

LEADERSHIP ON THE MIDDLE EAST IN A TIME OF WAR

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Key recommendations for a new approach to leadership:

- A shift in American diplomatic statements away from criticisms or condemnations of the parties and toward strong recommendations regarding humanitarian gestures that can be done presently on both official and unofficial levels
- Recommendations to come directly and forcefully from the President as a way of staking out a new presidential image and effect on all Middle East actors
- A focus on the relief of suffering and economic deprivation, coupled with demonstrable commitment to the protection of suffering populations from the clutches of extremists and terrorists
- A clear set of Presidential messages to the Holy Land, and perhaps the whole Middle East, on development, moderate faith, and democracy as key components of counter-terrorism and defeat of religious extremism
- Tangible political rewards to prominent individuals, official or unofficial, on either side, who take the initiative in following this new path of diplomacy
- Utilization of religious and cultural actors and well-publicized meaningful religious gestures that put the lie to radical religious propaganda in the Middle East

- The President's personal, public embrace of measures that acknowledge suffering on both sides and that honors all religious communities affected by the war
- The President's active restoration of vision and hope, such as by public ceremonies at the White House, beamed through various media outlets to the Middle East, that comfort the bereaved on all sides, honor each community's cultural and religious heroes of peace and democracy, and promote hopeful examples of coexistence

Terrorism and counter-terrorism are in control of the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation. The spiral continuously empowers the use of force. It strengthens patterns of revenge and punishment, and it teaches young populations that only force gets attention. It eviscerates the power base of moderate leaders on both sides. But it need not be this way.

Third party leadership is the key. American leadership can go a long way to undermining this bottomless pit of violence. It does not have to cost politically if the emphasis shifts away from criticism and rebuke of the parties and toward unassailable, forceful recommendations for humanitarian and people-to-people gestures. The United States should outline a concrete course of humanitarian gestures and confidence building measures for both parties to engage in and then publicly praise those actors who promote these gestures, rewarding them with tangible improvements in their political and economic status. Rewards could include invitations to Washington, greater prominence in negotiations, and oversight of important components of future projects. Rewards to senior individuals on either side for participation can help promote new leadership that will be serious about peace making. Anyone who demonstrably supports these gestures should, by agreement, receive substantial support from other major third parties.

We should aim for gestures that simultaneously improve Palestinian lives and safety, Israeli safety, and American standing in the Arab and Islamic world. What would accomplish this? Gestures that in their essence demonstrate respect for Israeli and Palestinian people and their needs, that acknowledge pain and suffering, that honor religious traditions, and that demonstrate a new American engagement with the region that will put the lie to radical Islamicist propaganda.

One example of this would be ambassadors of good will, mostly American, representing the three Abrahamic religious traditions most attached to the region, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. They would come to listen, to recommend and announce substantial aid, to bear witness to the suffering on both sides, and to share culturally and religiously in the travails of war and the hopes for peace.

Think of the effect of a widely reported set of ambassadors of the President who visit hospitals where Jewish and Palestinian victims of the war are languishing, places where traumatized children are being treated, with generous donations of support announced for long-term rehabilitation. Think of the message sent by these ambassadors before the cameras of the world, as representatives of the American President, who sit with the extraordinary group of three hundred parents of children killed, both Jewish and Arab, who plea every day for a cease fire. Think of the active support and high profile that these ambassadors could give to a people-to-people project, initiated in recent weeks by this same bereaved Parents Circle, in which over 28,000 Israelis and Palestinians have spoken directly to each other over the telephone, exchanging information, ideas, and their sorrow. They could announce a vastly expanded program in which Arabs from all over the Middle East could participate in this new technology and new conversation, thus bypassing the manipulative propaganda of their governments and religious extremists. Think, to take another

example, of high profile supporters of the President, together with courageous local religious clerics from all three faiths, announcing new clinics for children's therapy.

Strong leadership, the bully pulpit frankly, is the key, because few people in conflicts this deadly can imagine any one set of gestures that could actually benefit both sides. That is a psychological leap that the American president will demonstrate by what he says and what he personally supports. If he supports listening to the needs of average people, substantive steps to improve living conditions, and honoring of positive social values in all three faith traditions, then he may be able to challenge the atmosphere's domination by violence and those committed to it, especially those religiously committed to it. He may be able to spark the beginnings of a new vision.

How big must this be financially? It must be a gesture of sizable proportions that will demonstrate a major shift in intervention strategy, making it clear that American peace processes will put issues of dignity, safety, and material needs at the heart and not the periphery of the political process. This will strengthen moderates and immediately undercut the appeal of religious extremists as the sole source of support for the powerless, for the injured, and for the bereaved.

This does not imply that final status negotiations should not be undertaken as soon as they are realistically feasible. But we must learn from the mistakes of the Oslo years and make sure that every effort at negotiations is buttressed with great vigor through tangible improvements to daily life on both sides. A complete strategy of counter-terrorism and peace must embrace a competition for the hearts and minds of vulnerable populations and cultures. This is the most enduring way to win in this conflict, and perhaps in many conflicts that we face today. It is a strategy that will not convince the actual extremists but will decisively undercut their base of support.

Extensive humane engagement with average Palestinian villagers, fearful Israelis, and

victims on both sides, is the surest and fastest way to undermine the present danger of radical solutions to this conflict on both sides.