pro quo that supported this recognition, formalized in the Oslo process, is now clearly wrecked by Israel's unilateral annexations of land. Carving the West Bank into cantons has eliminated any hope of a viable Palestinian state. The two-state solution is not working. In these conditions, should Hamas

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