

LET'S TALK! HOUSE PARTY GUIDE

Brit Tzedek v'Shalom
The Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace



**BRIT
TZEDEK
V'SHALOM**

JEWISH ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE & PEACE



Dear Let's Talk Partners:

We are delighted you have decided to take part in one of the most important conversations in the Jewish community today—the conversation about the role of the American Jewish community in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Brit Tzedek's Let's Talk campaign seeks to encourage dialogue and discussion among members of the Jewish communities, while pressing for urgent US diplomatic engagement in the region.

Why is it necessary to have a national campaign to encourage American Jews to talk with one another about this issue? After all, talk sounds easy. But it isn't always easy when we face an issue—in this case, the security and well-being of Israel—that is so emotionally felt by most American Jews. And while positions on this issue remain so polarized, honest and open discussion about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue to be difficult.

We hope this house party guide will help you start the conversation in your community and will provide you with the necessary resources to help you get involved in the Let's Talk campaign at the local level, and to become a part of our national network of 39 chapters and over 35,000 supporters. Let's Talk activities will be constantly evolving during 2007, so when you encourage others to sign on to our pledges and petitions, you are helping them become part of an active, ongoing conversation and political movement.

Please be sure to visit our website at letstalk.btvshalom.org to view regular Let's Talk updates plus a great deal more about Brit Tzedek's ongoing advocacy and public education activities at the national and local levels.

If you have questions about the Let's Talk Campaign, please get in touch with Carinne Luck, our national Let's Talk Campaign Director at carinne@btvshalom.org. You can also call her at (212) 366 1670.

We're glad you have become part of the conversation.

Sincerely,


Marcia Freedman
Board President


Diane M. Cantor
Executive Director

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Video - Contact Brit Tzedek Office at (312) 341-1205 to order a copy of the Combatants for Peace Video.

Overview: Let's Talk! House Parties

General Description:

House parties are wonderful opportunities for small groups of people to gather in informal settings to examine and discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the role that we, as American Jews, can engage the US government in vigorous diplomacy towards a negotiated two-state resolution.

The intimate setting of a house meeting offers the opportunity for participants to share their thoughts and feelings about the current situation in the region and Brit Tzedek's perspective on it. These gatherings are more easily executed than similar events held at synagogues and community centers, which often require a great deal of advance planning and authorization.

House parties also function as opportunities for interpersonal connection and networking, which are critical first steps in breaking the isolation that so many Jews have experienced within their own communities around these issues. House parties help people develop an understanding that each of us can make a difference if we speak up and act together; they can empower people to join our movement and to take immediate and affirmative steps to achieve its goals (such as signing the Let's Talk Call, pledging to spread our message, and writing to and/or meeting with your Member of Congress).

Purpose of Let's Talk! House Parties:

- Spread the message and build support for the Let's Talk campaign
- Create a space for dialogue and debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the American Jewish community
- Educate our supporters on the current situation and recent support for diplomatic efforts towards resolving the conflict
- Provide our supporters with an opportunity to pledge to take action in support of the Let's Talk campaign
- Build our base of members and supporters

1. Recruit and Train a Team Of Speakers, Facilitators, Lead Organizers And Organizer Assistants For House Meetings

Speakers should be Brit Tzedek members with strong presentation skills. Recruit and train one speaker or a team of speakers who can learn to:

- Describe and respond to questions about the Let's Talk Campaign.
- Flexibly adapt the presentation to the audience.

Note: Speakers do not need to be policy experts. This packet includes talking points, resource materials, and a guide to answering the difficult questions about the conflict and the campaign.

Facilitators are speakers or other Brit Tzedek members who can:

- Facilitate warm-up, wrap-up, and other activities.
- Make participants feel welcome.
- Encourage active participation of guests and keep the event on track (on theme and on time).
- Politely interrupt disruptive speakers.
- Adapt program as appropriate.

A lead organizer oversees all components of the house meeting, but may recruit assistants to perform any of the following tasks:

- Make reminder and/or follow-up calls prior to the event.
- Copy and bring literature and letters.
- Circulate sign-in sheet and make sure information is complete and legible.
- Greet and converse with guests before and after the meeting.
- Collect all materials at the end of the evening and forward data to the national office.
- Administer a house meeting evaluation.
- Conduct follow-up with guests.

2. Recruit House Meeting Host(s)

There are many ways to identify potential hosts:

- Make calls to members or supporters within your chapter's pre-existing social-, professional-, or synagogue-based network.
- Make calls to people with an appropriate home for a meeting who might be able to host or co-host with someone else.
- Make cold calls to members and supporters to ascertain interest.
- Request references from sympathetic Jewish religious and/or community leaders.
- Send email solicitations to members and supporters.
- Place ads in synagogue or other organizational bulletins.

What to communicate to potential hosts:

What is a Let's Talk house party?

An intimate gathering to educate people about Brit Tzedek's Let's Talk campaign and our message of urgent and vigorous US diplomatic engagement in bringing Israel and her neighbors together for talks, and an opportunity for supporters to pledge to take action in support of this message and our goals.

Why are house meetings important?

They provide information and concrete steps people can take to advance the peace process. They help build a movement of American Jews who, together, can make a difference on one of the key issues facing Jews worldwide.

What benefit do hosts receive?

An opportunity to share with your community of friends, family, and acquaintances your commitment to making a positive contribution to peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

What are the expectations of hosts?

- Develop a list of 10-100 potential guests. (You generally need to send out 2-3 invitations for every person who ultimately attends.)
- Send out invitations and make follow-up calls immediately after.
- Provide the home for the meeting or the guest list for a co-Host.
- Serve appropriate refreshments.
- Provide space for literature, television, and VCR.

What does Brit Tzedek provide?

- Structured program including speakers, literature, and video plus assistance in planning.
- Set up and clean up, if needed.
- Follow-up.

3. Set a Date and Location

In setting a date, consider the following:

- Allow sufficient time for host(s) to create a guest list, send invitations, and make follow-up calls—a minimum of 2-3 weeks.
- Make sure that the host will be available to respond to inquiries prior to the event.
- Check the availability of your speakers, facilitators, and organizers.
- Avoid scheduling house meetings on Shabbat or Jewish holidays that have the same ‘non-work’ standards as Shabbat, in order to be inclusive of diversity within our community. Please consult a Jewish calendar before confirming a date, as there are many holidays that are not well known or observed by many Jews but do have significance to other Jews.

In reviewing the appropriateness of a location, consider the following:

- Public transportation accessibility, parking, parking permits, etc.
- Transportation resources of guest list.
- Multiple Hosts at a single location.
- Accessibility for those with physical disabilities
- **DVD player and television**

4. Work with Host to Develop Invitation List

Help your host(s) brainstorm an invitation list of potential Jewish supporters:

- *Family*: parents, grandparents, children, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws.
- *Friends*: your own friends and those of other friends or family members.
- *Social Acquaintances*: friends you see only on occasion; friends from college/school; friends from your old job; the parents of your children's friends; people you've met at classes or your gym; people with whom you shop, garden, vacation, go to protests, or share holidays.
- *Neighbors*: on the block, upstairs, downstairs, down the hall.
- *From Synagogue*: your rabbi; synagogue activists; people you see regularly or occasionally; parents of religious school students.
- *From Work or Community Work*: teachers, secretaries, school colleagues, classmates; former colleagues, partners, or clients; colleagues from community, political or charity work.
- *Members of*: your block association, political organization, community group, food co-op, local peace or environmental group, PTA, or union.
- *People on Lists You've Made In The Past*: people you invited to your last party; your holiday card list; the program from your last reunion; your rolodex (home or work); your personal phone book.

In addition to people your host's invitation list, you can invite Brit Tzedek members and supporters who live close to the host. This is a way to potentially activate members and supporters in your local chapter and also to integrate their experience in broadening Brit Tzedek's network. Please check with the host to make sure s/he is comfortable with expanding the invitation list in this way.

Note: Our target audience is American Jews, but we also welcome non-Jews, recognizing that they are often part of our families.

5. Send Out Invitations

You can invite guests by email or snail mail. Generally, email is the easiest, with snail mail as a back-up given its cost and the work involved. A sample invitation is below:

first name last name

Warmly Invite You to Their Home for a Let's Talk! House Meeting

When: March 8th, 7:00 to 9:30pm
Where: 900 River Drive, New Haven
Speakers: The House Meeting will be facilitated by the [fill in] chapter of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, a national organization of Jews committed to a negotiated, two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
What: A House Party to learn about Brit Tzedek v'Shalom's Let's talk! Campaign and our message of urgent US diplomatic engagement in bringing Israel and her neighbors together to talk. Join others who believe that a negotiated two-state solution is the only way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and bring peace and security to Israel.
RSVP and questions: jrgold@xnet.net or (000) 888-9999
Directions: By public transportation... From the north...

One popular e-mail method for invitations is evite, found at:

<http://www.evite.com/pages/homepage/index.jsp>. This site helps create attractive invitations and helps Hosts easily monitor RSVPs. Because its unique features stand out from ordinary e-mail, even people who are inundated with e-mails will take notice and respond to an evite.

6. Make Follow-Up Calls With Prospective Guests

A personal connection can make the difference in a person deciding to attend a house meeting. It is preferable that your Host(s) makes follow-up calls to invited guests.

- Call at least ten days in advance to give people time to plan their calendars.
- Keep track of all responses - positive, negative or undecided.
- If you have to leave a message, be sure to provide return contact information and a time when they can call you

Follow-up Phone Calls

Below is a sample script for follow-up phone calls to prospective guests. Convey in your own words why the meeting is important to you and how each person's presence will make a difference. Once you have a prospective guest on the phone, you can try to turn "maybes" into "yeses".

Hi, this is _____ calling the [fill in] chapter of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom. How are you? I was wondering if you received the invitation I sent you a few days ago regarding a house party on Brit Tzedek's Let's Talk campaign?

Great! The house party is on _____. It would be great if you could attend.

Even though the news coming from the Middle East does not seem that hopeful, we are hearing increasing calls from around the world for increased diplomacy and talks in the region, and we, like many academics and politicians, believe the US – and American Jews – can play an important role in facilitating talks between Israel and her neighbors. It would be great if you could join us at the house party on _____ to learn more. Can you come?

If they say YES:

Great. I'm really glad you'll be there to learn about this campaign.

If they're NOT SURE:

I understand and I hope you will be able to find time to join us. In the meantime, you can also go to our website to sign onto the campaign and find out other ways that you can get involved. The website is letstalk.btvshalom.org.

Reminder Calls

Below is a sample script for reminder phone calls or confirmed guests. You can leave a message.

I look forward to seeing you at our House Meeting tomorrow night at 7:00pm at 999 N. South St. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (888)555-3333 or to email me at me@me.com

7. Let's Talk Programming Outline

1. **Socializing and Sign-in** (10 minutes)

- Brit Tzedek volunteers introduce themselves and speak with the guests.
- Ask people to sign in and give complete information.
- Follow up with people who arrive late or sign in with incomplete information.

2. **Introductions** (10-15 minutes)

- Introduce Facilitator and Speakers.
- Ask guests to share name, affiliation, and/or something about themselves OR
- Have people ask ice-breaking question in dyads or small groups.

Sample Questions:

- What is your relationship with Israel?
- What has motivated your commitment to supporting Israeli-Palestinian peace?
- What has been most difficult for you about the current situation?
- What gives you hope about the current conflict?
- Share your name and one thing you are hoping to learn at this meeting.

Please refer to the Presentation Talking Points for guidance in leading the program.

3. **Introduction to Brit Tzedek's Let's Talk! Campaign** (10 minutes)

(include distribution of articles)

4. Introduction to the Combatants for Peace Video and the David Grossman Speech

5. **Video Presentation and Responses** (15 minutes)

6. **Read and Discuss** Selections from **David Grossman** (15 minutes)

7. **Facilitate discussion; take questions** (20 minutes)

- Ask people to try to be succinct in their comments and questions.
- Try to let everyone who wants to speak do so once before anyone speaks twice.
- Praise people for asking questions.
- Listen carefully for the underlying concerns expressed when people speak. Try to respond to these concerns.
- Communicate our message that a two-state negotiated resolution of the conflict is possible and that we American Jews can play an important role in bringing it about.

8. **The Importance of the American Government and American Jews** (5 minutes)

(See Answering the Difficult Questions and Talking Points)

9. **Brit Tzedek's Strategies and Role** (5 minutes)

(See Let's Talk! Talking Points)

10. **Let's Talk – Let's Take Action Together!** (10 minutes)

- Hand out petition and pledge form
- Encourage everyone to sign the call and make a pledge
- Provide people with extra materials to distribute to their own networks
- Encourage people to become members

8. Prepare for Meeting and Make Reminder Calls

A House Meeting checklist:

- Host has checked that TV/DVD functions.
- Literature is prepared: Brit Tzedek brochures, articles, Campaign Summary, sign-in-sheets, etc.
- Host has purchased snacks --Kosher and/or vegetarian snacks as appropriate-- preferably served on paper plates.
- Reminder calls have been placed to all who have RSVP'd in the three evenings immediately preceding your house meeting, excluding Friday night (Shabbat).
- Copies of sample letters have been customized to area Senators, Representatives, and Jewish leaders (if appropriate).
- Reminder calls/emails have been placed to speakers and other volunteers.

9. Hold House Meeting

- Show your enthusiasm about Brit Tzedek.
- Show your hope that the situation can shift.
- Demonstrate your confidence that together we can make a change.
- Enjoy getting to know the guests.
- Be prepared to go with the flow.
- Keep good records of who attends and who volunteers to do more.
- Appreciate your host(s)!

10. Follow-up after House Meeting

Follow up with all guests, both those who volunteered on the spot to do something and those who just attended.

Send the national office the petition and pledge forms so we can follow-up with the appropriate materials.

Presentation Talking Points Part 1

I. Introduction to the Let's Talk Campaign

A. The Campaign has two targets

1. Talking to the US government
2. Talking to the American Jewish community

Since the war in Lebanon, the organized American Jewish community-at-large has moved away from any pro-negotiations, pro-peace position it once held. As we saw in the response to the Baker-Hamilton commission, the immediate reaction from the American Jewish community was for the most part opposition to the notion that the US should be pursuing talks between Israel and her neighbors. There is little serious conversation as to the possibility of US diplomatic engagement in the Middle East towards a negotiated two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Lets Talk campaign is an attempt to 1) re-ignite this conversation in the American Jewish community and 2) organize Jews to bring the message of US diplomatic engagement to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the Administration and to Congress.

B. Why Let's Talk? Why now?

1. We have seen that unilateralism does not work. Israel withdrew unilaterally from Gaza (while the peace community adamantly demanded for disengagement with negotiations) and as predicted, the withdrawal was seen as a victory for Hamas. While Brit Tzedek supported the idea of leaving the territories, we understood that a unilateral withdrawal was likely to be unsuccessful; this proved to be true.

2. Israel attempted to defeat Hezbollah through military means but, as became apparent, a state army cannot defeat a non-state militant actor through military might alone. A ceasefire was the only way to halt the violence and the bloodshed.

3. Israel and the International Community's attempt to punish the Palestinian people by voting for Hamas, crippling their already fragile internal infrastructure, and limiting/halting aid has only caused extreme hardship for many Palestinians, and created internal turmoil in the territories. It serves no country to see the Palestinians engaged in civil war; it does not serve Israel to have a civil war on its doorstep.

4. A negotiated peace is the only stable peace and thus the only way to ensure Israel's security. A negotiated peace facilitated by the US can only enhance America's reputation in the region.

5. Palestinian moderates need to be able to show the Palestinians that moderation breeds stability and security for its people. Only a negotiated peace can provide Palestinian moderates with this proof.

C. Why engage with Lebanon and Syria?

1. As we saw this summer, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is inextricably tied to Israel's relationship with all of her neighbors. Creating stability and peace with Israel's neighbors can only advance the goal of peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

2. All possible paths to peace should be pursued; the Let's Talk campaign supports the full spectrum of talks – from backchannel talks to multilateral talks to an international peace conference similar to the Madrid conference that followed the Gulf War and ultimately led to the Oslo Peace Accords.

D. What are Brit Tzedek's goals for the campaign?

1. Host Let's Talk house parties in 30 cities
2. Deliver the message of the Let's Talk campaign through 60 meetings with Members of Congress and their staff, and at least 200 Members of Congress through letter-writing campaigns and phone calls
3. Organize around a legislative vehicle to advance the message of the Let's Talk
4. Sign-up 10,000 American Jews in support of the Let's Talk petition
5. Hold town-hall meetings in 10 cities

Presentation Talking Points Part 2

The campaign is intended to continue through the remainder of the Bush administration. Additional pledge items and action items will be added as relevant.

D. Campaign supports Brit Tzedek's organizational goals:

1. Educate and mobilize those American Jews who support a negotiated two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
2. Grow our grassroots network (through chapters and internet) and, with the leadership and support of the national organization, influence American foreign policy
3. Demonstrate that it is pro-Israel to be pro-peace

E. There is international support for US diplomatic engagement/talks to resolve Israeli-Palestinian conflict (*distribute attached articles*)

- A. Policy, Analysis and Commentary from the US, Europe
- B. Policy, Analysis and Commentary from Arab and Palestinian world
- C. Policy, Analysis and Commentary from Israel

We will not be reading through all of these now, but note the broad international support for the message and the goals of the Let's Talk campaign.

II. Introduction to video

1. This video is of the Israeli and Palestinian coordinators of Combatants for Peace, Elik Elhanan and Sulaiman Al Hamri speaking at Beth Emet synagogue in Evanston, IL on Jan 25, 2006.
2. C4P is an organization of former Israeli and Palestinian fighters who have chosen to put down their weapons and fight for a negotiated, two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through non-violent means
 - A. Show video of the Combatants for Peace tour
 - B. Reaction and responses

III. Introduction to selections from David Grossman (*attached*)

The selected excerpts here are from a speech given by David Grossman at the 2006 peace rally in commemoration of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in Tel Aviv. We will read some of these excerpts together and then discuss.

- A. Go around the room and read excerpts.
- B. Moderator can use suggested questions to lead discussion (*see attached*) or choose to facilitate open discussion

IV. Let's Talk Q&A

Open up the discussion for questions about the campaign overall

V. Critical role of US in Advancing Israeli-Palestinian Peace

- A. U.S. advocates for Israeli security and the establishment of a Palestinian state
- B. U.S. historic role in brokering peace agreements
 - Peace agreements: Israel and Egypt; Israel and Jordan
- C. U.S. interest to create stability in the Middle East
 1. An Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement would foster greater stability in the region
 2. US involvement in creating peace and establishing a Palestinian state would also increase US credibility in the region

Presentation Talking Points Part 3

VI. Critical Role of American Jews

- A. Strong ties to Israel as the Jewish homeland
- B. As peace advocates, American Jews contribute to the well-being of all Jews
- C. We are an important block of voters and significant political contributors
- D. As Jews, we are called upon to “Seek Peace and Pursue It.”
- E. Those American Jews who support negotiated two-state resolution are not represented by much of the mainstream Jewish community’s leadership – even though polls demonstrate we are in the majority
- F. Brit Tzedek supporters play a potentially pivotal role in engaging American voters in support of an active US role in negotiating resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

VII. Brit Tzedek strategies and roles

- A. Educate and mobilize American Jews to organize and advocate for urgent US diplomatic engagement in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
- B. Establish a grassroots network on the local and national level to influence American foreign policy
- C. Establish a netroots network for immediate and long-term online advocacy and outreach
- D. You can also give example of the chapter’s role at the local level.

VIII. Action steps

- A. Sign the call
- B. Pledge to “Talk!”
 - 1. Talk to friends
 - 2. Talk to the American Jews – Host a House Party!
 - 3. Talk to your Member of Congress

Pass around the pledge forms.

C. Join us in Washington DC for the National Grassroots Leadership Training Institute and National Advocacy Day

Full text can be found at: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/784034.html>

**Selections from David Grossman's Speech at Yitzhak Rabin Annual Memorial Ceremony,
Monday November 6, 2006**

The annual memorial ceremony for Yitzhak Rabin is the moment when we pause for a while to remember Rabin the man, the leader. And we also take a look at ourselves, at Israeli society, its leadership, the national mood, the state of the peace process, at ourselves as individuals in the face of national events.

It is not easy to take a look at ourselves this year. There was a war, and Israel flexed its massive military muscle, but also exposed Israel's fragility. We discovered that our military might ultimately cannot be the only guarantee of our existence. Primarily, we have found that the crisis Israel is experiencing is far deeper than we had feared, in almost every way.

I am speaking here tonight as a person whose love for the land is overwhelming and complex, and yet it is unequivocal, and as one whose continuous covenant with the land has turned his personal calamity into a covenant of blood.

The fundamental characteristics of the current Israeli leadership are primarily anxiety and intimidation, of the charade of power, the wink of the dirty deal, of selling out our most prized possessions. In this sense they are not true leaders, certainly they are not the leaders of a people in such a complicated position that has lost the way it so desperately needs.

When was the last time a prime minister formulated or took a step that could open up a new horizon for Israelis, for a better future? When did he initiate a social or cultural or ideological move, instead of merely reacting feverishly to moves forced upon him by others?

Rabin decided to act, because he discerned very wisely that Israeli society would not be able to sustain itself endlessly in a state of an unresolved conflict. He realized long before many others that life in a climate of violence, occupation, terror, anxiety and hopelessness, extracts a price Israel cannot afford. This is all relevant today, even more so.

Any reasonable person in Israel, and I will say in Palestine too, knows exactly the outline of a possible solution to the conflict between the two peoples. Any reasonable person here and over there knows deep in their heart the difference between dreams and the heart's desire, between what is possible and what is not possible by the conclusion of negotiations. Anyone who does not know, who refuses to acknowledge this, is already not a partner, be he Jew or Arab, is entrapped in his hermetic fanaticism, and is therefore not a partner.

Go to the Palestinians, Mr. Olmert, do not search all the time for reasons for not to talk to them. You backed down on the unilateral convergence, and that's a good thing, but do not leave a vacuum. It will be occupied instantly with violence, destruction. Talk to them, make them an offer their moderates can accept...

Approach them with the bravest and most serious plan Israel can offer. With the offer that any reasonable Palestinian and Israeli knows is the boundary of their refusal and our concession. There is no time. We have no choice and they have no choice. And a peace of no choice should be approached with the same determination and creativity as one approaches a war of no choice.

Maybe, Mr. Prime Minister, you need to be reminded, that if an Arab leader is sending a peace signal, be

it the slightest and most hesitant, you must accept it, you must test immediately its sincerity and seriousness. You do not have the moral right not to respond.

You owe it to those whom you would ask to sacrifice their lives should another war break out. Therefore, if President Assad says that Syria wants peace, even if you don't believe him, and we are all suspicious of him, you must offer to meet him that same day.

Don't wait a single day. When you launched the last war you did not even wait one hour. You charged with full force, with the complete arsenal, with the full power of destruction. Why, when a glimmer of peace surfaces, must you reject it immediately, dissolve it? What have you got to lose? ... Commit him to a prolonged process, act so that his people also become aware of this possibility. Help the moderates, who must exist there as well. Try to shape reality. Not only serve as its collaborator. This is what you were elected to do.

From where I stand right now, I beseech, I call on all those who listen, the young who came back from the war, who know they are the ones to be called upon to pay the price of the next war, on citizens, Jew and Arab, people on the right and the left, the secular, the religious, stop for a moment, take a look into the abyss. Think of how close we are to losing all that we have created here. Ask yourselves if this is not the time to get a grip, to break free of this paralysis, to finally claim the lives we deserve to live.

Introduction and Discussion Questions for:
David Grossman's Speech at Yitzhak Rabin Annual Memorial Peace Rally

Introduction

Widely acclaimed Israeli author, David Grossman is known for reaching out and writing about Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. While Grossman initially supported the war with Lebanon in 2006, he and fellow authors Amos Oz and A.B. Yehoshua eventually spoke out about the way, and in a press conference called upon the Israeli government to negotiate a ceasefire in Lebanon and Gaza as a basis for talks toward a negotiated solution, describing further military action as "dangerous and counterproductive." Two days later, Grossman's son, Uri, who was serving in the IDF at the time, died when he was hit by an anti-tank missile during an IDF operation in southern Lebanon.

Suggested Questions

1. What is your initial response to this speech? Do you agree with David Grossman? Do you disagree with him? Why/why not? Did you have an emotional response to this speech? If so, can you describe it?
2. How would you summarize Grossman's speech?
3. Grossman claims "military might" can never be the only guarantee of security. Do you agree? Do you disagree? Why/why not?
4. Grossman says, "Any reasonable person in Israel, and I will say in Palestine too, knows exactly the outline of a possible solution to the conflict between the two peoples. Any reasonable person here and over there knows deep in their heart the difference between dreams and the heart's desire, between what is possible and what is not possible by the conclusion of negotiations. Anyone who does not know, who refuses to acknowledge this, is already not a partner, be he Jew or Arab, is entrapped in his hermetic fanaticism, and is therefore not a partner.

Do you agree with his analysis? Why/why not? Do you think his analysis applies to American Jews as well? Do you think his speech overall relates to American Jews? How/how not?

5. What terms of peace do you think Grossman favors?

On the US Role in Diplomacy:

The Smart Way to Support Israel

By MJ Rosenberg. Israel Policy Forum, Washington DC, September 1, 2006

It is just one of the many misleading (at best) e-mails that turned up in my mailbox during and after the Lebanon war. This one claimed to be the “definitive” list of “anti-Israel Members of Congress.” The half-dozen copies I received all came from people active in mainstream pro-Israel organizations.

“Friends, if ever there was a definitive list of the anti-Israel members of Congress, we have it now.

“Surprisingly they are mostly Democrats.

“It's these 23 members who voted against last week's House and Senate resolutions of support for Israel.

“No other issue and no US political party allegiance is more important in these times than the safety and security of Israel.

“Following is a list of legislators who voted 'No' on yesterday's resolutions of support for Israel.”

The e-mail went out late in July and seems to be referring to a resolution that had just taken place.

The most glaring thing wrong with the e-mail is that it describes a vote that never took place. There was no such resolution. There was no such vote.

On top of that, of the 23 "anti-Israel Members of Congress" enumerated in the e-mail, six are not current members of Congress and have not been for two years.

The authors of the e-mail must have known that the list was a fake – anyone who's even glanced at CNN or any of the other cable news outlets in the last few years knows that Gary Condit is no longer serving California's 18th district. And Fritz Hollings, the well-known ex-Senator, retired from Congress in 2005.

Unfortunately, some of the people who see the e-mail will not know that. They will read it and believe that they know "definitively" who in Congress does not support Israel.

In a sense, however, the fact that the e-mail is fiction is irrelevant. Yes, manufacturing votes and producing an enemies list from it is an ugly tactic. But the tactic would not be much prettier if the vote described represented reality rather than a fantasy. That is because the underlying assumption – that Senators and House members who choose not to support reflexive resolutions of support for Israel are not friends of Israel – is faulty.

These resolutions are invariably the same. They have a host of "whereas" clauses which describe a series of situations or events in which, lo and behold, Israel is right and the Arabs (Palestinian, Egyptian, Jordanian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Syrian, whatever) are wrong. Then there is a "be it resolved" clause in which the House or Senate resolves that Congress supports whatever it is that the Israeli government has just done and urges the President to do the same.

The point of these resolutions is not to achieve any particular thing. They are non-binding, meaning they have no practical effect.

The purpose is to allow legislators to use their support for the resolution as evidence of their commitment to Israel. And, almost as important, it allows the people who oppose the resolution to be depicted as anti-Israel.

As evidenced by the partisan language in this email, another purpose these resolutions serve is to allow Republican and Democratic activists to claim that the other party is anti-Israel. (Both parties actually have set up highly-funded organizations to do just that, invariably with scant reference to facts).

It's a political game and Israel is the football.

But what kind of support are these monitors of Israel correctness talking about?

Office holders are characterized as "staunch" or "stalwart" friends of Israel if they vote for, without questioning, any "pro-Israel" resolution that is drafted for Congress to endorse. Those who question whether the resolution actually makes any sense are deemed anti-Israel or, at best, "not dependable." And those who dare suggest alternatives to the one-sided language of these resolutions can count on getting flack from both lobbyists and constituents – constituents told by Washington lobbyists to give their representative a hard time for either voting "wrong" or questioning the resolution's helpfulness to Israel.

The bottom line is that what is commonly deemed "support for Israel" is nothing more than support for the status quo. And we all can see where the status quo has gotten Israel this summer.

(Imagine, for a moment, if a Member of Congress had made a speech earlier this year urging Israel to establish a full mutual cease-fire with the Palestinian Authority so that it could focus instead on the threat from Hezbollah. She would have been offering a policy suggestion that would have helped Israel prevail in the struggle with Hezbollah. However, her reward would have been being targeted as soft on Hamas).

Professor Steven Spiegel, a well-known political scientist at UCLA and an Israel Policy Forum National Scholar, says that it is time to abandon reflexive "support" of Israel for, what he calls, "smart support."

"Historically," he says, "pro-Israel forces in the US had to fight strong foes who opposed the very creation of the State of Israel, and later the country's critical security needs. But since the end of the Cold War, a consensus has emerged in the United States of strong support for Israel. Especially since 9/11, the majority of the country sees Israel as a strong ally in the war on terrorism—democratic, innovative, and daring.

"In this atmosphere, it is ironic that pro-Israeli forces are still enmeshed in the old politics, when Israel's detractors were so prevalent that the key to supporting Israel was simply to proclaim, well, support. Now in a more complex world the choices confronting the governments of the United States and Israel are far more difficult.

"Is it pro-Israel to limit all US contact with Hamas and the Palestinian Authority or to leave open the possibility of assistance if the Hamas government changes its views and behavior or to expand aid to President Abbas?

"Which is more pro-Israel: to isolate Syria, to overthrow its government, to have public contacts with Damascus, or to have unofficial contacts with the aim of ending assistance to Hezbollah?"

"Is it pro-Israel for Congress to limit aid to Lebanon or would it be better to expand reconstruction aid to both Lebanon and Israel to compete more effectively with Hezbollah efforts to take all the credit in Lebanon and to prepare Israel better to thwart its foes?"

It is time for those of us who consider ourselves pro-Israel to tell our representatives that we expect them to do something more difficult than rubber stamping every rah-rah Israel resolution that finds its way to their desk. In good times, both US interests and Israel can afford symbolic and innocuous rhetoric. But these are not good times. At times like these, we need thoughtful policies that will advance a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

And, please, do not tell me that this suggestion is ridiculous because, after all, this is an election year.

Elections come and go, and somehow there is always one looming every time anyone suggests that the United States engage diplomatically to help end the killing in the Middle East.

We can't simply wait until some theoretical post-election, pre-election window opens before taking action. Too many Israelis, Lebanese, and Palestinians died this past summer. Too many more will die next time.

As Professor Spiegel says, it is time for the pro-Israel community to demand "smart support," smart for America, smart for Israel, smart for the Palestinians.

As the old 1960s mantra goes, "if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem." It's time for Congress to start being part of the solution.

U.S. — KEY TO SOLVING ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

By Saliba Sarsar, Jordan Times, Opinion (Jordan)

November 1, 2006

The words we use and the statements we make define who we are, what we believe. The more accurate our pronouncements are, the closer we are to the truth and to understanding each other. The better the understanding, the more engaged we become when the opportunity avails itself.

In her keynote address to the American Task Force on Palestine in Washington, DC on October 11, 2006, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice brought much understanding to the question of Palestine and to the American role in resolving it. She promised her personal commitment to bringing about a Palestinian state because: “I believe there could be no greater legacy to America than to help to bring into being a Palestinian state for a people who have suffered too long, who have been humiliated too long, who have not reached their potential for too long, and who have so much to give to the international community and to all of us.”

A similar commitment was made by President George Bush in his address to the United Nations General Assembly on September 19, 2006. He said: “I’m committed to a Palestinian state that has territorial integrity and will live peacefully with the Jewish state of Israel. This is the vision set forth in the roadmap — and helping the parties reach this goal is one of the great objectives of my presidency.”

If the US president and secretary of state are committed to a Palestinian state, why is there no movement in that direction? Why have Middle East leaders and specialists alike seen only indecision and inertia for peace in the Middle East during the last two years of the Bush presidency?

While Palestinian and Israeli leaders are ultimately responsible and should be held accountable for their daily actions and their intractable conflict, the real answers for a resolution reside in the White House. Bush must prove Middle East leaders and specialists wrong by actively advocating for peace. If he waits to become a peace maker or peace builder only after he leaves office, as some former presidents have done, the urgent need today will be sidetracked and peace will be delayed for several years to come.

Bush must overcome his fear of criticising Palestinians and Israelis when criticism is deserved. As Dennis Ross correctly points out in “The Missing Peace”, the United States must hold both sides accountable. That is, “there must be a consequence for nonperformance — and to have real meaning, it must be publicly seen”.

Requiring Palestinians to maintain law, order and security and to create good governance, and requiring Israelis to stop settlement building and expansion on the West Bank and in Jerusalem will generate balance and symmetry. These will generate the right environment for ending the Israeli occupation and the resultant Arab boycott, and for resolving the perennial issues separating Palestinians from Israelis.

Bush, like other political leaders, must also overcome his fear of depoliticizing Palestinian-Israeli relations, mainly promoting and being engaged in peace making regardless of the American election cycle or the influence of political lobbies and ideological religious groups.

Bush has everything to gain by championing Palestinian-Israeli peace. Through his vision of a two-state solution and active participation, he will fulfill American commitment to Israel’s security and keep his promise of creating a state of Palestine. Such deeds can benefit American involvement in the Middle East, thus freeing up the United States to address other hotspots and win the war on terror.

As the American Task Force on Palestine argues, Palestinian statehood will remove the greatest single source of anti-American sentiment throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds, enhance the security of all states in the Middle East by establishing defined borders for Israel, establish a democratic model for the rest of the Arab world to emulate, and open up substantial markets in the Middle East and North Africa to greater opportunities for economic cooperation.

Besides normal diplomatic gestures, Bush is advised to appoint a respected American as his special envoy to Israel/Palestine. With assistance from a team of Middle East experts and peace-building organizations and in coordination with all relevant parties (e.g., Arab world, European Union, Russia, United Nations), the envoy will help Palestinians and Israelis unmask their fear of each other and stop further damage to themselves and to each other. The envoy must be empowered to apply necessary pressure on both Palestinians and Israelis to negotiate in good faith and implement their agreements.

If peace is to be advanced, the United States key must be used now. Waiting longer will result in another missed opportunity and will make more complex and complicated a just resolution.

Saliba Sarsar is professor of political science and associate vice president at Monmouth University and board member of the American Task Force on Palestine.

Back to the Eisenhower Doctrine

By Yair Hirschfeld, Haaretz, January 6, 2007

Several days after the publication of the Baker-Hamilton Report, David Welch, the head of the Middle East desk in the United States Department of State, argued before a selected audience that U.S. policy had been, and would continue to be, to isolate American enemies in the Middle East: Iran, Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and Al-Qaida. The policy was to isolate each of them separately and all of them together. On a more positive note, Israel should be encouraged to support Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. Apparently, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has fully adopted this strategic approach.

Looking back at history may be useful to learn some lessons. The basic doctrine of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that broke apart at the end of World War I was "many enemies, much honor." The present U.S. administration appears to be attempting to copy the experience of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. One may question whether this will turn out to be a successful approach.

Future historians who study the political behavior of the Bush administration, in light of the achievements thus far, will tend to conclude that the effect of U.S. policies during the period 2000-2008 was to contribute to the creation of an Iranian radical Islamic hegemony in the Middle East. The United States helped to destroy Iran's enemy to the East, the Taliban; it opened the way to Shi'ite majority rule in Iraq, to the West; it contributed to the revival of Russian power politics in the North; and it opened the way for Iranian interference among the Shi'ite population of the Arabian peninsula to the south. The Bush administration's energy policies contributed to the rise of oil prices, which helped Iran to finance its regional aspirations. And now, through a policy of "isolating" the enemy, the United States is assisting Iran to build a wide and effective regional coalition together with Iraq, Syria, a Shi'ite-dominated Lebanon, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al-Qaida. Instead of isolating Iran, the Bush administration is actually "successfully" isolating its own regional allies, and is proactively undermining the stability of Jordan, Egypt and eventually also of the moderate forces in the Palestinian Authority.

Looking back at history may also be useful to learn some positive lessons. When the American and British policy of supporting the Baghdad Pact broke down, during and after the 1956 Sinai Campaign, then president Dwight D. Eisenhower changed course, and in January 1957, he issued the Eisenhower Doctrine: Engage all potential allies in a common struggle against two well-defined enemies, the Soviet Union and Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt. The Eisenhower Doctrine was intended to develop, and in fact succeeded in developing, a multitude of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral relationships among the United States and each of its allies in the Middle East, North Africa, southeast Europe and the Indian subcontinent. For Israel, this policy opened the door to relations with many of those regional powers (particularly Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia).

Today, the common fear of Iranian regional hegemony makes an updated Eisenhower Doctrine (the Bush-Blair Doctrine?) both necessary and possible: Engage with Lebanon to create a more stable balance of forces there; engage with the Syrians to draw them away from the Iranian orbit, using a step-by-step approach; engage with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan to assist in driving a wedge between Syria and Iran; and help Abbas to test whether he can form a Palestinian national unity government, and if not, support him in isolating Hamas.

Israel is no disinterested observer; it is an important player. Isolating one's enemy is only possible by engaging with his potential allies. Olmert's policy of creating an opening to the moderate Palestinian leadership is good, but it cannot stand alone. It needs three other elements: an opening move toward Syria; a political program to get Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and Jordan fully engaged, and a proactive effort to help the United States to change course.

The author is a senior lecturer in Middle Eastern history at the University of Haifa.

On The Need for Diplomacy:

Foreign Minister: Palestinian state is achievable, not an illusion

By News Agencies, Haaretz, 1/25/07

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni told participants in the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on Thursday that, "A Palestinian state is not an illusion. It's there, it's achievable."

Addressing a large crowd of political leaders, business leaders and others, Livni said that Israel's negotiations with Palestinians must stick to the vision of two states living side by side as the only way to achieve peace in the region.

Livni urged the international community to support moderates in the Middle East and told Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas that compromising with extremists will not promote anything, a clear reference to Hamas and other militant groups.

Livni said that a Palestinian state would have to honor previous agreements, recognize Israel's right to exist and denounce terrorism. She emphasized Israel's desire to promote peace but said Israel can't ignore controversial issues such as the war on terror. The foreign minister called on the international community to help fight terror by preventing the transfer of funds to extremist groups, and giving support to moderate groups.

Vice Premier Shimon Peres participated in a discussion at the conference and said that Israelis and Palestinians differ only slightly in their beliefs over where the borders separating the two should lie. "We don't want a Palestinian territory, we want an independent and prosperous Palestinian state with territorial continuity," he said.

Peres added that the Palestinian refugees should be able to return to Palestine, the way Jews are able to return to Israel.

Abbas, who addressed the conference before Livni, said that peace between Israel and the Palestinians was a concept whose time had come.

Abbas, speaking in Arabic, said that such an agreement would help strengthen the hands of moderates in the region and fight extremism of all kinds.

You agree with me that the Middle East is now in dire need of peace, he said, a reference to internal strife in Iraq, disagreement in Lebanon and elsewhere.

"The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the most serious conflicts that require a solution. I am fully convinced that despite all the difficulties, an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of the peace process exists," he said. "One that could lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state."

"We have the road map. A road map that includes the Arab initiative as well as President Bush's vision regarding the two-state solution," Abbas said. "What is required now, in all honesty, is for us to trace the beginning and the end of this peace process."

The map is there, he said, adding that he told Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that they had started moving in the right direction.

Abbas said that there is no need for new peace initiatives, rather there is a grave need to promote the peace process on the foundation of the existing initiatives, including the UN resolutions and the road map. He added that a "territory for peace" approach and the founding of a Palestinian state could end Palestinian-Israeli strife. He added that the solution must be all-inclusive and creative, not partial or temporary.

Abbas also spoke of poverty levels in Gaza having soared to record lows because of Israeli restrictions and the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure.

"Unemployment and poverty have reached unprecedented levels, with 79 percent of people in the Gaza Strip living below the poverty line, of which 51 percent live in utter poverty," he said.

On top of the Western sanctions, Palestinians say Israeli settlements, military checkpoints and a barrier cutting into the West Bank have also hit their economy because they seal off towns from workplaces, schools and farm fields. Israel says the barrier and checkpoints are needed to prevent militant attacks.

Abbas planned to meet with Livni during the conference to discuss ways to revitalize peace talks, an Abbas aide said Thursday. The planned meeting was confirmed by Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev, but he did not specify when the meeting would take place.

Also at the conference, Saeb Erekat, a senior Palestinian negotiator and aide to Abbas, and Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh told a media briefing that a peace accord was necessary to build an alliance of moderates in an increasingly polarized region.

"It may take six months to conclude these principles and another 18 months to conclude and iron out the details," Sneh told journalists.

"There is no need of mediation," he said. "We can do it directly. It is the best way. But we need international as well as regional backing and support."

Erekat applauded recent peace efforts by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as "very practical."

On Thursday, Abbas met behind closed doors with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to discuss efforts aimed at reviving the long-stalled peacemaking efforts.

Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert met last month to discuss confidence-building measures that would allow the sides to get back to the negotiating table, abandoned more than six years ago.

The two are going to try to push that process forward further next month in a three-way summit with United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The date and venue for that session have not yet been set.

An Informal Diplomatic Surge: Draft Israeli-Syrian Peace Deal Revealed

By Daniel Levy, from the Geneva Initiative

1/16/07

As Secretary Rice continues her swing through the Middle East, pointedly avoiding Damascus, Haaretz journalist Akiva Eldar today revealed that two years of informal meetings have produced a draft text for an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement. The full text can be read [here](#) and the story [here](#). While neither is as detailed nor dramatic as the Geneva Initiative model Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty, the new text exposed in Haaretz goes another step in demystifying the parameters of a comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace. Also this week, former officials and negotiators from Israel, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, the Gulf, the US and Europe met in Madrid to mark the 15th anniversary of the conference convened by Jim Baker and the grown-up Bush after the first Iraq war. So the vacuum created by the administration's dogged insistence on military escalation combined with diplomatic docility continues to be filled by unofficial peace initiatives.

Eldar's piece in Haaretz details a series of meetings between the former Director-General of Israel's Foreign Ministry and ex-Ambassador, Alon Liel, and US-based associate of the Syrian leadership, Ibrahim Suleiman, mediated and hosted by European government officials. The talks took place between January 2004 and the summer of 2006. The governments in both Damascus and Jerusalem have denied that the talks received any official blessing. It does seem that this was an exploratory back channel that probably got closer to leadership circles on the Syrian than the Israeli side.

The talks themselves dealt with the four pillars that would need to be addressed in any future Israeli-Syrian negotiation: security, water, normalization and borders. The main innovation in the draft text is the idea of establishing a "park" adjacent to the Lake of Tiberias on what would be the new (old) Syrian side of the border. The park area would guarantee continued Israeli freedom of access to what is the most disputed territorial component of any future border arrangement. Other than that, the paper outlines a border demarcation based on the 1967 lines, the establishment of demilitarized and reduced military presence zones, provisions for early warning stations and international security oversight, water use arrangements, and a timetable for full withdrawal and full peace.

The Israeli media has been abuzz all day with speculation regarding this new peace plan as it follows a period of intense debate on whether Israel should continue to adhere to the American veto of engaging with Damascus or whether Israel should explore the negotiation option that Syrian President Assad has been suggesting. Several senior Israeli ministers have argued in favor of the latter. Re-engaging on the Israeli-Syrian track would of course be in line with the US "New Diplomatic Offensive" recommended by the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group. President Bush's rejection of such a diplomatic surge almost guarantees the failure of the American mission in Iraq and further undermines US credibility and capacity to lead and build alliances in the broader Middle East.

We have just marked the seventh anniversary since the last Israeli-Syrian political negotiations, hosted by President Clinton at Shepherdstown. Four senators (Dodd, Kerry, Nelson, Specter) recently visited Damascus and heard firsthand of the Syrian willingness to constructively engage on the Iraqi, Lebanese and Palestinian issues. But President Bush seems determined to escalate on the Syrian front, as elsewhere, and to forego diplomatic solutions. If the serious thoughtful diplomatic recommendations of the ISG wise elders and the cautioning of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee against escalation and in favor of diplomacy are in a language that the President does not understand, then maybe he should turn to his own preferred sources – even in the Bible, seven lean years were enough.

Statement by Dr. Salam Fayyad to the Seventh Annual Herzliya Conference

As seen on: <http://www.americantaskforce.org>

January 24, 2007

Salam Fayyad is former Finance Minister of the Palestinian National Authority. In the Palestinian legislative election of 2006 Fayyad ran as founder and leader of the new Third Way political party alongside Hanan Ashrawi. Both Fayyad and Ashrawi currently represent their party, which won two seats, in the Legislative Council.

I would like to extend my thanks to the conference organizers for inviting me to speak before you. I recognize the importance of this conference – it is the very platform where major Israeli policies have been laid out including, most recently, unilateralism in the form of the Israeli “disengagement” from the Gaza Strip. As a Palestinian, who has felt the effects of these policies, it is my hope that today I will be able to shed some light on this issue, and on how together we can chart a new, brighter, more promising future for the Middle East – not just for our two peoples.

It would have been very easy for me to focus my talk today on economics and finance. But owing to the very important role that politics play in the success or failure of any economy and indeed the future of any state, I decided instead to focus my comments on matters of politics, leaving matters of economics and finance aside for the moment.

Examining the past 6 years of this conflict, I would characterize the Israeli-Palestinian relations over this period as having been too intimate – too intimate for the Palestinians and too intimate for the Israelis. You may be stunned by this characterization, for many have characterized it as the opposite. But the nature of relations today between Israelis and Palestinians has reached levels of micromanagement, where Israel is involved in the minute details of the lives of Palestinians. It is important to remember that the entirety of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is ruled by military orders – not by politics, logic, or reason – but by military orders with “security” dictating the rules of the game. Whether through the erection of hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks throughout the West Bank – most of which have no real security rationale, the requirement that Palestinians obtain permits to travel even within the West Bank or some of the absurd rules which are largely unknown to Israelis, the occupation has seeped into almost every aspect of Palestinian life. Take, for example, the recently announced prohibition on Palestinians riding in Israeli yellow-plated cars. While to many there is a clear security rationale, what is ignored are the ramifications of such policies. I know many Jerusalemites for whom this new policy means that they cannot transport their own relatives who happen, by the fate of war, to be characterized as “West Bankers.” I also know many Palestinians – whether in Jerusalem or elsewhere – whose land has been taken away and whose families have been divided for the construction of the wall. These are the details to which few Israelis are exposed but the very reality that Palestinians continue to live and suffer from daily.

And, while I understand that in the design of these and other measures there may be a “security” rationale involved, the effect is not to create more security for Israel, but rather to create more conditions for future instability. Why? Because at its core, this conflict is NOT a security conflict with political ramifications but instead a POLITICAL conflict with security ramifications. Unfortunately, for the past six years, and arguably longer, the focus has been solely on security, ignoring the inherent link between Israel’s lack of security and the Palestinians’ lack of freedom. This is not a humanitarian conflict needing a humanitarian response, nor is this a security conflict requiring a security response. What we are both suffering from is a political conflict requiring a political solution.

There was once, arguably, a focus on the larger picture – beyond checkpoints, dirt mounds and permits – to major political issues: Jerusalem, borders, refugees, the settlements, etc. Unfortunately, the process took center stage and not the actual need for peace. While meetings between the two sides and with the international community abounded, what was ignored was whether progress was actually being made to end the conflict – the occupation – and give both peoples what they want: peace. Today, meetings have been reduced to discussions on small, practical (and sometimes not so practical) issues that are peripheral to the conflict. By focusing on the peripheral, we are no closer to solving our problems and hence no closer to peace. We need to broaden our view and look to politics – not only to the small issues that are not germane to the fundamental nature of this conflict.

It is easy for Israel to shrug away and do nothing. Israel – as the stronger party to this conflict – has the luxury to do nothing. But in doing nothing, Israel is doing something: it is not contributing to solving this conflict; it is making it fester. Many believe that we are stuck between doing nothing and between unilateral approaches. Yet from our

experience we should now know that neither approach works: both doing nothing and acting unilaterally only serve to make matters worse.

What then should be done? We need bifocals. Yes, bifocals. By that, I mean we need clear vision to address the short term and the long term. While it is important to address the immediate concerns that preoccupy Palestinians and Israelis on a daily basis, we need to do so within a framework that provides a clear and agreed definition of where we are going and how we are going to get there. Ever so skeptical of transitional solutions, the need for a concrete definition of the "final status" was, for a long time, perceived to be a predominantly Palestinian need. But, I would argue that the adverse developments of the past few years, including the misgivings of unilateralism, have made working toward transitional arrangements in the absence of an agreed final status equally unattractive from the point of view of Israelis as well.

A peaceful solution is inevitable. It is. It is impossible to maintain the status quo because the status quo is not static; it is fluid and, unfortunately only gets worse, not better. There is no question that there will be stability when the Palestinians are given their freedom. The vision that has been laid out by President Bush and embraced by President Abbas is that of peaceful coexistence. For Israelis, this means feeling safe and secure; for Palestinians this means being free of Israeli interference and also living in safety and security. But these are just statements. What I really want to lay out for you is a vision for positive relations; not just coexistence.

Palestinians have a vision of peace. We want our state to be a qualitative addition to the region and model of democratic values and good governance. When I speak of good governance I mean it concretely – not as a lofty and unattainable goal but one in which the rule of law and not the rule of the gun will prevail. Palestinians have the highest rate of PhD holders per capita in the Arab world (I am one of those statistics), and our focus will be on creating a generation of smart, educated Palestinians who will demand no less than a credible system of laws and respect for rights. Many might ask why this has not happened already? The answer lies mainly in the occupation and the lack of freedom for the Palestinians. When you live in a context where there is no respect for laws under a suffocating and oppressive occupation, it is very difficult to demand and enforce civility.

That said, I will never use occupation as an excuse to allow ourselves to be sloppy or lax in the building of our state. As a Palestinian nationalist and someone who is committed to working to end the occupation, I will demand certain things from our independent Palestinian state on behalf of all Palestinians. I want to see a state that is free, where respect for rights is guaranteed (not simply sloganized), where education is at the fore, and where democracy is guiding principle.

These are matters that are of concern to Israel. But more importantly, I want to spell out a vision of peace with Israel. I seek a warm peace with Israel. I don't want it so warm that you are in our backyard as you are now, but I seek a warm peace. I seek strong political ties with Israel; I seek strong economic ties between the independent states of Israel and Palestine. I seek warm relations with Israelis. Yes, we seek warm relations with you. We do not want to simply get to a point where we just accept each other – we want to have warm relations where we both recognize the mutual economic, political, intellectual and spiritual benefits of living and working together. We do not want to erect walls; we want to see bridges. We do not want to close you out of our lives – we want to live with you – as your neighbors and as your equals.

At heart, I am an optimist. Why? How? After so much effort from all parties and after such spectacular failure, many question how I can persist in my optimism. The answer lies in the fact that I know that there is a great deal of depth of goodwill on both sides, and on the part of the international community.

This does not mean that the solution will be easy. It won't. If it were, obviously we would have been there. Political and other sacrifices are required and we will need to be bold and explain to our respective publics what we want and how to achieve it.

Time is running out for us. Time is not on our side. I am part of the last generation of Palestinians who see Israelis in normal settings, who meets with Israelis and who can call Israelis "friends." The cold separation coupled with the micromanagement of affairs must disappear soon, for if it does not, we will never be able to live together as equals with mutual respect. In Arabic, there is a saying, which is, ironically, the opposite of its English language counterpart – "absence makes the heart grow colder". As a father and husband, I fear that our hearts are growing colder the more that we are separated. I want a future for my children and I am certain that you do too. The future that I seek is a warm, bright one for them. And I know that you share this vision too. Too much time has been wasted. It is time for us to get back on track and work to end this conflict so that our children's future can be marked by Palestinian-Israeli friendships; not Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Public Opinion Polls Show Support for Negotiations:

Joint Truman–Palestinian Survey Shows: Strong Preference Among Palestinians, Israelis For Comprehensive Settlement Over an Interim Political Track

<http://www.huji.ac.il/>

December 26, 2006

Jerusalem, December 25, 2006 – A new public opinion survey published this week shows that there is a strong preference by both the Israeli and Palestinian publics for a comprehensive settlement option between the two peoples.

In the most recent joint poll of Israeli and Palestinian public opinion conducted December 11 and 16 by the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah, a range of optional tracks were examined for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian political process including the Roadmap, the Arab League (Saudi) plan, and an interim plan postponing the settlement of the refugees issue to the future. We also examined the Israeli leadership's degrees of freedom to begin negotiations with various configurations of a Palestinian government.

The findings indicate strong preference in both publics for the comprehensive settlement option with 58% of the Israelis and 81% of the Palestinians supporting this track compared to only 30% of the Israelis and 16% of the Palestinians supporting an interim track.

The joint poll further examined Israeli and Palestinian attitudes regarding a permanent settlement (along the lines of President Clinton's package for a Palestinian-Israeli final status settlement and the Geneva Initiative) against the backdrop of the Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire in Gaza. The results document a continuing decrease in support for that permanent status package and its parameters among Israelis throughout 2006, and overall stability among Palestinians. Despite the declining trend, among Israelis there is still a majority of 52% who support these parameters as a combined overall package. Among Palestinians, 48% support the package now, compared to 44% in June 2006 and 46% in December 2005 (see attached summary table).

The Palestinian sample consisted of 1270 adults interviewed face-to-face in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 127 randomly selected locations between December 14 and 16, 2006. The margin of error is 3%. The Israeli sample includes 602 adult Israelis interviewed by phone in Hebrew Arabic or Russian between December 11 and 14, 2006. The margin of error is 4%. The poll was planned and supervised by Dr. Yaacov Shamir, the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace and the Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University and Dr. Khalil Shikaki, director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR).

The joint survey was conducted with the support of the Ford Foundation Cairo office and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Ramallah.

On Diplomatic Options:

Comprehensive peace is the only kind of peace to save the Middle East

by: Marc Gopin, Common Ground News Service,
10/19/2006

WASHINGTON — In the course of intensively shuttling between and within enemy groups in the Arab—Israeli conflict in the last two years I have noticed a pattern on all sides: the tendency of even the peacemakers and diplomats to create alliances against someone to be excluded. “Divide and conquer“ is not just an imperial strategy, it is human nature. We tend to be compelled to think in terms of enemies and allies, as the noted psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan has taught in his classic works. An alternative approach must be that no one is left out who can then become a spoiler. Everyone must benefit so that the radicals in each camp will not have a political leg left on which to stand.

Let’s be clear on what you can no longer do. You can no longer cut a deal with Palestinian secular elites that has no demonstrable benefit for the Palestinian masses. Everyone rushes in to support them with militant programs: the Syrians, the Iranians, the refugee Palestinian community, really, just about everyone in the Arab and Muslim world. You cannot ignore the Palestinians and cut a deal with Syria. Iran and Hizbullah will not allow it and, as Bashar Assad said recently, you will simply create a Palestinian insurgency inside Syria. You cannot even cut a deal with Syria/Lebanon and the Palestinians, because Iran is determined to be a spoiler. To think that you can simply divide and conquer the Syria/Iran axis without Israel and the U.S. paying a price in return is to treat enemies with intellectual contempt. You also cannot cut a secular deal that does not address the way in which this conflict is framed and supported by millions of Muslims worldwide, not in the age of Al Qaeda and Salafism. You cannot cut a deal with resident Palestinians that leaves out the refugees. You cannot get the Israelis to the table without the U.S. Congress and Presidency, and you cannot divide them from the State of Israel because the American Jewish community will not let that happen. And you cannot cut a deal with secular Israelis hoping that nationalist religious Israelis will just go away and not resort to violence. Instead, peace must be about the enticement of all parties away from the waste of destructive human relations.

The secular Palestinian leadership and moderate Israeli leadership got very close to what they needed from each other at Camp David and Taba in 2000. What was not included were Syrian needs, Iranian needs, needs of the Palestinian poor, needs of Muslim conservatives, needs of Israeli Arabs or Palestinians, and needs of the Israeli and Jewish hardliners. Those who were missing at Camp David did very well in destroying the progress that was made by a variety of violent and political means, including settlements, suicide bomb funding, a worldwide campaign of Jew hatred, clever sidelining of the American Congress and Presidency from any constructive role, endless provocations on the ground and insults to Palestinian dignity. The recent war in Lebanon simply confirmed the awesome power of the spoilers.

Here is what is needed for any future plan to work:

1. Both the Palestinians and the Syrians must be at the table at the same time. Moderate Syrian leadership wants political victories such as the return of the Golan and a return to legitimacy on the global stage. The spoilers in Syria want the status quo of violent control and corruption, but they would be powerless before a serious inclusion of Syria by America, Israel and the Europeans.
2. The Iranians want security guarantees from America in exchange for giving up their genocidal rhetoric regarding Israel and their nuclear arms ambitions. This is the only way to sideline the extremists and bring back the moderate clerics into power. The only way to know if this would work, however, is to negotiate with them, develop mutual steps of confidence building, and verify the results.
3. Poor Palestinians need evidence that this process will tangibly and immediately change their lives for the better during the process. There will have to be a series of agreements between the sides on how to react to

spoilers and their provocations without holding the Palestinian masses hostage to revenge and collective punishment.

4. Conservative Muslims need to be persuaded by evidence that both Israel and Palestine will be places in the future that respect and care for Muslim families and their needs, their holy places and their dignity. Any peace process of the future must have a social, economic and cultural component that builds confidence in this new reality.

5. The Jewish community, hard—line Israel and especially religious nationalist Jews need to be convinced of one thing as they are asked to give up territory —— a far greater sense of safety, security and acceptance in the Arab and Muslim world. They will need evidence that is also a part of this new form of peace process.

6. Palestinian refugees need compensation; they need acknowledgement; they need a serious stake in the new Palestine; and I believe they need some symbolic welcome to, at the very least, visit their old homeland inside Israel. The two—state solution may be a necessity, but ultimately Jews and Palestinians need to feel welcome and equal in each other’s lands.

7. Israeli Arabs need absolute equality culturally and economically. They are the living symbol of whether the Arab world sees the possibility of Israel in the midst of Middle Eastern culture or not. This equality need not impinge on the Jewish quality of life in Israel. It simply must be that Israeli identity is multi—cultural and non—racial in every sense.

Any future process must offer concrete steps that will both entice all seven of these actors, but also test all these actors; hold their feet to the fire, evenly and fairly, in order for the remaining spoilers to truly be isolated and silenced politically, morally and psychologically.

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Appendix A: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is the overall goal of the “Let’s Talk” campaign?

Brit Tzedek’s “Let’s Talk” campaign has been launched to achieve two interconnected goals: We want to create the momentum necessary to allow for regular progress in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while also placing renewed focus on the crucial role of US diplomacy in bringing a peaceful resolution to the decades of bloodshed.

Brit Tzedek believes that these two goals will only be met if stakeholders are willing to engage in genuine communication: Jews must discuss the conflict with other Jews; Jews must sound out concerned non-Jews; voters must engage their elected officials; Americans must communicate honestly with those in the region, Hamas and Fatah must resolve their conflict, and most importantly, Israelis and Palestinians must talk – as the Israelis must talk with all of their remaining Arab adversaries.

The conversation is crucial on all these levels, in order to start breaking down the many barriers that stand before a peaceful resolution of the conflict..

Dialogue in the American Jewish Community. There has been little active dialogue within the Jewish community about what we can do to resolve the conflict. The years of the second intifada, followed by the violence in Gaza and Lebanon during the summer of 2006, have made many in the community reluctant to even raise the topic; instead the focus of the other than in the most defensive tones “Let’s Talk” campaign will reinvigorate dialogue and debate within the American Jewish community about a negotiated two state resolution. Without broad-based support within the Jewish community, America’s elected officials are unlikely to be willing to make the necessary commitment to vigorous diplomatic efforts that will be vital to achieving a mutually acceptable, two-state solution.

US Diplomatic Engagement in the Conflict. The campaign aims to encourage the US administration to urgently address the desperate need for a restoration of talks between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as with Syria and Lebanon. The status quo – uninspired attempts at managing the violence while people continue to die – is so firmly entrenched that we must first convince our representatives that peace is not just a noble hope, it is possible – that indeed, peace is the only real solution

Two-fold goal: These two aspects of the “Let’s Talk” campaign are interdependent and reflect the longstanding purpose of Brit Tzedek: to educate and mobilize American Jews in support of a negotiated two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in order to sway national policy.

2. Can non-Jews participate in the campaign?

Brit Tzedek welcomes the support of our non-Jewish allies in the campaign. While the petition and pledge are directed to those individuals who identify as American Jews (independent of religious practice), there are several ways that non-Jews can get involved in the campaign.

- Share the petition and pledge with Jewish colleagues and friends via email or with hard copies of the petition or pledge.
- Give a donation to support campaign activities.
- Offer your volunteer time to your local chapter to promote the campaign in your community.
- Become a member of Brit Tzedek.

3. Do Israelis and Palestinians support the message of the “Let’s Talk” campaign?

They absolutely do.

Israeli Support: A poll conducted in Israel by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research this September found that 61% of Israelis surveyed believe that achieving peace with the Palestinians is vital for Israel. A Truman Institute report found that 67% of Israelis support negotiations with a Palestinian national unity government and that further, more than half (56%) support talking directly with a Hamas-led government, if necessary to achieve a compromise agreement. In November of 2006, a poll conducted by Israeli daily newspaper Yediot Aharonot found that 58% of those surveyed believe that the government should take Syria up on its offer to negotiate; 59% believe that war will break out if no negotiations are held.

Palestinian Support: The Truman Institute also found that nearly 60% of Palestinians believe a Hamas-led government should negotiate with Israel. According to recent surveys conducted by highly respected Palestinian researcher Khalil Shikaki, some 2/3 of Palestinians believe that the Palestinian Authority should recognize Israel as the Jewish State, as part of a peace agreement. According to Shikaki: “The Palestinian public wants recognition of Israel. The only question is when.”

4. What is the position of the governments of Israel and the US on engaging in diplomacy with the Palestinians?

Officially, there are no relations between Israel or the US with the current Hamas-led Palestinian government, though both Prime Minister Olmert and Secretary of State Rice have met with Palestinian President Abbas, who is the official head of state, holds some executive functions, and also serves the chairman of the more moderate Fatah party. Within days of the Hamas electoral victory in January 2006 Israel achieved an agreement with the Quartet, (The EU, UN, US and Russia who work collectively to shape policy toward a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), according to which any Hamas-led government would have to meet the Quartet’s demands - renounce violence, recognize Israel, and accept previous peace agreements – before Israel and the Quartet would resume the transfer of aid and tax revenues, or any kind of political contact.

Israel. Prospects for renewed peace negotiations were recently revived following Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s speech in Sde Boker on November 27, 2006, in which he offered to resume negotiations and spoke favorably of the 2002 Arab League peace plan.

[<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/793308.html>] Furthermore, in January 2007, Olmert told the press that “under the existing circumstances, it would be more practical to achieve a two-state solution through negotiations rather than [unilateral] withdrawal.”

However, Olmert has also made clear that the Quartet's demands remain firmly in place, and that there can be no diplomatic progress until captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit is freed. Nonetheless, in January 2007 Israel did release withheld tax funds directly to the moderate PA President Mahmoud Abbas in an effort to bolster his standing among Palestinians.

United States. The Bush Administration has backed Israeli efforts to isolate the Hamas-led PA. Efforts to bolster Palestinian moderates have also been made: The Administration objected to punitive anti-Palestinian bills in Congress and President Bush has made statements of support for President Abbas, provided him with funding for his presidential guard, and has called on Israel to ease restrictions on the borders of Gaza.

Officially, the US government is committed to diplomacy to resolve the conflict, but in practice, has done little other than periodically send Secretary of State Rice to the region "to take stock," visits that have done little to actively revive diplomatic channels between Israel and Abbas. If, however, the U.S. government were to encourage either full-scale talks with the Palestinians or (more likely) careful back channel contacts intended to test the waters, some level of good will would be established towards larger goals.

5. What is the position of Israel and the US on Israel engaging in diplomacy with Lebanon and Syria?

Syria. While both Israel and the US believe that diplomatic negotiations with Syria are not suitable at the present time, neither side denies that unofficial back channel efforts took place for two years prior to the Lebanon war of 2006. Secret contacts between Syrian and Israeli representatives were held with the help of Swiss officials, and American Vice President Cheney was kept apprised on the progress of these talks. These back channel discussions succeeded in reaching a framework for a peace deal between the two countries.

Once made public, many Israelis seized the opportunity to encourage their government to pursue peace talks with the Syrian government, but the Olmert government has rejected recent Syrian overtures to this end. The Prime Minister set off a storm of protest in Israel when he said publicly that the reason for his government's rejectionist attitude is in fact Bush Administration policy, and a desire not to offend the sensitivities of Israel's greatest ally

Lebanon. Political turmoil in Lebanon, as well as the 15 year Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and the aftermath of its uncoordinated withdrawal in 2000, have long hampered efforts to successfully hold peace negotiations between the two countries. It is widely believed that Syria holds the key if successful talks are to take place because of their close relationship to Hezbollah.

Following Israel's war against Hezbollah in the summer of 2006, Israel's politically weakened prime minister, Ehud Olmert, offered to hold peace talks with Lebanon's moderate president, Fuad Siniora, but in implicit deference to Syrian control, Siniora replied that Lebanon would be "the last Arab country to sign a peace deal with Israel." Yet it remains true that only a negotiated peace, with clearly established parameters and mechanisms for the redress of complaints between the sides, will be able to prevent a repeat of the 2006 hostilities; a creative approach to the issue might allow for greater coordination and laying the foundation for peace once an agreement is reached with Syria. Siniora is an ally of the west and has worked in the past with the American administration on matters of regional security; it is in the best interests of both Israel and the US to cultivate relationships with moderates in his government and within Lebanon generally.

Much groundwork has already been laid for a vigorous US diplomatic effort to assist Israel and her Arab neighbors in returning to the path of negotiations. A concerted US push for peace talks is the necessary to allow the sides to pick up where past efforts left off.

6. Given the results of the mid-term elections and the fact that public opinion has largely turned against him, isn't the Bush administration too weak to accomplish anything in the region? Doesn't the same hold true for Olmert? Given their weakness how can you expect them to do anything?

The mid-term elections were in large part a referendum on the Bush Administration's foreign policy programs, and the American public has made clear – both with their votes and in subsequent polling – that they are unsatisfied with the President's handling of foreign affairs.

On the other hand, if President Bush makes bold decisions and changes the unilateralist policies that have failed this country's interests for six years, it is likely that the American public would be supportive. If the peace community advocates successfully, we will persuade Congress and the Senate to support initiatives that will bring real peace, giving the President the backing he needs to make substantive changes. Indeed, as a President in the last two years of his second term, President Bush now has the opportunity to focus on issues that need the full force of the Oval Office to succeed, without having to divert energy and resources to re-election efforts.

The government of Ehud Olmert has been greatly weakened in recent months, but its clear willingness to follow an American lead may well prove advantageous, should the US decide to move forward on a peace initiative. If the Prime Minister were to propose a return to negotiations that meets the expressed desires of his public, his standing may well be bolstered as a result.

7. Hasn't vigorous US diplomatic engagement accomplished little in the past? Why do you think it would work now?

On the contrary, the only time real progress has been made has been when the United States government has actively participated. Even the Oslo Process, famous for its early secrecy, was carried out with a clear understanding that any agreements made would hold only if the Americans supported them – indeed, then-Foreign Minister Shimon Peres initially suggested that then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher present the Declaration of Principles as an American achievement.

American governments have met failure when they have gone through the motions of working toward peace without making any real, substantive efforts to keep the process on track. Two recent examples of this are the now moribund Road Map to Peace, and an Israeli-Palestinian transportation agreement brokered by Condoleezza Rice herself, in advance of the elections which brought Hamas to power, but which was never implemented by Israel.

In the November 2006 mid-term elections the American people made clear their desire for a major overhaul in foreign policy. Indeed, a new political climate has settled over Washington, D.C., which the Bush administration will be hard pressed to ignore. A newly reconstituted Congress is an opportunity to mend six years of diplomatic neglect in the Middle East. The need for stability in a region where violence is continuing to worsen has never been more urgent. The demand for diplomatic engagement is strong, and comes not only from American voters, but from the international community and from leaders in Israel and the Arab world. The American government should seize this opportunity to serve as the main mediator in the Israeli-Arab conflict, and act with resolve to promote and facilitate talks between Israel and her neighbors.

8. What is the relationship between the Let's Talk campaign and the Baker-Hamilton commission recommendations?

While there is no official association between the findings of the Baker-Hamilton commission [link to excerpts of B-H report: http://ga3.org/btvshalom/notice-description.tcl?newsletter_id=4187472#excerpts] and the "Let's Talk" campaign, it is significant that the policy recommendations made by this non-partisan panel of experts mirror many of Brit Tzedek's longstanding positions for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict.

For instance, the Baker-Hamilton report recognizes that direct negotiations based on the principle of "land for peace" and the establishment of a just and viable Palestinian state are the only means for meeting Israel's security needs in the region. Furthermore, the commission's report notes that sustained US political leadership is required to facilitate a comprehensive resolution to both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the larger Israeli-Arab conflict. The commission, like Brit Tzedek's "Let's Talk" campaign, also stresses that negotiations with Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians should be goal-driven and not encumbered by unrealistic prerequisites for diplomatic engagement. Finally, the report recognizes that solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the key to achieving overall stability and combating extremism in the region. A comprehensive effort now by the US would go a long way toward facilitating the administration's other goals in the region and addressing other threats to Israel and the west, including Iran's nuclear ambitions.

9. What can be accomplished without a specific plan for peace?

The broad outline of a peace agreement that would satisfy the minimal aspirations of both sides is already known. Not known but evident to all parties? Known doesn't make sense to me. There are several fundamental steps that must be taken prior to signing a formal peace agreement. Previous agreements between Israel and her neighbors relied on varied strategies. Back channel efforts, multi-lateral talks involving third party mediation, and international peace conferences have all successfully been used in the past to overcome initial differences and pave the way toward political understandings.

For example, at the Madrid Conference in November 1991, the US and Soviet Union jointly sponsored a three day conference where Israel met face to face with Palestinian, Syrian, Jordanian, and Lebanese officials for the first time. The intensive efforts of US Secretary of State James Baker made possible historic breakthroughs, and Israel continued to meet bilaterally over the course of the next two years with these Arab neighbors.

The process begun at Madrid eventually culminated in a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, as well as the series of Israeli-Palestinian talks that launched the Oslo peace process. A similar conference today with high-level US and international involvement is likewise capable of overcoming the initial challenges obstructing peace so that formal agreements can take shape in the future.

10. What is Brit Tzedek's National Advocacy Days and Leadership Training Institute and what does it have to do with this campaign?

Coming to Brit Tzedek's National Advocacy Days and Leadership Training Institute is the perfect culmination of your support for the "Let's Talk" campaign. At the Training Institute you will hone your organizing skills and meet with other committed activists from across the country; during National

Advocacy Days, you will have the opportunity to take the “Let’s Talk” message directly and personally to your elected officials in Washington.

Brit Tzedek's 2nd Annual Grassroots Leadership Training Institute, “Building Our Political Movement for Israeli-Palestinian Peace,” will take place on the evening of Saturday, June 16 and all day Sunday, June 17, in downtown Washington, DC. The Institute will bring hundreds of activists together from across the U.S. for an evening plenary and day of intensive workshops, trainings and networking opportunities on topics such as: building a successful chapter in your city, establishing a Brit Tzedek presence in your local media, and bringing a pro-Israel, pro-peace message to your synagogues and organized Jewish community. One of the workshops will specifically address techniques for successfully debating the goals of the “Let’s Talk” campaign in your community and with your Congressional representative.

Brit Tzedek's 3rd Annual National Advocacy Days begins on Monday, June 18, with a day of political briefings and trainings on the Hill from policy experts and government officials, followed by an evening reception with Members of Congress. On Tuesday, June 19, you'll have the opportunity to meet with your own Senators and Representatives and urge them to support the “Let’s Talk” message.

If you indicate on your pledge that you'd like to meet with your Congressperson in Washington, D.C., Brit Tzedek's national office will send you a National Leadership Training and Advocacy Days registration form.

PETITION

1. What is the purpose of the petition and how will it be used to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians?

The petition will be used to convey to our elected officials the support of American Jews for immediate and vigorous US diplomatic engagement in finding a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

By calling on the Administration to urgently promote and facilitate negotiations, the petition plays a key role in our broader “Let’s Talk” campaign (see below), aimed at ending six years of diplomatic neglect that have led the Middle East into deeper and more dangerous levels of violence and instability.

Many at the highest levels of government already know that only sustained US diplomatic involvement in Arab-Israeli peacemaking can address Israel's long-term needs and achieve an independent Palestinian state, increasing stability across the Middle East and thus benefiting US interests in the region. The petition will let our leaders know that many in the American Jewish community understand this as well, and that we will support them when they take a principled stand in favor of negotiations.

2. The petition says that Israelis should talk to any party that “accepts Israel’s right to exist by engaging in direct negotiations....” How is this different from simply demanding that negotiating partners accept Israel’s right to exist?

Brit Tzedek believes that the act of sitting down with one's adversaries is itself an important and undeniable aspect of accepting the other side's right to exist; indeed, the very process of holding talks implicitly opens the possibility of diplomatic ties and deeper levels of political acceptance.

Evidence of this was apparent in the peace talks held between Israel and Egypt and Jordan, neither of which were required to meet preconditions of recognition, yet both of which signed lasting peace agreements with a country each once saw as its greatest enemy. Moreover, no preconditions for recognition were set when Israel undertook back channel talks with the PLO, but mutual recognition was granted later, in the course of negotiations.

Israel's peace treaties Egypt and Jordan have stood the test of time, and are further proof of the fact that only by creating a framework in which grievances may be honestly addressed will former enemies be able to move forward to cooperation. The groundwork for similar progress can be made today with partners from the Palestinian Authority, Syria, and Lebanon.

3. The petition discusses "direct negotiations, back channel contacts and/or an international peace conference." Why such a list of choices?

One of the most important things we can do as we continue to advocate for a mutually acceptable, negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to remain open to any reasonable method for achieving such a solution.

In the past, the US government has played an integral role in a number of diplomatic forums, bringing Israel together with its adversaries in a range of formats and structures: direct negotiations between two sides, back channel contacts, or in some instances, such as at the 1991 Madrid conference, multi-party negotiations, allowing simultaneous progress on several fronts. Each approach has its merits, depending on the political will of the parties involved and the determination of the US to play a leading role in promoting and facilitating the meeting.

4. Why is the petition directed to President Bush, rather than the newly Democratic Congress? Isn't Brit Tzedek likely to have more success on Capitol Hill?

Ultimate responsibility for American foreign policy rests in the hands of the President. In the past, successful peacemaking efforts in the Middle East have involved the President's dedication: Jimmy Carter presided over the Camp David accords between Israel and Egypt, and Bill Clinton was there to see the treaty signed between Israel and Jordan.

The Clinton Parameters, achieved at Taba in 2002 and widely considered the basis on which any future Israeli-Palestinian accords will be based, were reached because of the keen involvement of President Clinton; when his administration was replaced by that of President Bush, no further movement was made. We hope that President Bush will come to understand that the Middle East is an area in which he can make a real difference, and that he will choose to make a commitment similar to those made by Presidents in the past.

At the same time, while the campaign's central petition is directed at the President, we plan also to highlight legislation that supports the Let's Talk message. Let's Talk signers will be encouraged to contact their Members of Congress as an integral part of the campaign, just as Brit Tzedek has consistently worked to build our presence and influence on the Hill. While ultimate responsibility for foreign policy is indeed the President's, no President will make major changes in Middle East policy if Congress is not largely supportive.

PLEDGE QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of the Pledge and how will pledging help bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians?

By signing the Pledge, you're indicating that you will help Brit Tzedek convey the message and spirit of the "Let's Talk" campaign to the American Jewish community and the US government. This involvement is an important component of the campaign, in that it increases our activism on the ground, builds the activist base of the individual chapters, and ensures that "Let's Talk" reaches both legislators and the American Jewish community. By encouraging dialogue among American Jews about a negotiated, two-state solution, you will be helping to mobilize a growing number of Jews in support of urgent US diplomatic involvement and acting to persuade the Bush administration that such involvement is in the best interests of both Israel and the United States..

2. What happens after I've signed the Pledge?

After you sign the Pledge, someone from Brit Tzedek in your area or the national office will follow up with you, providing you with resources and information to help you in fulfilling your pledge.

3. What's meant by saying that I pledge myself to "talking to my network to tell them why I support 'Let's Talk' "?

The Pledge is a powerful tool with which to increase the American Jewish community's support of the Brit Tzedek message. Simply by discussing the idea of a negotiated, two-state solution and the importance of US diplomatic engagement with those we know, we normalize the ideas in a community that has long hesitated to take them on, and persuade those who may silently agree with us to join our efforts. Eventually, many who may currently disagree with our message will be brought around – but only if the ideas have gained currency and legitimacy in the broader community. Talking about negotiations and the need for urgent American involvement with friends, family, neighbors, fellow synagogue members and co-workers ultimately serves as one of the most important building blocks of this effort.

4. Is the Pledge only open to American Jews?

Brit Tzedek welcomes the support of our non-Jewish allies, but the pledge is directed toward Jews who are US citizens or residents. It's our goal to demonstrate that the traditional Jewish Lobby does not, in fact, represent all Jews, and that in fact, many American Jews actively oppose the supposedly "pro-Israel" positions supported by our representatives in Washington, positions many of us understand as contrary to Israel's interests. This point can only be made successfully if our signatories are, in fact, Jewish. Our non-Jewish supporters can find more information on the best ways to express their support here [link].

5. What is a "Let's Talk" house party?

House parties offer the opportunity for you and your guests to openly discuss your thoughts and feelings about the current situation in the Middle East and Brit Tzedek's perspective on it. Not only do such informal gatherings place the subject on a more personal level, they are generally more easily executed than similar events held at synagogues and community centers, which often require a great deal of advance planning and authorization. House parties are also a great opportunity for

relaxed connection and networking, and can empower people to join Brit Tzedek in working to achieve our campaign goals and pledging to take action in support of “Let’s Talk.” [[link to House Party guide](#)]

6. How can I talk to my Member of Congress in my home district?

If you indicate on your pledge that you’d like to meet with your Congressperson in your home district, we can help you arrange a meeting. Once we have received your pledge a Brit Tzedek representative will be in touch with you by email. You may also contact our Washington Representative, Rob Levy, to discuss the possibility of a home district meeting. Contact him by email: dcoffice@btvshalom.org, or by phone: 202-536-4092.

Appendix B: Answers to Difficult Questions

Difficult Questions:

<http://btvshalom.org/aboutus/FAQ.shtml#policies2>

1. Why should American Jews get involved in the debate around how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Many in the American Jewish community feel a strong connection to the state of Israel as the national or spiritual home of the Jewish people, a haven from anti-Semitism, the native home of family members, and so many other personal associations. As such they have a link to Israel in religious, ethnic and cultural terms that no other constituency in America can claim.

Historically Diaspora Jewry has been involved with domestic Israeli politics, starting with the establishment of the state. Indeed, it's possible that without American Jewish activism, the United States might not have voted in favor of the UN partition plan that created Israel.

The current US-Israel relationship and American Jewry's role in it has evolved over several decades. Concurrently, the US has become increasingly important in affecting the politics of the Middle East, especially when it comes to Israeli political and military policies.

The nature of the relationship between Israel and American Jews (and all Diaspora Jews for that matter) means the community often has passionate views about how best to act in the interests of the Israeli people, sparking debate and discussion from a wide range of voices. However, to the detriment of those would actively seek a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the full spectrum of voices has not been reflected in the most powerful American Jewish lobby. The mainstream Jewish institutions have tended to base their support around strong financial military and economic aid, and supporting Israel in times of crisis, and through uncritical support for Israeli government policies.

Brit Tzedek believes that we must move beyond this narrow focus. to encourage US engagement in bringing a peaceful solution to the conflict, critical for the well-being of Israelis, Palestinians, and world Jewry alike. Resolving the conflict will allow Israelis and Palestinians to heal from the trauma of war in peaceful coexistence. Jews throughout the world will be able to identify with our Jewish connection to Israel outside of the bitterness the conflict has engendered.

2. Doesn't it endanger Israel when American Jews advocate for US positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that differ from those of the standing Israeli government?

Just as in Israel, where the political spectrum is comprised of a broad range of political agendas, the positions of the American Jewish community on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also vary greatly. Indeed, in both countries the freedom to engage in public debate is at the core of these societies' democratic values. It is only natural, then, that not all American Jews will always agree with the positions of those parties heading the Israeli government at a given time. American Jewish organizations from left to right have publicly disagreed with or opposed Israeli policies at different times. AIPAC, for example, did not initially support the Gaza withdrawal while it was official Israeli policy. As American Jews, we must be allowed to take positions on issues that are commonplace in Israel's own debate.

Brit Tzedek maintains that it is incumbent on American Jewry to speak up on those positions that represent what are best for Israel and that we should not censor ourselves on an issue we care about

so deeply. Blindly supporting policies that are detrimental to Israel's well-being, such as settlement expansion or refusal to negotiate, endangers the country, while healthy debate will allow Israelis to find the best possible answers to their difficulties.

Our position that Israel's long term security depends on achieving a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is recognized at the highest levels of U.S. and Israeli government, as well as by the majority of Israelis themselves. We stand with millions of Israelis and numerous Israeli political leaders who are themselves unable to speak directly to American decision makers.

3. Why does Brit Tzedek advocate for a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict? Didn't the Palestinian rejection of Israel's offer at Camp David in 2000, and the more recent launching of Qassam rockets from the evacuated Gaza Strip, prove that the policy of "land for peace" can't work?

Many of those involved with the 2000 Camp David talks, (Israeli, American and Palestinian alike), have reported that the failure to reach an agreement was a result of actions on both sides, and that the Israeli offer was less straightforward than we have subsequently been told. However, during President Clinton's last weeks in office, he was able to bridge the differences between Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat that led to the breakdown of negotiations. The "Clinton Parameters", as they are known, were accepted by both sides and participants in subsequent talks held in Taba, Egypt reported that they were weeks away from achieving an agreement when both Clinton and Barak left office bringing negotiations to a standstill. Regardless, the proposals still stand today as a viable avenue to the resumption of peace talks. Indeed, the eventual reconvening of diplomatic negotiations will not start from scratch, but will be based on the substantial progress already made.

Moreover, since 2000, officials from the Fatah party (led since Arafat's death by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas), have maintained a positive attitude toward the possibility of resuming diplomatic contacts with Israel, and have publicly reiterated their recognition of the Jewish State. Likewise, polls show again and again that both Israelis and Palestinians support the achievement of a two-state solution.

The escalating violence of the second intifada and the barrage of Qassam rocket fire from Gaza serve not as an indictment of a land-for-peace approach, but as a cautionary tale about what can happen in the absence of negotiations: Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza was carried out unilaterally, without any coordination whatsoever with the moderate, Fatah-led Palestinian Authority. Israel disengaged from Gaza, but without any agreement as to what it was to receive in return or formal mechanisms with which to address potential grievances.

On the other hand, Israel's agreements with Jordan and Egypt, once enemies of the Jewish State, provide living proof of the efficacy of negotiations. The latter involved an enormous exchange of land for peace, and both have stood the test of time so well that the two Arab nations were at the forefront of mediation efforts during Israel's 2007 war in Lebanon.

In fact, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert himself has acknowledged unilateralism as a failed policy, saying in a January 2007 interview, "A year ago, I believed that we would be able to [withdraw from the West Bank] unilaterally. However, it should be said that our experience in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip is not encouraging....Under the existing circumstances, it would be more practical to achieve a two-state solution through negotiations rather than [unilateral] withdrawal."

Only a negotiated accord, with concrete terms that provide for Israel's security, is capable of providing lasting peace on Israel's borders. The basic framework for such an agreement has already been established and the majority of both Israelis and Palestinians desire its realization.

4. How can Israel agree to negotiate with the Palestinians when there is no real “partner for peace” on the Palestinian side?

The term “partner for peace” generally references an Israeli expectation that potential Palestinian negotiators must agree to certain preconditions before talks can take place. However, there are numerous precedents in Israeli history in which Israeli leaders had diplomatic contact with Arab leaders for whom no preconditions were set, and who did not, in fact recognize the State's existence –or were furthermore sworn to its destruction. Israel's first peace agreement was achieved with Egypt, the country that had previously been its single most dangerous enemy. In the course of negotiating the Camp David Accords, no demand was made that Egypt recognize Israel or its right to exist. The Oslo Peace Process, an initially secret series of talks between official Israeli and PLO representatives, was launched in advance of Palestinian recognition of Israel. Indeed, at the time, the PLO's National Covenant still called on the Palestinian people “to liquidate the Zionist presence in Palestine.” (Israel and the PLO exchanged letters of mutual recognition in 1993, at which point the PLO also committed to amending its covenant; the covenant was officially amended in 1996) Additionally, Israel did not require Jordan to “recognize” it prior to the Israel-Jordan peace agreement in 1994.

Rather than keeping Israel safe, preconditions unnecessarily impede diplomatic progress and an end to war. Under the “no partner” mantra, Israel eschewed bi-lateral relations with Arafat during his last years in power and with the moderate Mahmoud Abbas when he took over the PLO and PA, pursuing instead a unilateral course of action – the result being a complete breakdown of security in the Gaza Strip and regular Qassam rocket attacks on Israel's south. As a result, Israel was forced in November 2006 to reach a ceasefire in Gaza with the Hamas-led PA – ironically achieving with the radical militant group Hamas, the very option Ariel Sharon refused to consider with the moderate Abbas in August 2005. These circumstances have shown that the “partner for peace” notion is deployed when politically expedient, and shelved when reaching an agreement with Israel's enemies is absolutely necessary.

5 What evidence is there that even if an agreement is reached, a Palestinian leader will be able to uphold it? How do recent tensions between Fatah and Hamas factor into this?

Both Fatah and Hamas have reached agreements with Israel previously and have consistently abided by their respective terms.

Following its election to government, Hamas refused to abide by previous PLO-Israel accords, creating an obstacle to negotiations, but this can also be seen as a demonstration of the group's principled approach in regards to agreements with Israel: In lieu of accepting past PLO agreements, Hamas showed a willingness to let Palestinian President and PLO chair Mahmoud Abbas conduct negotiations with Israel. The leadership indicated that any agreement reached by the two sides would be subjected to a general referendum, and if it passed a popular vote, the Hamas-led PA would also lend its endorsement.

This, unfortunately, was not the route taken. With the breakdown in Hamas-Fatah relations and after many months of violence, Hamas and Israel finally concluded the terms of a ceasefire in Gaza through behind-the-scenes contacts, and it has held together with major shows of restraint from both sides.

This ceasefire, of course, is not the agreement Hamas proposed to Israel for many months. According to their proposed hudna, Israel and Palestinian leaders would agree to a long-term ceasefire during which time both sides could bridge the gaps between them gradually, as only a period with no violence can allow.

Despite their separate ideologies, both Fatah and Hamas have often shown, above all, a respect for the democratic system within which they operate (which is in fact a rarity in the Arab world) and their role as representatives of their people. Should Palestinian voters be given the chance to achieve a durable peace, leaders from Fatah and Hamas would be compelled to follow through.

Efforts to create a Palestinian unity government offer the best hope for a Palestinian polity capable both of reaching an agreement and maintaining it. Clear majorities of the general Palestinian public, including Hamas supporters, have said that they believe their government should negotiate a two-state solution with Israel; a unity government will have a broad enough basis to do just that.

Though some have suggested that Palestinian in-fighting is actually good for Israel, nothing could be further from the truth. Escalating violence could lead to civil war, which would not only bring ruin down on Palestinian society, but also become a real threat to Israeli security. Internecine violence in any context is often turned against outside forces, with each side attempting to prove greater loyalty to their own nation. This could easily result in “competing” Palestinian attacks against Israeli targets. Israeli expert Yossi Alpher, former senior advisor to Prime Minister Ehud Barak, recently wrote in the Forward that “the last thing Israel needs is a festering Somalia-like situation on its doorstep.” Serious diplomatic engagement – whether public or back-channel – would go a long way to averting just this scenario.

6. If the majority of Palestinians are sincere in their desire for a two state solution, why was Hamas victorious in legislative elections in January 2006?

The victory of Hamas in legislative elections did not signify that the Palestinian population had rejected a resumption of negotiations with Israel, or that the majority of the population supported Islamic fundamentalism. In fact, Palestinian public opinion after the election favored the continuation of the peace process and the implementation of the Bush-backed Road Map to Peace <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2006/p19e.html> . As many political experts (including those among the Palestinians themselves) explained at the time, Palestinian voters used the occasion of the elections to express their dissatisfaction with the failures and corruption of Fatah, the ruling party led by Yasser Arafat for many decades.

Indeed, Hamas acknowledged the popularity of the diplomatic route and even showed a willingness to allow the moderate head of Fatah, PA President Mahmoud Abbas, to conduct negotiations with Israel. This Palestinian formula for the resumption of negotiations quickly went nowhere, however, as Israel and the international community launched measures to isolate the PA as a whole, making negotiations with Abbas impossible until Hamas recognized Israel and met other conditions. In this tense political atmosphere Palestinians have supported Hamas’ position on Israel, if only not to bow to external pressures, while continuing to favor the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel in the West Bank and Gaza.

7. Is it too late for a two-state solution? Is a one-state solution a viable alternative to the two-state solution?

The ultimate goal of two viable, democratic states living side by side in peace still enjoys wide support from the U.S., the international community, and most importantly, (refer to polls) the majority of Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, past progress in negotiations demonstrates that such a resolution of the conflict remains entirely within reach.

The idea of a single, bi-national state, however, has little popular backing among either Israelis or Palestinians and no political traction. The international consensus is for a two-state solution. From an Israeli perspective, only a two-state solution is capable of preserving the state's Jewish and democratic character, two values at the very core of the nation's existence. From a Palestinian perspective, the national aspirations of the Palestinian people have not been diminished by decades of war, and remain centered on the establishment of their own independent state.

There are of course many obstacles to achieving a two-state resolution to the conflict, but creative solutions have already been found to even the most pressing problems. For example, in the case of Israel's settlement of West Bank lands, the idea of a "land swap" has gained increasing currency. This arrangement would allow Israel to keep its largest settlements (comprising 4-5% of the West Bank) in exchange for Israeli land of similar equity adjacent to the West Bank. Many other arrangements for the achievement of a two-state solution have also already been made in principle; the Clinton Parameters, the Taba Agreement, and the Geneva Accord already constitute the fundamental aspects of an eventual two-state agreement. Once the United States commits to playing a more active role in resolving the conflict, both sides can be encouraged to return to negotiations and fulfill the national aspirations of their peoples.

8. What is the position of the other Arab countries on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how can they contribute to its resolution?

The collective approach of the Arab states to the conflict is embodied in the Arab Peace Initiative launched by Saudi Arabia in 2002 and adopted later that year by the League's 22 member states. The Initiative states that the Arab countries will "consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states in the region [and] establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace," in return for Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied in June 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian state. The states of the Arab League – even those not allied with the U.S. – signed the Initiative, including Syria. Israeli officials have spoken favorably of the Initiative as providing a possible framework for a future agreement.

Egypt and Jordan already have formal peace agreements with Israel, consistently abiding by the treaties without any instances of non-compliance. Arab leaders in these states regularly act as mediators between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, in hopes of bridging differences between them for the sake of interim agreements and ceasefires, and ultimately, for achieving a two state solution.

9. Why is the US such an important player in the conflict and what can they do to bring about peace between Israel and the Palestinians and how does it relate to the region in general?

For the last half century, the United States has been the dominant power in Middle East diplomacy and the major actors (Israel, Palestinians, other Arab states and Europe) have largely looked to the US for leadership.

In the past we have seen that a committed and sustained diplomatic effort by the U.S. is capable of expediting policies in Israel and among Palestinians that are capable of facilitating negotiations. Likewise, it is also evident that when the U.S. disengages from active pursuit of diplomatic solutions, the cycle of violence intensifies and spirals toward chaos.

Indeed, the U.S. role in the Middle East is inextricably bound to Israel's stability and security. While this unswerving alliance can be seen in the billions of dollars in U.S. aid given to Israel every year, the willingness to support Israel in the halls of Congress, and in many instances of strategic partnership, the effect of this cooperation must also be expected by American Jews to serve the ultimate interest of the Jewish State: living at peace with its Arab neighbors.

A coordinated effort to solve the conflict in conjunction with the international community – particularly the Quartet (U.S., E.U., U.N., and Russia) and moderate Arab states – would provide great dividends for America as well, as described in the Baker-Hamilton report of December 2006. At stake for the U.S. are its position in Iraq, and its ability to effectively challenge Islamic fundamentalism in general.

Will solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict undermine support for fundamentalism in the Arab world? It is hard to say for sure, but it is unlikely that resolving the conflict will make Islamic fundamentalism disappear. But by finally achieving peace and security between Israel and the Palestinians, moderate Arab and European states are more likely to unreservedly join Israel and the US in facing future threats from Islamic fundamentalists, such as from Iran and its nuclear ambitions. Moreover, it will remove from groups such as Hezbollah the political cover they have used in the past for their anti-Israeli activities.

10. Are there Arab and Palestinian peace groups comparable to Brit Tzedek v'Shalom?

Yes! There are many Arab and Palestinian groups in the occupied territories, Israel, and the US working for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They are comprised of volunteers, activists, former combatants and intellectuals dedicated to peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. For a complete list of these groups with links to their websites visit <http://btvshalom.org/links/links.shtml#PalestinianPeace>



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