

It's Time to End the Violence in the Middle East—Once and For All

Convene an International Middle East Peace Conference to Impose a Final Settlement on All Parties

For the short while that the world's attention is focused on the Middle East, let's use it to insist on an end to this struggle in all its dimensions.

A Call for Lasting Peace

We call for an International Peace Conference to impose a fair and lasting solution to all aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the conflict between Israel and other states in the region. Why do we say "impose"? There are too many forces in each country in the region who are committed to continuing this struggle forever. Their provocations will continue until the international community stops the violence once and for all and imposes conditions of security that will allow the peace and reconciliation forces in each country to flourish.

Such a solution would be based on the following conditions:

- The creation of an economically and politically viable Palestinian state (roughly on the pre-1967 borders with minor border modifications mutually agreed upon between Israel and Palestine); and simultaneously the full and unequivocal recognition by Palestinians and the State of Palestine and all surrounding Arab states of the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state (e.g. celebrating Jewish holidays and the Sabbath in the same way that Christmas gets official sanction as a state holiday in the U.S.) while offering full and equal rights to all of its non-Jewish citizens (preferential treatment for Jews only with regard to immigration, and that to be phased out when anti-Semitism in the world has disappeared; and the same preferential treatment for Palestinians in the Palestinian state as long as they face discrimination or reduced rights or threats to their safety in other parts of the world);
- An international consortium to provide generous reparations for Palestinians who have lost homes or property from 1947 to the present, and generous reparations for Jewish refugees from Arab states from 1947–1967;
- A long-term international peacekeeping force to separate Hezbollah and Israel in southern Lebanon and northern Israel and to protect Israel and Palestine from each other; to police the borders and the corridor that will need to be established linking Gaza with the West Bank, and to protect both Israel and Palestine from other forces in the region who might seek to control or destroy either state; and
- The quick imposition of robust sanctions against any party that refuses to sign or violates these agreements.

Though there may be endless wars for the next thirty or forty years until the parties are forced into this kind of an agreement by the amount of suffering that is imposed on everyone (after all, as Hezbollah has just begun to demonstrate, the Arab world will eventually catch up to Israel's level of military hardware and capacity to fight devastating wars), we think it would be in the interests of Israel, the Palestinians, the Arab states, the Jewish people, the U.S. and the world if this solution could be imposed on the parties now. It breaks our heart to see the suffering of the Lebanese people, the Palestinian people, and the Israeli people when we know how unnecessary it is. The basic issues can be resolved. No matter how maximalist the fantasies are on each side about eliminating their enemies, the truth is that the majority of the people on all sides of the struggle would embrace peace if they thought it could be established in ways that provided for genuine security from military assault and terrorism for everyone, real justice for Palestinians, and acknowledgment of the wrongs that had been done to each side as a first step in healing the humiliations and huge psychic woundings that have happened to Arabs and Jews throughout their histories.

A New Spirit of Open-Heartedness and Reconciliation

We know that no political solution can work without a change of consciousness that minimally includes an open-heartedness and willingness to recognize the humanity of the Other, and repentance and atonement for the long history of insensitivity and cruelty to the other side.

All sides must take immediate steps to stop the discourse of violence and demeaning of the other in their media, their religious institutions, and their school text books and educational systems. They should implement this by creating a joint authority with each other and with moral leaders in the international community who can supervise, and if necessary, replace those in positions of power in Jewish, Islamic and Arab societies who continue to use the public institutions of the society to spread hatred or nurture anger at the other.

Once the other parts of a lasting peace have been set in place, we call upon the parties to this struggle to launch a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, following the model used in South Africa.

We Affirm the Sacredness of All Human Beings

This may well be the the last chance we in the advanced industrial societies have to avoid international catastrophe (either environmental or nuclear), if in our way of dealing with the world can model something else besides brute military might, economic self-interest, and indifference to the well-being of others. If not now, when?

It is time to overcome national chauvinism and arrogance, and instead to build ethical and spiritual solidarity among the people of the world. Our well being depends on the well being of everyone else on the planet. So we need to build and strengthen those international institutions that can foster this sense of solidarity which is the necessary foundation for building global peace, social and economic justice, and ecological repair of the planet. t

Use This Moment to Challenge The Cynical "Political Realism" That Generates Endless Wars

The self-described "realistic" version of global politics asserts that we live in a world in which our safety can only be achieved through domination, or others will seek to dominate us first. Of course, when we act on this assumption, it becomes self-fulfilling.

We propose, instead, a strategy of generosity—to act on the assumption that people have an enormous capacity for goodness and generosity (without negating the truth that certain conditions promote fear, anger and hatred which sometimes are expressed in horribly destructive ways). For the U.S. and other G8 countries, we call for a Global Marshall Plan: for each of the next twenty years, the U.S. and other G8 countries should dedicate 5% of their Gross Domestic Product to eliminating global (and domestic) hunger, homelessness, poverty, inadequate health care and inadequate education for the peoples of the world. This would have to be carefully monitored and apportioned in ways that ensure the care reaches the people for whom it was intended. But what is critical is the spirit in which it is done—not as an attempt to manipulate, but as a genuine expression of human caring about each other.

The only protection that we in the advanced industrial countries of the world can ever really have for our lives is to spread a spirit of love so powerful and genuine that it becomes capable of reducing the anger that has understandably developed against the powerful and the wealthy of the world.

The "cynical realists" claim that others are entrenched in their hatefulness, and that war and domination is the only way to battle them. This kind of thinking has led to five thousand years of people fighting wars in order to "end all wars"—and it has not worked. It's time now to try a new strategy of generosity, both economic generosity and generosity of spirit. As stated above, there will first have to be a transitional period in which real military protections are available to people on all sides of the struggle. But by beginning now to simultaneously commit our economic resources and change the way that we talk about those whom we previously designated as "enemies," we can begin the long process of thawing out angers that have existed for many generations.

Nothing can redeem the deaths and suffering that all sides have faced in this struggle for the past 120 years. But this very moment could also be the time in which the human race realizes the futility of violence and comes together not only to impose a lasting solution for the Middle East, but to begin a new era and to recognize that our own well-being depends on the well-being of everyone else on the planet. The International Middle East Peace Conference should be structured to achieve this end—which means it should have an explicit psychological and spiritual dimension and a visionary agenda.

Unrealistic? Nope. What has proved unrealistic time and again—whether we are talking about U.S. policy in Vietnam and Iraq or Israeli and Arab policies in the Middle East—is the fantasy that one more war will put an end to wars. The path to peace must be a path of peace.

Signed by:

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The Bush Administration's pro-war approach to the Middle East reflects the huge influence of the Christian Right, the American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and the oil industry. Each has its reasons for wanting the US to extend its war in Iraq to Iran, Syria, and other areas. And they are all willing to sacrifice the lives of many Israelis and many Arabs to achieve their vision of a world under the control of the U.S.

The Tikkun Community and our interfaith project The Network of Spiritual Progressives have developed a strategy to counter the Religious Right, and to challenge the fundamental assumptions of the military industrial complex in the U.S. (which, unfortunately, are articulated by many in both major parties). The strategy is articulated in Rabbi Lerner's book *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back our Country from the Religious Right*.

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