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THE QUARTET'S 'IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS' OF HAMAS

These excerpts are taken from Alvaro de Soto's confidential End of Mission Report to the United Nations, dated May 2007. It was leaked shortly after he resigned as the United Nations Special Co-ordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and as UN Envoy to the Quartet, the Middle East grouping dominated by the United States which also includes the European Union and Russia.

Barely five days after the 25 January 2006 elections, the Palestinians received an icy shower in the form of a pre-programmed Quartet meeting in London on 30 January 2006. Just as the dominant issue in September had been whether Hamas should participate in the elections, in January it was how to handle the result.

Not that the Palestinians were totally unprepared for the shock: warning shots had been fired across their bow in two statements, both issued after teleconferences between the Principals, issued on 28 December 2005 and on 26 January 2006, the day after the elections. In the first, the Quartet called on all those 'who want to be part of the political process' to 'renounce violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and disarm', and 'expressed its view that a future Palestinian Authority Cabinet should include no member who was not committed to the principles of Israel's right to exist in peace and security and an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism.' In the second, also issued after a teleconference, the Quartet said: 'A two-state solution to the conflict requires all participants in the democratic process to renounce violence and terror, accept Israel's right to exist, and disarm, as outlined in the Road Map.'

Yet in a 13 January meeting, I had gathered the impression that, though the United States had clearly decided who were 'the bad guys', they were not entirely averse to the approach, which I floated. This approach, drawing on the flexibility of Russia and the UN – those members of the Quartet unencumbered by legislative constraints regarding dealings with Hamas – would have been designed to encourage Hamas to continue moving in the direction taken when it decided to participate in the elections.

What I had in mind was that the Quartet could adopt a *common but differentiated* approach towards Hamas and the new government, and I

recommended to UNHQ that we avoid tying our hands in ways that we might come to regret later. I also said that, whereas we had to acknowledge that the United States and the European Union had real domestic constraints with regard to assistance to a government involving members of a movement listed by them as a terrorist organization, they should in turn acknowledge that a group that is likely to hold a high percentage of seats in the Legislature could not be effectively dealt with by pressure and isolation alone, that Hamas was evolving and could evolve still more, that if we are to encourage that evolution some channel of dialogue would be necessary, and that for the UN to play such a role, as it had done successfully in many cases elsewhere in the world, it had to be given some space. I also proposed that, regardless of what position it took regarding the new Palestinian dispensation, the Quartet should register concern about Israel's creation of facts on the ground, which impinge on the viability – indeed, let's not beat around the bush, the very achievability – of a future Palestinian state, and agree to become more explicit about the need for negotiations and convergence on the end-goal of the Road Map process ...

I could not erase what the Quartet had already said on 28 December. However, to me, it was one thing to take positions before the elections, when we all assumed an outcome that would preserve Fateh's majority, and another to take positions in the face of an outright Hamas victory. The people had spoken in free and fair elections whose holding had been encouraged by the international community, and their wishes should be respected. We had an entirely new, unforeseen situation before us, and we should adjust our reaction accordingly. The 26 January statement, which in effect echoed the one of 28 December, undercut me seriously in that respect

On 29 January we received a draft statement prepared by the United States that would have had the Quartet, in effect, decide to review all assistance to the new Palestinian Authority government unless its members adhered to three principles: nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations including the Road Map. It was quite clear that the Secretary-General could not speak for donors. As a stopgap, therefore, with the approval of the Secretary-General, I proposed that either the reference to the review of assistance should be deleted altogether or the decision should be taken only by the donor members of the Quartet.

I had arrived in London bereft of guidance from UNHQ in response to recommendations on the eve of the Quartet Principals meeting scheduled on 30 January, and was only able to consult with the Secretary-General at a rather late stage.

The Envoys met at 10am on 30 January in preparation for the Principals' meeting in the evening. I was subjected to a heavy barrage from Welch and Abrams [the US representatives], including ominous innuendo to the effect that if the Secretary-General didn't encourage a review of projects of UN agencies and programmes it could have repercussions when UN budget deliberations took place on Capitol Hill. This question was resolved when the US stepped back from

insisting on a decision by the Quartet on the matter, and settled for language – proposed, incidentally, by the US legal advisor, a veteran of Camp David and other US Middle East efforts – under which the Quartet merely ‘concluded that it was inevitable that future assistance to any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government’s commitment to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map’.

Despite the constraints under which I was operating, I pleaded with the Envoys for an approach that would be more compatible with the United Nations playing the role which comes naturally to us as explained above. I was weakened by the willingness expressed by both my European Union and Russian colleagues, at the outset, to accept the language proposed by the United States. I found myself arguing alone for formulations that would be more consistent with the Quartet’s support for Abu Mazen’s strategy of co-operation, firstly, and, secondly, more conducive to conveying to Hamas the message that the international community recognizes and welcomes the movement that they have made by participating in the elections and respecting the electoral rules of the game and by and large respecting the ‘*Hudna*’ [ceasefire], and that we earnestly hope that such movement will continue so that the international community can maintain the support it has always provided to the Palestinians. Predictably, I was unsuccessful in these endeavours; hence the undesirably punitive-sounding tone of the 30 January statement from which we have not succeeded in distancing ourselves to this day, and which effectively transformed the Quartet from a negotiation-promoting foursome guided by a common document (the Road Map) into a body that was all but imposing sanctions on a freely elected government of a people under occupation as well as setting unattainable preconditions for dialogue.

The impact of Quartet policy on the Palestinians and on prospects for a two state solution

The devastating consequences of the Quartet position have been well documented, including in UN Security Council briefings. Those consequences were, in fact, predicted by the Office of the United Nations Special Co-ordinator (UNSCO) in a paper that we circulated to Quartet partners before the London meeting on the institutional implications of pulling the financial plug on the Palestinian Authority. The precipitous decline of the standard of living of Palestinians, particularly but by no means exclusively in Gaza, has been disastrous, both in humanitarian terms and in the perilous weakening of Palestinian institutions. International assistance, which had been gradually shifting to development and institutional reform, has reverted largely to the humanitarian. The service-delivering capacity of the Palestinian Authority, consisting of the thousands of doctors, nurses and teachers, employees of the Palestinian Authority, who provide the bulk of medical care and education, has suffered tremendously. Perversely, this regression has made the already critical role of United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), as well as other UN agencies, even more crucial to the well-being of the Palestinians.

The underpinnings for a future Palestinian state have been seriously undermined, and the capacity of the Palestinian security apparatus to establish and maintain law and order, to say nothing of putting an end to attacks against Israel, has diminished tremendously – hardly surprising, given that the security forces who would have to risk their lives to achieve these goals haven't been being paid regular salaries. Thus the steps taken by the international community with the presumed purpose of bringing about a Palestinian entity that will live in peace with its neighbour Israel have had precisely the opposite effect.

Beyond the damage wrought in terms of international assistance, which in the final analysis is voluntary, there is that which has been inflicted by Israel, notwithstanding its responsibilities to the population, under international law, as occupying power: not just the killings of hundreds of civilians in sustained heavy incursions and the destruction of infrastructure, some of it wanton such as the surgical strikes on the only power plant, as well as bridges in Gaza; also the cessation of transfer to the Palestinian Authority, since February 2006, of the VAT and customs duties which Israel collects, under the Paris Protocol signed with the PLO pursuant to the Oslo Accords, on behalf of the Palestinians. This is money collected from Palestinian exporters and importers. It is Palestinian money. In normal circumstances it adds up to a full one third of Palestinian income. It is the main source of payment of salaries to Palestinian Authority employees. While the international community demands from the Palestinian government that it should accept 'previous agreements and obligations', Israel deprives the Palestinian Authority of the capacity to deliver basic services to the Palestinian population in violation of one such 'previous agreement', as well as its International Humanitarian Law obligations regarding the welfare of the population whose land it occupies.

Israel's cutoff of the main source of income of the Palestinian Authority was never intended by three of the Quartet members. The UN (myself) was the first to call on Israel not to do this, the very day that the decision was communicated to international representatives. The European Union has since repeatedly called on Israel to resume transfer; the sums withheld surely add up to the high hundreds of millions of dollars by now. However, the Quartet has been prevented from pronouncing on this because the United States, as its representatives have intimated to us, does not wish Israel to transfer these funds to the Palestinian Authority. It is interesting that in a recent interview in the *Financial Times* Secretary Rice was quoted as saying 'I do think that there are certain responsibilities that come with governing and that Hamas has not lived up to those because it has been unable to deliver because it is isolated from the international system because it will not give up violence. So there's a consequence to being in power and being unable to deliver.' One wonders whether it is credible to judge the ability of a government to deliver when it is being deprived of its largest source of income, to which it is indubitably entitled by virtue of an agreement endorsed by the Security Council, by the State which largely controls the capacity of that government and its people to generate income. In fact, the Palestinian

Authority government is being expected to deliver without having make-or-break attributes of sovereignty such as control of its borders, the monopoly over the use of force, or access to natural resources, let alone regular tax receipts.

In general, the other consequence of Quartet policy has been to take all pressure off Israel. With all focus on the failings of Hamas, the Israeli settlement enterprise and barrier construction has continued unabated. (In the same time period, the idea has also gained ground in Western public opinion and even some Arab governments that the problem in the region is Iran and the ‘Shia crescent’ – a framing device which tends to mute attention to the Palestinian issue.)

Palestinian realignment and the formation of a National Unity Government

Soon after the elections, Hamas expressed its desire to establish a broad-based government. The reactions in Fateh were mixed, but before the idea could advance any further the United States made it known that they wanted Hamas to be left alone to form its government. We were told that the US was against any ‘blurring of the line dividing Hamas from those Palestinian political forces committed to the two-state solution. Abu Mazen soon made clear that Fateh members would not participate in a Hamas-led government. The US reportedly also sent unequivocal signals to independents who had been approached about joining the government that they would be ill-advised to do so. In the event, Hamas formed a government that included some independents but was largely dominated by Hamas. This naturally facilitated the continued quarantine of the Palestinian Authority government, a.k.a. the ‘Hamas Government’.

Before going on, I want to stress that, in effect, a National Unity Government with a compromise platform along the lines of Mecca might have been achieved soon after the election, in February or March 2006, had the United States not led the Quartet to set impossible demands, and opposed a National Unity Government in principle. At the time, and indeed until the Mecca Agreement a year later, the United States clearly pushed for a confrontation between Fateh and Hamas – so much so that, a week before Mecca, the US envoy declared twice in an envoys’ meeting in Washington how much ‘I like this violence’, referring to the near-civil war that was erupting in Gaza in which civilians were being regularly killed and injured, because ‘it means that other Palestinians are resisting Hamas’. Please remember this next time someone argues that the Mecca agreement, to the extent that it showed progress, proved that a year of pressure ‘worked’, and we should keep the isolation going. On the contrary, the same result might have been achieved much earlier without the year in between in which so much damage was done to Palestinian institutions, and so much suffering brought to the people of the occupied territory, in pursuit of a policy that didn’t work, which many of us believed from the outset wouldn’t work, and which, I have no doubt, is at best extremely short-sighted ...

PRESIDENT CARTER – ‘ABOMINABLE’ BLAIR

On 19 May, James Naughtie interviewed former US President Jimmy Carter on Radio 4's Today programme. These excerpts are taken from the interview.

BBC: How do you judge these days Mr Blair's support for Mr Bush?

Carter: Abominable. Loyal. Blind. Apparently subservient. And I think that the almost undeviating support by Great Britain for the ill-advised policies of President Bush in Iraq have been a major tragedy for the world.

BBC: This is an interesting question because the implication behind what you say is that if Mr Blair at some point, say in the year in the run up to war, had taken a step back, had moved away from Mr Bush, it would've made an important difference inside the United States. Is that what you believe?

Carter: I believe so. I can't say it would have made the definitive difference. But it would certainly have assuaged the problems that have arose lately. And so one of the defences of the Bush administration, in the American public and on a worldwide basis (it hasn't been successful in my opinion) has been that we must be more correct in our actions than the world thinks because Great Britain is backing us. And so I think the combination of Bush and Blair giving their support to this tragedy in Iraq has strengthened the effort and has made opposition less effective and has prolonged the war and increased the tragedy that has resulted.

BBC: You sound quite sad as you say that.

Carter: Yes I am sad about it because the war was unjustified, unnecessary and has wrought a tragedy on the Iraqi people, on the American people, on some of the British people, and has caused deep chasms on a global basis.

BBC: How important is it that the new Prime Minister, and we'll have one by the end of next month in this country as you know, whose support of the war, who always supported it, who paid for it as Chancellor of the Exchequer, changes policy. Is that what you hope will happen?

Carter: I would hope that that combination of less enthusiasm from Great Britain would be a factor and the rising animosity toward the war within the American public and within the United States Congress — those factors together, I hope, will expedite the exodus of the occupying forces primarily of the United States and Great Britain.

BBC: One of the interesting things that's happened in your country, as you know, in the last quarter of a century is that a kind of religious fervour has entered into

politics. Now, some people probably forget that when you came into politics as President in the mid-seventies you were a man of conviction and of faith from the south and that was controversial in its time. And yet you now find yourself arguing against those who say that faith is essential to politics. It's an odd position for you to be in, isn't it?

Carter: No I don't think so. It was clear that I was a religious person, still am. But I was very meticulous in completely separating my religious faith from any element of politics of governance in the White House. I believed in what Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers, said that we should build a wall between church and state and I adhere to that premise.

BBC: It's a wall that has been chipped away at in your country, hasn't it?

Carter: It has been in the last six years in particular. Yes.

BBC: Do you want to see that change?

Carter: Yes, I do and I hope it will be. I believe it will be. The current trends and public opinion polls and the results of the election last year, I think, have shown that the political influence of the fundamentalist religious believers on the one side in the White House and in Congress is dissipating.

BBC: I think you once said that you worshipped a Prince of Peace not a Prince of something else.

Carter: Not a Prince of Pre-emptive war. Yes.

BBC: Look back finally, President Carter, over the last 30 years, during which you have been performing functions from the very highest in your country, to that of an ex-president wielding all the influence that you can. Are you still an optimist, or are you sad that we are where we are?

Carter: No, I am still an optimist. I think in most ways we've reached the death of international approbation of friendship toward our country. I think the only change that is going to be likely in the future is to improve that situation. The situation in the Middle East couldn't get much worse unless an all out war erupts. I believe that future changes will be beneficial and I think that it is inevitable that within the next few months, or certainly less than a few years, we'll see an exodus of the occupying forces from Iraq. So these kinds of things I believe are almost inevitably going to improve the global situation that we now suffer.

So, I am optimistic about that. And I don't give up hope on the premise that the Middle East peace process is still viable, and if we can capitalise on future opportunities, I believe that we can have success.

NATO – A SOBER EVALUATION

Johan Galtung, founder of TRANSCEND, the peace and development network, protested about the meeting of Nato foreign ministers in Oslo on 25 April 2007. This is what he said.

Foreign Ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization!

You are not welcome. The best thing about your meeting is the short duration. We wish you good riddance.

As a matter of fact, we wish you did not exist. We wish you had had the decency to dissolve like the Warsaw Treaty Organization after the Cold War.

The old Nato had a rationale, to contain Soviet aggression. About that we can discuss, but it is history.

The new Nato is offensive, not defensive. The theatre is no longer the North Atlantic arena, but the whole world. It is engaged in preventive war, rather than containing aggression, in expanding the space under Nato control, rather than in solving conflicts. In doing so, Nato creates the situations it is supposed to eliminate.

Today it looks like a major purpose is to keep Nato alive for its own sake, as a dinosaur heading for extinction. It is a tragedy to hear people claim that Nato must succeed instead of asking what is good for the Afghan people. And it is even more tragic to watch countries compensating for unwillingness to support Nato's Master, the United States of America, in Iraq by turning to Afghanistan, sacrificing Afghan lives on the altar of submission to Washington.

'North Atlantic'. That smells Anglo-America -- with a dash of Norway, where you are right now located. And with a trail of blood from Palestine to Iraq to Iran to Afghanistan. Yes, it also stands for democracy and human rights. Like apartheid for the Palestinians, torture and rendition to several of you, walls of concrete and steel, repression and killing.

Democracy? Some democracy: the USA executive is not accountable – *to the people*, but to money fuelling fake elections as in Florida and Ohio, and to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the National Rifle Association (NRA);

– *to the judiciary*, appointed by the executive itself;

– *to the Congress*, because the President can veto any bill and the two-party system makes it very difficult to override a veto.

Is this really a model for which you are killing people, or are you simply afraid of Washington? Of being rejected by the Master, of one day being exposed to its carpets of bombs? And what does that say about the nature of Nato?

As specialists on Afghanistan, you of course know the histories of the English invasions of 1838–42 and 1878–81, which ended with a massacre of the English Embassy in Kabul, and the Soviet invasion of 1979–86, with final withdrawal in 1989. You might draw a conclusion for good or for bad: these are proud people, who want to be masters in their own land.

You have no military chance whatsoever. You cling to the idea of something

finite – ‘Taliban’ – that you can crush or contain. But the more you kill, the more resistance you create. And that resistance has:

- *no limit in time*. There may be lulls, but never any capitulations;
- *no limit in space*. They have the whole Muslim *UMMA*, 1.3 billion, mainly separated by borders drawn by the West, to draw upon.

And yet there are solutions in Afghanistan, for them, not you, to bring about:

- A coalition government with, not without, Taliban, negotiating, not crushing them;
- Priority to the basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, health and education for all;
- Afghanistan as a federation, not the unitary state run for foreign benefit from Kabul;
- A Central Asian Community with neighbouring nations deeply intertwined with Afghanistan;
- Security provided by the Christian-dominated UN Security Council with the Muslim Organization of the Islamic Conference.

And there are solutions to the conflict with Iran. Why are the US/UK so much more worried about a nuclear Iran and missiles flying than about a nuclear Pakistan and India? Because they think Iran hates them. And why should Iran hate them? In one word: 1953. The CIA – MI6 coup against a legally elected Prime Minister, Mossadegh, installing the Shah and 25 years of dictatorship. And how does one handle that? By a one-minute Bush/Blair speech accepting responsibility and apologizing. Do you Foreign Ministers have the courage to tell the self-righteous Anglo-Americans to do so?

And there are solutions to Iraq, not any stupid ‘reconciliation’ without political solutions, better known as pacification. US/UK and the remaining coalition partners stop killing, shed their uniforms, apologize, compensate, clean up, and ask the UN to convene a Conference on Security and Cooperation in West Asia, like the Helsinki Conference 1973-75 model. The fate of Iraq – possibly as a community more than as a state – is for the Iraqis to decide.

And there are solutions to what your Master calls terrorism – in your midst you have a country called Spain, whose leader, Zapatero, did after 11 March 2004 what Bush and Blair should have done after 9/11 and 07/07. He stopped killing Arab Muslims in Iraq. He legalized migrants from Morocco. He started negotiating with Morocco instead of bombing. And he organized a Dialogue of Civilizations. Use Spain rather than US/UK as the model.

But you have a huge problem: your Master. With more than 70 interventions on its conscience after the Second World War, with somewhere between 13 and 17 million killed in overt actions. You are allies. With few exceptions, you are silent. Silence means consent – to one of the worst crimes in history: US/UK in Iraq.

There is one way out. You stand up against your Master rather than mimicking the Master’s Voice with some corridor whispering.

You can walk out.

You can say stop.

You can say: enough killing!

Let us solve all these conflicts, and let us turn the adversaries of our Master’s creation into our friends.