

Returning Israel and Palestine back on track for peace - Undermining Radical Islamists in Gaza

In light of the recent Israeli invasion of Gaza, the US must draw its attention to the cause of this invasion, the reason why Israelis and Palestinians have no peace – Islamist radicals in Gaza. As secretary of state, I feel it is our duty to undermine the power of radicals in Gaza by providing economic and diplomatic incentives for Gazans to support more moderate leaders. Returning Israelis and Palestinian commitments to peace is the only way to relieve tensions in the Middle East and create more allies who are willing to work for more security and stability in the region.

The rise of radicalism in Gaza has divided the Palestinians and obstructed the path to peace. Both Fatah, a moderate nationalist group that was the previous majority in the Palestinian Authority, and Israel continue to discuss a peaceful solution (Clinton). However in 2006, the radical Islamist group, Hamas, won the Palestinian majority, because Fatah's inefficiency and corruption turned even moderate voters towards Hamas with its \$90 million social services program(Shah). Hamas then took Gaza over in a coup, while Fatah governs the West Bank, dividing Palestinian leadership(Shah). Hamas refuses to recognize the existence of Israel and continually launches terror attacks on Israel(Clinton). Until Hamas renounces Anti-Zionism and terrorism, Israel refuses to negotiate or allow imports into Gaza (Maqbool). Peace can only come to a united Palestine, and that's why I will have Egypt arbitrate the reconciliation of a unity government between Fatah and Hamas, with the hope of encouraging moderates in the new government to take power and work for peace. Egypt has already set up a meeting between Hamas and Fatah.

However Israeli measures to weaken Hamas like economic sanctions have only made moderates in Gaza more dependent on Hamas, deepening radicalization. Israel placed economic sanctions on Gaza to prevent weapons and aid to go to Hamas, but at the same time withholds food and medical supplies, shut down 95% of Gaza's industrial operations, and leaves 67% of Gaza below the poverty line,

dependant on Hamas for food(“West Bank and Gaza: Economic...”), which Hamas smuggles in with weapons through tunnels from Egypt(Zakaria).

Hamas’s use of terror has caused widespread anger and disenchantment with peace in Israel. Hamas has launched a total of 2485 rockets into Israel, resulting in 584 new cases of PTSD in January alone(Human Rights Watch), paralyzing day to day life in Israeli border towns and placing 150,000 Israeli civilians in jeopardy. The state of fear has led to a conservative political shift in Israel, with many Israelis drifting away from peace, supporting more military action in Gaza (Sharp).

In response to the rockets, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) deployed in Gaza this January. While combating Hamas, 1300 Palestinians, mostly civilians, were killed(“Israel, Hamas...”). The sheer force, deemed inhumane by human rights organizations, resulted in 80% of Gazans unable to support themselves, 250,000 people without water, and a food shortage across Gaza(“Gaza Humanitarian Situation”). Both the economic sanctions and military intervention failed to reduce radicalism, and instead, left Gazans inflamed (Zakaria). As Richards Haas, President of the Council of Foreign Relations stated, “But the economics alone can't bring Hamas to its knees. What it can do is make Gaza miserable ... a breeding ground [for terrorists] ... there has also got to be some economic and some diplomatic incentives ... [to give] reason for the moderates to prevail and for Hamas ... [to] lose.” (Zakaria) Under my guidance, the US will give incentives like further aid in reconstructing Gaza; reintroducing jobs back to Gaza and relieving some limitations on the blockade, all to give the Gazans financial independence from Hamas, but giving more power to moderates using diplomacy.

Diplomacy and peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians are imperative to stop larger conflicts in the greater Middle East. Iran, Hamas second largest funder, has used Hamas and Hezbollah in a proxy war with Israel (Clinton). The US has diplomatic interests in abating Iran’s nuclear weapon ambitions, and diplomacy with Iran will involve discussions about Gaza (Zakaria). Egyptian and Saudi Arabian criticism of Hamas elicited a backlash from their own people (Zakaria). There have been 1037

requests from the Middle East to US companies to comply with a boycott of Israel in response to the Gaza blockade(Congressional Research Services). The Palestinian-Israelis crisis is the “...core issue in the region” as Gamal Mubarak, assistant secretary of Egypt, asserts, meaning stability in Palestine would resolve Arab – Israeli tensions (Zakaria). Furthermore, Al Qaeda has attempted to use the Middle East outrage with the Gaza Invasion to recruit terrorists, allegedly releasing a video calling the Gaza invasion a Holocaust (“Purported Bin Laden tape...”) .

While our nation combats terrorism, we want to reach out to Muslims everywhere. In the past 8 years we have alienated much of the Muslim world. Our stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict left many Muslims in the world viewing Israel as an outpost of Western Imperialism in the Middle East. Many feel the need to protect their national identity (Zakaria). In response to the Gaza Invasion, mass demonstrations took place in almost every country last December, resulting in not only the burning of Israeli flags, but the burning of pictures of Bush and signs bearing “Down with USA.” (“World rallies...”)

With Bin Laden still loose and Iran seeking nuclear ambitions, it is necessary to have strong allies in the Middle East, especially in the people. President Obama expressed his want to reach out to the Muslim world in his first TV interview, and by devoting ourselves to helping the Palestinians obtain Palestine; we obtain more allies in the Arab world working for more stability (Kessler and Shears).

Radicalism has undermined stability and I fear the young people of both ethnicities are drifting away from peace. Young Israelis attack Palestinian farmers (“Young Israelis...”), and worldwide anti-Semitic attacks are rising (“Anti-Semitic attacks...”). As a result, connections between the West and the Middle East are falling apart, but we will not lose our resolve for peace in the region. The Gaza invasion may have turned Gaza into a graveyard, but in our sincerest belief, peace has not found its grave in Gaza.

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