

WASHINGTON DATELINE

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Mondale and Mideast

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Vice President Walter Mondale said that just as respect for human rights is central to U.S. foreign policy values, so progress toward a just and lasting Middle East settlement is essential to the prospect of a more peaceful world.

In a 35 - minute speech last week to the World Affairs Council of Northern California at San Francisco's St. Francis Hotel, Mondale added that -- from all the talks on Mideast negotiations -- the Carter Administration "found deep fears and suspicion which must be overcome" if peace is to be achieved there.

"A genuine and lasting peace in the Mideast is of essential interest to all Americans," he said. "Conflict there carries the threat of a global confrontation, and runs the risk of nuclear war. War in the Mideast has profound economic consequence. It can, and has, damaged the economies of the entire world. It has been a tragedy for the nations of the region. Even short of war, continued confrontation encourages radicalization and instability."

Mondale went on to say that for three decades Israel has borne the burden of constant war, that more than half of its entire budget is dedicated to defense and that its citizens bear the highest average tax burden in the world. (More than

60% of their income goes for taxes.) The Vice President asserted that the U.S. has a special responsibility and a special opportunity to help bring about peace in the Mideast. "It's precisely because of our close ties with both Israel and her Arab neighbors that we're uniquely placed to promote the search for peace, to work for an improved understanding of each side's legitimate concerns, and to help them work out what we hope will be a basis for negotiation leading to a final peace in the Mideast."

He said that when the Carter Administration came to the White House last January, they found that the situation in the Mideast called for a new approach. "The step - by - step diplomacy of our predecessors had defused the immediate tensions produced by the war in 1973. But it was also evident that it would be increasingly difficult to achieve small diplomatic concessions when the ultimate shape of a peace agreement remained obscure. At the same time, it was unlikely that an agreement on a lasting peace could be achieved at one stroke in United Nations Council Resolution 242, which is supported by all the parties, provides a basis for the negotiations which are required if there is to be a settlement. But Resolution 242 doesn't, by itself, provide all that is required. We, therefore, decided to work with the parties concerned to outline the overall framework for an enduring peace. Our concept was to use this framework as the basis for a phased negotiation and implementation of specific steps toward peace. A major impediment to this approach lay in the fact that the positions of all sides were frozen. The words and phrases used by the parties had become encrusted with the fallout of countless

diplomatic battles." Mr. Mondale said the Administration tried to regain momentum in that process -- to encourage Arabs and Israelis to seriously begin thinking about the elements of peace and not to remain committed to particular words and formulations. He cited key elements of an overall framework for an agreement: (a) A commitment to a genuine and lasting peace demonstrated by concrete acts to normalize relations among the countries of the area. (b) The establishment of borders for Israel which are recognized by all and which can be kept secure. (c) A fair solution to the problem of the Palestinians.

As for the issue on the Palestinian people, Mondale described it as a "continuing tragedy," adding that there are two prerequisites for a lasting peace in this regard: (1) There must be a demonstrated willingness on the part of the Palestinians to live in peace alongside Israel. (2) The Palestinians must be given a stake in peace so that they will turn away from the violence of the past and toward a future in which they can express their legitimate political aspirations peacefully.

"Thus," Mondale said, "if the Palestinians are willing to exist in peace and are prepared to demonstrate that willingness, by recognizing Israel's right to exist in peace, we believe the Palestinians should be given a chance to shed their status as homeless refugees and to partake fully of the benefits of peace in the Mideast, including the possibility of some arrangements for a Palestinian homeland or entity -- preferably in association with Jordan."

"How this would be accomplished and the exact character of such an entity is, of course, something that would have to be decided by the parties themselves in the course of negotiation. However, the viability of this concept and the security of the region might be enhanced if this involved an association with Jordan."

Mondale concluded by emphasizing the importance of holding a Geneva Conference this year to provide the forum for "direct negotiations" among the parties concerned. "America can try to help establish the basis of trust necessary for peace," he said. "We can try to improve the atmosphere for communication. We can offer ideas, but we can't, in the end, determine whether peace or war is the fate of the Mideast. That can only be decided by Israel and her Arab neighbors. As we go forward in our mediating role, we'll have to expect from time to time to have differences with both sides. But these will be differences as to tactics. Our overall objectives will be those that we believe are now shared by all sides: a permanent and enduring peace in the Middle East."

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