
Interview: Leo Kramer

1.5 Million People Suffering in Gaza

Sept. 4—Leo Kramer, a traditional religious American Jew, has been a strong advocate for the rights of the Palestinians, and has worked in both the United States and the Middle East to improve the lives of the Palestinians in Gaza. Not satisfied with the response from “official Washington,” Kramer organized a forum in January 2009, at the Woodrow Wilson International Center, entitled, “Gaza and the Future of Peace in the Middle East.”

Kramer is a graduate of Harvard University in economics, an associate of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, a Fulbright Scholar, and was a U.S. Navy officer in World War II.

In 1994, President Clinton appointed Kramer to attend the signing in Cairo of the Gaza-Jericho Treaty between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. For the last year and a half, he has been working to establish a Trauma Center in the West Bank.

Kramer emphasizes the need to address the immediate issues of poverty, jobs, education, and public health. His approach parallels that of Lyndon LaRouche, who, in response to the Oslo Accords, called for immediately bringing in heavy construction equipment, and the like, to begin producing the requirements for better conditions of life. LaRouche had warned that if these concrete steps were not taken immediately, the Palestinian people would see no benefits from the papers signed by their leaders. In fact, that is what happened.

Lawrence Freeman interviewed Kramer on Aug. 20.



EIR: Mr. Kramer, you’ve had a long history in the Middle East region. Can you tell us about your involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over these many years?

Kramer: Well, lots of life happens by accident, and various events happen. At one point, the Israeli government officials asked me to help out with the export of Palestinian agriculture to Europe; and I indicated I did not have that capability. But that was followed with an invitation to come to Jordan, which I had never done before; and I found the Egyptians had brought together some Gaza agricultural producers to ask me to do the same thing. And therefore, with this accident of life, rather than having planned it, I saw an opportunity to be helpful. I shipped the first strawberries out of Gaza to Europe, and the first grapes out of the West Bank to England. And I stayed with it, in the hope that economic development would give the people a better life, and more likelihood of reaching political decisions.

‘A Deplorable Situation’

EIR: What kind of progress, or lack of progress, have you seen in this region?

Kramer: Obviously I don’t forget that I’m just a worker in the vineyard, and I’m very proud of that. So, I’ve stayed with the effort to bring these two to a conclusion, first because I found that people of all religions believed in decent treatment, and decent treatment would lead to a peace process.

Unfortunately, that has not happened. But it is worth the effort. Increasingly, people were looking for those who had lines of communication to both, did not use them for their own benefit, but to help people see a better way of life. I developed a joint committee of Israeli and Palestinian doctors to work together. I found the doctors very non-political, very committed to their profession. We started to expand on that. And we’re trying to develop some projects in the medical field. I crossed the line into Gaza. I saw no reason to separate Gaza from the West Bank. The people in Gaza were a million and a half civilians, and they’re suffering. There will not be a solution until they’re helped.

EIR: Can you give us a view of the conditions in Gaza?

Kramer: The situation in Gaza is deplorable. For reasons I’ve not understood, it has not been publicly

shown. People have difficulty earning a living. Medical care is limited. If they have emergency matters of crossing the border, that's another limit. They've got a long way to go to have a decent, modern life. There's no question about that.

Yes, there are people willing to help, but the general impact is that they cannot earn a living, the children don't get to school properly, and the families are suffering.

EIR: You are of the Jewish faith, yet, you have been critical of Israel, and critical of certain Jewish lobby organizations in the United States, in their attitude and policies toward the West Bank and Gaza. Could you tell us something about what you think is wrong with their attitude?

Kramer: I think that there's nothing wrong with anyone being critical, if you have a proper base. A sermon I gave 11 years ago, said to a Jewish environment, that the answer to peace was carrying out the mandate of the Bible, which they call in their place, the Torah. That tells you exactly how you must treat others, as well as how Muslims should treat others. No question there.

My view has been that, if you treat them as your religion requires, there'll be peace. And if you don't treat people well, and they feel abused, don't expect them to love you, and be at peace. What I'm suggesting is, we deliver what our religion teaches us. It's not new. It's not conservative or liberal; it's what the Bible teaches. I still believe that there are such people, but it hasn't yet happened. And as long as it doesn't happen, there will be no comfort, no security, no peace.

EIR: Conditions in Gaza have worsened since Hamas was elected, mainly by the way the United States and the West and Israel have treated Hamas. What do you think should be the policy of the United States and Israel toward Gaza, and toward Hamas?

Kramer: I think you've got to look at each area in turn. My country, our country, the United States—it's beyond me that I would ever see my country, with its wonderful history, belief in democracy. . . . If you [Gaza] then go elect a party we don't like, the next morning we help cut off your power, cut off your food, etc. It's not part of the history of our country. I don't understand how we could have done that politically, and expect other than hatred to evolve from it. Or despair.

When that election took place, the first thing we

should have done, is nothing. Then, see if we can talk and negotiate with these people. But instead, we took an unbelievable position: We cut off their facilities, and refused to talk to them. What good can possibly come of that? And the result has been no progress. These people in Gaza, if you disagree with them, fine. But they don't have the ability to invade Israel; they don't have the ability to bomb the United States; they don't have military power. They are a million and a half civilians suffering—and I'm sure they think their suffering is because of us.

Now, that's separate from what Israel has a right to do; that's a different matter. But as an American citizen, and really proud of my country, in this situation, somehow, politically, it's gone wrong. And we should never have been in such a position. We should have made the effort to deal with these people. And we haven't done that.

Mitchell Should Focus on Israel-Palestine

EIR: The Obama Administration has chosen former Sen. George Mitchell as special envoy to the Middle East. What do you think about his approach to solving the conflict?

Kramer: First, I think he's a first-class professional, and I think he's genuinely committed. It was good to bring someone new into the picture, because we've had 50 years of failures. We've had the endless process of someone appointed, someone letting word out to the press that they're making progress, and then at the end, it collapses, and they go away. So, I think George has a chance to make a new effort.

The problem we have in evaluating this, is that we don't know everything that's going on. In some ways, that's wise, because if you were to announce too many things, then it would be a public debate, before he makes progress. And I think the Administration would be best to let him stick to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but they seem to be having him run around to all the other countries. And increasingly, there's this talk of getting the support from other countries. My instinct is, that's a mistake. That's too much involvement of the grand picture.

What has to be settled is the Israeli-Palestinian matter. These are the people who suffer every day. These are the people who have no confidence in tomorrow morning. Without any lack of respect—I just wrote the Saudis—the problem is directly between Israel and Palestine.