
Sen. George McGovern

‘Arafat’s Death Can Open the Way to Peace’

by Nina Ogden

In a discussion with *EIR* about the death of Yassir Arafat, former Senator George McGovern recommended that President George W. Bush should immediately appoint two former sitting Presidents, George H.W. Bush and Jimmy Carter, to convene new Camp David talks with Palestinian and Israeli leaders. “A solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, at this time of Arafat’s death, is the key to solving the problem of terrorism, and the immoral war against Iraq,” McGovern said.

Sen. McGovern first met Yassir Arafat when McGovern was on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during his 18 years in the Senate, and still prizes the wooden carving of The Last Supper given to him by Yassir Arafat during one of their many meetings. Sen. McGovern subsequently was president of the Middle East Policy Council from 1991 until 1997, before being appointed Ambassador to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization by President Clinton. The Council is now headed by former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas W. Freeman.

In his discussion with *EIR*, McGovern referred to a pointed criticism he had made, in his recently published book, *The Essential America*, of “an influential group of advisors in the current Administration who do not want an even-handed American role in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict.” (The book was the subject of a wide-ranging interview published in *EIR*, Oct. 22, 2004.) McGovern wrote: “This group of neo-conservatives includes Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, advisers Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, Ken Adelman, and others. Among the views of the neo-cons, none is more deeply held than their belief that the United States should always support the government of Israel no matter what policy that government pursues. To the neo-cons, it is acceptable to criticize the American government, but to criticize Israeli policy is seen as anti-Semitism. This, of course, is the reason why almost no American politician who covets elective office will ever take issue with Israeli policy.”

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“The irony of the neo-conservatives’ policy designed to help Israel,” says Senator McGovern, “is that their strategy may be the greatest threat to Israel, in that it feeds an increasingly dangerous Arab-Israeli conflict. . . . The provocative militarism of the Sharon Administration is a suicidal policy for Israel. No true friend of Israel should support such a self-defeating policy.”

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Sen. McGovern expressed great interest in the application of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. “The only way peace can come to the Middle East,” he said, “is for Israel to adhere to the UN agreement of so many years ago. I have always been a friend of Israel, and a supporter of its cultural, political, and spiritual traditions, but we must see that there are two ‘rights’ in this conflict. Israel has a right to live as a free and independent nation within secure borders, and the Palestinians have the right to an independent, secure state situated on the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip, the territory taken from the Palestinians in the 1967 Six-Day War. This has been my position for over 25 years. Of course, we must have a development policy, especially based on water, as central to peace in the Middle-East.”

McGovern thinks that a number of the “mature successors to Arafat would make good negotiating partners with former sitting Presidents Bush and Carter,” and also expressed interest in the prospects of the younger Marwan Barghouti, if Sharon would free him from his Israeli prison. He proposed the former Speaker of the Israeli Knesset, Avraham Burg, as an able negotiating partner for Israel. He quoted from Burg’s 2004 article in the Israeli journal, *Yediot Aharonot*, “We cannot keep a Palestinian majority under an Israeli boot and at the same time think ourselves the only democracy in the Middle East. . . . We must remove all the settlements and draw an internationally recognized border between the Israeli national home and the Palestinian national home. . . . Israel’s friends abroad—Jewish and non-Jewish alike, presidents and prime ministers, rabbis and lay people—should choose as well. They must reach out and help Israel to navigate the road map toward our nation’s destiny as a light unto the nations and a society of peace, justice, and equality.”