

The Only Way Out

Terrorism has no military solution.

Israeli security officer

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The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Hate cannot drive out hate: Only love can do that.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Al-Qaeda network has been severely crippled; it may no longer be a coherent unit led from a single source. But it has morphed, amoeba-like, into terrorist cells in many parts of the world, employing the fruits of common training, in touch with one another, but acting independently. Islamic fundamentalism and the internal political struggles within Muslim countries that give birth to Al-Qaeda remain. So long as the Israeli- Palestinian conflict is unresolved, the Holy Land will remain in the vortex of a destabilized world.

In the International War on Terrorism that is the declared response to the bombing of the World Trade Center September 11, 2001, the Israeli- Palestinian conflict is shoved repeatedly to the forefront. The United States must be able to count on its Arab allies – allies who are quite ready to tie their cooperation to a just peace in the Holy Land.

The definition of *just*, of course, depends on who answers the question posed in the title of this book. No agreement is ever totally just. Agreement can come about only through negotiation, through the willingness of both parties to give. As I write, statesmen from the United States and Europe, as well as the United Nations, continue to prod the adversaries to the table, to tap the residue of willingness that remains on both sides.

Leading spokesmen both in Israel and Palestine now recognize publicly that the al-Aqsa Intifadeh and the harsh Israeli retaliatory measures have brought no gains whatsoever, to either side. Even as attitudes harden and negotiation becomes ever more difficult, and even as a Security Barrier designed to keep terrorists out of Israel snakes deeply into Palestinian territory, a growing number of both Palestinians and Israelis now realize that only through talking, and not through guns, can come the peace that both sides crave.

Israelis are in the Holy Land to stay. And so are the Palestinians. Both are deeply attached to the same land. Through negotiation, somehow they must squelch the fanatics among them and find a way to share that land. There will be pain on both sides, for neither will be

satisfied with the compromises that they must eventually make. But the alternative, already underway, is what Martin Luther King has called the “descending spiral of violence.”

Yitzhak Frankenthal, an orthodox Israeli and a religious Zionist, is the founder of the Bereaved Families Forum in Tel Aviv. He has met with political leaders on both sides, and with leaders of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. “The current situation is dreadful for Israelis and Palestinians alike,” says Frankenthal. “That’s why there is no alternative to peace.”

Ten year ago, at about the time the Oslo Accord is signed but before the first Intifadeh has been declared at an end, Frankenthal is traveling in the Gaza Strip with his nineteen-year-old son Arik, on leave from the army. The son senses the tension and bitterness on Gaza streets, and he tells his father that if he were a Palestinian in Gaza, what he would most want to do is kill an Israeli soldier. A week later, back in service in the West Bank, Arik is dead, kidnapped and slain by four young members of Hamas. Frankenthal, in his agony, drives back to Gaza. He searches for a family whose son has been killed by Israeli soldiers, and he finds that family. He embraces them, and they weep together. Then Frankenthal decides to form a league of the bereaved.

The Bereaved Families Forum is now 400-strong, its membership roughly half- Palestinian, half-Israeli. They have made a memorial display of hundreds of mock caskets, some draped with Israeli flags, some with Palestinian flags, side by side, and they center their activities in a Tent of Peace in Tel Aviv’s Rabin Square. They sponsor billboards, erected on both sides of the Green Line, proclaiming in Hebrew and Arabic: “Better the Pains of Peace than the Agonies of War.”

There is common ground, in the suffering both sides endure, in the peace with security that all want, and in the tangent faiths they embrace.

In the words of the Prophet Isaiah:
*He shall judge between the nations,
and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
their spears into sickles.*

*Nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more.*

In the words of the Prophet Muhammed:
If they incline toward peace, incline thou also to it.

And in the words of Jesus:
Blessed are the peacemakers.

Shalom Peace Salaam