

**ANOTHER VIEWPOINT**  
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**ISRAEL'S SEARCH FOR PEACE: TIME FOR REDIRECTION**

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I am convinced that Israel wants peace. I am equally convinced that Israel has been following the wrong approach to achieve that goal, as evident in the fact that peace has so far remained a dream. Some critics will question putting the responsibility on Israel for this failure. Others will question whether Israel genuinely wants peace. I admit that the opponents of Israel must carry some of the responsibility, but not all of it. I also suggest that the logic of Israel's existence leaves little doubt that peace must be a high priority objective for the Israeli policy makers. It is true that the Israeli terms for peace are not clear and they keep changing, but most such terms are negotiable and reconcilable. Why then has the "peace" attempts by the Israeli government failed so far?

First it should be stated clearly that the "enemies" of Israel have not been cooperative in the peace making process. They have rarely made their demands clear. They have rarely presented a unified feasible platform for reaching a settlement with Israel. However, it is equally true that Israel has not made it seem logical or justifiable for such cooperation to be forthcoming. Israel's policies and actions have generally inspired less, rather than more cooperation, even by a country which has opted for peace, such as Egypt.

To say that the behavior of Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict has not invited cooperation is to put it mildly. Israel has continued to occupy Arab territory for more than 20 years; it has

subjected over one and one-half million Palestinians to oppression, cruelty, and incitement; it has failed to acknowledge the basic right of the Palestinians to a national home in Palestine; it has continued to insist on dealing with the wrong parties in the conflict, in an attempt to obliterate the identity and basic rights of Palestinians, the primary legitimate party to the conflict. Israel has also set a poor example of cooperation in the treatment of its Arab citizens, whether in education, the labor market, or the development of the economy. These Israeli policies have no doubt aggravated the conflict and made peace a more difficult objective to achieve. It may be easy to rationalize Israel's behavior, given the deep feelings of insecurity the Israeli people suffer from, and realistically so. But it would be far from easy to justify or rationalize Israel's failure to seek other avenues for dealing with the conflict, which could invite cooperation and increase the probability of reaching a peaceful settlement with the Palestinians and other Arabs. Israel knows that the occupation policy has been a failure and it is threatening the moral fiber on which the Israeli society was established. Oppression of the occupied Arab people has not silenced them; on the contrary, it has hardened them and strengthened their resistance. Israel's refusal to recognize the basic rights of the Palestinians has not diminished their solidarity or compromised their identity; on the contrary it has mobilized support and recognition of these rights by many nations. The internal conflict within the Palestinian liberation movement centers on strategies and tactics, not on the identity or objectives of the Palestinian people. Israel's treatment of its Arab citizens has failed to promote their assimilation in the Israeli society, has failed to isolate them intellectually and culturally from the larger Arab society, and has failed to mobilize them as a bridge for reconciliation with the Palestinian leadership at large. Finally, while Israel continues to enjoy blind support from its major backers such as the U.S., the U.K., and implicitly the Soviet

Union, it has failed to recruit new supporters around the world. Why does Israel persist in these counter-productive policies?

Though Israel's policies have failed so far to bring it closer to a peace settlement, the policies of its opponents have not been more successful either, whether by reducing Israel's power in the Middle East, or by rendering a peaceful settlement closer at hand than previously. In other words, a stalemate has developed, but Israel has maintained its earlier gains and position of power. From the standpoint, Israel has had no compelling reasons to change its policies, whether because of mounting military pressure by its opponents, or because of moral pressure by its supporters. Another argument against changing the policy by Israel is the sustained hope of achieving peace on its own terms, with as little compromise as possible. This hope has frequently been reinforced by the inability of the Arabs to raise the costs to Israel of continuing its current policies, and by the continued moral and material support of Israel by at least three of the five permanent members of the Security Council, regardless of the policy implemented. Finally, given the fragmentation of the electorate in the Israeli society, it may have been a safe policy to avoid a show down by postponing any new policies as long as the government is under little pressure to do so.

All these arguments suggest that Israeli policies may have been less of a failure than implied above, at least in the short run. Yet, one can hardly avoid the main questions of whether Israel has come closer to a peace settlement and whether it can afford to ignore its primary objective of creating a secure and peaceful existence for its people. These are long term and long standing objectives which cannot be traded for short term objectives. On the other hand, Israel can hardly postpone reaching a settlement with the Palestinians much longer. Not only is

the economic burden becoming heavier and the resistance becoming stronger, but the skepticism of the Israeli people and of Jews around the world toward these policies has been mounting. The Israelis and other Jews know that the longer the conflict lasts, the more difficult it becomes to resolve it.

Israel still can and must redirect its policies if it desires to enhance the prospects of peace in the Middle East. Israel can begin by recognizing that the conflict with the Palestinians will not go away by waiting because the Palestinians themselves will not go away. Israel must also begin to acknowledge that by recognizing the rights of the Palestinians to a secure national home in Palestine, similar to a secure national home for the Jews in Israel, the closer at hand a peace settlement will be, and the sooner these rights are recognized, the more secure Israel itself will be. At the same time, the sooner Israel modifies its policies towards the people of the Occupied Territories, in favor of reconciliation and cooperation, the easier it becomes to resolve the larger conflict. Finally, the sooner Israel recognizes that equalization between Israeli citizens, Arabs and Jews alike is a critical step toward a solution, the closer to realization its attempts to bring about peace will be.

Several years ago, I had an interview with an Israeli cabinet minister. At one point he bluntly stated that he had followed the career of Yasir Arafat for the last 14 years and that if he had been in his place, he would have probably behaved in the same way. On the other hand, I have talked with many Palestinians who have stated that they would have behaved in the same way as the Israeli policy makers have behaved, had they been in their place. Both parties made these statements not only as experts in strategy, but also as empathizers with each other. Both parties would advance the cause of peace if they would turn such empathy into action.

Speaking of empathy as a moral issue, Israel has earned much deserved admiration by not having a death penalty, even against Palestinians convicted of “terrorism” against Israeli Jews; this is a good example to follow.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is bound to be resolved someday. To agree in principle to a just and peaceful settlement will not only expedite the conflict resolution, but it will also help to make better neighbors in the future. I shall deal with the responsibility of the Palestinians in the next AVP; here I want to emphasize that Israel may be more successful in assuring its security by reconciling its own existence with the legitimate rights and security of the Palestinian people.

In 1975 Mattityahu Peled and I suggested a four-step sequence of action and reaction as a challenge to the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization to implement prior to the then - pending Geneva Conference. These steps are:

“First, the Government of Israel and the P.L.O. should issue declarations by which they denounce war and territorial expansionism and commit themselves to the principle that all territorial war gains are returnable.”

“Second, the Government of Israel should issue a declaration by which it recognizes the right of the Palestinian people to form a state of their own west of the River Jordan within internationally recognized boundaries.

“Third, the P.L.O. should reciprocate by issuing a declaration recognizing the right of the Israeli people to live in their own state peacefully and securely.

“Fourth, the Government of Israel should declare itself ready to negotiate with the P.L.O., directly, as the representative of the Palestinian people, on all future relationships between their two states.”

These steps are still valid today and timely, to be implemented before, or in lieu of the prospective International Conference. Mutual recognition and direct negotiation are the shortest cut to a peaceful and just settlement.

Next AVP: The Palestine Liberation Organization’s Search for Peace: Time for Redirection.  
AVP is published by Elias H. Tuma and is open for viewpoints of others.