



Inside Brit Tzedek

BRIT TZEDEK V' SHALOM

JEWISH ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE & PEACE

CAMPAIGN FOCUSES ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Let's Talk to the Candidates

The mission of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace is to educate and mobilize American Jews in support of a negotiated two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Presidential campaigns serve as opportunities to debate national issues widely and become actively engaged in the political process, even for those who usually avoid politics. Around the water-cooler government policies are discussed, and candidates formulate positions in relationship to these conversations.

Yet rather than address these realities, most candidates talk about supporting Israel militarily, largely if not completely ignoring conflict resolution; many are afraid they'll lose Jewish votes or funding if they express anything else. This is where Brit Tzedek can make a real difference.

We are calling for a "pro-Israel" candidate who unambiguously works for a two-state solution and has a plan to make it happen. We must let the candidates know that their Administration can play a critical role in reinvigorating the peace process, particularly by holding the sides to commitments they've already

"Whoever is elected, it is vital that he or she know that there is a strong, solid base among American Jews who want not "pro-Israel" platitudes, but true diplomatic engagement, with a negotiated, two-state resolution of the conflict as the goal."

Yet the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is rarely discussed. Both parties assume that a successful candidate must be traditionally "pro-Israel" — promoting unconditional American backing for Israel, its current government and policies — to gain the support of American Jews. Unlike other foreign policy issues, it's believed that no discussion is needed on Israel.

This is particularly odd given that American Jews tend to be politically liberal. Recent polls show that 87% of American Jews support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and 68% are more likely to vote for a candidate who promises to take an active role in the peace process (May 2007 poll conducted by Americans for Peace Now and the Arab American Institute).

The current Administration badly neglected the issue until recently, and the results were obvious in the now-moribund Road Map to Peace. U.S. Presidents traditionally play an important role in negotiations for a future Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Yet it took President Bush almost seven years to begin to truly engage in searching for a solution. Israel and the Palestinians can't wait that long again.

We who believe that being pro-peace is pro-Israel have to ask the candidates how they plan to approach the conflict. The candidates need to know that American Jews want to see it end, and that we want to hear specifics — it's no longer enough to issue statements of "support" for Israel, or of a desire for "peace."

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BRIT TZEDEK'S RABBINIC CABINET EXPANDS

Brit Tzedek's Rabbinic Cabinet has grown in numbers to more than 200 rabbis and cantors. In June many Cabinet members contributed to our publication, **Rabbinic Guide to 40 Years of Occupation**, created to help engaging congregations in considering the unintended political consequences of Israel's occupation and to frame the discussions rabbis are leading across the country in this 40th year of occupation. With the leadership of Board Member and Chair, Rabbi John Friedman, the Cabinet promoted the interchange of ideas for Israel-related sermons over the high holidays and recently completed a survey on topics for synagogue educational programs on Brit Tzedek-related topics. In November, the Cabinet released *Kindle the Lights of Peace*; A Rabbinic call to the American Jewish Community. To join the Rabbinic Cabinet write to rabbifriedman@btvshalom.org.



Brit Tzedek Advocacy Reaches New Heights

5 Years Of Keeping Our Eyes On The Prize

One of my favorite Civil Rights Era spirituals has the refrain: “keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.” As we look back on our impressive accomplishments from our first five years, it is abundantly clear that we’ve held on and kept our eyes on the prize. It is founding president Marcia Freedman’s focused leadership that has made all this possible.

Marcia was able to take an idea carried in the hearts of a group of 16 well-meaning people, forge a budget and fundraising plan, hire a staff and grow us into a formidable organization whose influence is felt throughout Congress and throughout the Jewish community. I applaud Marcia’s leadership and her legacy to this organization. Together, I hope we can build on her many accomplishments and always count on Marcia’s wise counsel.

I also want to acknowledge and thank our professional staff, those who have served on the Executive Committee and the Board. This is our first board leadership transition, and as we keep our eyes focused on the prize going forward, let’s remember the prizes we’ve won so far.

The Prize of Increasing Our Influence in Congress

At our first National Advocacy Days on Capitol Hill in 2005, just 60 of us introduced Brit Tzedek to 39 members of Congress. In 2007, we doubled our numbers and brought our message to over 100 members of Congress. Brit Tzedek has grown to be a well-respected presence on the Washington scene in part due to our amazing one-person Washington office.

The Prize of Changing the Way the American Jewish Community Publicly Talks About Israel

Back in 2002, we received both nodding heads and curious looks when we unveiled our message “there is more than one way to be Pro-Israel” at the 2002 General Assembly of United Jewish Communities. A mere five years later, after hundreds of successful events in synagogues and JCC’s across the country, our slogan has become conventional wisdom. This was evident at a meeting with key Middle East policy advisors to a frontrunner Presidential candidate, when one advisor uttered our slogan to us when explaining their candidate’s appreciation for the diversity of views on Israel among American Jews.

As we look to the future, with our **Let’s Talk to the Presidential Candidates** campaign and our efforts to promote a successful outcome for the U.S.-backed peace conference in Annapolis, we’ll be holding on to our founding vision and keeping our eyes on the prize.

These are exciting days for Brit Tzedek and I welcome you to be in touch with me with your ideas and suggestions. I have set up a special email address for you to use — president@btvshalom.org

I close with the traditional salutation — Hazak v’Amatz— for the sake of Israel, may we all have the strength and courage to carry on with our vital work.



STEVE MASTERS
President, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom

In 2007, Brit Tzedek’s grassroots advocacy has been instrumental in building support for pro-peace, pro-Israel Congressional initiatives. In the Senate we have spearheaded support for the Feinstein/Lugar resolution (S.Res.321), a bipartisan resolution calling for active U.S. engagement in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. S.Res.321 welcomes the Arab League Peace Initiative, calls on President Bush to make a two-state solution a “top priority,” and urges him to appoint a Special U.S. Envoy for Middle East Peace.

We began our efforts around this resolution with the challenging goal of securing at least 20 cosponsors, and as this goes to press we have 37 — well over a third of the Senate. It has been four years since the last pro-active peace legislation on the conflict was introduced in the Senate in support of the Geneva Accord, and that garnered only seven cosponsors. The last time pro-active peace legislation actually passed the Senate was during the Oslo era in the mid-1990s!

In the House, we have secured bipartisan support for a sign-on letter to Secretary Rice, introduced by Reps. Ackerman (D-NY) and Boustany (R-LA), commending Rice’s efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by convening an international conference and calling for additional steps to ensure its success. These initiatives are significant for their pro-engagement content after years of Congressional demonization of the Palestinians and failure to push for U.S. efforts to promote peace negotiations. For years, Congress behaved as if the U.S. role was simply to maintain the status quo in the Middle East. Increasing support for pro-peace, pro-Israel resolutions not only represents a change in perception, but acts as an agent for further change.

Since our inception five years ago, Brit Tzedek has become increasingly effective. Recently, we’ve been instrumental in making small but significant progress toward a resolution of the conflict: promoting the Hyde-Capps letter to Secretary Rice (2005); opposing, and winning significant modifications to the 2006 Palestinian sanctions bill and the Nelson-Ensign letter (Feb. 2007); promoting Feinstein/Lugar, as well as the similar Davis Resolution in the House; and most recently the Ackerman-Boustany letter. And after these resolutions pass from the spotlight, we will be back with new ones, and with them, more and more signers and votes. Brit Tzedek has emerged as a key player, bringing to Washington the unique strength of our committed and active grassroots base, 37,000 supporters strong. ★

[continued from p. 1] We need to do this at every opportunity in the primaries. We need to write letters to newspapers, make comments online, and write to the candidates themselves. How does the candidate plan to bring real peace to Israelis and Palestinians? Will s/he support peace efforts between Israel and Syria? Will s/he engage Iran diplomatically to prevent development of nuclear weapons and a war that risks Israel’s security? These questions are not asked enough; we need to start.

We need to work for the candidates — whatever candidate you like, from whatever party — and talk to them about the importance of achieving a two-state solution, raising the issue with campaign headquarters. When donating to candidates, we must include a note explaining our support for a negotiated two-state solution.

We’re trying to effect real change; we must amplify our message. Whoever is elected, it’s vital that he or she know that there is a solid base of American Jews who want not “pro-Israel” platitudes, but true diplomatic engagement, with a negotiated, two-state resolution of the conflict as the goal.

Over the course of this election season, Brit Tzedek’s “Let’s Talk to the Candidates” campaign will be providing its members and supporters with ways to get this message across to the candidates, the American Jewish community, and the public at large. We hope you will join us in this important task. ★

—Diane Balsev, National Advocacy Co-Chair, and Rob Levy, Washington Representative

Activism in a Jewish Community Near You — A 2007 REPORT

Brit Tzedek welcomed two new chapters into the family this year: **Denver**, our first chapter in Colorado, and **San Diego**, our fourth chapter in California.

Chapters Nationwide Host Combatants for Peace Tour

Early in 2007 Brit Tzedek hosted a 22-city speaking tour with the Israeli-Palestinian movement of ex-combatants, Combatants for Peace. Atlanta was the first stop on the tour, where the chapter hosted events reaching nearly 1000 people. The Connecticut chapter reached across the Jewish organizational spectrum, holding successful events at Temple Emanuel of Greater New Haven, the JCC of Greater New Haven and the Bridgeport Jewish Center for Community Services.

BTVS Leadership Speaks Across Country Advocacy co-chair Diane Balsler spoke at Brit Tzedek events in Durham-Chapel Hill, New York City, Philadelphia, and Seattle. Our new Board President, Steve Masters, spoke in San Francisco. Board President Emeritus Marcia Freedman has spoken at three LA metro area synagogues, and also in Olympia, Seattle and San Diego. Board member Aaron Ahuvia spoke at events in Detroit and Ann Arbor. Board member Ivan Handler spoke at two Chicago-area events with Palestinian National Council member Jihad Abu Zneid, and board member Beth Wasserman spoke at events in the Boston area.

House Parties for "Let's Talk Campaign" Chapters around the country hosted house parties promoting the call for active US diplomatic engagement to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many showed a video we made of our Combatants for Peace tour (also posted on YouTube).

The Los Angeles chapter has been

regularly hosting screenings of movies about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict followed by discussion in conjunction with the Workmen's Circle. The Albany, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, DC, New Haven, New York, Rhode Island, San Francisco, and St. Louis chapters hosted speakers including Daniel Levy, Rafi Dajani, Jihad Abu Zneid, Dr. Tzvia Greenfield, Stephen P. Cohen, Rabbi Arik Ascherman, Rabbi David Ariel-Joel, Gershon Gorenberg, Tom Segev, and many more.

San Diego Chapter Runs with Home District Advocacy

Our new San Diego chapter, inspired by National Advocacy Days, scheduled a series of meetings with their elected officials at their home district offices during the August summer recess. They have met in person with Congressional Representatives Susan Davis, sponsor of Brit Tzedek-endorsed H.Res143, and Robert Filner and staff of Representative Darrell Issa and Senator Barbara Boxer.



MESSAGE FROM OUR OUTGOING PRESIDENT — MARCIA FREEDMAN

At the time of Brit Tzedek's founding, no one thought a group of grassroots activists could realize a dream of creating a national movement of American Jews advocating for Israeli-Palestinian peace-making. It was 2002, the Second Intifada was at its height, and the mainstream American Jewish community was organizing rallies and heavily lobbying in Washington in solidarity with Israeli government and military policies and vilifying the Palestinians. Dissent was not welcome, and in some settings, not even tolerated.

Brit Tzedek had a very different message. Israel is making a terrible mistake, we said. Israelis and Palestinians must return to the negotiating table to work toward a negotiated settlement of the conflict. The settlements are an obstacle that must be removed. The American Jewish community needs a very different sort of pro-Israel voice. Stifling dissent is at the expense of the vibrancy of our community, which historically has thrived on discussion, dispute, dialogue and discourse.

Our rapid growth to 40 chapters and 37,000 active supporters has given us a voice now heard in Washington DC, the American Jewish community, and Israel. We have succeeded in breaking the silence, and we have created an increasingly strong alternative pro-Israel voice. We are also, for the first time in five years, at a moment in history when the U.S. government, the Israelis and the Palestinians appear to be serious about a negotiated settlement — *from my keyboard to God's ear*. To the extent that we and our sister organizations have played any role in making this happen, *dayenu* — for now.

During the past year I've heard many people say of Brit Tzedek, "I didn't believe it was possible." To tell the truth, I didn't believe it was possible either. But sometimes it's worth taking a chance on a dream, and sometimes we can begin to make it happen.

Marcia Freedman completed her term as founding president of Brit Tzedek at the end of October 2007.

Brit Tzedek's Resource Page Check It Out at www.btvshalom.org

Brit Tzedek provides many invaluable resources about the conflict, the U.S. Jewish community, advocacy, and more. Our staff and volunteers spend countless hours fact checking and researching resources that allow each of us to be on top of the ever-changing landscape of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Resource Page Highlights:

ABCs of the American Jewish Community

This section includes brief descriptions of Jewish religious organizations, Jewish umbrella groups, and selected Jewish organizations and their position statements on the conflict.

Activities Sponsored by Israeli Peace and Coexistence Organizations

This section was developed in response to regular requests we get from individuals and organizations who are going to visit Israel and the occupied territories for information on tours and activities with peace-oriented organizations.

Weblinks on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

This comprehensive set of weblinks includes hundreds of U.S.-based peace organizations, Israeli and Palestinian peace organizations, dialogue projects, institutes and policy forums, and blogs.

Fact Sheets

This section includes original fact sheets and Q & A's on key issues related to the conflict.

Brit Tzedek's Resource Page can be accessed at www.btvshalom.org/resources/resources.html

CONTRIBUTE

Your tax-deductible membership contribution to Brit Tzedek v'Shalom will strengthen the voice of the American Jewish community in its call for a negotiated, two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Help us continue to do our work in communities across the United States.

Make a donation now.

Make a secure donation online at www.btvshalom.org or send a check, payable to "Brit Tzedek":

Brit Tzedek v'Shalom
11 East Adams Street
Suite 707
Chicago, Illinois 60603

Speaking with One Voice

Ask two Jews a question and you might end up with three or four opinions. Yet seriously, the beauty of our organization, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, is the place it creates for discussion which is safe and respectful, even around matters as sensitive as whether Israel should talk to Hamas. Through conference calls and constant electronic conversation, activists across our nation express their ideas and insights, and from a multitude of impassioned thoughts a unified, disciplined message emerges.

From across the nation, we challenge and disagree, write and rewrite, until from many views comes the message that mobilizes the American Jewish community in the pursuit of peace. A communication highlight from this year: we are now often described as "dovish" — our ideas are now seen as persuasive and reasonable, not radical, and our comments are weighed whenever the media seeks the perspective of the Jewish peace movement. To Congress, to the Jewish community and wherever Middle East peace is discussed, Brit Tzedek speaks with one voice. And it is being heard.

— Diane Cantor

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Happy Chanukah!

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