

Editorial

Bush Dinosaurs Stalk Mitchell Peace Mission

As U.S. Presidential Middle East peace envoy George Mitchell embarked on one of his most important trips to the region on June 8, the ghost of the Bush-Cheney regime was stalking him, attempting to sabotage his crucial efforts at reconstituting a Palestinian unity government. Sources close to the White House report that former Senator Mitchell has gone to President Obama, arguing that the actions of Gen. Keith Dayton, the officer in charge of training the Palestinian Authority (PA) security force, is jeopardizing any prospect of reconciliation between rival Palestinian factions.

Dayton has recently defended the fact that PA security forces, trained by his U.S. team, have been killing and arresting Hamas members in the West Bank; that this, indeed, is part of his mission in training them.

Gun battles have erupted between Hamas and PA forces, resulting in a number of deaths and injuries. But most important, is the danger that any renewed conflict poses to Mitchell's efforts. From the outset, the Presidential envoy has faced two daunting challenges: how to deal with a Benjamin Netanyahu government in Israel that is dead set against any kind of genuine peace agreement that would create a viable Palestinian state; and how to repair the rift between Hamas and Fatah, because a unity government is a precondition to a final agreement on a two-state solution.

The fault lines among the Palestinians were brutally exploited during the Bush-Cheney era, by what came to be known in the Middle East as the "Abrams Plan," after National Security Council Middle East czar Elliott Abrams, a neocon who was convicted in the Iran-Contra affair in the 1980s. Millions of dollars in training, cash,

and weapons were funneled to Mohammed Dahlan and others within the Palestinian Authority; and Abrams and company deluded themselves that these units could move into Gaza and destroy Hamas. In fact, it was as the result of the smuggling of arms and trained fighters into Gaza by Dahlan and his crew, that Hamas moved preemptively to take control of Gaza, and break up the unity government.

While Mitchell has a very clear strategy for moving the peace process forward, a strategy centered on forcing the Israeli government to accept a freeze on all settlement expansion, including so-called "natural growth," the parallel U.S. role in the effort to achieve a "military" solution to the Fatah-Hamas split can easily sabotage the Mitchell effort.

It is no secret that enemies of the peace process and the Mitchell mission are hard at work, trying to exploit weaknesses in the Obama Administration. From London, persistent rumors and slanders are being aimed against President Obama's National Security Advisor, Gen. James Jones (ret.). Jones, a former NATO Commander, is experienced in dealing with the Middle East, and particularly with the Israeli military. If there is any solid ground within Team Obama, it is the national security and foreign policy team of General Jones, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, and Senator Mitchell. It is no surprise that there should be an effort to spread dissension and paranoia, to undermine their unified efforts.

It is in this context that the dispute between Mitchell and Dayton needs to be settled, and in favor of the Senator's wise call for a concentration on Palestinian unity, and an end to all relics of the flawed and failed "Abrams Plan."