

Israel's road to peace

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As American Jews, we work hard to support Israel - to be a good friend to Israel - and to help create a secure future for our brothers and sisters there. To truly be a good friend to Israel requires constantly asking ourselves what will bring about long-term peace and security. The Israel-Hezbollah conflict made it plain that peace cannot be achieved solely through military superiority - it even brought into question whether military superiority can assure military victory. Unilateral withdrawal from Gaza demonstrated that unilateral actions don't bring peace or security. The settlement movement confirms daily that territorial expansion is inimical to peace. As good friends of Israel, it is incumbent on us to learn from these lessons of recent history. It is time to reevaluate the actions Israelis can take to ensure a peaceful and secure future, and what actions we, as American Jewish supporters of Israel, can take to help them.

Israel will only achieve peace, security, and hope for the future when its neighbors - especially the Palestinians - achieve peace, security, and hope for the future. Acting boldly and working for peace and security for both peoples is not without risk. However, blindly and naively facilitating Israel's current position vis-à-vis the Palestinians is a far greater risk. Expanding settlements, closing borders, building fences, and waging war, all harm Israeli society and security and wreak havoc on its image in the world. As supporters of Israel we ignore these risks at our own - and Israel's - peril.

All of us have been accustomed since youth to believe that if one side of a conflict wins then the other must lose. This zero-sum outlook can conceal the fact that an enduring win actually requires both sides to win. Winning at another's expense is typically temporary. It lasts only until the "other side" regroupes or finds other allies or changes to a "winning" tactic. As supporters of Israel, this dualistic win or lose idea informs our attitude toward Israel's *matzav*

(situation). It has led to a harmful, in fact deadly, blind spot in how we view Israel. This blind spot allows us to see short-term wins, but hides their long-term negative consequences. It is unlikely that "wins" such as targeted assassinations or military operations in the occupied territories will be any more lasting in the future than they have been in the past.

Each side of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict sees itself as David in a "David and Goliath" struggle. Each side sees its own victimization clearly but fails to recognize its own aggression. Each side has become dependent on retaliation. With a formal army and superior firepower, Israel suffers greatly from the illusion that it can consistently retaliate, each time with more force, to maintain security. As the victim of suicide bombing and fire from thousands of makeshift rockets, Israel, not surprisingly, is drawn to strike back. However, military action and repression has only served to foment further problems and create more insecurity.

As Jews, we have inherited millennia of discrimination and oppression - manifested by ghettos, pogroms, expulsion, inquisitions, banishment and the Holocaust. This history makes it difficult for us to comprehend our own strength. Even with a thriving democracy, a standing army, and a working economy, it is hard for us as Jews to see Israel as strong. It is time to recognize this strength and to act both generously and courageously and to reap the rewards of doing so. Acting bravely and recognizing the importance of human rights and security for all can turn the tide in the Middle East. Until then, the tense balance and cycle of retaliation is likely to continue.

There are existential threats to Israel. Iran and its client Hezbollah have both given voice to such threats. But until there is real peace and a final and fair settlement with the Palestinians, these threats will only grow and help Israel's enemies grow in strength. The World Bank, the United Nations, and many human rights organizations recognize that Palestinians live in dire conditions. The

desperate conditions of Palestinian life and its unstable government are threats to Israel. Unstable governments cannot keep peace, protect their own people, improve living conditions, or keep terrorism from growing. People who live in desperate conditions do desperate things. Palestinians desperate for a change in their living conditions voted for a Hamas government. The reaction of the Western world made their conditions even worse. These conditions are the heart of a growing threat to Israel; the more unstable the situation is in the West Bank and Gaza the greater the threat to peace. Backing and working for human rights on both sides and a stable government for the Palestinians is the only way out of the current stalemate. It is the only way to be a responsible supporter of Israel.

The Talmud teaches that "All Jews are responsible for one another." Each of us has witnessed a friend behave in a way that might appear reasonable in the short-term, but which will clearly create long-term problems. Often the friend is caught up in the moment or acting out of fear or responding to a previous offense and thus cannot see the consequences of his or her actions. Believing in military strength may be

a natural outgrowth of our history of oppression. However, given the reality of what we have seen our brothers and sisters experience in Israel, it is time as American Jews to move beyond this failed mentality towards one that holds a true promise of future peace and security.

Recent events in Israel give cause for optimism. For example, it is imperative to support the ceasefire in Gaza. It is equally imperative to back Prime Minister Olmert's insight that Israel's restraint to ceasefire violations gives the Palestinian Authority a chance to control those responsible for firing rockets and thereby improves the standing of moderate Palestinians. Modest steps forward by our own government such as Secretary of State Rice's support for Prime Minister Olmert's speech at Sde Boker merits backing from the American Jewish community. The Iraq Study Group's recommendation that the US initiates Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations to achieve a comprehensive peace is an important and clear recognition of the situation that deserves our enthusiastic backing. As Americans, we have the advantage of seeing the situation from a distance, and taking advantage of this distance can become a powerful tool to help our fellow Jews in Israel live in peace with their neighbors.