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FROM: JIMMY CARTER (HIST)

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JIMMY CARTER

Visit to Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan
April 13-22, 2008

Rosalynn, Jeff, and I arrived in Israel Sunday, 4/13/08, after a very exciting and successful election monitoring mission in Nepal (see prior trip report). Since Israel had declined to approve a previously planned visit by three of us Elders (Kofi Annan, Mary Robinson, and me), I expected a similar negative reaction when I substituted this trip on behalf of The Carter Center. Sure enough, all my requests to meet with ministers of the government were publicly rejected and, more seriously, three requests from our Secret Service detail to work with Israeli security were rejected. This was our first experience of this kind in more than 125 foreign nations we've visited since leaving the White House. (After several news stories on this subject, when we returned to Israel, Shin Bet security met us at the airport and worked with us.)

We were met in Tel Aviv by Bob Pastor, former Congressman Steve Solarz, and Hrair Balian, who arrived on a plane furnished by Jeff Skoll, and we proceeded together to the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. My first event was an extensive interview with Ha'aretz newspaper, and I was able to convince them that we were undeterred, that the challenges were the reason we decided on our trip, and to explain our reasoning and basic purposes. Luckily, in a democracy like Israel, there are numerous sources of information from private citizens who are experts on government policies and attitudes. Also, official Israeli policies are well known.

President Shimon Peres did agree to meet on a personal basis just with the members of our family, and we had a very pleasant and congenial exchange of ideas. Later, one of his aides reported untruthfully that it was a harsh exchange and that I was scolded by him about our plans to meet Hamas. Our next meeting was with Noam and Aviva Schalit, parents of the young Israeli soldier who has been held for about 18 months by the Palestinians in Gaza. We pledged to do our best to learn about his condition and to aid in his release.

After a much-needed rest, we began the next day with a breakfast briefing by two Israeli public opinion researchers on their latest information about Israeli Jews. To summarize, Israelis are fairly satisfied with the status quo, have little confidence in the peace negotiators on either side, are deliberately uninformed about the plight of the Palestinians, and (surprisingly) are much more concerned in the negotiations for peace with the Palestinians about the "right of return" than about settlements or Jerusalem. U.S. Consul General Jacob Walles gave us a briefing about the seemingly limited role the U.S. State Department plays in the Occupied Territories. The Israelis are very restrictive, costs of required security in the West Bank are high, and they do not have access to Gaza. We later learned from several sources that there are some fundamental differences between the State Department and the NSC/ White House, and as in most Administrations, the White House view prevails.

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We had an informative meeting with Yossi Beilin, founder of the Meretz political party and co-author of the Geneva peace proposal. Soon after, to our surprise, he held a press conference and quoted me (accurately) on several subjects. Our next stop was Sderot, a town of about 20,000 that is near Gaza and has had about two Qassam missiles strike it each day for the past seven years, but the larger proportion has come in the last year. Thirteen people have been killed by the small and inaccurate rockets, and the town is traumatized by the daily attacks. The streets, playgrounds, etc. were empty, and about 3,000 residents have moved away. We looked at nearby Gaza from a hilltop and then had a long discussion with several citizens and Mayor Eli Moyal in his office. He said that there were two ways for a government to protect its people: by diplomacy or military action - and the Israelis were doing neither for his town. We toured the Berzilai hospital in Ashkelon, where trauma victims are brought from Gaza and Israeli communities, with no distinctions between Jews and Arabs. Psychological injuries are most prevalent.

After driving back to Tel Aviv, I spoke to an audience at an Internet convention and engaged in a forum discussion with Ha'aretz reporter David Landau. Our next meeting was with the families of the two soldiers captured by Hezbollah, who have had no indication of whether they are still alive.

Back at our hotel, we had an intriguing discussion with about a dozen distinguished Israelis, who have held major positions in intelligence, government, or the military or who are experts in their personal careers relating to the peace effort. At the end of the session, I felt that most of them approved of my pending visit with Hamas and Syria. Collectively, the group had many years of experience in dealing with the Palestinians and other Arabs, in addition to studying the attitude and history of Israelis over the years.

On Tuesday, 4/15, we drove to Ramallah, where Tim Rothermel in our Carter Center office hosted meetings. We were briefed by staff members of the Palestinian Authority who are advising negotiating teams, but found that they are excluded from the top tier of negotiating, either at the Abbas-Olmert level or even the discussion of "road map" issues. We received some interesting polling data from Dr. Nader Said, which showed no confidence in the current negotiations and rising anger. About 50 members of the diplomatic corps joined us for a reception, and seemed supportive of our mission. They were, almost by definition, sympathetic with the Palestinians.

Perhaps the most emotional event of our entire trip was a meeting with young people, mostly of college age. The description of their deprivations and persecution was appalling, and their determination and hope for a better life brought tears to our eyes. They and their families had had citizenship rights taken away even though born and raised in Ramallah, Jericho, or Nablus, just because they may have visited or studied elsewhere. Many relatives were imprisoned for years because of some non-violent political activity. Including women and children, the Israelis now hold 11,600 prisoners, and about 25 percent of the entire Palestinian populations have been arrested.

After a brief ceremony at Arafat's grave, we had an extensive discussion with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who is a very impressive leader. Among other things, he expressed hope for reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, but we knew that President Mahmoud Abbas has been told by the U.S. and Israel that the peace talks will end and all funding cut off if he makes this move. He emphasized, quite emotionally, "Unless America stops the Israelis from expanding settlements, there can be no peace. Not one more brick!" has become his mantra. The Prime Minister gave us some suggestions for our meetings with Hamas leaders.

We then had lunch with about a dozen distinguished Palestinian leaders from both political parties. I embraced Eyad Sarraj, a courageous human rights leader from Gaza, who I've known, but the press thought he was one of the people from Hamas, and it became a worldwide news story that I embraced a Hamas leader. (Of 43 Hamas candidates elected to the Palestinian parliament from the West Bank, 41 are in prison.) After other meetings during the afternoon, we returned to East Jerusalem for a session with the Israel-Palestine Business Council, a group attempting to demonstrate that trade and commerce between the two are both possible and profitable.

On Wednesday, we met first with Avigdor Lieberman, leader of "Israel Our Home." He believes that Jews and Arabs should be completely separated, with Israeli Arabs moved east into the West Bank and Jewish settlers returned back to Israel. We then met with the NGO Peace Forum, a room full of representatives from about 120 groups from Israel and Palestine who are striving for peace. As expected, they all supported our mission, and I advised them to concentrate their diverse efforts around the acceptance of the Geneva Accords.

U.S. General Dayton and his multinational staff gave us a briefing as best they could while avoiding all the subjects they are forbidden to discuss. He has been in the region for 2½ years, is obviously dedicated and competent, and has had to accommodate frequent changes in his assigned duties each time there have been different circumstances on the ground. A major project now is to train a professional security force in Jordan. They have just completed training of a 600-person battalion.

Our next meeting was quite interesting, with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade Eli Yishai. He is leader of Shas, a conservative religious group of 11 Knesset members that is dedicated to peace – and holding on to all of Jerusalem. He was very interested in our mission, expressed no opposition, and asked us to help arrange a meeting with Hamas leaders for himself in order to orchestrate the release of Corporal Schalit. He was the only member of the Israeli cabinet willing to meet with me.

Our last stop before flying to Egypt was Hadassah Hospital, where wonderful medical work is being done and the main emphasis seems to be on peace between Israelis and Arabs. The patients and also the staff include Jews and Arabs from both Israel and Palestine.

In Cairo, we received an excellent briefing from U.S. Ambassador Ricciardone concerning U.S.-Egypt relations and the ongoing negotiations between Egypt and Hamas on behalf of Israel and the U.S. This was his last day on this assignment, and we attended a going-away reception for him.

Our first meeting on Thursday was with Osamah al-Baz, who was my key Egyptian negotiator at Camp David and the closest confidante of Anwar Sadat. Although no longer active in government, he is one of the wisest and most knowledgeable people I know. Next, we had an intriguing session with Chief of Intelligence Omar Soliman, who is in total charge of all the relations with Hamas. Through him, the U.S. and Israel are negotiating with Hamas while publicly denying any relationship. He was extremely impressive. His position gives him an excellent insight into the intricacies of Middle East political and military affairs.

During an elaborate luncheon with President Hosni Mubarak and his wife Suzanne (old friends), we discussed former times and how much Egypt has been blessed by the peace treaty with Israel. Not engaged in warfare, having their land and oil wells returned, and being a special friend of the U.S., Egypt is thriving. With the president and prime minister, I probed for some more tolerant policies toward non-violent and secular political opponents in coming elections.

Our meeting with Hamas leaders, Mahmoud Al-Zahar, Siad Siam, and Ahmed Yousef went on for more than three hours. Well briefed by Mr. Soliman, we made full use of this time. My primary goal was to induce them to stop all rocket attacks against Israeli civilians, to be flexible in negotiating for a prisoner exchange involving Schalit's release, to accept the basic control premises for the opening of the Rafah gate between Gaza and the Sinai, to be open to the idea of a possible non-partisan government of technocrats, and to agree to accept any agreement negotiated between Abu Mazen and Olmert provided it is then approved by Palestinians, perhaps in a referendum. I also delivered requests from Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yishai and Yossi Beilin to meet with Hamas leaders. It was an amicable and interesting discussion, and helped to prepare us for the meeting in Damascus with Mashaal. In all discussions, Rosalynn, Bob Pastor, and Congressman Solarz played a crucial role.

In the evening, I gave a lecture to a packed crowd at the American University of Cairo and answered their questions as frankly as I could.

On Friday, we flew to Damascus, where our first official event was a delightful luncheon with President Bashar al Assad and his wife Asma. Although I had known him as a college student, this was our first meeting since he inherited the office after his father died. In the meantime, Bob, Steve, and Hrair met with Foreign Minister Walid Mualem and his deputy, Faysal Mekdad. We then assembled at the presidential palace for a thorough discussion of all the important issues: Golan Heights, Lebanon, Iran, and U.S.-Syrian relations. Assad was very eager to resume peace talks with Israel, if strongly supported by the U.S. The only precondition would be public acknowledgement that the discussions were being held. The most significant discovery was the obvious personal strength and mastery of details by the young president. He also promised that all the seven imprisoned human rights activists would be released if they request clemency.

We then had a long meeting, before and after supper, with Mashaal and top leaders in the Hamas politburo. I pursued as forcefully as possible the same issues as before, including steps they might take to reduce tension, to resolve some current conflicts with Israel, and to enhance the prospects for progress in the peace talks underway between Israel and the Palestinians representing the PLO. Mashaal and I left before midnight, with Bob, Steve, and Hrair to continue detailed discussions with the remaining Hamas politburo members and to seek written understandings on the issues. We reassembled the following morning to continue our talks, and Mashaal and I agreed on wording of our points, which he said he would submit to the top Hamas leaders, including those from Gaza, and would give us their response to our proposals before our final press conference Monday morning in Israel.

Our plane had a flat tire, but we were given a substitute by President Assad and were able to proceed, on time, to Saudi Arabia. We first met with Prince Turki al-Faisal at the King Faisal Foundation, and were able to share information about our trip and his analysis of various issues of common interest. A major conference was underway at his center on how to resolve the Iraqi quandary. We then visited with King Abdullah for about 45 minutes, who interrupted his weekly session with private Saudi citizens. When I returned to our hotel suite, Saudi's ambassador to the U.S., H.E. Adel Al-Jubair, called to say that his majesty was making a nice contribution for our health work in Africa.

During the evening we had dinner with Prince Alwalid bin Talal and toured his estate. The next morning we proceeded to Jordan (in the prince's plane) for a visit with King Abdullah II, Foreign Minister Salah Eddin al Bashir, and other ministers. They were quite critical of Hamas, Syria, and Iran, but also with the lack of progress and apparent lack of commitment to the peace talks between Israel and Palestine. The king will express his concerns in an upcoming visit to Washington. After a meeting with Adnan abu Odeh we flew to Israel, where we finally received protection from Israel's superb security force. During the night, we received responses to our suggestions and questions from the combined Hamas leadership.

Monday morning we first met with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and then Shas leader Eli Yishai, to whom we outlined the results of our trip. We prepared a presentation for me to make to a conference sponsored by the Israeli Council on Foreign Relations. Although repeating some of the above, this is the report, slightly revised, that I made to an audience mostly of Israeli leaders, foreign diplomats, and the news media:

"During the past eight days, we traveled to Israel, the West Bank, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan and met with distinguished leaders of each nation – from government, business, academia, and civil society. We visited the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem and a hospital in Ashkelon where we saw Israeli and Palestinian doctors treating patients from Israel and Palestine equally – a positive sign of what the future could hold if peace is achieved.

"We knew that some of our meetings – particularly with Hamas and the Syrian government – would be viewed negatively in some quarters. The problem is not that we met them, but that the U.S. and Israeli governments refuse to meet with them, making peace harder if not impossible to achieve.

"In Israel, we visited Sderot and Ashkelon and saw the despair and fear due to the barrage of rockets. Aiming these rockets at civilian communities is an act of terrorism, and we urged Hamas to stop. I also visited the Palestinian territories and spoke to families who have lost their loved ones through violence and imprisonment. Most others are impeded from going to work, to school, or to worship because of the intruding wall and a plethora of road blocks. This too is unacceptable.

"On this 60th anniversary of the independence of Israel, I acknowledge a personal sadness that, during 30 years since Camp David, only Jordan has recognized Israel. I am glad that President Bush and Secretary Rice have pledged to complete a peace agreement by the end of the year. I hope that such an agreement will set the stage for wider recognition of Israel and acceptance of a sovereign Palestinian state. Our talks in Syria have led us to conclude that peace with Israel could be within reach, with Syria being the next country to recognize Israel if an agreement is reached.

"Allow me to offer some tentative conclusions based on our many meetings:

1. Public Opinion: Despair. A substantial majority of Israeli and Palestinian citizens and political leaders share the view that the peace negotiations are not making any progress and are unlikely to succeed. Palestinians are convinced that the Israeli government is more focused on expanding settlements than in making peace. Israelis fear more Palestinian attacks. When hope for peace declines and frustration increases, some people begin to turn to violence as the only path, and recent public opinion polls in the West Bank and Gaza suggest this is happening.

2. The State of Peace Talks and the Roadmap. Four levels of talks are occurring: (a) between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert on final status issues; (b) between Ahmed Qurai and Tzipi Livni on the same issues, though in more detail; (c) between technical teams on both sides; and (d) among Prime Minister Fayyad, Minister Ehud Barak, and U.S. General Fraser on monitoring the roadmap. President Abbas recently deplored the lack of progress on the major status issues, and without concrete progress at that level there is no chance that the next two levels can be productive. Minister Barak did not even attend the recent session convened by General Fraser to review the roadmap. One possible reason is that he had nothing positive to report. Indeed, not only does there appear to be no progress on the final status issues, but there is regression on the roadmap. Since Annapolis, about 9,000 more settlements have been announced and are being expanded or built; more roadblocks and checkpoints have gone up; and Gaza is increasingly isolated as a prison for 1.5 million Palestinians. On the Palestinian side, according to U.S. General Dayton, there has been progress in the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority in the training of security forces.

3. Palestinian Desperation. The impression of no progress on final status issues, combined with the expansion of settlements and roadblocks, have left the Palestinians increasingly angry. In a meeting we had with young leaders in the West Bank, several mentioned a “third intifada,” based on the feeling that peace is not possible and the facts on the ground are growing worse. They did not defend the position taken by some of their friends on the need for violence, but they understand it. The danger is that most Israelis seem unaware of this growing crisis.

4. Five Interlocking Conflicts. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict lies at the center of other crises or challenges in the Middle East: intra-Palestinian; Syria-Israel; Lebanon; and Iran’s growing influence. While each crisis needs to be addressed on its own, none of them can be solved without addressing or at least taking account of the others.

5. Comprehensive Peace. For peace in the Middle East to be sustainable, it needs to be comprehensive. This means that one needs to relate each crisis to the other, but it also means that **actors with an obvious stake in the conflict need to have a stake in finding a solution.** Groups such as Hamas view themselves as seeking liberation, but their role is viewed by some as using terrorism to undermine the prospects for peace. Syria, which we believe is ready to negotiate peace with Israel and normal relations with the United States, should also be permitted a place in the overall peace process lest they seek to subvert it.

6. Neighbors. All of Israel’s neighbors believe they have much at stake in the success of the negotiations. Egypt is mediating between Hamas and Israel, and Saudi Arabia and Jordan have played key roles in assisting the peace process. And yet all are deeply worried that the negotiations will not succeed, and the effect on the region will be devastating. In our meeting, King Abdullah II of Jordan stressed the absence of tangible progress in the ongoing peace negotiations, and especially the need for stopping the expansion of settlements.

“We did not come as mediators or negotiators, and have been careful not to interfere in the principal peace negotiations. But we think there is a role in listening closely to two excluded actors – Hamas and the Syrian Government – and offering ideas on ways that they could take a more productive road to peace. Our conclusion is that there are good reasons to believe that such a strategy can yield constructive involvement by them, but it will take considerable time and patience.

“Let me focus my remarks on the two most controversial sets of meetings.

Hamas. I understand why Israel and other governments are reluctant to engage Hamas. They have not yet agreed to accept Israel’s peaceful existence; they have not renounced violence; and they do not accept previous peace agreements. In our judgment, Hamas should accept all three points, but we **do not believe peace is likely and we are certain peace is not sustainable unless a way can be found to ensure that Hamas will not disrupt the peace negotiations.**

“The current strategy of isolating and suppressing Hamas and persecuting the people of Gaza is not working. It only exacerbates the cycle of violence, and latest polls show that it increases the relative popularity of Hamas throughout Palestine. Some feel that my meeting with Hamas legitimized them, but their legitimacy came when a plurality of the Palestinian people voted for them in the 2006 elections, which I observed. Israelis know that Hamas won a majority of parliamentary seats, and a recent poll of Israeli citizens indicates strong support (64 percent) for direct Israel-Hamas talks.

“We have no illusions that our brief meetings will stop the violence or produce peace, but we needed to take that first step. It is clear from our conversations that their views, as well as those of Israelis, need to be tested by regular exchanges, such as occurred in the many years of Track II diplomacy with the PLO.

“Violence freezes adversaries in a counterproductive posture. Israelis think the Palestinians will never accept Israel and Palestinians believe that Israel will never accept a genuinely independent Palestine. We think both are wrong and trust Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to find their path to a two-state solution.

“I met with Hamas leaders from the West Bank, Gaza, and Damascus. After all-day discussions among their leaders, they agreed that they would accept a two-state solution on the 1967 borders if approved by Palestinians – a departure from long-standing Hamas doctrine that refused to recognize the possibility of two states living side-by-side in peace. This may be a very significant change.

“Specifically, they agreed to these exact words: “If President Abbas succeeds in negotiating a final status agreement with Israel, Hamas will accept the decision made by the Palestinian people and their will through a referendum monitored by international observers, including those from the Carter Center, or by a newly elected Palestinian National Council by mechanisms agreed upon nationally, even if Hamas is opposed to the agreement. In order to ensure that the referendum can be debated and the choice by voters truly reflects the will of the Palestinian people, a national reconciliation and, in particular, between Fatah and Hamas will be necessary.

“Let me underscore the significance of the statement. It means that Hamas will not undermine Abbas’ efforts to negotiate the agreement, and whatever position Hamas chooses to take on the agreement, Hamas will accept an agreement if the Palestinian people support it by a free vote. If the agreement calls for a two-state solution and the recognition of Israel and Palestine, Hamas will, in effect, accept Israel’s right to exist in peace - if the people agree on the plan.

“Hamas leaders said they did not want violence, but they believed it was necessary to end the occupation. However, they did say they would consider alternative strategies, including non-violence, to achieve their goal of a sovereign Palestinian state.

“In our meetings with Hamas, we made the following additional points:

1. We pressed them hard on a cease-fire. They are negotiating with Egypt, and we urged them to move rapidly to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion.
2. We proposed a rapid exchange of prisoners, involving the early transfer of Corporal Schalit to Egypt in exchange for a group of prisoners not guilty of serious crimes, including all the women and children. Hamas considered their negotiations through Egypt to be well advanced and including prisoners whose families had been promised a high priority on their list to be swapped. Mr. Mashaal assured us that Schalit is well and promised a new letter from him to his parents, to be delivered through The Carter Center. Also, Schalit will be transferred to Egypt as an intermediate step in the exchange.
3. Hamas urged that the border crossing at Rafah be reopened. The crossing would be monitored by the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, the European Union, and Egypt. Final decisions would be made by Egyptian officials.
4. Hamas is prepared to consider with President Abbas an idea of creating a government of national consensus, with a unified and non-partisan professional security force for the West Bank and Gaza. There would be a cabinet composed of technocrats belonging neither to Fatah or Hamas, but approved by both. This non-partisan group would govern until the scheduled elections in 2010.
5. The leaders of Hamas asked me to express their greatest concern with the terrible suffering of the Palestinian people and reiterated that the basis for peace would be the fulfillment of Palestinians’ national right of self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders.

“Syria. Communications between Israel and the United States with Syria are almost non-existent, and relations have been strained when not hostile. The United States and Israel brand Syria as a supporter of terrorism through its cooperation with Iran and the funding and support for Hamas and Hezbollah. Furthermore, the two governments view Syria as undermining the stability of Lebanon and the selection of a President. In our conversations, the Syrian government seemed determined to correct these allegations. Senior government officials pledged to complete an agreement on the Golan Heights and peace with Israel as soon as possible. The government took very seriously the recent comment by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that he understood Syrian expectations, and he thought Syria understood Israeli expectations. Since the Syrian government considers that about 85 percent of the issues have been resolved in prior negotiations, it believes the agreement should be completed soon. In Syria’s view, there has been agreement on the borders, riparian rights as they apply to the Sea of Galilee, security zones and the presence of international forces.

“The United States has three options. It can continue to oppose such peace talks, which will make it impossible to achieve peace. It can play a neutral role, but that won’t be enough. Finally, the U.S. could play a positive and constructive role, as proposed by the Syrian government, and we hope it does. On Lebanon, Syria acknowledges that it has some influence but insists that it is no longer playing a large role, as it did when it had troops there, and that the key to the solution is a national dialogue in which the various parties reach a consensus. In effect, this means that on critical issues (constitutional, economic policy, security), the government should negotiate an agreement with the opposition parties that represent 45 percent of the parliament, including Hezbollah.

“In brief, Syria has influence over four of the conflicts that we have been discussing: Syria-Israel; Israel-Palestine; Intra-Palestine; and Lebanon. A successful negotiation on each will have positive effects on the other, and conversely, failure to reach agreement on one would make it harder to solve the others. If there is an agreement between Israel and Palestine and reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, then there is no longer any need for Syria to help Hamas; and if there is a consensus on Lebanon, there is no need to support Hezbollah. And finally, if the United States decides to support the negotiations with Israel, then U.S. concerns with Syria’s performance will be addressed.

“In Syria, we raised our concerns about the people imprisoned for signing the Damascus Declaration, and President Bashar al-Assad said that there were only seven still being held from the original 90 detained. He said that if they sought clemency, they would receive it. We also asked him about Guy Hever, the young Israeli soldier who has been missing since August 1997, and he said they had no evidence of his whereabouts. We asked about Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev who were captured by Hezbollah at the beginning of the war. The Syrian government has no information on them.

Conclusion

“In conclusion, we agree with President Abbas’ recent statement that the final status negotiations are moving so slowly, with so few obvious results, that it is very unlikely negotiations will be completed by the deadline at the end of the year. This conclusion is widely shared, and may prove to be tragic. The combination of little or no progress on final status issues and a regression on the roadmap issues – settlements, checkpoints, etc. – and the closure of Gaza – all this means that the frustration level among Palestinians may be reaching the boiling point.

“Therefore, it is essential that we find an alternative and that includes a ceasefire, exchange of prisoners, negotiations between Israel and Syria and some rapprochement between Fatah and Hamas.

“No important achievement has ever occurred in the Middle East without taking a risk. I hope the Israeli government, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, and the U.S. government are prepared to take risks for peace. The transformation of Israel in sixty years has been wonderful to behold. The next miracle for which we should all pray is the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state that will live in peace with Israel and will cooperate with all their neighbors for the future of the region and its children. The Holy Land is a place of miracles. It is time for the miracle of peace.”

After answering a number of questions in the public forum, I had a number of interviews including CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, Fox, Reuters, AP, AFP, Chicago Tribune, ABC, NPR, two Israeli TV channels, New York Times, Washington Post, Newsweek, and LA Times. Meetings with the leader of Arab Israelis, Ahmed Tibi, Yossi Beilin, and former Prime Minister Ben Amin concluded a very busy day. Still not having a private plane, we departed Israel about midnight on a Delta flight to Atlanta. As I had predicted to Bob Pastor and Steve Solarz, the entire trip was exciting, challenging, adventurous, adequately productive – and fun!

Jimmy Carter

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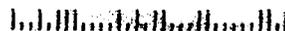
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