

Arab States and a Clear Commitment

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Articles & Testimony

Testimony before the House Committee on International Relations

The horrific attack on America is a defining moment not just for us, but also for the world. It was an attack on civilization. It was an attack on humanity. It requires a change in our mindset. We are no longer countering terror; we are waging war against it. There can be no neutrals in such a struggle. As President Bush said, "You are either with us or you are with the terrorists."

In this struggle, as the President also made clear, we must use all the instruments in our arsenal: intelligence, law enforcement, financial, diplomatic, and military. But to be successful, we must focus as well on the psychological dimension of fighting terror. Terror must be discredited. It must be delegitimized. We must wage an international campaign against the use of terror for any purpose. No "cause" justifies its use. Any cause that employs terror is itself delegitimized.

Nowhere is it more important for the international community to make this point than in the Middle East. While terror is a global phenomenon, it is a special problem in the Middle East precisely because it has been treated too often as legitimate. In the "struggle" with Israel, suicide bombers are portrayed as martyrs, not as monsters. Killing innocent non-combatants has been glorified, not rejected. Recruiting kids for human destruction has been celebrated, not condemned.

There can be no victory over terror if a climate that justifies it in certain circumstances is pervasive in one part of the world. It is good that Arab leaders condemned the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. But such condemnations will mean little in practice if there is no change in day-to-day behaviors that convey a tolerance for the use of terror. And, it has not been only the fringe that has done so.

Check nearly any Friday sermon broadcast by the Palestinian Authority over the last year and you will see that suicide bombers are glorified and calls for jihad against Israel and the United States are commonplace. The editorial in al-Hayat al-Jadida, perhaps the leading Palestinian newspaper, stated that the suicide bombers in Israel were in the "noble tradition" of those who bombed the U.S. Marines in Lebanon. The date of its publication: September 11, 2001. The Palestinian media and public posture are not unique in the area. A few days prior to the attack, an Egyptian journalist in one of Egypt's mainstream newspapers described how he had swelled with pride when he saw

the suicide bombing of the pizza parlor in Jerusalem.

I am not calling for Arab leaders to prevent a free press. (Indeed, I would like to see a free press flourish in the area.) I am also not saying that the Palestinians specifically or the Arabs generally must give up their cause or their grievance; I continue to believe that the Palestinians have legitimate aspirations that must be addressed. But I am saying that we are long past the point where Middle Eastern leaders can continue to use their media as a safety valve, designed to release anger and appease extremist sentiments. They must discredit those sentiments, not acquiesce in them. They must condemn all such efforts to legitimize the use of terror.

It is time they made it clear that peace is legitimate; terror is not. That suicide bombing is not a reflection of Islam, but its perversion. That the Palestinian cause is not promoted by terror, but undermined by it. That Arab interests and everything they value are not advanced by terror, but threatened by it.

In short, it is time for Arab leaders to level with their publics and make it clear they will not tolerate terror. Absent that, it will be very difficult to succeed in the fight against terror. Absent that, Arab leaders should not expect that we would intervene decisively on Arab-Israeli peace. We have a responsibility to promote peace, but we stand no chance of succeeding in an environment where terror is considered a legitimate part of the struggle. If we are prepared to do our part, Middle Eastern leaders must also be prepared to do theirs.

For Chairman Arafat, this is the sine qua non for having a relationship with us. He declared a ceasefire because he knew his "cause" might be discredited otherwise. He understands well the consequence of his being considered the equivalent of Osama bin Laden. He understands well the consequence of being on the wrong side of the international community. And, he understands well the consequence of Hamas or Islamic Jihad suicide bombings in Israel now in terms of possible Israeli and American responses.

But his words cannot be taken at face value. What matters now is his behavior. Commitments must not only be made, but fulfilled. He must stop the glorification of suicide bombers, taking down the banners in Palestinian schools that treat bombers as heroes. He must make arrests of those who are planning or promoting terror. The Palestinian Authority can no longer be a safe haven for those who would kill Israelis.

For those who question whether Chairman Arafat has the power to do this, the answer is that every time he has cracked down he has succeeded. True, the environment is more difficult for him today, but he has contributed to that environment and he has a responsibility to change it.

Should he do so, it will be important to develop a credible negotiating process to deal with Palestinian grievances and needs. There is no military solution for the Israelis. No amount of force will extinguish Palestinian aspirations. By the same token, violence will not work for the Palestinians and no one should underestimate how destructive the effects of the last year have been on the ability to pursue peace.

We are not in the position we were at the end of the Clinton administration. We cannot simply pick up where things left off. Chairman Arafat could not say yes to the Clinton ideas-ideas that would have produced an independent state in nearly all of the West Bank and an enlarged Gaza; a capital for that state in the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem; security arrangements that included an international presence in the Jordan Valley six years into the implementation period; and an unlimited right of return for Palestinians to their state, not to Israel.

Chairman Arafat's inability to accept the Clinton ideas-along with the violence and the new emphasis on right of return to Israel-convicted the Israeli public that he could not accept any ideas and was, in fact, neither interested in nor capable of making peace. Unfortunately, for their part, the Palestinian public has a mirror image of the Israelis. The Palestinian public was never told by their leadership what was offered and what was not accepted. They were constantly told that the Israelis were resisting their obligations on peace, rejecting the implementation of "international legitimacy." They believed that after seven-and-a-half years of Oslo, rather than ending Israeli control

of their lives, the process was cementing that control. And, though, they initiated the Intifada, they saw the Israeli response as somehow treating them as if they were subhuman.

In an environment in which each side has lost faith in the process, it is an illusion to think that the most existential issues of Jerusalem, refugees, and borders can be resolved. The objectives at this stage must be more limited. Reestablishing faith in peaceful coexistence and peacemaking must be the first order of priority.

I believe that the only way to do that is to focus again on the fundamental premise of peacemaking: the Israelis get security; the Palestinians get an end of Israeli control of their lives. Both sides must see this premise being fulfilled not in words, not in abstractions, but in reality. Every step taken by each side must affirm it. Faith will not be restored overnight. But if the Israelis begin to feel secure, and the Palestinians begin to feel freer, peacemaking will again become feasible.

We should have no illusions. It will take time to recreate the conditions in which the core issues of permanent status can be addressed. In the meantime, assuming stabilization, we should seek to promote a more realistic agenda for the resumption of political negotiations. That agenda can deal with statehood, security arrangements, and disengagement.

Each can provide a bridge to the core questions of permanent status. Each has an inherent logic and need. Statehood as a principle is not contentious between the two sides. But what are the attributes of this state? What kind of relations will it have with Israel? Will its economy be linked to Israel's? Questions about water, environment, health, agriculture, must all be addressed. Similarly, there will be no agreement without systematic security arrangements. Dealing with terror, defining the terms of security cooperation, and exploring border security regimes are all essential issues for the present and the future. While security arrangements cannot be finalized until borders can be resolved, the psychology for taking the next step can be developed by productive negotiations on security. Finally, disengagement, or what some in Israel call separation, also responds to the temper of the times. Both sides need to disengage from the possible points of friction between them. Disengagement will involve some Israeli withdrawal. It is the way to deal with the territorial question in the near term. Done mutually, it can do much to foster security for the Israelis and end of Israeli control for the Palestinians.

There are no panaceas. For us and for the parties, the starting point in fighting terror and promoting peace is truth-telling. Truth-telling in terms of making it clear that terror is a threat and will not be tolerated. Truth-telling in terms of acknowledging that both sides, Israelis and Palestinians, have real grievances that must be alleviated. Truth-telling in terms of telling publics that there is no alternative to negotiations and hard compromises. And, particularly for us, truth-telling in terms of being willing to say who is living up to their commitments and who is not. ❖

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