
National News

Carter Calls for End to Siege of Palestinians

Former President Jimmy Carter issued a statement on Oct. 7, calling for resumption of a serious peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

"The attempt to coerce Hamas leaders by starving the Palestinian people has failed," he said, "and it is time for the international community to alleviate their suffering and resort to diplomacy.

"Since elected Hamas members assumed a major role in the Palestinian National Authority, Israel and the United States (with uncomfortable acquiescence from the European Union) have deprived the people of humanitarian aid and have even withheld taxes and customs that belong to the Palestinian government," creating a situation in which the PNA "has not been able to pay its debts, or to compensate police, teachers, nurses, or other public servants."

Pointing to the violence between Palestinian factions, he said that "inevitably, violence has broken out in Gaza among protesting citizens whose families are suffering" because of the "stranghold" by Israel.

"It is doubtful that the Palestinian leaders will seek a reconciliation with Israel . . . as long as the Palestinians are subjected to this kind of debasement and personal suffering."

In conclusion, he declared, "A strong peace effort has been absent for the past five years. It is long overdue."

Warner, Levin Sound Alarm on Iraq War

In separate Oct. 5 press conferences to report on their findings from a recent trip to Iraq, where they met with Iraqi leaders, U.S. military officers, and U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, Senators John Warner (R-Va.) and Carl Levin (D-Mich.), the chairman and the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, gave dramatic reports on the collapsing situation in Baghdad and Anbar province.

Warner characterized the situation as qualitatively different from that on his earlier trips. He noted that violence has increased, while the economic situation in many places was horrendous, and the situation was at best "drifting sideways." He said at one point that the current offensive in Baghdad was "lost," but later changed that to saying that the Madi militia of Muqtadar al-Sadr in Sadr City must be subdued and disarmed, or the battle will be lost. Warner indicated that the "uniforms" (the U.S. military officers) give a "more cautious evaluation" than the Administration does, and that the next 60-90 days will determine whether the Iraqis can end the violence, or, if not, the Congress must take a stand of its own, separate from the Administration, to deal with Iraq.

Senator Levin was even more pessimistic than Warner. He reported that when he told U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad of his belief that the United States must set a date for beginning a phased withdrawal, to put the Iraqis on notice, Khalilzad told him twice that that would be an excellent message to be delivered to the Iraqis "by the Senate," although clearly this contradicts the Administration policy and Khalilzad could not say it himself.

Bill Against Iran Also Targets Russia

The so-called Iran Freedom Support Act, H.R. 6198, passed by voice vote in the House on Oct. 5 and the Senate on Oct. 6. It not only codifies existing sanctions against Iran which had been imposed under Executive order, and requires secondary sanctions against any person or entity determined to be doing business that benefits Iran's nuclear program, or its acquisition of missiles or other conventional weapons; it also targets Russia.

Embedded in the bill is a sense-of-the-Congress resolution that states that "it should be the policy of the United States not to bring into force an agreement of cooperation with the government of any country that is assisting the nuclear program of Iran or transferring advanced conventional weap-

ons or missiles to Iran," unless Iran suspends uranium enrichment activities, or that government suspends all nuclear assistance to Iran and all weapons transfers.

Bush Defies Congress With Signing Statements

Despite the uproar over the President's use of "signing statements," President Bush used this device twice the week of Oct. 2, to say that he won't comply with laws enacted by Congress. In signing the military budget bill, Bush issued a signing statement challenging 16 of its provisions, including a prohibition against the Pentagon using intelligence that is gathered illegally (such as information on Americans collected in violation of the Fourth Amendment), and a requirement that the President notify Congress if he diverts Pentagon funds to secret activities or otherwise. The Homeland Security bill says that no one except the Department of Homeland Security privacy officer can alter, delay, or prohibit the mandated annual report to Congress; the issue is how "watch lists" are created that affect air travel, government employment, etc. Bush affirmed that he can alter the report; it also challenged other aspects of the bill, such as requirements for the director of FEMA to have at least five years experience, and "demonstrated ability" in emergency management and homeland security.

The Congressional Research Service issued a report on Sept. 20, which states that the Bush Administration is using signing statements as "an integral part" of its "comprehensive strategy to strengthen and expand executive power" at the expense of the legislative branch; and that they are a means to condition Congress into accepting the White House's broad conception of "unitary executive" Presidential power, which includes a Presidential right to ignore laws that he believes are unconstitutional. The "broad and persistent nature of the claims of executive authority forwarded by President Bush appear designed to inure Congress, as well as others, to the belief that the president in fact possesses expansive and exclusive powers upon which the other branches may not intrude."