

Security and Coexistence:

An Alternative Approach to Breaking the Deadlock between Israel and the Palestinians

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Brief Analysis

(a) Hostility and hatred. Fifty years after the creation of Israel hostility, hatred and suspicion still characterize the political landscape of the Middle East. On the most basic level, Palestinians and Arabs have still not fully accepted the legitimacy of a non-Arab, non-Moslem entity like the state of Israel in the region. Must we wait for these attitudes to change? I believe not. The relentless effort to achieve peace should remain a guiding principle in all our considerations.

(b) An unprecedented arms race (both conventional and non-conventional) is currently under way in the Middle East. Israel, as a country which absorbs mass immigration, having to meet social, economic and humanitarian needs on a large scale, cannot and does not want to compete in this race.

Israel is a small country—its size is 24,000 sq. km (about 10,000 sq. m. equals the size of the state of New Jersey). Everything is on a small scale: the distance from the Jordan river (Israel's Eastern border) to Tel Aviv on the coastline is 70Km. (44 Miles), to Haifa - 60 Km. (37 Miles); to Jerusalem - 30 Km. (19 Miles).

> A prominent feature of the Middle East today is the ongoing conventional and non-conventional military build-up by Arab countries surrounding Israel. In addition, the threat of weapons of mass destruction emanating from such countries as Iran and Iraq make territory and strategic depth vital for security in general, and for Israel in particular. No state has ever given up essential strategic depth or territory. In the case of Israel, we are dealing with a small territory and minimal strategic depth.

(c) Terrorism. (1) A strategic threat. Terrorism in the Middle East is not just a tactical problem. Terror activity preceded and instigated almost all wars in the region. Cross-border terrorism (against Israel) served as a catalyst in the past for Soviet/Russian penetration to the Middle East. (2) Without a concerted regional struggle against terrorism, peace efforts and peace itself will continue to be held as hostages of terror and its instigators.

(d) The refugee problem. This is the real tragedy of the conflict. About one million Palestinians left Israel during the war of independence, mainly after being encouraged to do so by the invading Arab countries. At the same time, Israel absorbed about 1 million Jews from various Arab and Muslim countries, who fled and left all their property behind. The solution: resettling refugees in the places where they live (through a joint Arab-Israeli, international effort). As for the 1967 refugees, the possibility of their return should be considered. As for the rest, a fair solution would be mutual compensation (for Palestinians and Jews from Arab countries alike).

(e) Trends and future developments. Two competing trends in the Middle East: (1) A gradual development of understanding and concern regarding economic development, modernization and openness to the West. (2) Increased radical Islamic fundamentalism in its various manifestations.

There is an ongoing conflict between these two trends in many countries in the Middle East. There is no doubt that if

the first trend prevails this will be a very significant development in the region towards the establishment of durable peace. However, this is going to be a prolonged, protracted process and meanwhile immediate risks and dangers still exist.

Peace Agreements With Egypt—A relatively cold but very important peace agreement.

With Jordan—A developing peace, which I am content to be a partner of, and a contributor to its development.

With the Palestinians - (a) The present government has accepted the Oslo Accord, despite the complexities and the risks inherited in it. I personally, like the whole government of Israel, want and believe it to be possible and necessary to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

(b) The Oslo Agreement is very important for the Palestinians since it is the only official, agreed upon document they've got.

(c) For Israel the time dimension that will allow for development of normalized relations of coexistence, is most important.

(d) The Palestinians, suspecting that Israel does not intend to implement the agreement, are interested in exerting pressure on Israel (thus, suspending and delaying implementation of what could be already agreed upon). It should be emphasized that any pressure that will increase the security threats to Israel is totally unacceptable.

(e) Although the Palestinian Authority (PA) already controls 98 percent of the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria, their main complaint is that the areas under their control are like "Swiss Cheese", lacking contiguity, while security checks and road blocks cause hardship to the civilian population.

(f) Israel insists on reciprocity—both sides must honor and fulfill their commitments. Unfortunately, in many cases the Palestinians have not followed this principle and have not fulfilled their commitments. A few examples: The Palestinian Covenant calling for the destruction of Israel, which has to be voided by the Palestinian National Council (PNC) has not been changed. Reducing the size of the Palestinian armed forces to its agreed upon size has not been fulfilled. The Hebron Agreement, which the Palestinian signed has yet to be implemented. Moreover the Palestinian Authority is not conducting a true full-scale struggle against the terror infrastructure in the areas under its control, as it committed itself to do in the agreement.

(g) Judea and Samaria—the historical, cultural roots of the Jewish people: One must always remember that Judea and Samaria—the so-called 'Occupied Territories'—are the cradle of the Jewish People. There has been an uninterrupted Jewish life and presence in Israel for thousands of years and no nation or country on earth would give up territory and historical sites which are at the roots of its national existence (the Cave of the Patriarchs, Rachel Tomb, Beth-El, Shilo—to mention a few). Yet, Israel has decided that it is willing to compromise and make concessions in order to reach peace.

How Can the Process be Advanced? Proposed Principles (a) Crisis avoidance—In the course of the negotiations all efforts must be exerted to prevent such crises which may cause a breakdown of the entire process.

(b) Israel must try and do whatever is possible to ease and improve daily life conditions of Palestinians in the territories.

(c) Israel must protect and insist on maintaining its basic strategic requirements for its security and existence, which have to include security zones.

(d) Israel's position must be stated in clear unequivocal terms: what it can and cannot do.

(e) In principle, two parallel tracks to advance the peace process must be pursued:

1. Political strategic track: (borders, security, territorial and reciprocal agreements etc.)

2. Humanitarian economic track: (improving economic conditions, humanitarian incentives, mutual confidence building measures etc.)

The process has to be divided into two phases:

1. Providing for Palestinian contiguity, which will allow free passage and travel within a defined period of time (in territories under their control). Full P.A. control over parts of the territory and full control over 98 percent of the population, which they already have.

The security zones will remain in Israel's hands and under full Israeli security control.

2. Developing security, economic and civilian cooperation in order to enhance trust and confidence for mutual peaceful coexistence. The greater the cooperation is the easier will be the path to a permanent agreement.

Summary The way I view the situation today, it is possible to reach an agreement with the Palestinians in the interim phase, which would be somewhat similar to the concept of non-belligerency. This will provide the Palestinians with the possibility of keeping and holding to the Oslo Accords and Israel the necessary time to examine and see that conditions for a true and lasting peace have materialized. ❖

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