

PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Chicagoland Jews join in an Open Letter from American Jews to Our Government

IN THE WAKE OF THE recent bloodshed in the Middle East, many Israelis and Palestinians—and their supporters in the United States—have reverted to an us-versus-them thinking in which they see themselves as righteous victims and ignore or minimize the injustices they have done, and continue to do, to the other people.

In fact, both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples have suffered great wrongs at the hands of the other, albeit in different and unequal ways; both have legitimate grievances, legitimate fears, and legitimate distrust of the other people's willingness to compromise for the sake of peace.

Though the signers of this letter have a wide range of views about the blame for the present situation, we have a common view of what a solution will have to consist of.

Incremental attempts at building trust have reached an impasse. The only alternative to endless war is a comprehensive settlement based on simple but radical principles:

- ▶ Israeli and Palestinian lives are equally precious.
- ▶ The Israeli and Palestinian peoples have equal rights to national self-determination and to live in peace and security.
- ▶ The Israeli and Palestinian peoples have equal rights to a fair share of the land and resources of historic Palestine.

Fair-minded people throughout the world have long understood with some precision what a tenable solution, respecting these principles, would entail:

- ▶ Two national states, Israel and Palestine, with equal sovereignty, equal rights and equal responsibilities.
- ▶ Partition along the pre-1967 border as modified only by minor mutually agreed territorial swaps.
- ▶ Israeli evacuation of all settlements in the occupied territories except those within the agreed swapped areas.

- ▶ Palestinian and Arab recognition of Israel and renunciation of any further territorial claims.

- ▶ Palestinian acceptance of negotiated limitations on the "right of return" in exchange for financial compensation for refugees.

Several years ago, polls showed that majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians were willing to accept a compromise settlement of this kind. Despite the current carnage, that may still be the case; but compromise is difficult when majorities on both sides support provocative military actions that they view as purely defensive, while powerful minorities pursue maximalist territorial aims.

If Israelis and Palestinians are unwilling or unable to negotiate a workable peace, the international community must take the lead in promoting one. This is in the long-term interest not only of Israelis and Palestinians, but also of Americans: recent events have made painfully clear that our own national security is deeply undermined by instability and injustice in the Middle East.

The U.S. bears a special responsibility for the current tragic impasse, by virtue of our massive economic and military support for the Israeli government: \$500 per Israeli citizen per year. Our country has an extraordinary leverage on Israeli policy, if only our government would dare to use it. As American Jews who care deeply about the long-term security of Israel, we call on our government to make continued aid conditional on Israeli acceptance of an internationally agreed two-state settlement.

Rejectionists on both sides will of course attack any such settlement. Foreign troops may well be required to enforce it, and they must be prepared to accept casualties. One may nevertheless hope that majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians will realize that an imperfect peace is preferable to endless war.

There is no guarantee that this approach will work; but it is virtually guaranteed that all alternatives will fail.

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To date, over 3,300 people nationwide have signed this letter. Please help spread the word! To add your signature to this petition or for additional information, go to www.peacemideast.org; or send an e-mail to Alan Sokal (sokal@physics.nyu.edu), giving your name as you would like it printed, along with affiliation or city/state; or write to Bruce Robbins, Department of English and Comparative Literature, Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, NY, NY 10027. Contributions to help publish this letter in other newspapers will be gratefully accepted. For additional local publications in Chicago contact Yali Amit (amit@marx.uchicago.edu).