



NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOB DOLE

TIME FOR PROGRESS IN MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS

Senate Chamber
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Mr. Dole. Mr. President, it is gratifying that Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin's visit to Washington this week ended on a positive note, commemorating as it did the thirty years of friendship and diplomatic relations between the United States and Israel. The creation of an independent state of Israel on May 14, 1948 occurred in the midst of tension and uncertainty in the Middle East, not unlike that which exists today. The primary goals then, as now, were the territorial security of the Jewish nation, and the political stability of the entire region. It can be said that now, three decades later, the prospects for achieving these goals are substantially more encouraging.

The Senator from Kansas believes that the desire for peace in the Middle East is strong among all responsible parties in the area, and the opportunity for progress in reaching a settlement is at hand. But time grows short, and difficult obstacles remain. We cannot afford to jeopardize peace prospects by laying all the blame for delay at the doorstep of any one nation, nor would that be a realistic approach to the current situation. A stable solution to remaining problems -- political jurisdiction over the West Bank and Gaza Strip, future status of Israeli settlements, provisions for Palestinian refugees and compensation for Jewish refugees from Arab lands -- will necessarily require equivalent flexibility on the part of Israel, Egypt, and the Arab nations alike.

Unfortunately, the meandering policies of the Carter Administration have not contributed significantly to that stability, particularly in recent weeks. Only six weeks ago, Prime Minister Begin's visit to Washington ended in frustration as President Carter asked for further negotiating concessions on the part of Israel. More recently, the Administration's proposal of an arms sales "package" for Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia has served to irritate all three nations. And only this week, contradictory White House statements on the framework for a Middle East settlement has confused the participants, as well as observers here in the United States. One expects that the President himself may not be sure just what his position on an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank is, despite his efforts to accommodate all viewpoints.

BALANCED APPROACH

For the United States to continue to play a useful role in nurturing a settlement of Middle East differences, it is vital that our efforts be skillful, balanced, and consistent. There is no room for amateurism or inconsistency if our positive influence in the peace process is to continue.

Furthermore, our approach must reflect insight and sensitivity to the practical realities of the situation. In my opinion, this does not involve a public declaration of support for a Palestinian homeland. This does not necessitate an invitation to the Soviet Union to re-enter the diplomatic picture. And this does not entail careless accommodation of Arab or Egyptian demands, which leads to unrealistic illusions on their part. Yet, all of these policies have been expounded by the President within recent months.

Instead, I believe the Carter Administration should carefully reflect upon the contributions *which the Israeli government has already made to the peace effort*, and demonstrate more sensitivity towards the points of our basic policy disagreements, such as the future status of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. In addition, our government must be willing to

ask for reciprocal contributions towards peace from Egyptian and Arab leaders, so that no one nation need feel intimidated by the call for sacrifice and concessions.

CONFRONTING ARAB AND EGYPTIAN INTRANSIGENCE

It is relatively easy for the United States to place the blame for the present negotiations stalemate on the shoulders of those with whom we have the most influence. But that is neither realistic nor fair. A major disadvantage of this approach is that it tends to harden the positions of other parties, at the same time that it alienates our traditional allies. And peace seems more distant as a result.

The Senator from Kansas nominated President Anwar Sadat along with Prime Minister Menachem Begin for the Nobel Peace Prize last November. The Egyptian leader's initiative at that time was an historic step towards direct communications among the parties. But at the same time, it must be remembered that Egypt has not made many substantive concessions in her own policy positions, towards a settlement of remaining differences. The Arab nations have likewise refused to show any willingness to compromise, and continue to insist upon complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the establishment of a Palestinian state. And, of course, it was Egypt which actually suspended negotiations with Israel last January leading to the current impasse.

In order to regain our image as an even-handed, fair-minded influence for peace in the area, the President is going to have to make it clear to Mr. Sadat that we will not agree to "run interference" for Egypt in efforts to get the peace talks started again. We will not agree to allow the Egyptian government to fall back into the pattern of talking only to American mediators and leaving it to Americans to put pressure on Israel. Such a role by the Carter Administration can only result in hardening of the Egyptian position, and may even "damage and delay the peace process," as Israeli Defense Minister Ezer Weizman suggested in March.

It is not our intention or our desire to alienate Egypt and the Arab states, by ignoring their own interests in a Middle East settlement. All interests must be taken into account if a common ground is to be reached. What we must not do, however, is to shelter Mr. Sadat or Arab leaders from certain realities -- that they must be willing to talk over their differences directly with Israel, and make reciprocal sacrifices for the purpose of a settlement. By fostering illusions on these points, we serve only to frustrate the movement towards peace.

POLICY TOWARDS ISRAEL

Peace negotiations will necessarily require continued flexibility by all parties. For her part, Israel, has been forthcoming in her willingness to meet antagonists half-way on outstanding issues. Prime Minister Begin has made it eminently clear that, at the bargaining table, "everything is negotiable except the destruction of the state of Israel". Mr. Begin's own proposals for a peaceful resolution of the West Bank problem -- including local autonomy for Arab communities -- deserves fair and thoughtful consideration by the Administration. For, if the United States does not lend a sympathetic ear, neither Egypt nor the Arab states can be expected to give the proposals responsible consideration.

And yet, the Begin peace proposal has now become the subject of the latest policy contradiction emanating from the White House. In an interview published over the weekend, President Carter was quoted as saying:

"My belief is that a permanent settlement will not include an independent Palestinian nation on the West Bank. My belief is that a permanent settlement will not call for complete withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories. My belief is that a permanent settlement will be based substantially upon the home rule proposal that Prime Minister Begin has put forth".

Publication of the President's remarks led to a frantic meeting Sunday between our Ambassador to Egypt and the Egyptian Foreign Minister, after which the Foreign Minister commented that "The Ambassador assured me specifically that the United States does not consider Begin's plan for the West Bank a good basis for a settlement because it does not provide an opportunity for the Palestinian people to participate in the determination of their own future." Sadly enough, this appears to be another in a series of efforts by the Carter Administration to be all things to all parties. The only result is confusion and doubts among all the participants.

By avoiding any temptation to reject Israeli peace proposals out-of-hand, and by reaffirming the U.S. commitment to the survival and territorial integrity of Israel, President Carter can help preserve the goodwill and cooperative relationship between our two nations. The spirit of cooperation between Israel and the United States is essential to the ultimate achievement of a Middle East settlement, from which all parties can benefit.

LOOKING AHEAD

After the low point in U.S.-Israeli relations which followed Prime Minister Begin's frustrating visit with President Carter last March, we now have the opportunity to restore and strengthen the cooperative relationship between our two nations. That, in itself, will be critical to the prospects for resumption of talks between the parties in the Middle East. Rather than attempt to dictate pre-conditions for resuming the negotiations to Mr. Begin, President Carter should reaffirm our basic commitments to Israel's welfare, and lend his efforts in the days ahead towards bringing all parties back to the discussion table. Conditions for a final settlement should be established there, rather than ahead of time in Washington or Cairo.

Unfortunately, the President's arms sales "package" for the Middle East has complicated matters. Even if the proposed sales to Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia would be beneficial to long-range stability in the Middle East, the timing and method of presentation has been inept. The current sensitive stage of Middle East conditions is not receptive to a large influx of major weapons purchases. And the effort to tie these arms proposals together serves only to obscure the critical military and political factors that should be examined in detail for each of these separate proposals.

In what the Washington Star referred to last week as "A kind of legislative squeeze play," Israel is being asked to accept a condition of arms-linkage as part of our fulfillment of a commitment made to her three years ago. Despite speculation that the President might have dropped his insistence on a "package deal" when he formally submitted his proposals to Congress last Friday, Secretary of State Vance on Sunday reiterated the "package" notion: that if only one portion of the arms sale triad is approved by Congress, the entire proposal will be withdrawn. It is this Senator's belief that our attention and energies must remain focused on achievement of a responsible Middle East settlement as the first priority and arms sales might best be postponed until that goal has been reached.

In the meantime, it is vital that the United States retain a balanced and persuasive role in the mediation process, and not attempt to dictate terms to either side. If we do, our credibility and influence will vanish, and prospects for a solution to age-old Middle East problems will also disappear.

As one who feels that the time for an equitable Middle East solution is at hand, I hope that the President will encourage all parties to begin talking with each other, and listening to each other once again.