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Is Hamas viable 'partner for peace'?

Hateful covenant makes cooperation an impossibility

By GEOFFREY A. BERG

A PPEARING on CNN last Sunday, Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar demanded that Israel change its flag.

The co-chairman of the terrorist group responsible for murdering hundreds of civilians wants the Jewish state to remove each of the blue stripes at the flag's top and bottom because, he said, "[t]hey signify Israel's borders stretching from the Euphrates River to the Nile River." Zahar's statement provides extraordinary insight into the ideology of the party just elected to represent the Palestinian people. His comments underscore why negotiation with Hamas is not only undesirable, but impossible.

Enshrined in Hamas' founding document is the belief that "the Jews covet expansion from the Nile to the Euphrates." It claims that "the Jews" want to take over Egypt, Iraq and everything in between.

Hamas' proof? As Zahar said, hiding in plain sight on the Israeli flag is a secret plan. With the banner, Jews affirm their conspiracy to conquer substantial portions of the Arab world and oppress its people.

Hamas arrives at its conclusions through a mixture of religious zealotry and paranoia. Its disdain for Israeli Jews is nearly matched by its hatred for Americans. In 2004, Hamas declared itself at war not only with Israel, but the United States as well. It condemned President Bush as "the enemy of God, enemy of Islam."

Hamas has been clear that it wants no part of any peace process because it does not want peace with Israel. Its goal is to destroy it. To Hamas, genocide against Israeli Jews is a non-negotiable religious duty.

Israel, on the other hand, long ago accepted the inevitability of a Palestinian state. Having internalized this fact, it unilaterally withdrew from Gaza and parts of the West Bank last summer. Instead of seeing this unprecedented act for what it was — an Israeli abandonment of territory the Palestinians had demanded as part of their hoped-for state — Zahar and Hamas believe that such withdrawal is further evidence of Israeli expansion. After all, those stripes are still on the flag.

In addition to their desire to control Arab territory, Hamas believes "the Jews" conspire to manipulate world government, finance and media. How does it know? The Hamas Covenant says that the Jewish plan "has been laid out in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion..."

The Protocols is a 19th century forgery concocted by the Russian secret police to paint Jews as instruments of evil. Like Hamas, Hitler cited it as evidence of Jewish wickedness. It was debunked a hundred

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NO: No hypocrisy in isolating victor

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years ago. But Umm Nidal, a new Hamas member of Parliament, believes it. She takes to heart what . . . death for the case of Allah."

Nidal raised her six children to kill themselves and take as many Jews with them as possible. She was filmed joyfully preparing one of her sons for a suicide mission, during which he blew himself up at a Jewish religious school, murdering five teenagers and wounding 23 others. Two other sons were killed while trying to carry out similar acts. When she learned of the death of her first son, Nidal

handed out chocolate in celebration. During her campaign, she proudly announced that she was willing to "sacrifice [her] other sons for the struggle."

Negotiation presupposes that both parties will act rationally based on available facts. People who hold Hamas' views can be counted on to do the opposite. Nonetheless, some suggest that the United States and Israel should deal with Hamas because it won an election, runs hospitals and because the last Palestinian gov-

ernment was corrupt. The United States insists on the spread of democracy and Hamas

was democratically elected; it would therefore be hypocritical not to talk to the victor, they say. Nonsense.

Honoring democracy means respecting the rule of law. Hamas is a fascist organization committed to, among other things, genocide against Israel and oppression of minorities. (Gays, for example, can expect to be put to death during a Hamas administration.)

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Victory at the polls does not transform a violent movement into a debating society. Hitler was democratically elected and ran social services, and his predecessor was also corrupt; few believe Hitler could or should have been reasoned with.

A party committed to mass murder, which deals in a paranoid reality of its own making, cannot be expected to negotiate in good faith. Until it renounces violence, accepts Israel's right to exist, disarms and amends its hateful covenant, Hamas must be isolated, its funding withdrawn and, when necessary, confronted.