

# Israeli and Palestinian Peace: Based upon Security, Freedom, and a Change of Heart

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FORMER U.S. SENATOR CONNIE MACK OF FLORIDA

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*(The text of a speech delivered before the U.S. Senate on March 3, 1999.)*

Mr. President, I very recently traveled to Israel. It had been several years since my last visit, and I expected this year we would bring some important measures to the Senate floor. I learned a great deal during the week and I rise today to share a few simple thoughts regarding what I saw and what went through my mind as the week in Israel unfolded.

Let me begin with the question that is on

my mind today: How is it possible to engage in peace negotiations with people who maintain the right to obliterate you, who are filled with hatred toward you, and who harbor the dream of one day destroying your homeland? Peace is a matter of the heart. I believe in the depths of every person's heart is a desire to live in peace. But what I saw, which was the outcome of the Palestinian Authority rule, convinced me that their hearts and minds are set on other goals.

The Palestinian leadership does not want peace. They want, first, their own state which they can control with total power. Then they want to use that state to eliminate the State of Israel.

Let's be clear. The peace process, to be meaningful, must be about more than rules and laws and lines on a map. We can reach a short-term agreement on these points, but if the Palestinian leadership fails to abandon incitement of hatred, persecution, and terrorism, then we are all dreaming, only dreaming, and our President's behavior must be labeled foolish appeasement. There will not be peace until hearts and minds are changed, and we must focus our

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attention on these issues. Mr. President, many of my colleagues in the Senate and in the House are aware of the promotion of hatred contained in the Palestinian media, and more significantly in the Palestinian school-books. Let me provide some examples.

This is a picture that was taken off of Palestinian Authority-controlled television. It is a picture of a young girl, probably six or seven years old. This is a young girl singing into a microphone. She is on a television show that would be what we would refer to as kind of a Mickey Mouse Club type of show that would be shown to children by the Palestinian Authority. I want to read to you what this little girl is singing. Again, this is a program that was produced by the people who are sitting across the table from you, supposedly negotiating peace. This is what the little girl is singing:

*When I wander into  
the entrance of Jerusalem,  
I'll turn into a sui-*

*cide warrior in battle-  
dress. In battledress. In  
battledress.*

There is no way I can convey to you the emotion of actually seeing that scene on television. There is no way I can put the emotion into what she was expressing and the emotion that she was expressing as she sang those words. And after her song, she got an ovation from her classmates and from her teacher.

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This focuses us on the fundamental difference in approach between the Palestinians and the Israelis. I have a grandson about that age, about the age of that little girl. How would I feel if he were being taught hatred in school? If he were being taught hatred on television, how would I feel? How would you feel if your government was teaching your children to hate? Could you conclude that they were serious about long-term peace with their neighbors?

I also have some examples from Palestinian textbooks for a

third-grade grammar lesson. Here is the task: "Complete the following blank spaces with the appropriate word." And the sentence is, "The Zionist enemy blank civilians with its aircraft." The "correct" answer is, "The Zionist enemy attacked civilians with its aircraft." For seventh graders: "Answer the following question: Why do the Jews hate Muslim unity and want to cause division among them? Give an example of the evil attempts of the Jews, from events happening today." These are from Palestinian textbooks today. One would expect, rather than focus on hatred, if they were serious about peace, they would focus on how the two peoples are working to live side by side. A history book for twelfth graders published only last summer teaches: "The clearest examples of racist belief and racial discrimination in the world are Nazism and Zionism."

To see this taking place today is chilling. If you

can, think about it in the context of being in Israel and being briefed by a member of the government with respect to what is happening in what they refer to as the anti-incitement committee, which was set up by the Wye Agreement. To be sitting there and seeing this, I must say to you, was chilling. I found it to be extremely chilling.

While the government of Israel makes good-faith efforts to come to a peace agreement, the Palestinian Authority teaches children hatred. This causes me to ask: How can peace be obtained when the children are being taught hatred? Let me share another story. I attended Shabbat dinner at the home of Saul and Wendy Singer in Jerusalem. Saul worked on my staff for seven years before moving with his wife to Israel. They just had their second child, a girl named Tamar.

Wendy told the story of the day she was checking out of the hospital in Jerusalem, two days after giving birth. In a very or-

dinary and matter-of-fact way, the hospital gave her the necessities for bringing home a newborn baby. In addition to providing for diapers and other things we would expect, she was handed a gas mask for her baby. It is actually a tent which you put your baby under in case of a chemical weapons attack.

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In Israel, this preparation is routine. Everyone in Israel knows to have a gas mask ready. It just becomes a part of the craziness of everyday life. But when you bring home a newborn baby, when you bring home your baby and you get the chemical weapons tent at the hospital, then you realize how unordinary life is in Israel today. You realize that you are really simply struggling for a normal life, hoping for peace and security, praying to God, while actually living in a war zone.

I had another profound meeting during this week. I met one evening privately—secretly—with Arabs who were

being persecuted for their Christian faith. I met with about ten Palestinian Christians. I will tell you just one of their stories, but I will change some of the details to protect the person I am describing.

I remember an energetic man, in his early forties, at the end of the table. I remember him because he seemed so full of life and love. He had a great smile on his face and displayed a wonderful sense of humor. I say this was memorable because, frankly, after hearing what he had been through, I do not know if I could express the sense of peace and love he did. This is his story.

He had many children and very little money. He converted to Christianity in 1993. He clearly loved God, and he loved to tell people about his conversion. He described to me how in 1997, the Palestinian Authority asked him to come to the police station for questioning. When he arrived, he was immediately arrested and detained on charges

of selling land to Jews. He denied this charge, since he was very poor and owned no land. He was beaten. He was hung from the ceiling by his hands for many hours. He showed me what I just said. He showed me how his hands were tied behind his back and then raised from the floor and hung that way for many, many hours.

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After two weeks, he was transferred to a larger prison where he was held for eight months without trial. He was released in February 1998, after his family borrowed thousands of dollars to pay off the local authorities. And even though he is free, they are keeping his father in prison. They believe it is for his son's beliefs. He feels his father is being held hostage to prevent him from talking with people about his faith. Needless to say, these Christians met with me at considerable risk. They conveyed to me a message of fear and des-

peration. But their mere presence in the room with me demonstrated their hope, and it also caused me to ask, how can the people of Israel find peace with the Palestinian Authority while the Palestinian Authority engages in coercion and torture based upon religious beliefs?

I also met with the parents of American children killed by Palestinian terrorists. In this meeting, I was struck by the courage displayed by these families after suffering the tremendous loss of a child brutally murdered. These families told me of the hopes and dreams they had for their children. I couldn't help thinking about my own. My daughter, Debbie, traveled with me on this trip. She was in the room as these stories of brutality and murder were related. There was scarcely a dry eye in the room.

I am sure Debbie was thinking about her three little boys, ages 14, 11, and 5. We were moved by the comments made by the parents as they

described to us what had happened.

I understand that the Palestinian Authority knows a great deal about these murderers, but they are not being punished. Some of them have gone to trial and were sentenced, but we don't know if they remain in prison. I was told that we know some have been released.

There are reports that the Palestinian Authority allows them to leave prison each day and return in the evening—like free room and board more than like prison. I was also presented with stories of the lionization of these murderers in the press and again in the classrooms. Try to imagine how you would feel, try to imagine what would be going through your mind when you are dealing with the grief of the loss of your child. You know who is responsible. You saw them go on trial. You saw them then released. You have to ask yourself, what are we going through this peace process for?

I would like to mention one story of many that I heard. Mrs. Dassberg sat directly across the table from me. When she told us of the loss of her daughter and son-in-law, the lesson of these murders became so clear—we must fight terror and we cannot back off.

Mrs. Dassberg's family, her daughter, American son-in-law, and their nine-month-old daughter, attended a wedding in central Israel on June 9, 1996. They decided not to bring their two-year-old daughter along. Thank God. On the way home from the wedding they were stopped by Palestinian terrorists and killed in a so-called drive-by shooting. Fifty bullets were found to have been used in this murder, and yet, by some miracle, the baby survived. Even with a crime this gross, the Palestinian Authority did not arrest everyone involved or suspected in the shooting. One of those who remained free, it is believed, later took part in the bombing of the Apropos Café, killing

many others.

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Another suspected killer, according to the Israeli Justice Ministry, was under arrest but given permission to come and go as he pleases from prison. Mohammed Dief, another suspected Palestinian terrorist, took part in the murder of two other Americans, at two different times, according to the mothers with whom I spoke. Mrs. Sharon Weinstock lost her 19-year-old son in a drive-by shooting masterminded by Dief. And only a year later, Mrs. Wachsmann told me of the kidnap-murder of her son, also believed to have been planned by Dief.

I am told Mohammed Dief remains a free man today. The obvious lesson—terrorists kill and those who are not jailed remain free to kill and to kill again, thanks to the Palestinian Authority.

How would I feel in their place? I couldn't keep the thought from my mind, as I listened. If I had lost a child and knew that the murderer

or accomplices were on the loose, how would I feel? And if I knew the killer remained free to kill other people's children, how would I feel? It is so hard, hard to even consider, but I do know that I left there committed to doing whatever I could to help each of those families.

Once again, I began to better understand the way the Palestinian Authority leadership was approaching peace. How can one find peace with people who do not condemn terrorism? Mr. President, how is it possible to engage in peace negotiations with people who want to teach their children to die in a holy war against you? How is it possible to engage in peace negotiations with people who persecute those of other faiths? How is it possible to engage in peace negotiations with people who keep terrorists on the loose to wreak havoc and evil against you and praise them for heroism?

Today the Israeli people are exhausted by fifty

years of violence against their homes and families, of sending their sons and daughters into the army, and they dream of a promised peace now. This is our hope and our dream as well. But we must not get confused. History is replete with examples of compromises which bring terror and destroy dreams.

In the United States, many people seem to think that if we do not confront these obstacles to peace and if we look the other way, then we will be able to come to an agreement. The reality, however, is just the opposite. If we do not acknowledge the attitudes and acts of those at the peace table, then the peace process is already over, and we just won't admit it.

In other words, the surest way to kill the peace process is to avoid confrontation, to fear upsetting a belligerent force and to avoid addressing incitement, violence, persecution, and terrorism. The only way to keep the peace process alive is to

focus on truth, freedom, security, and justice.

Israeli efforts, to date, have sought to keep the peace process alive, improve security during the negotiating process, and obtain reciprocity as a vital element of implementation.

The process remains alive, but terrorism continues and is exalted by many in the Palestinian Authority, and reciprocity does not exist. The United States' role has been to seek the middle ground. Unfortunately, this only rewards those willing to go to new extremes.

The middle ground between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat is not halfway between the two. The United States must not engage in moral equivocation. We must not shy away from holding Arafat responsible for acts of violence, incitement, and persecution.

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The United States must demonstrate principled leadership and end the appeasement that perpetuates the cycle of vio-

lence. The peace process can only work when leaders uphold their agreements and answer to the people, and the United States remains a vigilant defender of the principles which bind us to Israel: freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

What should we do? I believe there are three things. First, we should insist upon the strict adherence to Oslo and the reciprocity codified at Wye. The purpose of the Wye accord was at long last to force the Palestinians to comply with commitments before further territory would be turned over.

So at Wye, Israel agreed only to turn over territory in phases, in which it could verify Palestinian compliance at each and every step. In the first phase, Israel completed its redeployment after the Palestinian Authority completed its tasks. In phase two, the Palestinians did not meet all their obligations, and, therefore, Israel has not yet turned over the additional land. Reciprocity makes

no sense unless it is based upon this formulation. Once Israel has ceded territory, it is unlikely it ever could recover it. The Palestinians, on the other hand, can turn on and off their promises. In fact, this is exactly what they have done.

Second, we should stop paying the Palestinian Authority. Any funds provided to the Palestinian people should continue to go through private voluntary organizations. We should also monitor much more closely the rampant corruption and mismanagement of funds provided currently.

And third, we must aggressively seek the bringing to justice of Palestinian terrorists who killed American citizens. I am told that our Justice Department can do a better job here, that they have a great deal of information on the murderers of the Americans who are free in the Palestinian areas and, indeed, can make some requests for indictments. It is time to do this. Let's put the needs of the American families and

other victims' families over the needs of those engaging in or supporting terrorism.

Mr. President, these are very basic principles. I am not discussing today the intricacies of the peace process, U.S. funding, embassies, or any other number of issues we will be discussing this year in the Senate. We need to focus on a more fundamental level first. And I hope that this message will be heard at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

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What I mean when I say this is that I hope the President will hear the message. I say this from a standpoint not of arrogance, not of confrontation, and I do not mean it in a political way. I just hope that the President will listen and take another look at what he and his foreign policy team are trying to force the Israeli government to do.

There cannot be peace until there is a change of heart. I returned from this trip with a newfound concern for the future of

Israel. I saw examples of incitement. I heard examples of persecution and hatred being taught throughout Palestinian society by their leaders. When the people engaged in peace talks return from the negotiating table only to disparage compromise and incite violence, there can be no progress toward peace.

Israel has come a long way since I first began following the fate of this state and the people of Israel. In so many respects, life appears and feels normal. The economy is developing, the standard of living is growing and improving. But just below the surface of this normalcy, Mr. President, Israel still faces a threat to the state's very existence. Israel's survival remains, unfortunately, a very real and central concern fifty years after its independence.

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Some people believe, however, that by ignoring this threat, that the peace process can succeed. Mr. President, it will fail. It

is clear to me that many in the Palestinian leadership today see the peace process toward the goal of eliminating the State of Israel.

I suggest today that we get back to the basics. Peace is not possible while teaching children to hate and kill. Peace is not possible while persecuting those of other faiths. Peace is not possible while lionizing terrorism. We must stand up for freedom, security, and human dignity. We must stand up to ensure the security of Israel. We must stand up

in the Congress, and we must insist that our President stand with us.

Today is the day to end American pressure on Israel to force a peace agreement. Today is the day to remember it is up to the people of Israel to determine their own fate—their own security. We should pressure those who fill children with slogans of hatred and holy war; we should pressure them to change. We should pressure those who torture; we should pressure them to change. We should pressure those

who encourage and support terror and murder, and those who rejoice in hatred. That is where the pressure should be.

Now is the time, Mr. President, for a return to our principled stand. The only way to truly attain peace is to support freedom, democracy, and justice, and oppose the cycle of hatred. We must face tyranny and oppression where it exists, condemn it, and stand up for peace—real peace based on security, freedom, and a change of heart.