

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, May 25, 2011 3:02 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: NY Mag: Why Mitchell Resigned

Worth a read

----- Original Message -----

From: Sachar, Alon (NEA/IPA)
Sent: Wednesday, May 25, 2011 01:34 AM
To: Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: Fw: NY Mag: Why Mitchell Resigned

Wow.

----- Original Message -----

From: Irwin, Matthew T
Sent: Tuesday, May 24, 2011 01:18 PM
To: Irwin, Matthew T; Sachar, Alon (NEA/IPA); Djerassi, Alexander M; Hof, Frederic C
Cc: Ried, Curtis R (USUN)
Subject: NY Mag: Why Mitchell Resigned

I'm almost entirely sure this is fake...

A top-secret missive from George Mitchell, the just-resigned special Middle East envoy, explaining why he quit.

By John Heilemann
 Published May 22, 2011

Dear Mr. President: Let me be among the first to offer congratulations for your speech yesterday at the State Department. As you already know, on the central question of the Israelis and the Palestinians, the final draft did not go as far toward outlining the proper framework for a two-state solution as I would have liked—about which more in a moment. But your words, I thought, were inspirational, measured, idealistic, and tough-minded in the right proportions. That you are now getting so much grief for them from our friends in the region is not a result of any misjudgment on your part. Instead, the blowback is a sign of just how maddeningly, depressingly intractable the situation there has become.

I am sorry that we didn't have a chance to talk before I tendered my resignation. Between killing bin Laden, rustling up your birth certificate, and gearing up for your reelection campaign, you have been quite busy—and at my age, I take a lot more naps, so scheduling has been a bitch. But I did want to take the opportunity to explain why I am departing now, especially in light of all the errant speculation. I also wanted to give you a final, candid assessment of where things stand some 850 days after you appointed me as U.S. special envoy for the Middle East, along with a few words of parting advice.

I write this before your meeting on May 20 with Prime Minister Netanyahu. By the time you read it, you and he will both have spoken at the annual AIPAC policy conference in Washington, and he will have delivered his address to a joint session of Congress. With all due respect to both of you, however, my guess is that nothing that either of you says,

publicly or privately, in the next few days will alter the underlying political and diplomatic dynamics governing the situation.

Before turning to that, let me quickly dispense with the theories being spouted about why I chose to quit. In the main, there are two. The first revolves around bureaucratic infighting: that I was piqued about being frozen out of internal deliberations, and even in my relationship to you, by your national-security adviser, Tom Donilon, and your special assistant on the Middle East, Dennis Ross. And the second, not unrelated to the first, revolves around policy: that I was on the losing end of our team's (recently highly intense) debate about modifying U.S. policy in light of the breakdown between the two sides, the dawning of the Arab Spring, and the wave of instability engulfing the region.

On the question of interpersonal relations, it is true that Tom and Dennis have been—how to put this gently?—a royal pain in my ass. But I am a big boy, and if that were the only issue in play, I would have stayed on. More to the point, I have never felt that anything interfered with the communication and trust between us, Mr. President, despite the best efforts of smaller men.

On the question of policy, the answer is somewhat more complex and leads directly to the broader themes of this letter. In the internal debate leading up to your State Department speech, as you know, there were deep disagreements among the players in your foreign-policy operation about just how far to go. Elliott Abrams, among others, has contended that I advocated that you lay out an "American detailed plan for Middle East peace," and that when you rejected that approach, it was the final straw for me. But that wasn't my position. Any detailed peace plan would have included not just U.S. principles on borders, security, Jerusalem, and refugees, but a proposed map as the basis for negotiating a final settlement—the last of which I did not favor and have never argued for.

What I did advocate, as did Secretary Clinton, was including principles on all four of the above areas; Donilon and Ross, among others, wished to include none, and until the final days before the speech, it appeared that they would have their way. So, in truth, I was more than satisfied with where you came down. Those who claimed in advance that there would be no "Mitchell DNA" in the speech were proven wrong; the night before, I was on the line with Tom's deputy, Denis McDonough, offering my input, which your speech incorporated—and for which I am most grateful.

The inclusion of a principle on borders—that they "should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed [land] swaps," as you put it—has kicked up a hell of a commotion, as we fully knew it would. Not that, in substance, endorsing the use of the boundaries that existed before the 1967 war is in any way controversial. Everyone has long known that this would be the basis of any deal. It was the template that Bill Clinton, Ehud Barak, and Yasser Arafat employed in their peace efforts, as it was for George W. Bush, Ariel Sharon, and Ehud Olmert. And it was extremely close to what Secretary Clinton said in 2009: "We believe ... the parties can mutually agree on an outcome ... based on the 1967 lines, with agreed swaps."

But in the world of diplomacy, textual analysis is as fine-grained—and niggling, and loony—as what goes on in any postmodern literature department. The difference between your statement and Madame Secretary's boils down to the difference between two words: "can" and "should." And in that difference lies the source of the wailing and gnashing that the speech has provoked, especially from our pal Bibi.

Who knew that "Netanyahu" was Hebrew for "drama queen"? His reaction to the speech was predictable but still way over the top. (Don't get me started about Mitt Romney and the rest of the Republicans, who have provided new definitions of shamelessness, pandering, and idiocy, all in one fell swoop.) On myriad issues that matter hugely to Bibi, your speech should have thrilled him no end, with its scornful rejection of the Palestinian attempt to gain recognition via the U.N.; its forceful criticism of Hamas and its gimlet-eyed questioning of its new alliance with Fatah; its condemnation of Iran; its strong language against Syria; and its reaffirmation of the rock-solid bond between the U.S. and Israel. But instead, because Bibi was not expecting it—because, I suspect, Ross was telling him it wouldn't be there—the border issue sent him into a tizzy.

Why is he behaving this way? The answer is obvious: He is playing to the folks back home, as he has been all along. Which brings me to one of my central (and dispiriting) conclusions. All through the nearly two and a half years that I

served as your envoy, Netanyahu's behavior has been driven by domestic politics. And now that his coalition is secure, after Barak moved his Independence Party into it, he sees no upside in taking the risks required to achieve peace.

But Netanyahu is not the only one at fault for where we are. Troubling as the "reconciliation" between Fatah and Hamas surely is, it is wrong to say that it is the central reason a deal is now all but impossible under current conditions; in fact, the merger is a reaction to the unlikelihood of a deal, an attempt by Abu Mazen to salvage some domestic political legacy from the wreckage of the peace process. Yet Abbas himself deserves much of the blame for that wreckage. For if Bibi has never had the requisite desire to engineer a deal, his Palestinian counterpart, in my judgment, has never had the requisite stones—which is to say, the guts—to make painful compromises or even to come to the table.

A politically savvy friend of mine once observed that the Israelis are always happy to hold talks as long as they go nowhere, while the Palestinians are desperate to strike a deal as long as they have to do nothing to get there. I'm afraid this pretty much sums things up. In the absence of meaningful change in the domestic political situations on both sides, the peace process is, for now, dead—or, if a cheerier formulation would provide some small comfort, comatose. This, in reality, is why I have resigned: The assignment you tasked me with was to negotiate peace, and I have reached the conclusion that there is no realistic prospect of negotiations, let alone peace, in the foreseeable future.

Given all this, the point of your speech last week was not, as so much reporting and punditry maintained, to rejuvenate that process. It was to forestall a recognition of the reality that it is moribund, which might lead to an escalation in violence, and to lay down a marker for when the moment comes that negotiations can fruitfully resume (though it may be quite a while).

As for what you should do in the meantime, Mr. President, there is a train wreck that must be averted: the looming, Abbas-pushed vote on Palestinian statehood at the U.N. General Assembly in September. Were recognition to be granted in this way, it would turn an already grim situation into something absolutely bleak, emboldening the Palestinians and making the Israelis feel cornered and isolated—pushing both parties into the positions, in other words, in which they tend to behave worst. The appearance that you are carrying Bibi's water, by not only vetoing the resolution in the Security Council but strong-arming Europe to reject it as well, will be unfortunate, especially in light of everything occurring in the Arab world. But you really have no choice.

For my part, I want again to thank you for the opportunity to serve as your special envoy. The experience was supremely frustrating, and no doubt I made errors that contributed to the awful stalemate that we now confront. I hate to leave you in this pickle. But it is, as they say, why you get paid the big bucks.

Yours Sincerely,

George John Mitchell Jr.