

Former Israeli Officials Are Sowing Seeds of Confusion About the Taylor Force Act

An organization comprised of dozens of former Israeli generals and security officials has spurred confusion regarding the Jewish state's policy on the Palestinian Authority's (PA) payments to terrorists and their families.

In mid-June, a group called "Commanders for Israel's Security" (CIS) issued a statement directly contradicting the Israeli government's official stance on the terror payments. Appearing to present itself as representing the consensus in the Israeli security establishment, CIS asserted that passing the Taylor Force Act in the U.S. would pose the risk of weakening the PA and undermining the PA's security cooperation with Israel.

The American legislation—which is named after a U.S. Army veteran who was killed by a Palestinian terrorist in Jaffa in 2016—would cut U.S. economic aid to the PA if it continues to issue the terror payments. The proposal has been championed by the Trump administration and has broad bipartisan support on Capitol Hill.

Soon after CIS issued its statement against the legislation, a group of 13 retired security officials—notably comprised of individuals predominantly from the center-left of Israel's political establishment—responded in an op-ed for the *The Jerusalem Post*, writing that CIS is "fundamentally mistaken" in its opposition to U.S. efforts to punish the PA for incentivizing terrorism.

"The main obstacle to peace is the Palestinian attitude and that has never changed," Brig. Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser—director of the Project on Regional Middle East Developments at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

(JCPA), and one of the signatories on the op-ed in *The Jerusalem Post*—told . “The Palestinians still see themselves as being in a struggle, regardless of the fact that they [signed] the Oslo agreement with us back in 1993—they almost always ignore it.”

“Somebody has to tell them that, ‘You have to sit at the table with a real intention to make peace,’ and there’s no way to promote peace while you keep paying salaries to terrorists,” Kuperwasser added.

Dan Diker, director of the Political Warfare Project at the JCPA, said the Taylor Force Act “sends a very strong message to the PA leadership, which has not been sent before.” The message, he told , “is that you cannot claim to be a peace partner and fund terrorism at the same time against those that you insist you’re trying to make peace with.”

The CIS statement creates a major challenge for both Israel and the U.S. because it appears to convey conflicting messages within the Jewish state on issues of national security, Diker explained.

According to Diker, Israel’s typically vibrant and dramatic political discourse “gets mistranslated, frequently, into conclusions that are incorrectly drawn by U.S. governments, which posit that Israel is prepared to make deep concessions both on the level of overlooking Palestinian violations of Oslo and violations of international law, for the sake of continued security cooperation.”

The current debate over the Taylor Force Act, Diker said, is “a perfect example” of a situation that is untenable for Israel, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government has made definitive statements that the PA’s terror payments are completely unacceptable and must end.

The conundrum created by CIS, in Diker’s estimation, is that generals and security officials “who have done tremendous

things for the state of Israel” have issued a collective political statement “undermining the clear message of the government of Israel.”

“[The CIS members] have a political agenda, and they say it clearly,” said Diker. “They have an interpretation of a two-state solution, and part of that interpretation is that Israel should at all costs prop up the PA ... and that includes overlooking a severe economic punishment of the PA for this type of policy.”

Diker said CIS positions itself as representing the consensus view in Israel, which “is not true.” He said the most important point in the op-ed opposing the CIS statement is that it is signed by officials predominantly from Israel’s center-left, who state that CIS members “do not represent any kind of broad consensus in Israeli society.”

“These commanders who stood up to the CIS are not from the right wing ... These are people that come from the Labor party, that come from the center-left part of the political map, and they’re saying that CIS is actually threatening to endanger Israel’s security by communicating opposition to the Taylor Force Act,” Diker said.

Diker added that the CIS statement sends a confusing message to the American Jewish community, which may misinterpret the statement as representing the official stance of Israel’s security establishment.

CIS did not immediately return a request for comment from .

Shawn Evenhaim, chairman of the Israeli-American Coalition for Action advocacy group, which endorsed the Taylor Force Act, told that the U.S. government “should use all tools its disposal, including its economic leverage, to pressure the Palestinian Authority to end the abhorrent culture of hate and the glorification of terrorism fostered by its official institutions. Ending incitement is in America’s interest,

Israel's interest and in the interest of everyone who seeks peace in the region."

"We have been proud to help facilitate a bipartisan effort now underway in the U.S. Congress to pass this legislation," Evenhaim said, "ensuring that America addresses the issue of Palestinian incitement in a way that is both thoughtful and meaningful." {eo}

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